



AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION

March 21, 2026

Honorable Abigail Spanberger
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
Via email

RE: Request to Revise and Return SB388 to Legislature

Dear Governor Spanberger:

The Aurora Highlands Civic Association is one of the most densely population locations in Virginia, and represents 8 - 10,000 residents including the Aurora Highlands National Register Historic District and parts of Pentagon City in National Landing (See Attachment A).

I write on behalf of the association to ask to return SB388 to the Legislature and require revisions or reenactment so that newly-introduced provisions which are likely to create a significant strain on infrastructure in our urban neighborhood can be adequately studied and revised to avoid unintended consequences.

As currently written, the legislation would grant non-profits the right to build large multi-family buildings with the potential in Aurora Highlands to match the recently approved Melwood project on 23rd Street, which we opposed, of 60 ft and 60 units per acre in our small-scale historic district (See Attachment B).

This right is granted to non-profits specifically under the 500-foot radius provisions which were added in January of this year, hastily advanced through Virginia Legislature, and approved in less than a month, allowing density, height and setback to be dictated by the highest and most dense nearby development without any review, analysis or regard for impact on the infrastructure of the neighborhoods where these non-profits are located. In Aurora Highland's case, the Melwood project would not be an isolated outcome: once Melwood establishes its height and density, the 500-foot radius rule would trigger a cascading effect, allowing the four nearby nonprofit properties to build to the same scale—with the potential to add over 500 housing units. (see Attachment B).

These unstudied, untested new provisions allow exponential increases in density and height along with reduced setbacks, based on nearby developments, and will create irreversible impacts on safety and infrastructure as well as a strain on local budgets. Absent reenactment, amendments are necessary to ensure infrastructure capacity and long-term planning are not unintentionally and irreversibly upended.

Our neighborhood has seen extreme growth with thousands of units added as a consequence of Amazon HQ2. Our small area also already contains approvals / existing for over almost 2000 affordable units. Once the existing approvals are built out, affordable units will be very concentrated in Aurora Highlands, with

around 20% of the residents of Aurora Highlands in affordable units, a percentage which is double or triple the Virginia average cited of 5 – 10%.

Our schools are already overcrowded with kids in trailers and with kids being bussed across I-395, our streets are congested, pedestrian accidents have increased and crime is up over 20% in the past two years. We desperately need infrastructure to manage the density we already have, before introducing more, especially density that will be unplanned.

There are clearly defined plans and long-standing tapering rules per the Arlington Comprehensive Plan, which harmonize the high-density commercial areas like Pentagon City with the historic neighborhoods like Aurora Highlands while also taking into consideration local resources and the capacity to serve residents. Specifically, the Arlington General Land Use Plan and its supporting documents including the Crystal City Sector Plan, the Pentagon City Sector Plan, and the Aurora Highlands Neighborhood Conservation Plan which represent decades of transit-oriented award-winning planning, all speak to protection of the scale of the Aurora Highlands Historic District.

Density Only by-right development legislation like Faith in Housing jeopardizes adequate infrastructure and safety / streets, roads and traffic patterns, infrastructure and pedestrian safety. Preserving walkability and safety remains a high priority. There is considerable risk that the capacity standards for adequate and safe infrastructure, including those established through VA legislation, could be eroded.

Equally troubling is that the neighbors who will be directly impacted by this bill have received no meaningful notice or opportunity to comment. We are also concerned that insufficient time has been provided to reconcile conflicts between state legislation and local ordinances. Unless addressed, this could lead to avoidable litigation and unnecessary public expenditures. At a time of limited resources, tax dollars should be used to strengthen communities, not fund lawsuits.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask you to consider the following:

1. Remove the unvetted, unstudied 500-foot provisions in § 15.2-2288.9. Affordable housing; religious organizations and other tax-exempt properties - Section D (starting at line 320-325 of the Engrossed bill) via your line-item amendment power or require reenactment of these provisions. This will preserve by-right development (up to 20 units/acre) while stakeholders could analyze the impact of by-right proposals tied to nearby density, height and setbacks, particularly in those areas where high density was planned near low-density residential neighborhoods with an understanding that sector plans would guide future development decisions.
2. Revise the height limit to the existing limit in historic districts (35 ft in Aurora Highlands) to protect the historic viewsheds, as more than three (3) stories are inappropriate in Nationally Registered Historic Neighborhoods like ours. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties require that significant viewsheds, landscapes, and character-defining vistas within historic districts be preserved and that new construction or alterations must be compatible with the district's setting, maintaining established massing, scale, and spatial relationships while avoiding destruction of important views. To do otherwise could jeopardize important federal funding for these affordable housing projects.

3. Revise and return the bill to reconcile conflicts between state and local legislation. Add language that clearly states that this bill does not change local responsibility to implement VA laws that establish safety and capacity standards for development and occupancy.
4. Allow local authorities to maintain decision-making power in jurisdictions like ours where a threshold of affordable housing has been met. Further, it is critical that in our very urban location we continue to have a public technical review process regarding impacts of building more multifamily development in such a tightly packed space - including historic preservation review where applicable, and review of potential nuisances of multifamily development like garage exhaust location, transformer location, pick up and drop off lanes, loading dock screening, landscape buffering and setbacks, trash storage, visitor parking, overflow parking restrictions around impacted neighborhoods, light pollution mitigation, screening mechanical units, garage screening and entry details, pet relief facilities, market equivalent architecture, confirmation of available infrastructure including schools, road networks, sidewalks, etc.

We respectfully request that you hear our voices before you make the final decision. With open dialogue, we believe it is entirely possible to reach balanced solutions that serve both housing needs without creating infrastructure strains and unintended negative impacts on our communities.

Thank you for your service and consideration. We stand ready to engage constructively.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stacy Meyer', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Stacy Meyer, RA LEED AP
President, Aurora Highlands Civic Association

cc: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Dan Helmer, Delegate
Joshua Cole, Delegate
Adele McClure, Delegate
Patrick Hope, Delegate
Senator Barbara Favola
Senator Jeremy McPike
Arlington County Board
Aurora Highlands Civic Association Board

Attachment A

AMAZON
HQ2

Crystal House
1500 units of
affordable housing

Claridge House
300 units of
affordable housing

Melwood -
105 units of
affordable housing



23rd Street – See
Attachment B
for blowup

Aurora Highlands
Historic District in
yellow

Parts of National Landing & the Aurora Highlands Historic District are included within the boundary of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association shown in light blue. As part of the National Landing proposal, the county is developing 1500 units of affordable housing at the Crystal House property just a few blocks from the churches along 23rd Street in the historic district in addition to the Melwood proposal of 105 units and the 350 units that were existing in the neighborhood. (Some are scattered throughout the other buildings)

Attachment B

AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT RESULTING FROM FAITH IN HOUSING ON 23rd STREET S



Melwood is approved for ~60 units / acre, 105 units

IN 500 ft COPYCAT RADIUS OF MELWOOD:

Calvary owns several properties totaling ~ 67K SF, 1.6 acres > copycat potential 92 units
Latter Day Saints buildings total ~48K SF, 1.1 acres > 66 units
Our Lady of Lourdes (including the Arlington underground stream) totals ~140K SF, 3.2 acres > 193 units

Mt. Vernon is in the 500 ft copycat radius of Our Lady of Lourdes. Once OLOL is built out Mt. Vernon can copycat its ~27K SF, .6 acres > 38 units

Potential exceeds 500 units!!!*

*figures from Arlington County land records - potential based on legislation.