

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

Opening & Approval of Minutes

President Cory 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 February meeting that had been posted to the AHCA web site for review.

Amazon HQ2 Update

Cory introduced Patrick Phillipi, Amazon's Head of HQ2 Community Engagement, who was joined by Brian Stout, for a discussion of Amazon's recently announced pause of construction at the HQ2 PenPlace site. Patrick explained that Amazon is here to be a long-term partner with a goal of being transparent with the challenges and shifts in their building program. He noted first and foremost that Amazon looks forward to completing the PenPlace project. The shift is in the timing, due to current economic conditions. They will continue with preconstruction and permit work this year while utility work on and around the site will be ongoing. The long-term commitment is still for 25,000 jobs at HQ2. Amazon has about 8,000 employees at HQ2 who will return to the office 3 days/week beginning May 1.

Many neighbors expressed concern with the unsightly state of the 12 acres at PenPlace, which is currently owned by Amazon, and has been a construction staging site for decades. Patrick agreed to work with the real estate department to consider a cleanup and also took on board the idea of an interim public park use once the length of the pause is determined. He also noted that the hole where the Residence Inn was located is needed as preliminary excavation for one of the towers.

Work on the MetPark portion of HQ2 is wrapping up and Amazon anticipates occupancy in June of this year. The employees will begin the shift over from six different short-term leased spaces and there is space for about 14,000 employees at MetPark (Amazon will also retain 1771 Crystal Drive). This was another factor in the pause, with work at home Amazon does not need office space as quickly as previously planned and since HQ2 is a large capital project there was internal completion for funds.

Amazon's commitment to the community benefits has not changed. They still look forward to hosting the Arlington Community High School on PenPlace (Tower 1 rather than Tower 3, which requires a site plan amendment). It will not be ready for the 2026 academic year, but Arlington Schools have option years on the current Ballston facility that will accommodate the need.

Arlington Historical Society (<http://www.ArlingtonHistoricalSociety.org>)

President Cathy Bonneville Hix gave an overview of the work that the society has been doing since its founding in 1956, much of it at the Hume School right up on South Arlington Ridge Road. In addition to the museum at Hume School (our oldest standing school), they also run the Ball-Sellers House, the oldest home in the county and both are available to visit for free. In addition to the two museums, AHS conducts free monthly events year round and special projects such as [memorializing the enslaved](#) in Arlington County and [preservation education](#) to let homeowners, real estate agents, and home builders

know that teardowns are not the only option (especially with historic preservation tax incentives). All these projects and outreach are to improve knowledge of our shared history in Arlington.

AHS receives no government funds, it does all of its work through [membership](#), donations, and grants. So, how can you help? Become a member, donate funds or artifacts, and volunteer. AHS has no paid staff and all the work is done by a cadre of dedicated local volunteers.

County Requests for Comments – 1) Veritas Collegiate Academy

Cory briefed on the request for a use permit for 25 students, even though the current use permit is for 25 students and the County reports that there are 110 students currently enrolled. Neighbors wondered how there could be such a huge discrepancy and why neither the County nor the applicant take the terms of the use permit seriously. What are the sanctions for such an egregious violation of use permit terms? Neighbors also wondered about issues such as ADA compliance, lack of bike parking, and adequacy of the recreational facilities for a K-12 student population. The members agreed to send a letter to the County Board.

2) Avis Request for Use Permit for 601/701 South 12th Street

Avis is planning to set up an interim neighborhood facility in the garage of the ex-TSA headquarters buildings while Brookfield Properties works on its redevelopment plan. Our primary concerns are with the traffic flow through the garage ramps on South Hayes and Fern Streets. Related to the project, Avis is also opening a facility at 2600 Richmond Highway. Members expressed concerns about the traffic flow from this facility spilling into the neighborhood as well as the new lights that do not seem to meet dark sky standards. The members agreed to send a letter to the County Board.

3) Westpost (Pentagon Row) Renovations

This minor site plan amendment is to permit 1,300 gross square feet of additional retail space by closing off the current escalator lobby to DSW and to build out of a 2,400 square foot terrace on an existing rooftop (overlooking the Walgreens parking lot). There were no objections to this request. The other amendment is to permit a large media screen on the clock tower. While members thought it would be great for movie nights, there were reservations about how many hours it would be in use, the associated noise, and concern that it would turn into a 24/7 billboard. The members agreed to send a letter to the County Board.

SPRC Updates – 1) Americana

John Whall gave an update on the most recent meeting of the Site Plan Review Committee, which dealt with façade materials, the east-west corridor, a larger dog run, parking (split between on-site and at the Bartlett), as well as green features and sustainability (electric/gas mix). Community benefits for this project will be to fund and design the Metro market development on the 8 acres near the Crystal City Metro, as well as South Eads Street improvements, and something related to affordable housing. Next stop for this project is the Planning Commission, see the March newsletter for more details as well as the [County's project page](#).

2) Crystal Towers 3 Infill Project

Ben D'Avanzo was away and Cory passed along the Ben's report about the February 23 meeting:

An issue with this site is that the current zoning, which the applicant is not seeking to change, allows a higher height than the Crystal City Sector Plan. However, after review and display of images made it clear the proposed building is about the same height as the current Crystal Tower buildings and will not be visible from outside the block. Therefore no one on the SPRC objected to the height, which most felt stepped down nicely. There is an issue the applicant is addressing about how close it is to Crystal Lofts.

There was concern about the loss of many mature trees, especially where the new retail will be along Eads, which are along the street. There is a push to get even more new trees planted. For example, they could eliminate some of the unattractive surface parking and put trees instead.

There was mixed reception to the coloring of the façade.

Next meeting in April is about transportation, and there is concern there about eliminating one entrance of their garage, which may lead to internal traffic on the block. Also park space, such as revisiting the park at 15th and Eads, and Community benefits. For more details see the County [project page](#).

RiverHouse Densification Project

Many members of the association participated in the JBG Smith open house on March 2. All agreed that it was a very useful briefing on where the project is headed, for more on the project visit the JBG Smith [project page](#) and see the [presentation](#) materials from the open house.

Bowlero

A member raised a question about the use permit for Bowlero. There was supposed to have been an administrative review in January 2023, yet it seems that problems continue at the site. The Executive Board will work with the neighboring civic associations and the County to determine the current status.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.
Recording Secretary