
Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) of the Planning Commission
Meeting Summary
Tuesday, November 28, 2023
7:00 p.m.

This meeting was a hybrid virtual/in-person public meeting held through electronic communication means.

Planning Commissioners in attendance:

James Lantelme (Chair of this Special GLUP Study)
Nia Bagley
Karen Guevara
Tenley Peterson
Daniel Weir
Tony Striner
Peter Robertson
Eric Berkey
Sara Steinberger

Staff in attendance:

Margaret Rhodes (CPHD – Planning)
Kellie Brown (CPHD – Planning)
Matt Mattauszek (CPHD – Planning)
Walter Gonzalez (DPR)
Angie de la Barrera (DES)
Christine Seebauer (DES)

LRPC members:

Crystal City Civic Association – Eric Cassel
Aurora Highlands Civic Association – Stacy Meyer
Melwood Services Representative – Taquanda Dixon
Arlington Ridge Civic Association – Kateri Garcia
Housing Commission – Mike Hemminger
Transportation Commission – Sohail Husain
Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board – not in attendance
Park and Recreation Commission – not in attendance
Disability Advisory Commission – not in attendance
Commission on Aging – not in attendance

Others in attendance:

John Steele
Gladys
Bob Dilonardo

Sharon Cichy
Margaret McGilvray
Fred Zimmerman
Barnes Lawson
Alice Hogan
Pamela Van Hine
Ashley Labadie
Heather Spence
Malaika Scriven
Susan English
Ben Watts
R. Pettit
Lauren G. Riley
Ben D'Avanzo
Adam Theo
Suzanne Sundburg
Spinchef
Lucia
Scott Gibson
Christie Roberts
Lk
Andy Greenwood
David
Pblum
Hiram Brown
Lucua
Nicolas F. Negretti
Kara Simon
Jon Obenberger
James Turner
Andreas G. Elterich
Jacqueline Snelling
Jason Schwartz
Adam Theo
Jeff Williams
Natasha Atkins
Nicholas Giacobbe
Rob Douglas
Rachel Hills

Matthew Kowalyk
Josue Amaya
Huan Vuong
Margot Greenlee
John Stestz
Christine Beetham
Jemal Ruthnoum
Laryssa Kautz
Cathy Puskar
Raul Es
Alyssa Gardner
Jewelyn Cosgrove
Andrew Hay
Deborah Hay
Natalie Roy
Ben Watts
George Sarkey
Jane Green
Rachel Hicks

Melwood Special General Land Use Plan LRPC Meeting

Commissioner Lantelme opened the meeting at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Commissioner Lantelme recognized members of the LRPC and others in attendance. A staff presentation by Margaret Rhodes was followed by an applicant presentation by Cathy Puskar and an Aurora Highlands Civic Association presentation by Stacy Meyer. Following the presentations there was discussion that addressed the following key issues:

- Request for confirmation that the conclusion of the Special GLUP Study process results in a Study Document and a request to advertise or not to advertise, not a GLUP amendment.
- No change would occur to the GLUP unless there was an associated site plan project approved by the County Board.
- Is a Parks & Recreation or HALRB commissioner present? They were present for the Tier I Review.

- The Nelly Custis School building is historic and is celebrating its 100-year anniversary. While it is not a landmark building, it has historical significance as one of the few historic school buildings still standing in the County.
- What percentage of the units would be accessible for individuals with disabilities? Would the existing structure be preserved and reused?
- The number and type of units is more appropriate for a Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) discussion, as this is a high-level land use discussion.
- The Nelly Custis School building is a contributing building for the Aurora Highlands National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listing, but it is not listed in the County's Historical Resources Inventory.
- Affordable housing and housing for individuals with disabilities should be considered. A fifth guiding principle could be that redevelopment here should address one of the County's equity goals.
- I do not know whether we can constrain uses as part of a Special GLUP Study.
- What if the property was sold and a luxury apartment building was proposed that met the other 4 guiding principles?
- A guiding principle for a preference for elder care uses was added to the Sunrise Special GLUP Study Document.
- I would be more open to adding density if we had an affordable housing goal, not just adding density for density's sake. If it will be just another luxury high-rise, what is the point?
- If there is a lower height, would the density be constrained? With a higher height, would not there be greater density?
- It is important to explore preserving the façade where it is and to explore creating a more urban edge with the building closer to the sidewalk on 23rd Street South. Neither option should be eliminated now so that both can be looked at in greater depth during a future SPRC discussion.
- Was the location of respondents to the Aurora Highlands Civic Association survey captured?
- In order to get the same density, when the building gets bigger horizontally the historic façade would have to go.
- There is a push and pull between footprint, setbacks, etc.. We can add markers for what the most important elements are.
- The applicant needs a certain amount of density to continue Melwood operations and to offer affordable units to the most vulnerable. We heard from the neighborhood that they wanted a lower height. If the neighborhood wants to keep the façade and open space/tree, then a greater height might be needed. Keeping the façade would create a lot of physical and financial constraints.

- The historic façade could be relocated on site. There are creative solutions and the answer does not have to be one or the other. Let's not pigeonhole ourselves here. We need to leave this open for SPRC discussions.
- The Clarendon Presbyterian Church incorporation of the historic façade was a good example of creative preservation.
- Are there setback/stepback rules when a site is adjacent to a park? Transitions are important. Let's keep the height options open for now. Let's not take it off the table now.
- The 60' height could be beneficial for open space/green space, but a stepback to 35' closer to 23rd Street could be good for a better pedestrian feel.
- Some of the nearest houses are also 35'. How the walls and roof are treated is also important for the transition area to the park. A green roof could help the transition, though this is more of an SPRC topic.
- The Study Document should address biophilic elements in the transition area to the park.
- Could we get a brief history of the school and the park?
- The guiding principle that speaks to open space is concerning because tree conservation is a potential trade-off with different massing designs so it may be precluding some stepback, footprint and site design options.
- The park is essential to this area so discussion of biophilia is important.
- A good principle to add could be consideration of the transition to the park.
- It is still too early to take the 60' height off the table. It would preclude creative options.
- Agreed because this is early days. Let's not rule out anything. We have more options when a building is taller than wider.
- There are options that do not include a full take-down of the existing building.
- Only ¼ of a mile from here is a good example of not taking the greater height off the table at River House. Do not contract the outside lines preemptively.
- Shadows will not fall on the park because of its location to the south. The building height will not impact the light on the park.
- Landscaping and biophilia is very important. Plants, biophilia and open space are important in the upcoming Livability 22202 report. It's even more critical to prioritize these elements as you add density.
- The Chair said that he heard that there are different concerns about height, but that no options should be taken off the table at this juncture.
- If trees are removed on the north site of the building, could trees added to the park be a good thing?
- In 2019, there was an extensive update to the park.
- When the park was updated, there was only a fence added on the Melwood side. There is not a lot of separation there. More should be done on the Melwood side of the park.

We don't want a looming building looking out onto the playground. Biophilia and good transitions on the Melwood side of the park are important.

- What should the setbacks be on Grant Street? It is a really narrow street. If site access is planned for this street, there could be a big increase in car and pedestrian traffic. More explicit language may be needed on improvements to the sidewalks and bus stops. There would be more people in this area and more people using transit if the site is redeveloped. Is access on Grant Street the best location? The conversation should be more geared to the pedestrian instead of the car. Recommendations should be more explicit.
- The bus stops should all be covered bus stops with shelters.
- There are concerns about children walking to the park and conflicts with access and loading.
- On Sundays, Grant Street is one-way heading into the church parking lot.

Public Comment

- This is a great location for many stories of affordable housing. Only two walls are still historic. It won't cast shadows on the park. We should not limit the building height to 5 stories. It is close to Metro and transit. This would be a great addition to the neighborhood.
- It is not that close to the Metro and it's hard to cross the two major streets to get there. Did the transportation study take into consideration the expansion of the Veritas Academy that has caused more traffic? Grant Street could be a problem for access.
- The Alliance for Housing Solutions thinks that the parcels here should be aligned in terms of land use and zoning. This site is near Restaurant Row and Amazon headquarters. Several floors are appropriate here and affordable housing is appropriate here.
- The National Landing BID is supportive of the GLUP amendment to add affordable housing and housing for individuals with disabilities. We need to prioritize inclusivity.
- Our neighborhood is in dire need of affordable housing and every unit is a massive benefit for our residents. The Parcview in Aurora Highlands is directly adjacent to a park and across from many single-family homes and is on a more residential street than 23rd Street and has more units and no one has had issues with it.
- This proposal does not go with the neighborhood and people seem obsessed with a certain amount of density here. This is a single-family neighborhood that is preserved in the middle of the city. I would hate to see its historic value destroyed.
- This is too tall and dense and I am opposed. I think this is just for the money for Melwood. It would stick out from whichever way you are looking down the street. 100 units would be about 5 blocks of houses. It would add cars and traffic.

- This building would be a great asset to the neighborhood. The new Rosslyn Highlands Park is in the elbow of a very tall building and housing and parks can coexist.
- I am significantly disabled and believe in Melwood, but I don't support a plan where there is a concentration of affordable housing in one building. It creates a stigma and isolation. We learned this in the 1960s. Something could be built, but not at this level of density.
- I support this project for affordable housing. Oftentimes new projects are built along arterials. This is a walkable, bikeable area and 23rd Street is not an overly busy road.
- I object to the density and height. There is no mention of the number of parking spaces needed. There would need to be more than 100 spaces. There is not enough parking in this area. It is problematic to drive on the neighborhood side streets. Context, context, context. 3 stories maximum here. If the developer can't make it work, so be it.
- There is a real need for support for people with disabilities.
- The site is surrounded by churches on three sides and the park. I support massing scenario #3 that pushes the massing to the front and allows for more tapering on the back. The nearby neighbors strongly oppose this, but I do not think a five-story building is incompatible and we used to live at the Shawnee Apartments that was five stories on a park.
- This is not an urban site. This is a residential neighborhood and there are churches with lots of open space. This is really important. I hope Melwood can make a plan to stay in scale. 45' or 60' is not appropriate. This is not Langston Boulevard.
- This could be the start of a parcel-by-parcel rezoning on 23rd Street. This could be a precedent for spot zoning. The Livability 22202 group does not have a position on this. Aurora Highlands set out its concerns in a letter in November.
- The highest building here is the bell tower at the Methodist church. There are no equivalent buildings here to what is being proposed. We've been living with cranes and the construction of extremely tall buildings. This project could be sold, so it may not be Melwood. It is not appropriate.
- This is being done so they can qualify for tax credits. We love the Melwood clientele, but we want them to have the same quality of life as the neighborhood with low-scale development. The roads here are too narrow, the grocery store is a mile away, we love the historic building, we love our park. This would be a blight.
- I think this is the opposite of isolation. This is being done by a non-profit. We need to think about equity. The façade is the last thing to worry about. If it's changing the context, it's for the better.
- Stomping Ground supports the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to live independently. This is so important to let them have a chance at a happy life.
- I am disabled and now I can have a full life due to Stomping Ground. We need more opportunities for people with disabilities.

- Stomping Ground helps people with disabilities match up with affordable housing and thrive there. We will be your best neighbors, picking up trash, inviting you to join us for yoga. The doors will be open. That is being inclusive. In terms of context, think about equity and the future of Arlington.
- The Melwood Day Program supports the affordable housing opportunity. If people who came to us for services could have housing where they help support the neighborhood, that would be great.
- There are more opportunities to comment online if you were not able to comment at this meeting. We heard thoughtful comments in favor and in opposition.

Chair Lantelme adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:00 p.m.