



AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION

FEBRUARY 2022 NEWSLETTER

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Neighbors,

As many of you know, the Arlington County Board is scheduled to vote on and adopt the Pentagon City Sector Plan (PCSP) [bit.ly/pcps-arl] at the County Board meeting on Saturday, February 12. Last month at our Civic Association meeting, we voted on a motion and amendment regarding the plan, and sent the position to the County Board. [This letter](#) dated January 24, 2022 is posted at AuroraHighlands.org. The issue of the PCSP has caused some fairly heated conversations in our community in the last weeks, with passionate pleas and proposals coming from different points of view. I want to emphasize that while I've spoken to and corresponded with many of you in the last few weeks on this topic, several common themes unite us. We all want to live in a safe, clean, quiet neighborhood where our kids can play and we can walk to amenities and transportation and jobs. Our joint vision was laid out in the document [Livability22202](#).

If you would like share your concerns about the PCSP before it goes to the County Board for a vote, I encourage you to either write to the County Board at countyboard@arlingtonva.us, or sign up to speak at the Board meeting either in person or virtually by following this link: bit.ly/arl-board-speak.

In addition, the county planning staff has added a Pentagon City Planning Study Virtual Listening Session on Monday, Feb. 7 at 7 pm. Here is a link to join the meeting: bit.ly/arl-pcps-listen
-- Cory Giacobbe

Discussion of Committees

Stacy Meyer has agreed to chair our Zoning Committee and will talk about the sorts of projects that it will be involved with. We also would like to revive our Budget Committee, so we have an efficient system to spend the funds we accumulate, and our Publicity Committee, so that we can ensure we are reaching into all areas of our civic association boundaries. Please come with questions and think about volunteering.

>> Dues are Due! <<

Please show your support for AHCA and our community by sending in your annual dues for 2022. It's only \$20 per household and helps support this monthly newsletter, community events, and other neighborhood building activities, and also lets you vote at meetings. Please pay online at aurorahighlands.org by clicking the "Donate" button to pay by PayPal. Checks can also be mailed to AHCA, P.O. Box 25201, Arlington, VA 22202. Thank You!

Next Meeting: Wednesday, February 9

7-9pm, Virtual -- Zoom / Facebook
<https://aurorahighlands.org/event/feb2022>

School Walking Bus Proposal

Neighbors Andrea Walker and Lauren Hassel are proposing an Arlington County/APS pilot project in which Arlington 55+ volunteers will walk to school with a groups of students. See the article in this newsletter and join us Wednesday night for a presentation of the project.

Route 1 Working Group Update

Eric Cassel, President of the Crystal City Civic Association and head of the Route 1 Working Group, will talk about the major changes being developed for Route 1. The Virginia Dept. of Transportation has proposed bringing to grade all crossings of Route 1 south of 12th St. This would eliminate the existing configuration of 18th St., which allows traffic, bikes, and pedestrians to cross under Route 1.

LAC Community Studios & Event Space

LAC, formerly the Lee Arts Center, closed in 2020 after more that 40 years of providing quality art studio space for Arlington artists. SaveLAC.org is trying to revitalize this valuable resource. Local artist and art professor David Carlson will present the project.

Read Up & Reach Out!



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Pentagon City Planning Study

In late January, project staff released the 4th draft document, now called the [Pentagon City Sector Plan](#), as well as a staff report and a matrix with comments received and staff responses. Note that the Transportation Commission recommended approval of the Plan at their January 27 meeting, and that the Planning Commission recommended approval at their February 2 meeting.

The County Board will vote on whether or not to approve the Pentagon City Sector Plan, along with associated land use changes and other documents, at either its February 12th or 15th meetings. Check for the finalized agenda at bit.ly/arh-board. You can sign up to speak at the Board meeting at bit.ly/arh-board-speak.

Ben D'Avanzo has been the representative for AHCA on this project. He has drafted a summary, available online, of the civic association's comments on the plan and how the plan has or has not evolved over time in response to them. You can read the summary at <https://bit.ly/PCSPNotes>

Outstanding concerns include:

- Need for a more clear timeline and placement of community facilities, like school, community center and library.
- Disagreement with moving Joyce street and appending Grace Murray Hopper Park to Virginia Highlands Park
- Lack of a protected bike facility on 12th Street
- Insufficiently wide universal sidewalk standards

At the January 12 AHCA meeting [bit.ly/ahca-jan21-video], Matt Mattauszek presented an update on the Plan, which was followed by a vigorous discussion and a proposed resolution. The resolution passed and was incorporated into a letter sent to the County Board [bit.ly/ahca-pcsp-letter]. ARCA, our neighbor civic association to the west, will host an open virtual meeting [bit.ly/arca-feb4] on the RiverHouse portion of the Plan on Friday, February 4 at 7PM. Note that pre registration is required.

Concerns with the Pentagon City Sector Plan

Editorial by Scott Miles

As past President over the duration of the Study and someone that continues to have concerns, I've been asked to share my personal opinion: I do not currently support the proposed Plan, because it still has serious issues that are not good for Aurora Highlands:

- It does not provide nearly enough open, green, and recreational space.
- It does not guarantee essential basic community facilities like libraries, community centers, and schools will be provided.
- It is not adequately understood by residents impacted the most.
- And perhaps most concerning, the Plan pushes critical public facilities discussions on parks, recreation, schools, libraries, community centers, to future plans that will pit neighbor against neighbor as we fight over space the County knows is insufficient.

That is not to say there are not things to like in the plan. I'd like to thank Ben for sharing the positive aspects he sees in the plan. I agree with most of them and would like to see many of the proposed changes come to fruition. But that is not sufficient.

Lacks Informed Consent. On one hand, the County touts extensive community engagement and on the other dismisses residents for not understanding the Plan. It is simply not reasonable to expect people to read and digest the 190-page document. The Plan will lead to major changes, and the County has an obligation to make sure that we, the residents of the area, not only have a reasonable understanding of the plan, but also support it, and that has not yet happened.

Lack of commitment to Library, Community Center, School.

After much effort from residents, the plan was finally improved to at least acknowledge the possible need for a new school and larger library and community center. But there is no commitment to any minimum sizes nor a commitment to when these facilities will be delivered, if ever. These expanded facilities are essential for the projected population increases. The Plan needs to be much clearer on what will be provided and when.

Insufficient Open Green Space. The original 1976 Pentagon City plan 1976 created 11 acres of park space off the bat and also required at least 1 acre with each new block - that was the requirement to accommodate the planned development. This plan introduces just as much development, but provides drastically less park space. At the same time, existing space will be expected to absorb new buildings and additional uses as tennis courts, pools, and a dog park are removed from RiverHouse. This places even more pressure on the already over-prescribed recreational uses in Virginia Highlands Park (VHP), which will become the only destination for recreational needs in Pentagon City. The Plan needs to explicitly commit to a minimum goal of 8.5 acres of open green space and natural areas and even more for recreation and buildings, the minimum required just to maintain current per-capita access.

More Green is Questionable. The "Green Ribbon" idea is nice but is a basic necessity as proposed buildings in-fill throughout Pentagon City just to ensure that it didn't become an impenetrable fortress of walls. The execution of the green ribbon in the appendix is far from "green" and could allow adding basic things like potted plants on the sidewalk, flower boxes, or even just images of nature as acceptable "greenery." The "green" targets like tree canopy targets of 20% sound great, until you realize the acres of asphalt parking lot next to RiverHouse James currently provides 21% coverage. Enthusiastic marketing is OK, but the changes are from the current conditions we are familiar with must be more clear.

Neighborhood wars over insufficient space. The common theme throughout the Plan is that Virginia Highlands Park is the fallback location for all public facilities. A school. A community center. A library. More recreation. Very little of this is feasible – there's simply not enough space and we have contention over it already today. This is overloading the long-promised "master planning" process for the park, and will pit neighbor against neighbor as we fight over facilities, all of which we need. That is not fair to our neighborhood. We need to see now how this is feasible, and if it isn't, there must be a commitment to providing additional land, less density or requiring facilities be located elsewhere in this area.

All of this becomes more frustrating in comparison to the original 1976 PDSP. That plan provided roughly the same development increase as this update. And it also committed to 11 for the park. And 1.67 acres with a Library, Fire Station, and Community Center. And at least 1 acre park space in each site plan. And a 300-unit Nursing home (or 3 acres). And 300-unit subsidized housing (or 3 acres). Plus new streets, bike lanes, etc. The deal this plan provides is embarrassing in comparison. If the same priorities back then were applied to RiverHouse, just that parcel alone would provide 7.7 acres of park space. Instead, the Plan commits to 3.5 and an undefined "Green Ribbon".

I do think the Plan is redeemable. It just needs to adequately include residents, increase the open space goals, provide firm commitments for community facilities, and show us how a Virginia Highlands Plan master planning process will be feasible and not tear our neighborhood apart. Please share your concerns.

Scott Miles served as president of AHCA from 2019 to 2021.

What To Be Happy About in the Pentagon City Sector Plan Editorial by Ben D'Avanzo

Many folks in the area have continued to be interested in the Pentagon City Sector Plan proposal. A lot of attention has focused on the areas of the plan that could be improved, and I've previously shared and have now updated, reflecting the fourth draft, a matrix of comments and outcomes made by the Aurora Highlands Civic Association. Therefore, I would also like to share some of the improvements this plan will lead to in our neighborhood.

To be clear, this following list represents my own opinions, not that of the civic association, though the official comments and the Livability22202 framework all have reflections in them.

Badly Needed Neighborhood Planning - The area for Pentagon City is decades old and outdated. Development under it has no requirements for biophilia, sustainability or improving bike and pedestrian access. And, thanks to community input in this process, the new Sector Plan will require each block to have subsequent planning efforts devoted to building placement, use, size, etc. The plan moves forward planning for Virginia Highlands Park, something neighborhood activists have pushed for many years, as well as ongoing transportation monitoring and further studies on transportation demand management, including requirements for how new development will be mandated to encourage non-car forms of transportation.

Addressing the Housing Shortage - Thanks to Amazon, thousands of new people are going to want to live in our neighborhood in coming years. However, increased demand but limited supply means that housing prices (rents and property tax assessments) will skyrocket. Many residents of apartment buildings have reported double digit rent increases this year and fear displacement. The new housing allowed by the plan, while not solving the overall housing crunch, should lead to more competition and slower growth in housing costs than we otherwise would have experienced.

Affordable Housing - Developments under the plan are required to make 10% of their units affordable. This is much more than usual and developers cannot simply make a contribution to the (important) housing trust fund. This means that there will be housing available to the folks who work in our schools, emergency response, hotels, restaurants and other neighborhood businesses.

Improved Public Space - A major criticism of the plan, one that I share, is that it does not promise a net increase in green space. However, the plan instead focuses on improving poorly designed, generally privately owned, open space and ensuring they do not develop in the future through public ownership. This includes the depressing spaces outside the Nordstrom and in-between the TSA and DEA buildings, as well as the underutilized and often ignored Grace Murray Hopper Park. The plan also has new requirements, added thanks to community input, for minimum tree and planting requirements for every development, and it requires a park within a 10 minute walk for every resident.

Bike and Pedestrian Improvements - Under the plan, we'd see new protected bike lanes for 15th, Hayes, Joyce and Fern Streets. We would also see clear and good standards for wide sidewalks throughout Pentagon City.

Buses - This is one of my favorite aspects of the plan. Though more detail will be determined in a future Hayes street study, I think we can all share frustration with the amount of curb space that idling or parked tourist buses take up. The plan proposes making Hayes bus parking pick up and drop off only, pushing parking to a potential new bus station on the Pentagon parking lot. Instead, there will be more room for Metrobuses, allowing better service and fewer conflicts with bikes and cars.

The Green Ribbon and Biophilia - One of the primary requests of the Livability 22202 Framework was to create a pedestrian focused green pathway, connecting all the parks in the area. The county has directly adopted this neighborhood driven idea. While the devil will be in the details in implementation, it is exciting to see this plan have significant content and policies pushing new development to incorporate biophilic elements.

Sustainability - New housing near transportation, like Pentagon City, is good for the environment because it helps reduce exurban sprawl where habitats are disrupted and cars are the only form of transportation.. However, this plan also requires LEED Gold, as compared to LEED Silver, as a minimum requirement for new development. I'd recommend checking out the sustainability measures in the proposed Amazon PenPlace development for an example of a strong implementation.

Community Facilities - Again, thanks to community input, the plan specifically identifies the need for a school, as well as an improved library and community center. For the first time in a document like this, I believe, it includes student generation rates.

I'm sharing this list in part because of some flyers posted around the neighborhood that include misleading information, including out of context quotes from myself, as well as the transportation and renter representatives on the plan. I think the County could have done a lot better with outreach about the plan, and, given past experiences, a healthy skepticism is called for. I think there's room for improvement, especially in terms of certainty around community facilities. Yet there is also a lot to like in the plan itself.

I encourage everyone to read the plan themselves, despite it being a long document. In particular, pay attention to where a subsection is titled "Policy Approach," as this is where changes are actually being made. Other content is generally narrative, background or illustrative examples. For instance, the renderings of new buildings are not developer proposals, which will be reviewed on a case by case basis, but rather potential concepts from the county's consultants.

I think it's important for neighbors who want to constructively push the County to make this plan better to do so, though that push should come from accurate representations of the plans' contents. I plan to do so myself. At the same time, let's also get excited about the potential of Pentagon City to serve as a green, bikeable, transit-friendly, welcoming, walkable and vibrant area in the coming years!

Ben D'Avanzo has been the AHCA rep on this project. He drafted a summary, available online, of the civic association's comments on the plan and how the plan has or has not evolved over time in response to them. You can read the summary at <https://bit.ly/PCSPNotes>

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Calendar

See aurorahighlands.org/events/

Open Door Mondays

Every Monday, 7-8:30pm

Talk to a County Board member on any topic. bit.ly/arl-board-mondays

County Snow Removal

County website on snow removal: <https://bit.ly/arl-snow>. Also check on your neighbors and help if you can.

HOG Pull, Saturday

February 5, 2022, 9-11am

Invasive Plant Pull

Meet at Haley Park, 2400 S.

Meade St., Arlington, VA 22202

Please preregister at

<https://environment.arlingtonva.us/trees/invasive-plants/>

Ft. Scott Invasives Removal

Feb 26, 10 am to Noon

During COVID, registration is

required. Pre-register at

<https://bit.ly/ft-scott-restore>

55+ Programs @ Aurora Hills

If you are 55 or older, check out the

55+ Pass programs at Aurora Hills.

<https://bit.ly/arl-ah55plus>

COVID Updates from the County

For up to date information on COVID-19 in Arlington visit the [COVID-19 Dashboard](https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Health/COVID-19). For information on testing and vaccines in Arlington, visit

www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Health/COVID-19

Questions about your real estate assessment?

Watch this [video](#) to understand how the County assesses property. Learn more about real estate assessments in Arlington and find answers to frequently asked questions at arlingtonva.us/assessments. Information on how to appeal your assessment – and forms to complete – can be found through this [link](#).

Long Bridge Aquatics & Fitness Center

recently [won an Excellence Award](#) in the 2021 [DESIGNArlington competition](#). Excellence Awards give the highest recognition for Arlington projects that represent a comprehensive approach to high-quality design and execution. Congrats to the team that made Long Bridge possible!

Newsletters & Social Media

We have heard from residents that really enjoy having a print newsletter. While we'll do our best to continue it, that will depend on continued support from advertisers and volunteers to assemble it. Sign up for newsletters by email at aurorahighlands.org/join-ahca and follow us at @AuroraHighlands on Twitter, Facebook, or Insta to stay connected no matter what.

This Bus Runs on Volunteer Power! This Bus is US!

Age-Friendly Arlington, Arlington Public Schools Safe Routes to School and WalkArlington are proposing our first intergenerational WALKING SCHOOL BUS!

Arlington 55+ volunteers will walk with groups of students to Oakridge Elementary. The Walking School Bus route(s) would serve families in our neighborhood that lie within the school's one-mile walk zone.

This unique Arlington County/APS pilot project will kick off in Spring 2022, with virtual training, safety resources, and family meet-up opportunities provided to volunteers prior to kick-off. Learn more at the AHCA meeting on Feb. 9.

Contact Andrea Walker at tasteless@verizon.net or Lauren Hassel at lauren.hassel@apsva.us

Celebrate, the Carbon-Neutral Way

Over the years, AHCA has focused on green events. So we have reusable plates, utensils, and even a portable battery. Contact info@aurorahighlands.org to use for your events.

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