

SUMMARY OF UNADDRESSED ISSUES REGARDING THE MELWOOD SITE PLAN APPLICATION
January 20, 2025

PART 1: KEY / NEW ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

OVERARCHING PROCESS PROBLEMS

- The Tier 1 GLUP Study **only considered the specific application and did not review the surrounding area**. It prioritized developer interests, as the Planning Staff stated in a meeting with AHCA, the Study **only included alternatives that the developer would accept**. This is not in keeping with the 2008 County GLUP amendment policy. The lack of alternatives and consideration of the surrounding area led to a proposal that is too big, poorly designed and does not have community support.
- The Site Plan process running in parallel with the LHD – which has been accepted by the HALRB for a Study - is not per County practice and creates a **conundrum** if the LHD is approved **after** the land is rezoned for residential. The building is *specifically designed* as a school **limiting** its ability to be used as residential and **the site plan depends** on demolition of the building. Approval of the **Site Plan Application must be paused until HALRB has acted on the LHD as is County practice** (Gilliam Place for example).
- No study was conducted regarding the need for the property to remain Public for future public use. **APS and the School Board were not consulted about using the site**.
- The Applicant is making representations as to cost and ability to execute but stated in a meeting on January 8, 2025 with AHCA they have **not secured gap financing as there is no AHIF funding available**. They have proposed **no community benefits** to mitigate the impacts of the development.

ARLINGTON PLANNING GUIDANCE NOT ADDRESSED IN GLUP STUDY

- The **2024 GLUP** Map addresses the site under note ** (Public Use, not publicly owned) and **specifically states** the **existing zoning** of the property and **surrounding land uses should determine the development potential** of the site. This requirement **precedes** any change of land use or re-zoning action. The existing zoning is Public, **the GLUP states the existing zoning is to determine the development potential of the site – it is the intent of the GLUP to maintain the existing zoning**, and there is not an “oversight” regarding the existing land use as claimed.
- The surrounding land uses have a development potential limited by a height restriction of 35’ per the GLUP, the Crystal City Sector Plan, and the Pentagon City Sector Plan. Why taper to 35’ and then build 60’ in the middle of a low-density area?
- The proposed density is not Low-Medium, it is equivalent to **High-Medium Density Mixed Use**. Labeling it otherwise is misleading. The height sets a negative precedent for 23rd Street.
- The area is saturated with affordable housing, and adding more in one location is not per the **Affordable Housing Master Plan**, for cross county distribution, and it **exacerbates inequity in schools** in South Arlington.
- **12.3.7 and 15.5.9.A** requirements for affordable housing bonus density state that the design **must be appropriate for the site and surrounding area**. The proposal is inappropriate in nearly every way because it is too big for the site and does not taper appropriately. Many have expressed this concern, and most recently, commenting on the design at the HALRB

informational meeting January 15, HALRB member Joan Lawrence observed the building is too big for the site, and questioned 5-stories fitting in the location.

ARLINGTON'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITMENT

- Most of the non-residential historic fabric east of 395 has been demolished – and just like today, at the time, those who benefited from redevelopment had **“good reasons”**, and claimed that an **“old”** building **“didn’t matter”** . It is only in hindsight the devastating extent of loss is clear. The ugly truth is Arlington has not been a good steward of the **American architecture** in its boundary. An invaluable amount of American cultural history and texture in 22202 was lost when **Queen City, the brick warehouses, the Luna Park, Prospect Hill** among others were demolished.
- This Study also ignores the **Historic & Cultural Resources Plan (HCRP)** by recommending rezoning from Public and **encouraging the demolition** of Nellie Custis School despite that the HCRP enjoys wide support by the Planning Commission. 10/11/2023: Mr. Sarli stated, **“we are not a soulless place, we have identity and uniqueness”**. Ms. Steinberger, **“the history of Arlington is tied up in the buildings we preserve. This is our story”**. Mr. Lantelme, Ms. Bagley, Mr. Berkey, and Mr. Striner were all in support.

LACK OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

- There is **3.3M vacant square feet of office** in Pentagon City / Crystal City: near metro, high density with lots of parking near 3 grocery stores.
- Virginia Highlands Park is going to be studied for development with a school in a few years – potentially displacing the Aurora Hills library and community center. Meanwhile, historic Nellie Custis School is perfectly designed to be **adaptively reused** as a library.
- Where is the county’s economic development team for the **win-win-win**? AHCA requested a meeting with staff **in Fall 2024** to discuss comprehensive planning ideas, but was rejected. Why didn’t the County study options that give the county its **public land back** for much needed public use in the fastest growing part of the county, and find appropriate **vacant** office space or **underutilized** development approvals for Melwood, that also eat into the vacancy rates, like Alexandria recently did with long vacant Victory Center??

UNADDRESSED LEGAL ISSUES

- The deed restriction **“for school use only”** limits use and could make the County liable if they change the zoning to conflict with the deed restriction rendering the site useless. Approval of the Site Plan Application must address this.
- No affordability covenant that goes with **base Residential Use / RA8-18** zoning has been required. Without a covenant that goes with the RA8-18 (and not just bonus density or the site plan application) **what prevents the developer from building market rate housing if he cannot fund affordable housing especially if there is no AHIF funding?**
- Existing parking for two churches will **be removed by the County** when it approves the project with no plan to replace. Will the County then be liable for putting the churches’ ability to operate at risk, as they are required to provide this parking? Will the County also be liable for the overflow of cars with nowhere to park onto residential streets?

COMMUNITY OPPOSITION BEING IGNORED

- The Planning Commission admonished the Developer for not working with the community in May 2024, and they still **have not done** so in any material way.
- The residents of AHCA have been nearly unanimously opposed this project from the beginning and many have expressed disappointment and anger, feeling betrayed by the County Board.
 - The change.org petition to stop upzoning at this site and CPC has **1157 signatures**
 - AHCA voted nearly **unanimously to oppose the project** in a meeting with over 100 attendees.
 - The Fall 2024 Online Engagement with over 1000 comments, **was 2:1 opposed to the project**
 - AHCA has raised numerous problems with the project and proposed an **appropriate Alternative Envelope** in May 2024 and voted to approve the LHD in June 2024 with no County response.

APPLICANT CLAIM FOR NEEDING AN OVERSIZED BUILDING HAS NO MERIT

- Virginia **no longer rewards** LIHTC points for lower “cost per unit” as the Applicant has claimed
- Virginia **encourages smaller** projects by rewarding them with more LIHTC points
- Wesley Housing has a **dozen properties under 56 units** with an average size of these smaller units of 24 per building.
- Virginia and the federal government provide **historic preservation tax credits** that are not being utilized – buildings that are eligible include brick warehouse buildings.

COMPLETELY INADEQUATE PARKING – A SHORTAGE OF AT LEAST 100 spaces

- There is a shortage of over **50** spaces for the Melwood Program which can only be categorized as Office Use. It does not meet the definition of a community center as the Applicant claims.
- Affordable housing residents #1 building complaint in Arlington per APAH is **lack of parking**. People who make 60% of AMI in Arlington can afford cars, and need cars for **reliable transportation**. The site is a mile from grocery and over a half mile from metro and served only by one bus line.
- If the building were typically sized apartments, the proposed parking is short by 50 spaces. But these are family sized units, which are in other jurisdictions parked 1 per bedroom, and there are 212 bedrooms. Studies based on actual parking data suggest 143 – 151 spaces are required – **creating a shortage of 73 - 81 spaces. Parking inequity should not exist in publicly funded buildings.**
- The Disability Commission raised concerns at SPRC about the reduced amount of parking when there are **caregivers that will need spaces**. Not to mention, visitors, delivery, Our Stomping Grounds staff and maintenance vehicles, etc.
- **Overflow** parking will impact existing residential and retail. AHCA needs **24x7 parking restrictions** in the neighborhood.
- The Applicant has agreed to continue to allow voting, but **there will no longer be parking available** at the site and there are many elderly residents who come to the existing location to vote. No parking plan has been proposed.

INADEQUATE SEPARATION FROM NELLY CUSTIS PARK & INADEQUATE OPEN SPACE / LANDSCAPING

- A heavy forest of **evergreen trees and strategically places walls** will help per Planning Commissioner Lantelme and Peterson. AHCA has forwarded some resident recommendations.
- Protecting small heavily used parks like Nelly Custis is a priority of the Public Spaces Master Plan Action Plan. Yet, there is a party deck overlooking the park without adequate separation from the park or the residential homes adjacent. The 1st Floor Party Deck is **8 – 10 feet above** ground level. There are above ground **transformers, garage exhaust and generator exhaust** next to the children's playground in the park without adequate separation.
- A **dozen mature trees** recommended to remain per the GLUP Study will be removed including the Christmas Spruce

PART 2: OTHER ISSUES

PROCESS PROBLEMS

- The County Board stated in 2024 it would review the GLUP amendment process per the 2022 CivFed resolution to increase community agency but there has been **no update**.
- The GLUP Study **did not perform a financial analysis** of the value of rezoning the site which is a public good via its public zoning.
- The **Staff Report to the SPRC was incomplete**, it did not include parking and density calculations.

PLANNING GUIDANCE NOT ADDRESSED IN GLUP STUDY

- The existing building is **contributing to the Aurora Highlands Historic District**, and the site is addressed in the **2008 Aurora Highlands Neighborhood Conservation Plan** (a GLUP document) for the zoning to remain as is.
- The Study ignores the **Forestry and Natural Resources Plan** (2023), the existing site with Public land use is a unique opportunity to obtain 40% tree canopy where there is a severe lack of tree canopy & there is heat island affect.
- The Study ignores the **Public Spaces Master Plan Priority Action 5** “ensure access to spaces that are intentionally designed to support casual, impromptu use and connection with nature” by not providing a heavy evergreen biophillic barrier between the park and the development.

STREET IMPACTS OF OVERSIZED PROJECT TO ROADWAY

- Grant Street is being widened for the project, encouraging speeding cars in a residential neighborhood and creating a **pedestrian safety hazard**, per Mr. Weir and others at SPRC.
- 23rd Street is a **two-lane road**, leading into Route 1. It already backs up frequently and is dangerous to cross (several preschools cross regularly to get to Nelly Custis Park.) Adding more cars will exacerbate the situation. There is inadequate layby proposed for drop off. The loading dock creates a pedestrian safety hazard next to the children’s park, as noted by Calvary Church and others at SPRC.

OTHER APPLICATION PROBLEMS

- The **renderings** in the Application are inaccurate and misleading.
- The elevations show 60’ height, but that is at the top of the topography, **not the average and the number excludes mechanical penthouse**. The floor-to-floor **heights are excessive** for the building type.
- There are questions in regard to **the multimodal and parking assumptions** in the traffic study that have not been addressed
- The Applicant has not committed to moving the WIFI, providing bus stops on both sides of the street, or undergrounding the power line at Grant Street as part of its proposal
- There is no dog run for the service dogs that will be allowed
- The Traceries report uses the National Landmark standard which is the wrong standard to assess a local historic district. The building is a textbook case for preservation. The Application does not meet the **25%** tree canopy requirements
- The Applicant has not committed to providing reduced light levels, bird friendly glass, pollinator planting renewable energy, per the SPRC recommendations.

- There is an incomplete first floor plan as the “Community Service” space is not shown. Note: this is not a tenant use, and as such needs to be drawn in order to provide a complete review.
- There is no description of the proposed “shared parking program” or any shuttle services.