

**Membership Meeting Minutes
Aurora Highlands Civic Association
November 8, 2023 via Zoom**

Opening & Approval of Minutes

President Cory Jacobson Giacobbe opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. with a welcome to the membership and an overview of the agenda for the evening. The group approved the minutes for the October meeting that had been posted to the AHCA website for review.

Melwood Horticultural Training Center

Melwood President and CEO Larysa Kautz, joined by Scott Gibson, gave an update on Melwood's activities since their merger with Linden. Melwood is once again hosting the Miracle on 23rd Street this year and it will include ice skating and a moon bounce. The Miracle will be on Friday, December 8 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m., register at: <https://melwood.org/event/melwoods-annual-miracle-on-23rd-street>.

Melwood is a non-profit organization that has been advocating for programs and jobs for 60 years. They work to expand careers in order to create fully inclusive workforces. An advocacy group, they press for legislation such as ending sub-minimum wages in Virginia. With a focus on the dignity of work, they are also looking at the housing challenges that their clients face.

In collaboration with [Main Street Housing](#), they are looking at ways to address the "extraordinary need" for housing. Melwood is planning to build 100-105 units of committed affordable housing on their current 750 23rd Street South site with 25% set aside for disabled residents. They have entered into an agreement with [Wesley Housing](#) as the developer. The goal is for true inclusion, with accommodation built into the design of the facility rather than afterward. It is too soon for a design, but they are looking at various options on the height, size, and massing of the building. The current facility (the century old Nelly Custis School) has about 25,000 square feet of program space and with the new facility they are planning for about 22,000 square feet of program space (essentially equal due to more efficient design).

Melwood hopes to continue the current programming on 23rd Street, including administrative offices for staffers who serve clients in the community, as well as the existing training programs. For example, Melwood offers IT technical training for job placement with clients such as Mitre, NGIS, KPMG, and Wells Fargo. They also do workforce training and development, as well as run a day program for disabled clients. In addition, they rent out spaces to groups such as [Sustainable Scoop](#) (training in media arts) and [Inclusive Pathways to Success](#) (woodworking classes).

Community questions focused on the redevelopment project and most of the questions could not be answered. The breakout by apartment size/number of bedrooms is not yet determined, it depends on the size of the building and financing mechanism. There are no architectural renderings yet, only massing studies and no determination on maintaining the historic facade. Parking has not yet been determined, though it is estimated a single below-grade parking level would yield about 100 spaces at a cost of about \$60,000/space. An initial traffic study was completed as a part of the Tier 1 application and is posted on the [County project page](#).

In response to the reason for the significant density, Ms. Kautz said that the break event point for financial viability for this type of project is generally around 100 units, also noting that one of the County

proposals is for 123 units, which Melwood is not requesting. There were questions about the 25% disability rate and the response was that they are seeking inclusion without isolation.

As the conversation wrapped up, the question got to how do we arrive at a zone of mutual unhappiness. There was a suggestion that the association should meet with Melwood in advance of the November 28 Long Range Planning Committee meeting. A motion by Rachel Hicks was approved by the membership that such a meeting should be public and open to all. Cory will work with the Executive Board and Melwood to schedule a meeting and look at having it in person.

The County has also posted a [survey](#) that is open until November 14.

Election of Officers for Calendar Year 2024

After a lengthy delay to gather up enough paid members to meet the 20 person quorum requirement prescribed in the bylaws, the following slate was voted into office by a plurality of those present:

President Rachel Hicks
Vice-President Jill Braun
Second Vice-President Stacy Meyer
Treasurer Ben Watts
Business (Recording) Secretary Nicholas Giacobbe
Corresponding Secretary Alyssa Gardner

Cory congratulated the new officers and said she looks forward a smooth transition as they prepare to take office on January 1, 2024.

The members adopted a motion proposed by Rachel Hicks to celebrate and mark our appreciation for Cory Giacobbe's two years as AHCA president, noting her hard work, tireless efforts at advancing the neighborhood's goals, quiet diplomacy, and great sacrifice as she led many meeting during the middle of the night from Kosovo.

Livability22202 Reboot

Cory updated the group on the October 26 community meeting at the Amazon community room on the as the neighborhood seeks to reimagine its priorities for the future in light of the significant development of the past few years. The initial draft prior to the October 26 meeting included three tiers as follows:

First Tier: Elementary School; Community Center; Libraries

Second Tier: Housing; Green Ribbon; Route 1; Green Space; Underground

Third Tier: Childcare services; a second entrance to Pentagon City Metro; local "jitney" service

During the preparatory meetings for the October 26 meeting and thanks to direction from the discussions at the September and October AHCA meetings, Livability leadership (the 3 CA presidents) pared the priorities down to just two:

First Tier: Elementary School; Open Space; Community Center; Green Ribbon

Second Tier: Libraries; Route 1; Underground

After the presentations on October 26, the community participants were able to post questions/comments and prioritize the community benefits (see attachments to these minutes). They were also invited to submit written comments by November 17 (to President@aurorahighlands.org). The next step is for Livability leadership to evaluate the comments and revise the priorities as needed. These new priorities will then be used to inform a letter to the County and briefing for the CPCC. Cory was reminded that AHCA has repeatedly expressed a desire to vote on the priorities before signing on to the revised priorities. This is a critical step in the community's ongoing support for the Livability effort and helps to diminish the trust deficit.

Planning Commission Updates

Nick Giacobbe gave a briefing on the second meeting of the [RiverHouse Long Range Planning Committee](#), which focused on transportation, the Green Ribbon, view sheds, lighting, and interconnections with the edge of the community. There will be a final meeting of the LRPC on November 16 at 7:00 p.m. The next steps are a walking tour, meetings on the park master plan for the site, and likely four SPRC meetings in 2024.

Nick also noted that there will be an initial meeting of the [LRPC on the requested site plan amendment for the Pentagon Centre site](#) on November 20 at 7:00 p.m. KIMCO is seeking a significant density increase for their long-term redevelopment project. Alyssa Gardner is the AHCA rep for this project.

There will also be a meeting of the LRPC on the [Melwood](#) project on November 28 at 7:00 p.m., Stacy Meyer is the AHCA rep for this project. In addition to the [survey](#), which closes on November 14, the LRPC meeting will be a good opportunity to have your voice heard.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.
Recording Secretary

**Verbatim Notes from Flipcharts at
Livability22202 Community Meeting on
Oct. 26, 2023**

Tier 1

Community Center - re-use?/combine uses?

Seniors/multi-generational

Library - maker spaces, workforce development

Separate or joined with school/senior center

Underground - how to use?

Increase the use and increase the safety

Community center functions in underground? Art spaces?

Don't diminish open space

Library - ten year plan for JBG provided library space (in crystal city)

What to do about the fire station

Important for community gatherings/work from home

Elementary School

Walkable - how fit with route 1

Overcrowding and trailers

Influx of kids with development

Build it here

South Arlington

What about middle school?

Open Space

Too much hardscape

Water Park too developed

Dog Park

Time to delivery

Questions/concerns:

How is "essential services" defined?

How can you preserve unique value of the community center and library if they are co-located?

How do we consider functions instead of facilities?

What does a multi-use community center look like?

How do we get more people in the underground?*

How do we preserve the open space and not end up with a complete built-up neighborhood?*

Crystal City library is important to Crystal City residents and in addition to the Aurora

Hills library?

Are we talking about a new or refurbished library?

Concerns with overdevelopment (how do we balance open space and amenities and facilities)?

School might be the only thing with an actual need?

How do we include public safety in the discussion - the fire station is connected to the current library?

How are old and new fire stations facilities used?
Can some community center “uses” be put in the underground? “Art in the underground”
How will Route 1 at-grade effect walkability for schools?
How do we improve the quality of the existing 22202 schools?
What about overgrowing in middle school (Gunston)?
How do we consider essential services as a priority?
Can we emphasize high-quality schools in the area?
How do we serve the children of the neighborhood (current and new)?
How can we avoid busing our kids?
How do we resolve the middle school challenges?
How do we emphasize actual open space?
How do we consider Long Bridge Community Center within the larger neighborhood Community Center needs?
How can open space planning consider use for owners of large dogs and the need for large non-cramped spaces?
How can we get more public park space (vice developer-owned space)?
Who are the open space people? (i.e. the community leaders/organizations who care about open space)
How can the community play an oversight role on delivery and implementation?
How do we change policy to ensure “concurrent delivery” of developments and parks?

Tier 2

Green Ribbon

Intersect with long bridge, incorporate roaches run
Light pollution
Safety
Material for paths
18th and 12th street underpass
Advanced crossing measures for pedestrian safety

Why??? **Route 1**

Underground - art spaces/music club/dance studio/rehearsal spaces (art district)

Questions/concerns:

Where is parking and infrastructure and roads?
How can we integrate roaches run with green ribbon? And the Mount Vernon trail?
How do we decrease/consider light pollution (for the fireflies)?
How can we decrease light pollution from large buildings?
Can we make safety a Tier 1?***
How do we utilize materials that are safe?
Can we have more public/private partnerships for security?
How do we connect crystal and pentagon city? The desolation is real
How can we improve and automate safe pedestrian crossings?
How can we ensure consistency of bike mobility through 22202?
How would we make an underground passage safe?
Why does anyone want to bring Route 1 to grade?

How can we expand the culture and arts spaces in the underground?

What about music clubs in the underground?

Revitalized Water Park has people there and is more secure?

How do you concentrate uses in the underground? (i.e. hubs in the underground)

How can we expand and facilitate ownership and allow families to grow in place?

What would it take to start a pop-up in the underground?

How is SEPTED (?) considered in developments?

