



AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION

July 13, 2023

Emma Martin
Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 700
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Emma Martin,

Thank you for the email and the notice of the request for a minor site plan amendment for Crystal Towers VI. I believe this project is actually for the Crystal House development that is being managed by the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing.

I am writing to express our concerns about the proposed changes. This does not seem like a minor site plan amendment and it is the kind of modification that should be given a much more significant site plan evaluation rather than an administrative approval. The proposal is conversion of an approved condominium project to a rental building with an increase in the number of units of over 26%. While we are supportive of dedicated housing for seniors, there is a severe lack of home ownership opportunities, especially condominiums, in our neighborhood. That said, we support senior housing but let's give the project the careful attention it deserves, including review by the Commission on Aging and the Disability Advisory Commission.

There are also concerns with other proposed amendments. Our community has a strong commitment to sustainability and reducing our environmental impact. We are concerned about proposed plans to reduce the number of bike spots, particularly as the number of units increases and the number of vehicle parking spots declines. Transportation Commission representatives need to review the overall transportation plans for the site given the many proposed changes to building use and recent major growth in development and population in our neighborhood.

We are also not familiar with Earthcraft certification and wonder how this is equated back to the familiar LEED system managed by the U.S. Green Building Council. Can you please give us more information about the benefits of Earthcraft certification, other than the lower cost, so we can evaluate this change? We encourage a review by C2E2 given the unusual proposed environmental certification. The shift in the façade to “materials consistent with other publicly financed affordable housing projects” is concerning. We should follow the County Board’s initiative as highlighted by the DESIGNArlington awards and strive for excellence in design rather than seeking an affordable housing look. Life cycle costs for the façade and other building components should be considered, rather than simply reducing the up-front costs. The Planning Commission should have an opportunity to give their expertise to this modification, as they did when the condominium project was initially approved in 2019. Finally, we are concerned about the changes to pedestrian access. We would like to know more about how these changes will affect residents and visitors. We are dealing with a superblock and we have a long-standing commitment to increase the porosity of superblocks such as this. The Pentagon City Sector

Plan and the Livability22202 framework call for access, porosity of the superblocks, and prioritize biophilia. The addition of a landscaped walking path from the Southeast corner of 22nd and Fern through the site to the Southwest corner of Eads and 18th Streets would meet these goals. Comfortable, convenient pedestrian access through and around this massive superblock that matches pedestrian desire lines, aligns with area green ribbon routes, and provides easy access to key transit routes along 18th Street need to be addressed. The PAC will be able to ensure that the pedestrian needs are considered and addressed.

Also, toward the goal of biophilia, the small park on the corner of 22nd and Fern should also be landscaped with native plants and serve as public access open space. While there have been proposals of a dog run there, the park is too small for that use. Another proposal for fruit trees is laudable, but fruit trees are not really practical because they require so much maintenance. Native pollinator plants with a few shade trees is the most practical and useful option for that small corner of the site. PRC and FNRC will be able to weigh in with thoughtful consideration of that space.

In sum, these really are significant changes to the site plan and worthy of more evaluation than a minor amendment. We strongly encourage staff to provide a formal, yet modified, SPRC review of the entire project in light of the many proposed changes and recent changes in our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cory J. Giacobbe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Cory Giacobbe
President
Aurora Highlands Civic Association