



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Long Range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission

Margaret Rhodes, Principal Planner,
Department of Community Planning,
Housing and Development

FROM:

DATE: 6/8/2022

SUBJECT: 750 23rd Street South (Melwood) Special General Land Use Plan Study –
Tier I Initial Review

On December 20, 2021, staff received a Special General Land Use Plan (GLUP) Study application for a property located at 750 23rd Street South in the Aurora Highlands neighborhood. This site, which is comprised of two parcels, is currently occupied by the Melwood Horticultural Training Center and a portion of Nelly Custis Park. The applicant, Melwood Horticultural Training Center, Inc., is requesting to amend the GLUP from “Public” (Parks. [local, regional and federal]. Schools [public]. Parkways, major unpaved rights-of-way. Libraries and cultural facilities.) to “Low-Medium” Residential (16-36 units/acre). Given that this site has been privately owned since 1981 and the County has no plans to reacquire the site, the “Public” designation is not appropriate. As described in the Tier I application, the applicant is interested in building an all-affordable multifamily residential building, with some units for residents with disabilities, which would house the Melwood facility on the first one to two floors. The portion of the site that is currently a part of the adjacent park with a public access easement will remain as such.

Per the Special GLUP Study application process, which calls for a study in those instances where there is insufficient planning guidance for a site, staff has conducted a Tier I Initial Review of the application, as there is no adopted plan for this area. On May 12, 2022, the Long Range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission (LRPC) met to discuss staff’s findings and to determine whether or not a full GLUP Study or another type of review is needed.

Additional information can be found at the [project website](#).

GLUP Designations:

The subject site is currently designated “Public.” With regards to the surrounding context, the adjacent properties on the subject block are designated “Public” and “Low” Residential (1-10 units/acre). On the subject block is Nelly Custis Park, which is designated “Public,” a one-story

commercial building, which is designated “Low” Residential (1-10 units/acre) and two single-family homes, which are designated “Low” Residential (1-10 units/acre). Across 23rd Street South is a church and one or two-story commercial buildings, both of which are designated “Low” Residential (1-10 units/acre). To the east, across South Grant Street, is a church designated “Low” Residential (1-10 units/acre) and to the west, across South Hayes Street, is another church, which is designated “Semi-Public” (Country clubs and semi-public recreational facilities. Churches, private schools and private cemeteries [predominant use on block]).

Zoning

Along with the requested amendment to the GLUP, the applicant is requesting an associated rezoning from C-1 Local Commercial District and R-6 One-family Dwelling District to RA8-18 Multiple-family Dwelling District. The existing C-1 and R-6 zoning is inconsistent with the current GLUP designation and with the existing and proposed uses.

Staff Assessment:

Staff has concluded that, given the lack of adopted planning guidance in this area, a full Tier II Special GLUP Study review is warranted to determine what GLUP category or categories may be appropriate for this specific area. Important considerations will include building height, density, building form and scale, transitions and use mix.

LRPC Guidance:

At the May 2022 LRPC meeting, the general consensus among the commissioners was that a Tier II Full Special GLUP Study, as recommended by staff, is warranted. Beyond the Planning Commission members, attendees invited to participate in the expanded LRPC discussion included representatives from the Transportation Commission, the Park and Recreation Commission, the Housing Commission, the Disability Advisory Commission, the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board and the Aurora Highlands Civic Association (the host association for this site), along with a representative of the individuals who are served by Melwood, the applicant and the owner of the commercial building on the block (who did not attend). Other attendees included representatives of the Arlington Ridge and Crystal City Civic Associations, the Crystal City Citizen Review Council, the National Landing BID, the Pedestrian Advisory Commission and the Commission on Aging, some of whom were invited by the LRPC Chair to join the active discussion during the meeting. The Aurora Highlands Civic Association representative expressed concerns that the proposed amendment would allow for a building that is too tall and massive given the surrounding context and that there are additional concerns about precedent, traffic, density and impacts on the adjacent park. She indicated that the neighborhood had taken a survey which revealed that the vast majority were not in favor of continuing to study the proposal. During public comment, other attendees from the neighborhood agreed with her remarks, while some said that they were supportive of further study and the potential opportunity for affordable housing and housing for persons with disabilities. The Chair noted that a Tier II Review should address the concerns raised by residents.

Timing:

This Special GLUP Study application was submitted in December 2021. Current work plan activities, including the Courthouse West Special GLUP Study and the Sunrise Special GLUP Study, are still underway and expected to continue into mid to late-2022. As a result, this study is

expected to start no sooner than late-2022. This timing is also contingent on determining the staffing needs for additional priorities identified in the Planning Division 2022 Work Plan.