

**Membership Meeting Minutes  
Aurora Highlands Civic Association  
October 11, 2023 via Zoom**

**Opening & Approval of Minutes**

Vice President Jill Braun opened the meeting at 7:06 p.m. with a welcome to the membership and an overview of the agenda for the evening (President Cory Giacobbe was unable to attend). The group approved the minutes for the September meeting that had been posted to the AHCA website for review.

**Nomination for 2024 AHCA Officers**

Nominating Committee Chair Natasha Atkins noted the lack of a quorum (12 of 20 needed per the bylaws) and the Chair determined that a quorum was not needed for nominations. Natasha then presented the following slate:

President Rachel Hicks  
Vice-President Jill Braun  
Second Vice-President – no nominees  
Treasurer Ben Watts  
Business (Recording) Secretary Nicholas Giacobbe  
Corresponding Secretary – no nominees

From the floor Stacy Meyer was nominated as Second Vice-President and Alyssa Gardner as Corresponding Secretary.

There were no further nominations from the floor and the above slate will be considered for election at the November meeting. If elected, the new team will take office on January 1, 2024.

Jill invited each candidate to present their focus for the coming year, noting her excitement to be a part of something that is new and old as we face so many changes.

Ben Watts spoke of his experience for the past year as treasurer and addressed the need for more members to pay their dues. Ben has lived here a while and enjoys the neighborhood.

Rachel Hicks grew up in northern Virginia and has lived here in 22202 for three years. Passionate about the neighborhood as inclusive with good quality of life with schools, parks, and parking for people. She said we need to work together with community and County. She aims to work to help everyone feel included and welcome as well as work with important neighborhood players such as Amazon.

Stacy Meyer has lived here for a long time and loves the neighborhood. Rumors that Stacy doesn't like dogs is pure misinformation, in spite of her four cats. Stacy works a lot on zoning and wants to be sure the single family residences don't get stomped on. There are lots of projects in the pipeline and we need to ensure they are executed properly.

Nick Giacobbe was not present but Jill noted that he has been active as Recording Secretary for the past year and produced excellent work.

Alyssa Gardner has lived at Met Park for the past 3 and a half years and hopes to represent the residents of the apartments. She wants to be more involved in the community and help cultivate a great place for all of us to live.

### **Livability22202 Reboot**

While waiting for Mike Dowell to fix his connection, Jill reiterated Cory's point from September that we need to be sure to preserve open space and breathing room. We need to have an option of nothing, where everything is not developed. It will also include the important green ribbon to permit passage through the neighborhood for people and wildlife.

Stacy Meyer noted the importance of the null option, especially with Nelly Custis Park. Through Friends of Aurora Highlands Park she has been pushing for open space without the many demands for programming. We need to preserve unprogrammed grass and open space. Rachel said we need to understand the balance between space/breathing room/open sky and development and one of the tools we need to use is zoning.

David Litman spoke about the Arlington Neighborhoods Program (former Neighborhood Conservation Program) and noted that we are lacking a project since the neighbors nixed the 21<sup>st</sup> Street sidewalk project (needed 60% of project's linear footage for approval). Please keep AN in mind as a way to develop a project such as community gardens or something on a median strip rather than the traditional sidewalk projects.

Stacy Meyer announced that she and Nick Giacobbe heard from Planning Commissioner Jim Lantelme that the Melwood Horticultural Training Center is continuing pursuit of their housing project on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. The County will be putting out a survey county-wide in the next week or so and it will be open for ten days. This is in spite of the County not responding to our letters and concerns of more than a year ago. We should publicize this survey broadly when it comes out.

### **Mike Dowell's Presentation**

Mike Dowell, Chair of the Crystal and Pentagon Cities Council (CPCC), gave a brief background on the Council and its concern that our community has all of the features that people need. There has been a list of needs such as a community center, school, and more open space. Mike led the group through a history of the Livability22202 process (a coalition of the three civic associations), and noted that many of the needs have been included in the County's sector plans (link to Mike's presentation: <https://aurorahighlands.org/wp-content/uploads/Livability22202-Priorities-Oct-2023-DRAFT-CCPC.pptx>).

These are not the relatively small community amenities that are typically addressed in a single site plan, but rather the big ticket items that would require the County to finance through bonding. The activity underway is to revalidate those priorities. Consensus is critical so that all three civic associations are in alignment. The next step will be the community meeting on October 26 at Amazon HQ2, then a set of activities to actually advance the effort through workshops.

Timing of the priorities is important, by the time we see a site plan application we are about a year too late. The County and developer have been negotiating the community amenities for a long time by then

without our knowledge or involvement. Having an agreed upon set of priorities in place will give the County a sense of the community's wishes for their negotiations.

Based on the priorities identified by the Livability leadership group, Mike walked the group through the three tiers as prioritized:

- First Tier: Elementary School; Community Center; Libraries; Open Space
- Second Tier: Housing; Green Ribbon; Route 1; Transportation Plan; Underground
- Third Tier: Childcare services; a second entrance to Pentagon City Metro; essential services; local "jitney" service

**Emergent Issues:**

- Need for a 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Restaurant row small area plan
- Synetic's departure
- Pentagon Centre alignment with Pentagon City Sector Plan

**Opportunities to do better/best practices:**

- Improved porosity through superblocks
- Concurrent delivery of parks with sites
- Green ribbon detail planning (gaps, eco-system support)
- Less Hardscape, more green space in parks and open space

**During the discussion some of the issues raised were:**

- Stacy Meyer stressed her desire for a vote by AHCA on these priorities and Mike said that would be up to the association. However, we need to move quickly to get these updates to the County. Mike recommended keeping the language as simple as possible in order to get consensus and alignment.
- Mike noted that surveys are not meaningful and that we should look at focused areas for future charrettes and workshops.
- Brent Spence and Janet Dunkelberger stressed the need to look at other alternatives for school siting, noting that the County owns lots of land across from the ART bus depot on Eads Street. They also pointed out that Virginia Highlands Park is our prime open space and that it should not be taken as a given to site a new school. Others noted that the County should look at the old Nelly Custis School on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street for possible reacquisition as a school site.
- A frequent point that was raised was questioning the urgency for moving these priorities forward.
- Stacy Meyer asked if spot zoning was ever considered as an emerging issue, Mike said that it had not been discussed.
- Natasha Atkins asked if the Simon property was a part of the Pentagon City Sector Plan and Mike said that it is. She also suggested that the dangerous entrance to Westport (Pentagon Row) from 15<sup>th</sup> Street really needs to be improved, perhaps as a part of the green ribbon effort.
- There were several questions about the need for the jitney pilot and whether there was sufficient data to support the service, especially since the neighborhood already has bus service.

- Several people expressed the need for broader community input and noted that there has been a communication breakdown during this rushed process. (Secretary's note: Livability priorities were in fact covered extensively, see the September and October 2023 newsletters as well as the minutes from the September 2023 meeting. Newsletters were distributed in hard copy, by social media, email and the website. End Note.) Mike stressed the need for the community to agree on high-level goals and that they should be consistent with the 2019 Livability documents, as well as the need for quick validation for the County and developers to act upon the community input through the updates. The document will not go to the County until it has been properly validated by the three civic associations and each civic association decides the validation process.
- What happened to the Roaches Run access? Carol Fuller in Crystal City is following it closely but there are complications with land ownership. Should it be added to the list?
- Funding question – what are the County's plans? Mike is not sure but historically the County has used bonds for schools and major parks improvements. These projects are beyond the scope of community benefits typically considered with a site plan.

### **Zoning Committee Report**

Stacy Meyer has been following the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) amendment process for the Melwood Horticultural Training Center and residential plots on Eads Street. She is also tracking one in Lyon Village near Clarendon Metro, where the Presbyterian church wants to build LGBT senior housing (see [ArlNow](#) story). The residents are concerned that this will be a precedent that impacts the entire County and are asking for our support. Stacy noted there is an LRPC meeting on October 25 on this project. One of the critical issues to follow is spot zoning, which is illegal in Virginia, especially as it seems to be an emerging County policy.

### **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.  
Recording Secretary