

Membership Meeting Minutes
Aurora Highlands Civic Association
April 10, 2024, at Aurora Hills Recreation Center and via Zoom

Opening of Meeting

President Rachel Hicks opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. with a welcome to the membership and an overview of the agenda. She also thanked the new Toby's Ice Cream at Met Park for their generous contribution of an ice cream cart for the meeting. Participants enjoyed the many flavors that Toby was scooping for our participants.

Minutes Approval

The draft minutes for the March 2024 meeting were approved.

Neighborhood Spring Fair

Rachel gave an update on the fair scheduled for Saturday, April 20 from 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. in Ives Street Park. Thanks to the many volunteers, we will have a bounce house, food trucks, cotton candy, and a live band.

Development Activities

Library: Nick Giacobbe briefed on the current status of the Crystal City branch library that was offered as a site plan condition for a JBG Smith project. The County and the developer have not been able to come to an agreement on a site, so the County wants to buy out the obligation. There is an effort in Crystal City, in collaboration with a member of the Board, to construct a major library facility in Crystal City – leaving the future of the Aurora Hills branch in jeopardy. This is contrary to the wishes of the community as expressed in the most recent Livability22202 update. The three Civic Association Presidents need to discuss the issue.

CC2DCA: Nick briefed on a grant the County has requested for \$22 million from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and noted that the Civic Association has been asked by JBG Smith to send in a letter of support for the CC2DCA bridge project. The sense of the group (with a vote of 14-3-2, not a quorum) was to support the grant application. (Note: Susan Cunningham also mentioned the need for these funds for the project to move forward. End Note.)

Brookfield: Nick briefed on the last Long Range Planning Committee meeting for this massive 1.8 million square foot mixed use project on the old TSA HQ site (12th & Hayes). The anticipated four buildings will likely contain residential (possibly condos), hotel, office space, and retail. For a project this size there are very few traditional community benefits since the paved sidewalks and other general site amenities are being racked as community benefits. The long range plan will be adopted by the Planning Commission and County Board over the next few months and Brookfield will later come back with an actual site plan for the project.

Melwood: Rachel briefed that the Tier 2 study on Melwood is supposed to be released on Friday. We will scrub it carefully and then likely write a letter with the AHCA findings. The hearing will likely be held on May 6 or 8, more details to follow.

Crystal House: Rachel described the latest proposal on the ongoing Crystal House redevelopment, this one is for Crystal House 7 and 8. Originally proposed as condos, the developer is once again making a multitude of changes, including doubling the number of units, changing to multi-family, modifying parking, and reducing the unit size. The County is once again treating these many changes as a minor site amendment, so it does not require the full review process. Rachel polled the group and there was a sense that we should send a letter expressing AHCA's concern and questioning the proposal and process.

County Board Member Susan Cunningham

Susan opened by noting that she has just finished 100 days in office and that the County is in the midst of its annual budget season. Her priority is to invest in a connected community, the County needs to be responsive to the residents and questions should be answered. She is also looking at how to reconnect teens and young adults, as well as look closely at housing and planning.

Some of the themes addressed in the question and answer session included:

- Answering the mail – staff should confirm receipt within 24 – 48 hours and then an actual response within two weeks. Susan confirmed that this timeline is not being met and she is pressing the staff to do better.
- Crime – lots of work going on with hiring and retention of police officers, Arlington also suffers from poaching of experienced officers by other jurisdictions. When looking at prosecutions, that is not under the purview of the County Board, but rather the elected Commonwealth Attorney.
- Speeding – Arlington recently received authority for cameras in school zones and still has a limit on the number of red light cameras.
- Development – Lots of discussion about projects in the neighborhood, we are ground zero for construction. Projects such as the ongoing work at the Dominion substation, the importance of maintaining quality of life for current residents, and the public costs of private development (infrastructure, schools, utilities, etc.). There was lots of concern about the increasing density in AHCA and the creeping of the high rises from Crystal City into the neighborhood. Neighbors noted that they moved into this neighborhood because of its lower density and we should maintain diversity of housing types across the County. It shouldn't all become Manhattan.
- Commercial Office Space – County is undertaking phase two of the Commercial Market Resiliency Initiative to look at how to deal with the crisis in commercial office space.
- Zoning – There are too many special GLUP applications, they are not special. Discussion of the Melwood case and how it is being handled by the County.
- Tree Canopy – The bill granting Arlington more authority in enforcing tree protection was vetoed by the Governor. The Forestry and Natural Resource Plan goal is for 40% tree coverage.
- Demographics – Studies show there is an exodus of 30 – 40 year olds from the County. The impact will be significant on the school system, which will be facing flat enrollment numbers and the difficulty of juggling classroom space across the County.
- CC2DCA – The County is applying for a grant from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority to fill out funding of the pedestrian/bike bridge. This is an important funding source to be able to move this project forward.

- AIM and Sustainable Scoop – There is an audit underway looking at the procedures at Arlington Independent Media, as a result things are on pause at AIM, which has a detrimental impact on the local Sustainable Scoop operations.
- Green Building Incentives – The County is rewriting the incentive program which has been static for too long, resulting in developers receiving bonuses for features that would have been included because they make good business sense.
- Taxes – Advertised an increase of 2.5 cents and likely to end up 1.5 -2.0 cents. The result will be not only an increase in taxes due to the rate going up, but also due to assessment increases.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.
Recording Secretary