

## **Draft transmittal letter to County Board on Livability22202 Priorities**

### Background and Overview:

Livability22202 is a coalition of the three civic associations of 22202 – Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, and Crystal City – all of which face common pressures from rapid commercial and residential development. In 2018, community leaders, activists, and interested citizens met to develop holistic strategies, based on shared themes, to create a better, more livable community. In 2019, the coalition published an Action Plan and Framework, which have been used by the County, developers, and even VDOT in their plans for the 22202 neighborhoods.

Fast forward to June 2023, when County staff asked Livability22202 and the Crystal and Pentagon Cities Council (CPCC) for an updated list of community priorities to help focus development of the County's next Capital Improvement Plan. Using the 2019 Priorities as a starting point, the three civic associations held a series of meetings to ask the community to identify our most important priorities.

As a result, two major themes emerged as priorities for quality of life: Facilities and Open Space. Residents are overwhelmingly concerned with the overcrowding of the neighborhood schools. With more housing in the pipeline, families need an additional centrally located elementary school that pupils can walk to. In addition, our community is seriously underserved by an outdated community center and library that are largely unchanged since the 1970s. The rapidly growing neighborhood needs a state-of-the-art community center that can offer a venue to support programs to enrich and unite our community such as an enhanced senior center, youth programs, performing space, meeting rooms, and more. Whether a modern library is included in this complex or whether it becomes a separate stand-alone facility, a new centrally located modern library is essential for the future of the community. Opening and maintaining a smaller library branch in Crystal City is also a high priority.

Open Space and robust design and buildout of the Green Ribbon are high priorities. In addition to completing the park plans and delivering parks that have already been promised, residents want to be assured that no open space is lost in the delivery of the essential county facilities. Open space and tree canopy are very high concerns of the residents of 22202, and all county and private development projects should adhere to open space and tree canopy goals.

During this series of meetings in the fall of 2023, participants agreed upon the following set of priorities, but also brought up additional concerns and ideas. The coalition and the individual civic associations will be following up on these issues. For example, safety, security, airport and construction noise, parking, light pollution, and access to Roaches Run are all resident concerns that impact our quality of life. We will be following up during 2024 to find ways to address these additional focus areas that have been raised by our neighbors.

### Livability Priorities:

- **Elementary School** - The County must resolve the current overcrowding at Oakridge Elementary School and Gunston Middle School. Specifically, 22202 needs an additional centrally located, walkable elementary school to alleviate overcrowding at Oakridge.

- **Community Center** - The neighborhood needs a centrally located community center that meets the needs of our current and future population. The center should retain the existing senior programs and community room and include additional features to be identified in community workshops.
- **Libraries** - The existing Aurora Hills library requires updating to modern functionality. A larger centrally located library is needed in addition to a smaller, separate library branch in Crystal City.
- **Planning, Design and Delivery of Open Space** - Throughout 22202, the community needs more green open space and less hardscape, while preserving and increasing tree canopy. The addition of new county facilities (school, community center, library) *should not decrease the net amount of open space*. Delivery of planned parks is lagging behind new building construction, particularly in Crystal City. It is time to complete the park planning in Crystal City and Virginia Highlands Park, ensuring community needs are identified and met, and parks are built.
- **Green Ribbon** - The Green Ribbon is a continuous biophilic connected pedestrian and bike network throughout 22202 that increases porosity through the superblocks. It connects the three neighborhoods of 22202, extends to Crystal City and to areas outside 22202. Landscape design should support the local ecosystem. Develop more detailed design guidelines (and schedules) for the Green Ribbon that support this vision across the community.

#### Livability Stakeholder Concerns:

- **Route 1** - The community strongly disagrees with the current plan to bring Route 1 to grade and considers it critical that the design options maintain the status quo at 18th Street South, or, alternatively, add a pedestrian underpass or Barnes Dance signalization. The traffic demand management (TDM) for Route 1 and other projects should be integrated into an overall 22202-wide TDM master plan.
- **Transportation Plan** - A comprehensive community-wide transportation plan is required across development projects and neighboring communities and jurisdictions, that considers traffic calming and other tools to ensure safety and robust multi-modal transit options across 22202.
- **Crystal City Underground** – Revitalize the Underground, both as a commuter route as well as new uses for the empty retail spaces.

*Note: Housing – Because of our extraordinary successes in delivering additional affordable housing units of all kinds the last few years, the community would like to shift focus to other priorities to ensure that the infrastructure is delivered for current and future residents. The community has an ongoing interest in helping existing and future residents to remain in the neighborhood.*