

Membership Meeting Minutes
Aurora Highlands Civic Association
June 14, 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 May meeting that had been posted to the AHCA web site for review.

Pamela Van Hine and Dana Bres on VDOT Route 1 Multimodal Feasibility Improvements Study Phase 2

The 2018 MOU between the Commonwealth of Virginia and Amazon is the basis for the project to improve safety, accessibility and the pedestrian experience crossing Route 1. This project will accomplish none of those goals. The plan is to create an “urban boulevard” by lowering 15th and 18th Streets to grade, free up 4 acres of land for development (owned by Arlington County), as well as improvements to 20 and 23rd Street crossings. Looking at a lower speed limit (25 MPH) but want to study further to ensure that it does not impact I-395 traffic. Outside the scope is a plan to replace the I-395 flyover and left exit from I-395 to Crystal City.

Recommending that VDOT consider maintaining the existing bridge at 18th Street as a safe crossing for pedestrians, cyclists, and emergency vehicles. VDOT is considering a dedicated pedestrian crossing (a Barnes Dance) that would stop all traffic. Another consideration is a Traffic Demand Management plan to reduce traffic.

VDOT has accepted the recommendation to increase the right of way north of 18th Street to 160 feet and keeping the right of way at 142 feet south of 18th Street.

However, major issues remain:

- Maintain the grade separation at 18th Street for safety and emergency access
- More robust Traffic Demand Management that will actually reduce traffic and keep it off the neighborhood streets
- Speed of traffic on Route 1 with 11’ lanes rather than 10’ wide (and 13’ on the outside lanes) and no place (or plan) for real speed enforcement activities

For additional information, see the presentation at: <https://youtu.be/HqITsO1F7ic>

Mary Glass of ATAG with Sustainable Scoop’s video on the condition of Arlington’s tree canopy

Sustainable Scoop is a neighborhood NGO founded by Miriam Gennari and housed in the Melwood Building on 23rd Street South. Offer studio and video production training on sustainable issues so that students can develop their communication skills. The Sustainable Scoop video presented the benefits of the County’s tree canopies and the critical threats it is facing.

The video is available at: <https://vimeo.com/834752567?share=copy>

Mary also presented data on the recent tree canopy study that found a 33% tree canopy cover (excluding the airport and DoD properties). The prior 2017 study showed a 41% canopy, an alarming

decline in short time. This couples with an increase in impervious surface by 2% in just 5 years. She showed slides of the declining tree canopy in the Aurora Highlands neighborhood and recommendations for future planting. AHCA had a tree canopy in 2021 of about 22%, with 3,030 trees.

The new County Forestry and Natural Resources Plan is out for comment through June 30, see <https://publicinput.com/x1078>. The plan proposes *maintaining* a 40% tree canopy, which is far from the current reality. It also does not present the real sense of urgency that is needed on tree canopy.

See meeting video for Mary's presentation: <https://youtu.be/HqITsO1F7ic>

County Requests for Comments

1) Use permit for Lantern Karaoke at 320 23rd St. South. This is for karaoke at a restaurant in the Buchanan building and will take place in six private rooms. We will consult with Crystal City Civic Association since it is in their neighborhood.

2) Veritas Academy. County responded to our comments on the use permit renewal and have addressed our concerns related to fire safety, pudo, and bicycles. It will go to the County Board in July.

New Business/Announcements

Nominating Committee for next year is actively looking for participants in the executive committee next year. If you are interested or know neighbors who are interested in taking an active role please let Cory know.

The County reports that crews will be surfacing and lining two tennis hitting wall areas at Virginia Highlands Park between June 20 and June 23. This first phase of work will include resurfacing the courts and adding new tennis lines. No full-size tennis courts will be impacted, so regular play can continue throughout the duration of the maintenance work. Later this summer, pickleball lines and acoustic fencing will be added to the tennis hitting wall area as part of the Arlington Outdoor Courts Assessment project.

The Civic Federation met last night for its annual election of officers. John Ford was re-elected as President and we have three AHCA members in leadership roles, Ben Watts was elected Treasurer and Scott Miles and Nick Giacobbe were elected board members at large.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.
Recording Secretary