



# AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

## A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Neighbors,

It was clear that when Amazon announced HQ2 our part of the county was about to change dramatically. Here we are over 6 years on – and what we are experiencing in 22202 is doubling of density and development often without adequate guardrails for impacted residents.

Last winter, the County Board approved an unprecedented zoning change from public use to private residential on South 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, allowing Melwood to put up a 70 foot tall apartment building and demolish one of the oldest school buildings in the county and remove mature landscaping - including the pine that is the highlight of the decades old community tree lighting event, this, despite overwhelming opposition by the Civic Association.

**But there is still a chance to possibly save the historic school and tree via a Local Historic District. Details inside.**

The only way we are going to have improvements at our library, a voice in our schools, to keep our parks from being encroached on and historic buildings with mature landscaping from being demolished, to have adequate parking, to avoid congestion, to have an adequate police presence is to **be actively involved**. This is no joke. Special interests pay people to work full time to bypass us **in real life** in real time. I feel the job as president is to inform you and let you know **this is a call to action, this is teamwork, and you are needed on the team, I cannot stress this strongly enough.**

**Cool neighborhoods like ours only exist because of people just like you who live there and care about them actively work to preserve quality of life.**

Please join our next meeting in person or online January 14, and in the meantime, *please think about how you can contribute to your neighborhood.* More information on opportunities inside.

At our January 14 meeting we will be introduced to the leadership of Veritas Collegiate Academy, our neighbor right here on S. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street who was recently ranked by Niche as the #1 Private K-12/High school in Virginia & #2 Best Christian K-12 School in America, as well as Stephanie Bello, Director of Constituent Services & County Ombus, from the County Manager's office. And there will be an hour to discuss civic association initiatives for the year and volunteer sign up. Looking forward to seeing you Wednesday night! Thank you,

Stacy Meyer  
President

Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia (MGNV) is launching a Restoring Nature series to share practical actions to support wildlife, protect our watershed and build healthy soil:  
For more information and to follow their monthly action items visit :  
<https://mgnv.org/>

### Next Meeting:

**Wednesday, January 14**  
**At: Aurora Hills Recreation Center**

**735 18th St S, Arlington, VA | 7:00-9:00 pm**  
**refreshments & social at 6:30 pm**

#### AGENDA

- 6:30 pm Hot Choc & Chai w/giftcard doorprize sponsored by Natl Landing BID Partnership**
- 7:00 pm Veritas Collegiate Academy**
- 7:30 pm Stephanie Bello, Dir. of Constituent Services**
- 8:00pm AHCA Business**
- 9:00pm Adjourn (latest)**

Optional: Register via Zoom  
<https://bit.ly/2026AHCA>

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[Local Listserve: 4D-A](https://groups.io/g/4D-A22202)  
<https://groups.io/g/4D-A22202>

**BREAKING NEWS: Demolition of Historic Nelly Custis School by Melwood is likely in 2026 – BUT YOUR VOICE MATTERS**



Demolition of the Febrey-Lothrop Estate / Rouse Estate



Not Historic Preservation of the Wilson School, 2017

Melwood is proposing demolition of the historic Nelly Custis School and the mature landscaping (including the Christmas Tree) on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and to replace it with a 70 ft tall (equivalent 7 stories), ~150,000 Square Foot building (>50% **bigger** than the proposed Ballroom in downtown DC), that will tower over 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Nelly Custis Park. The proposal provides woefully inadequate parking (1 space for 5 large apartments), and dumpsters, transformers and car exhaust next to Nelly Custis Park playground, unscreened mechanical equipment on the roof, and as a result of its configuration, light pollution into the park and neighborhood.

Here is a link to the proposal:  
<https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Project-Types/Site-Plan/Melwood>

AHCA voted overwhelmingly to **oppose** the development, and recommended an “Alternate Envelope” – a development plan with a height and massing appropriate for the site and that preserved the historic portion of Nelly Custis School preferably as a school. Our comments are posted to the proposal link and on our website under the tab “documents”.

As an additional effort to protect the historic school from demolition by Melwood, AHCA voted nearly unanimously to support the nomination of Nelly Custis School as a Local Historic District in 2024 – and the Arlington Historic and Landmark Review Board (HALRB) **agreed that the Nelly Custis School nomination had merit enough** to authorize a Local Historic District (LHD) Study.

Despite approval of the LHD Study by HALRB (which is still ongoing), in February 2025, the County Board (all at large, none live in the neighborhood) approved zoning necessary for Melwood to move forward with its plans, without incorporating the recommendations made by AHCA to preserve the **school and park**.

The County Board has a long history of tearing down historic buildings despite public opposition like the Wilson School in 2017 & the Rouse Estate in Dominion Hills in 2020 - see pictures.

**Nelly Custis School on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street is up next.**

**At this time the only thing keeping Nelly Custis School from being demolished and the proposed 70 ft. tall building built, is the pending Local Historic District Nomination.**

**HOW YOU CAN MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD**

The county historic study for the Local Historic District Nomination is expected to be published in early 2026. The Local Historic District nomination is expected to be on the agenda at an upcoming HALRB meeting and then it goes to the County Board.

1)Write an email to the County Board: [countyboard@arlingtonva.us](mailto:countyboard@arlingtonva.us) – If you copy [president@aurorahighlands.org](mailto:president@aurorahighlands.org) your email will be compiled with others as part of a presentation to the county by AHCA. Encourage your friends & neighbors to do the same.

2)Attend the HALRB Meeting. In person preferably or online. Bring a friend. Stay tuned for the time and location.

3)Attend the County Board Meeting. In person preferably, or online. Bring a friend. Stay tuned for the time and location.

4)Updates to meeting times will be posted by email so make sure you are on the civic association email distribution list - see info next page

**22202 Headlines**

**RETAIL**

- *Twins Ace Hardware Store Hopes to Open at 2051 S. Bell Street by March 1, 2026*
- *Mae's Market at 1450 S. Eads Street Closing, Maman Coffee opening*
- *Daydrift Books & Cafe open at 1550 Crystal Drive*

**DEVELOPMENT**

- *600 new units approved for Potomac Yard in Alexandria*
- *743 new units approved for the River House Complex including a Virginia Health Care clinic with subsequent plans for 2000 more units*
- *Adaptive Reuse to residential of the office buildings at 1800 and 1901 S. Bell Street - review still ongoing, Center Park at risk of being delayed for decades*

**GOVERNMENT**

- *Arlington County Board will begin reviewing its all At-Large, County Manager Form of Government in 2026*
- *Crime in Aurora Highlands in 2025 is 22% up from 2023 per County Crime Hub Data website, while the whole county is up 6%.*
- *County deer population to be culled in parks starting Feb. Public virtual meeting Jan 15 - see Calendar*
- *School Option Application Deadline Jan 16, 4 pm*

**TRANSPORTATION**

- *Long Bridge Pedestrian Bridge Schedule opening is now delayed until some time post 2030*
- *Crystal City Metro Station to be closed 10 weekends in the Spring between Feb 14 and June 21 with a break for the Cherry Blossom Festival - there will be a shuttle*
- *GW Pkwy Repaving Spout Run to Old Town this spring*

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

- *Arlington Historical Society (AHS) is now collecting oral histories of stories of the Crystal City underground*
- *AHS is also collecting stories about Arlington for the 250<sup>th</sup> US anniversary until March 2026*

**NATIVE GARDENING**

- *January can be the perfect time to plan additions to your native plant garden - <https://www.plantnovanatives.org>*

**INTRODUCING: YOUR CIVIC ASSOCIATION**

Did you know, that since our county government is voted in all "at large", none of the County Board members directly represents our neighborhood, and further, none of them even live east of 395? The Aurora Highlands Civic Association is the primary way the county expects us to give voice to the issues affecting us as a community, yet, our civic association is **all volunteer**. Your neighbors continue to distribute this newsletter by hand, **for you**, to make sure that you are informed about neighborhood issues that may impact your life. Even in the age of social media, this is the most effective way to make sure that you get this information. In addition to monthly meetings, the association also has a couple of community events each year, and maintains a website and social media presence.

**JOINING & DUES**

Please **join** the Civic Association, your community voice - all of those who are eligible and who join can vote.

**HELP NEEDED / ONGOING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

- 1) **Walkers:** Newsletter delivery (there are varying lengths)
- 2) **Writers:** Newsletter writer / editor
- 3) **Techies:** Social media / web help / online meeting help
- 4) **Partiers:** Event planning, and if you are busy, *even just help set up one event*
- 5) **Social butterflies:** 2026 is the USA 250 anniversary
- 6) **Creatives:** Bring Your Own Ideas (BYOI)
- 7) **You want more?** We have liaisons to the Crystal and Pentagon Cities Council (CPCC), National Landing BID, and Arlington Civic Federation and Arlington Neighborhood Program and several spots are open and all of our committees are in need of leadership: Neighborhood Conservation, Publicity, Membership and Planning & Zoning.

PLEASE email [president@aurorahighlands.org](mailto:president@aurorahighlands.org) if you are curious, interested or committed and / **or just show up at a meeting!** Please don't be shy! **Any and all help is welcome and appreciated. THANK YOU THANK YOU**

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## Calendar

### ONGOING

- Four Mile Run Farmers Market, Sundays 9am-1pm, 4109 Mount Vernon Ave
- Aurora Hills Library hosts activities including kids clubs, knitting club, yoga, game nights, writer's cafe, English conversation & more

### JANUARY

- Jan 14: AHCA Meeting 7 pm, 6:30 pm social
- Jan 14: APS Summer Activities Fair. 6 - 8 pm Wakefield
- Jan 15: Info on 2026 deer management: 7 pm - virtual - see Arlington Deer Management Program Page to register
- Jan 16: APS closing date for option school & programs 4 pm
- Jan 18: "2026 Tribute to Dr. MLK", 5 pm Wakefield HS - tickets at Eventbrite
- Jan 21: HALRB 6:30 pm (agenda TBD)
- Jan 22: School Board Meeting 7 pm
- Jan 24: County Board Meeting 9:30 am
- Jan 29: Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VRE) Advisory Group Meeting 12:30 - 1:30 PM <http://www.tinyurl.com/m5pvkc8w> to register
- Jan 30: Cursor Hackathon DC 241 18<sup>th</sup> Street S, 11 am
- Jan 30: APS Teen Health Fair Wakefield, 1 - 4 pm

### AHCA Membership Dues for Calendar Year 2026

**Dues for 2026 ARE NOW DUE** are \$20 per household. Mail a check to AHCA at P.O. Box 25201, Arlington, VA 22202, or via PayPal at <https://bit.ly/AHCAdues>

Find out your membership status by emailing: [treasurerahca@gmail.com](mailto:treasurerahca@gmail.com)

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### Report a Problem

If you see problems you can report them to the County. Try it: <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Topics/Report-Problem>

### 2026 AHCA officers

President Stacy Meyer  
 1st Vice President Alex Chakrin  
 2nd Vice President Vacant  
 Treasurer Ben Watts  
 Recording Secretary Nick Giacobbe  
 Corresponding Secretary Lexi Tinker  
 Editor Vacant

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