

**Membership Meeting Minutes
Aurora Highlands Civic Association
February 12, 2025, via Zoom**

Opening of Meeting

President Rachel Hicks opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. with a welcome to the membership and an overview of the agenda.

Minutes Approval

The draft minutes for the January 2025 regular meeting were approved.

President's Updates

- **Virtual Meeting** - Sorry could not meet in person, virtual only due to the storm.
- **Officers for 2025** – The slate approved at the November meeting is in place and we still have a vacancy in the 2nd Vice President position. We had a volunteer but still need to confirm his eligibility. The office remains vacant, and members are encouraged to let Rachel know their interest in joining the leadership team.
- **Featured Guest** – Introduced Julius JD Spain, Sr., the newest member of the Arlington County Board.

County Board Member JD Spain (JDSpainSR@arlingtonva.us)

- In Arlington 16 years, came from diplomatic assignment in Brussels, 26 years, 4 months and 4 days in U.S. Marine Corps. Only 48 days on County Board and loving it.
- Priorities: Single family homeowner in Penrose, kids went to APS and graduated from W&L but concerned for all of county.
 - We are in uncharted territory, lots of change taking place around us that is intended to benefit the American people. Questions about what Arlington is doing to keep the County running in a very tight budget cycle.
 - Public Safety – crime, safe modes of transportation, safe streets
 - Schools and families – need to maintain cost sharing arrangement with APS, need more support, alarming numbers of students need mental health services.
 - Environmental sustainability – we've made some progress but work to be done to meet our 2050 goals.
 - Fiscal tail winds are challenging as Federal funding declines, impact on jobs and commercial buildings – need to incentive alternatives and activities that lead to revenue.
 - Robust public engagement but make sure it's equitable – get all the voices heard as we shape new policies.
- Remember, the Arlington I came to 16 years ago is gone, it's a whole new place with different dynamics and density. How can we achieve more attainable housing that includes a diversity of housing types?
- Getting a briefing on Melwood tomorrow and will ask the tough questions, we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Questions & Answer Session

- APS divide – County Board and School Board point to one another, even on things like Melwood that has a deed saying for school use only. APS says they were never approached, how do you address the need for more school seats in 22202? JD says it comes down to adequate space and relationship between students and teachers. It's true that the CB/SB relationship is fractured, and we need to work together.
- Melwood – Agree that it's not the same neighborhood it was 25 years ago, what do we do with all the unused commercial real estate and vacant apartments? Need to be creative and look at how to incentivize. Have they looked at access to services for Melwood? Will look into it.
- Route 1 – Thoughts on lowering to grade? Major artery in and out of the County, needs to do more homework on project and second and third order impacts. Change is not always the best solution.
- Millenium conversion – agree that should not be that accommodating. Let me know when these things come up and I will dig into it.
- Density – seems we are being punished in 22202 with density to make up revenue shortfall, good example is RiverHouse. JBG submitted a plan they thought was viable and yet the staff said to maximize out density permitted in the sector plan. How can we get the process back on track? Need to look for a compromise with the community on new builds. Council of Government projections show increased density, so how do we keep the community safe and our ability to offer the needed services. Will look into it some more and get back to the community.
- Libraries – can be tangible community benefits from development projects – we need more of them that are walkable in the neighborhood, you won't see me trying to remove libraries.
- Bike infrastructure – lowering Rt 1 will have an impact on bike transit, how do you get a transit mix? Believe we should do everything we can to be multimodal with safe bike and pedestrian options, plus environmental impact. We need to get people out of cars.
- Move Melwood to CH5 site and purchase old school? Sharp departure from where we are today, and the process is far down the path. Cannot commit to make such a radical shift now but thanks for the creative thinking.
- Density – when will the CB's density initiative be satisfied – when is enough enough? Increase in people, vacant office space, so it will continue to be a work in progress as we have smart growth along Metro corridors. Neighborhood by neighborhood and we need to preserve character. We have goals and visions, what does that really mean? Need lots of infrastructure to support these projects – smart density!
- Who does the County Board listen to, new arrivals or existing residents? We need to look at quality of life across the board, we want to be a place for young families, professionals, and a place where seniors can stay in retirement.
- Housing affordability – does not want to see tax rate increase this year – uncertain economy, especially for the 40,000 federal employees who call Arlington home.
- McMansions – it's a challenge with our zoning and living in a Dillon Rule state.
- Sanctuary City – I am not going to get in the way of law enforcement doing its job – not our place or place of ACPD to get in the way of lawful actions. We are not going to challenge the

federal government from exercising warrants. As a retired Marine, rule of law is important to me.

- Flipping it around - What do you expect from a County Board member? Honesty, listen to current residents of Arlington, keep taxes low, transparency and openness (also demand same from staff), willingness to engage, common sense, working to achieve consensus, representing the constituents.
- Melwood update - thanked Stacy Meyer for hard work and tenacity to explain the neighborhood position.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.
Recording Secretary