



## Fwd: Nellie Custis School - County Board Meeting Outtake

1 message

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On Jun 19, 2026, at 12:51 PM, AHCA <[info@aurorahighlands.org](mailto:info@aurorahighlands.org)> wrote:



### AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION

**Thank you** to the community that wrote and came out to speak up for Nellie Custis School Wednesday night. We were extremely effective in delivering the message that **we care about this historic school and do not agree with the Melwood design that seeks to demolish it.** If you missed the meeting and want to see the video, it's available at: [Arlington County Board Recessed Meeting | June 17, 2026 - YouTube](#)

**What we accomplished:** by pursuing the Local Historic District, County Board members were forced to take a clear position about demolition. By putting together solid arguments filled with facts, any vote to oppose was based solely on personal opinion.

**JD Spain** made the motion to overrule the recommendation of HALRB, and to demolish the building. **Maureen Coffey** eagerly seconded. Both felt that the 102-year-old Nellie Custis School just wasn't historic enough for their taste. **Takis Karantonis** said he needed more than it just being the first school that was built after Alexandria County became Arlington County, suggesting civic history and places aren't important enough - aligning with Spain and Coffey.

**Chair Matt de Ferranti, currently up for re-election in the August 4 primary,** solidly aligned himself with Spain, Coffey and Karantonis in support of demolition of Nellie Custis School, and with all those in the past that have been responsible for the dearth of historic fabric here in Arlington.

This County Board majority made their position clear - just like with **Missing Middle** and **Faith in Housing** – it is **density at all cost. Build, baby, build!**

**Susan Cunningham** did what she could as the minority voice advocating for adaptive reuse and for the 12 civic associations and other organizations that supported preservation across Arlington. But, her colleagues treated her like the new girl in the high school cafeteria, forming a clique and refusing to engage in any meaningful dialog about working with Melwood to make revisions.

**ArlNow** reporting yesterday on the meeting was far less than objective, in favor of the majority of the County Board, and their zeal to demolish the only civic building left in Aurora Highlands. ArlNow omitted reporting on the **wide support from across the county for preservation**, and the fact that [nearly] every architect and building professional that has looked at this agrees adaptive reuse is the right solution. They even failed to cover the newsworthy event that three political candidates spoke out in favor of preservation, a **striking journalistic omission considering it is primary season here in Arlington.**

**Julie Farnam**, who is running against **Matt de Ferranti** in the democratic primary, showed up Wednesday night, polished and prepared. Julie, who lives near the neighborhood, concluded: "the community would have supported a three-story building or adaptive reuse rather than the five stories that was approved. We could have already had a net gain of new, additional affordable housing and received the support of the neighborhood, but this board hasn't taken that approach. **It creates distrust, resentment and cynicism towards our elected officials when we don't seek common ground.**"

**Audrey Clement**, independent candidate for county board who will be on the ballot in November, **has consistently supported the civic association throughout this process as well.**

**Natalie Roy**, President of the Lyon Park Civic Association, and past democratic candidate for county board was also in support and **on fire**, calling out the county board for **once again not listening to residents.**

As a reminder, **in Virginia any registered voter can vote in the democratic primary.** Early voting is now open and ongoing until **August 1** with the election on **August 4**. In addition to Matt de Ferranti, **Julie Farnam and James DeVita** are on the democratic, ranked choice ballot.

As in every election, no matter how you feel, **in support of the current board decision, or that your voice wasn't heard**, the ballot box is now available to you.



EARLY VOTING INFORMATION HERE:

<https://vote.arlingtonva.gov/Early-Voting>



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