

**Site Plan Review Committee**  
Community Engagement Comments and Responses  
Project – Vernon Street Duplex (SP #461)

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**Site Plan Project Information**

**Project Name:** Vernon Street Duplex – 1201 N. Vernon Street

**Items Requested:** New Site Plan

**Engagement Session #1:** February 1 – February 7, 2021

**Review Focus Topics:** Zoning & Land Use, Lot Size & Density,  
Building Placement & Setbacks, Parking & Transportation,  
Architecture & Materials, Landscape Plan & Tree Preservation



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**About this Document**

This document contains all the comments received as a part of the first Site Plan Review Committee’s (SPRC) online engagement for the Vernon Street Duplex project. The comments are sorted by the topics that were highlighted in this review (Zoning & Land Use, Lot Size & Density, Building Placement & Setbacks, Parking & Transportation, Architecture & Materials, Landscape Plan & Tree Preservation) with SPRC member comments appearing first in the document. All comments beyond the review focus topics are in the “Other Comments” section.

## Responses to Common Topics

Below are common themes received through the online engagement session that were identified by County staff, including responses from the applicant. Please note that the topics have been summarized in order to provide an overview of the common themes and may not fully capture the concerns expressed by each individual commenter.

### **Building Placement & Setbacks: Impact on Existing Trees**

*Applicant Response:* Building setbacks have been carefully coordinated to ensure a viable building footprint as well as appropriate transitions to neighboring properties. Based on community feedback and coordination with Arlington County staff, the driveway and site design details have been adjusted to achieve the preservation of existing trees #101, 103, and 109.

### **Parking & Transportation: Reduced Parking Ratio**

*Applicant Response:* For two-family semidetached residences, the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance requires 2 parking spaces per unit. The Applicant has requested a modification for this requirement in order to permit a ratio of 1 parking space per unit. The proposed floorplans feature an oversized 1-car garage for each unit. The garages are capable of parking 1 larger vehicle, or perhaps 2 compact or sub-compact vehicles. Additional tandem parking in the driveway may also be achievable. Given the proximity of the site to the Ballston Metro Station (0.5 miles) and other multi-modal transportation options, the Applicant believes that the proposed parking is sufficient to support the building.

### **Architecture & Materials: Green Home Choice**

*Applicant Response:* The proposed building features numerous green building measures, such as energy-efficient design and solar-ready infrastructure. The Applicant has committed to achieving certification under the County's Green Home Choice program (or potentially LEED for Homes) and has met with County staff to discuss certification and green building measures. The Applicant will continue evaluating opportunities for green building measures and coordinating with County staff through final design.

### **Landscape Plan & Tree Preservation: Overall Tree Retention**

*Applicant Response:* The Applicant has coordinated with Arlington County Staff to analyze opportunities for tree retention. Based on this additional analysis, the Applicant has modified the landscape and tree preservation plans to achieve preservation of existing trees #101, 103, and 109.

## SPRC Comments – Zoning & Land Use

#	Name	Connection to the Project	Comments
N/A			

## SPRC Comments – Lot Size & Density

#	Name	Connection to Project	Comments
SPRC-SD-1	Carrie Thompson	SPRC – Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2)	The Applicant is to be commended on the creativity it employed in developing a duplex design on this modest lot size.
SPRC-SD-2	Ian Blackwell	SPRC – Pedestrian Advisory Committee	I fully support this redevelopment of the lot from the single to double unit. Given the proximity to the Ballston metro (1/2 mile or less) this increase in density from single to double unit I think is a positive for redevelopment. This strikes a happy balance as the cascade of density decreases from the main line on Fairfax Drive morning northward. The 3 stories also does not appear out of place in the surrounding neighborhood. I think that this type of redevelopment can be a model along Washington Blvd in both East/West directions, that can increase density without a complete shift in the neighborhood appearance.

## SPRC Comments – Building Placement & Setbacks

#	Name	Connection to Project	Comments
SPRC-BPS-1	Carrie Thompson	SPRC – Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2)	The proposed additional setback is a problem in that it appears to oblige the Applicant to remove all of the mature trees on the north side of the property to accommodate the driveway. The building placement and setback need to be reconsidered.

## SPRC Comments – Parking & Transportation

#	Name	Connection to Project	Comments
SPRC-PT-1	Ian Blackwell	SPRC – Pedestrian Advisory Committee	The parking allocation of one space per unit appears right for this location. The placement of the parking garage on the backside of the development, and not facing Washington Blvd, I believe is a plus.

## SPRC Comments – Architecture & Materials

#	Name	Connection to Project	Comments
SPRC-AM-1	Carrie Thompson	SPRC – Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2)	<p>(comments keyed to Green Home Choice categories)</p> <p><b>SITE AND STORMWATER PROTECTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The proposed removal of 25 trees, many of them mature ones with large crowns and expansive root systems, will significantly diminish the natural storm water retention capacity of the lot. It will also reduce other benefits that mature trees confer to residents such as protection against the heat island effect and an array of biophilic benefits. Please reconsider this plan.</li> <li>- Why not consider installing permeable pavers in the driveway to enhance its storm water retention capacity?</li> <li>- What storm water retention controls will be installed--a rain garden? Planters? Infiltration trenches? (3 points have been credited in this area, but not clear for what)</li> </ul> <p><b>ENERGY EFFICIENT BUILDING ENVELOPE AND SYSTEMS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kudos on the highly energy-efficient envelope and systems</li> <li>- Kudos also for creating rooftop space for solar PV. Will the Applicant also install the conduit and wiring needed to allow future-installed rooftop solar to power the buildings' domestic systems, as well as potentially include space for battery storage?</li> <li>- Why not commit to zero energy certification for this project? The Applicant could do this by installing the rooftop PV and powering the domestic systems with solar energy.</li> <li>- Are all domestic systems electric, including HVAC, water and cooking? Not clear from the documents, but it appears so.</li> <li>- It appears credit has been given for EV charging--will it be EV-capable or EV-ready?</li> </ul> <p><b>ENERGY EFFICIENT LIGHTING AND APPLIANCES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why not install 100% LED light bulbs, and not just 50%?</li> </ul> <p><b>WASTE REDUCTION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why no points in this category? Why not recycle some of the building materials?</li> </ul> <p><b>ON-SITE ALTERNATIVE ENERGY AND CONDITIONING:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Applicant could gain additional points in this category by installing solar PV, per above.</li> </ul>
SPRC-AM-2	Ian Blackwell	SPRC – Pedestrian Advisory Committee	<p>The 3 stories also does not appear out of place in the surrounding neighborhood. I think that this type of redevelopment can be a model along Washington Blvd in both East/West directions, that can increase density without a complete shift in the neighborhood appearance. I think the architecture and materials chosen offer a very attractive appearance and are in line with similar single-family home renovations and rebuilds that have occurred over the last few years in the Ballston/Va</p>

#	Name	Connection to Project	Comments
			Square/Courthouse neighborhoods. As such, I don't believe this modern look will appear out of place.

### SPRC Comments – Landscape Plan & Tree Preservation

#	Name	Connection to Project	Comments
SPRC-LT-1	Carrie Thompson	SPRC – Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2)	<p>I feel I must preface my comments by stating that I find proposing to remove all 25 trees on the property, many of them mature ones, to be a very serious concern. Doing so will negatively impact the pursuit of many of Arlington County's environmental and community livability goals.</p> <p>Again, proposing to remove all 25 trees on the property, including four large Willow Oaks and a large Elm tree, would seem to be a great loss for both the residents of the new duplexes and the Arlington community. As previously noted, mature trees provide multiple ecosystem services and biophilic benefits. There is strong public demand in Arlington County to halt the ongoing reduction in our tree canopy and we must do it one development project at a time. I note that, in its Landscape Plan, the Applicant is planning to replace the removed trees with two native trees and no native shrubs. I urge the Applicant to go back to the drawing board on this design and re-configure the building's footprint in such a way as to retain all of the mature trees on the property, and as many of the others as possible.</p>

### SPRC Comments – Other

#	Name	Connection to Project	Comments
SPRC-O-1			

## Community Member Comments

#	Name	Connection to Project	Zoning & Land Use	Lot Size & Density	Building Placement & Setbacks	Parking & Transportation	Architecture & Materials	Landscape Plan & Tree Preservation	Comments
SPRC-O-1	David Howell	Other Arlington County Board, Commission, or Committee member					X	X	<p>This is an attractive design and the location is not so sensitive that the additional density is as much an issue as would be with some neighborhood lots. Several immediate issues do arise from the plans. First, despite the boilerplate format for the tree preservation slide, with various diagram codes on the right side, the plan calls for denuding the site of all vegetation with 0% retention, and the required 20% coverage all coming from new planting. Given the footprint and current tree locations, that may be necessary, but the developer should justify that in a virtual meeting. As importantly, the tree removal on the north side as well as construction activity in that area may well have impact on the current tree canopy protecting the adjacent property from summer sun. That impact could result directly from the removal of edge trees on the property being developed as well as root damage to trees on the neighbor's property. Care should be taken. The second main issue evident from these plans is the excellent opportunity, almost necessity, to reduce the negative effects of solar radiation, while also taking advantage of the open sky exposure of 180 degrees by installing solar panels. That is a strong selling point because it benefits residents, and good stewardship. The third, and related issue, is the impervious surface concern. All driveways and walkways should be made according to county standards for permeable paved areas. Likewise, the developer should consider flat roof covering the roof with low vegetation, such as low beds or moveable flats of ground cover or other durable plantings. These mitigate water flow as well as significantly lowering energy consumption by providing natural insulation. Such beds are also recognized as making solar panels more efficient due to the fact that an optimum temperature for most photovoltaic panels near the comfort range for people, while roof surfaces can exceed that by 10-40 degrees in the warm months. The only other comment is that more can and should be done to provide a sense of isolation and distance for the front entrances from</p>

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									Washington Blvd. That may be landscaping, or some other architectural features or design modifications.
SPRC-O-2	Susan English	Other: Rep to CCCRC from ARCA; Missing Middle partner via Livability 22202; housing/planning/zoning interests	X	X	X	X	X	X	<p>Zoning &amp; land use: better use of lot than existing</p> <p>Lot size &amp; density: see comments under 'Other'; this site might have accommodated a quad if part of a small area plan.</p> <p>Building placement &amp; setbacks; given the zoning limits and existing constraints on a corner lot on a high traffic street, the plan seems reasonable.</p> <p>Parking &amp; Transportation: One garage per dwelling is more than enough; the area is walkable.</p> <p>Architecture &amp; materials: attractive</p> <p>Landscape/tree preservation: Satisfactory; Excellent idea for County to suggest appropriate trees for the site; right tree, right place helps to produce healthier canopy over time with fewer unfortunate choices.</p>
SPRC-O-3	N/A	Community member or neighbor		X	X	X	X	X	As a resident of this neighborhood for 26 years, my opinion is that the lot size and density modification requested should be denied. The setback should conform to the surrounding structures for uniformity in the neighborhood. The parking modification is not compatible and exacerbates parking problems in this area. Architecture is interesting, but is not compatible with surrounding structures. Removing 25 trees and replacing only a few trees on this lot reduces the tree canopy in our neighborhood.
SPRC-O-4	Janice Hull	Community member or neighbor				X	X	X	I am concerned about the impact on the neighborhood parking since only one parking space for each unit will be allowed. Most people have at least two cars. I am greatly concerned about the 24 trees being cut down. I am also concerned about the size of the units and the affordability of the units. They will each probably go for over a million dollars which will be

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									unaffordable to middle income families which this county is supposedly so concerned about.
SPRC-O-5	Nancy Iacomini	Community member or neighbor	X	X	X	X	X	X	<p>1. Land Use and Zoning There are many examples of duplexes and even small triplex apartment buildings in the Ballston/Virginia Square area as well as in contiguous Cherrydale. The duplex use seems appropriate here.</p> <p>2. Minimum Lot Size – There are other duplexes in Ballston – are they on lots that were allowed to reduce minimum lot size? I’m thinking of 13th/N. Monroe and the newest one in the 1100 block of North Utah. While this lot size is close, it could become a precedent before we have a full study of duplexes and other housing types.</p> <p>3. Building Placement with Surrounding Context - I think first it’s important to think about the context – and how subject to change it would be. I would doubt the townhouses across the street – to the south – will change and their entrances are right behind the sidewalk. Similarly, I do not expect the townhouses to the west across N. Vernon will change. Their Washington Boulevard frontage has an additional turn lane added and so are closer to the ROW. However, they also transition to the larger commercial hotel use at the corner. The structure along Washington Boulevard to the east is a 2/3 unit apartment building that has at least a 25 foot setback. And one block further, at North Vermont, there is a similar structure with setback. I would not expect the townhouses on either side of Washington Boulevard to redevelop. Because of their lot size, and that they are incoming producing properties in seemingly relatively good repair we could expect the small apartment buildings to stay in place. Thus, the existing condition and what seems to be the future condition, is a setback at or nearer the required 25 foot setback. The new duplexes should follow the zoning requirement for a 25 foot setback. Also, Washington Boulevard is a busy 4-lane street and having some separation from it for a dwelling</p>

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									<p>would seem prudent. While the existing house is closer – it wasn’t when it was first built – Washington Boulevard was widened over time. While the applicant notes “unique geometry of a corner lot site” I would say it’s not unique – corner lots are ubiquitous in Arlington – and often are in rectangular shapes. Also, “reasonably-sized” dwelling units is a somewhat ambiguous term. We certainly have smaller and larger duplex examples in Arlington.</p> <p>4. Parking Parking is not required to be in a garage one- or two-family dwellings in R districts. Parking is allowed in required setbacks. Could the duplexes be modified to provide for a parking space for each unit outside of the garage – even if it is a tandem space?</p> <p>5. Architecture/Materials While we are seeing some modern design being interspersed in our older neighborhoods, they are not common. The context here are brick townhouses and brick and/or sided single family houses. The newest single family homes in the surrounding blocks have chosen more traditional designs as have new townhouse developments to the south in the R15-20T area. Was the design chosen in order to better accommodate a flat roof design in order to achieve the height they wished? A more traditional design with a hipped roof would still accommodate 3 stories. Also, the provision of roof decks makes this proposed duplex seem more in character with townhouses than single family houses that predominate the blocks between Washington Boulevard and I-66.</p> <p>6. Tree/Landscape While I do not like to see any residential lot clear cut – particularly one with at least 7 large, mature trees – at the end of the day it’s probably more prudent to do so. Our experience with tree preservation areas has not been good in by right situations since the new owner can cut down</p>

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									<p>trees – even ones that had been purposely preserved – once the house is sold by the builder. While this is a site plan that has greater control – if a mature tree set for preservation would die, only a replacement would be available as a remedy. So it is probably best at the outset to go for replanting. Since there are about 6 canopy trees being removed, there should be at least 2 canopy trees required to be replanted on the site. While tree preservation and required plantings in by right seem to be null and void once someone buys the new structure from a developer, at least with a site plan there would have to be compliance over time regardless of ownership.</p>
SPRC-O-6	Michelle Winters	Community group or organization representative	X	X	X	X		X	<p>I support approval of this application for a duplex on N. Vernon Street. The county is in the early stages of the Missing Middle Study and this application is in many ways a “before” picture of the zoning regulations. The fact that this project even needed to seek any special approvals shows how restrictive our current zoning is with regard to anything that is not a single-family home.</p> <p>Parking at one garage space plus the associated driveway space is more than adequate for the proposed duplex. The site is 1500 feet to the new Metro entrance and abuts bus routes along Washington Blvd.</p> <p>The lot size is also more than sufficient for the proposed structures. These duplex units are likely to sell for relatively high prices in part because of the minimum lot size requirement leading to fairly substantially sized units. If the County’s zoning rules were more flexible and allowed duplexes on smaller lots we would see smaller and more moderately priced duplexes.</p> <p>The setback rules appear to be pushing the building back toward the east rear/side lot line when it looks like it could be more evened out to allow each unit to have a similarly sized yard.</p>

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									<p>It's unfortunate that they will be removing all onsite trees for the project, although this is very likely to have been the outcome for a by-right development as well. Are there additional flexibilities or incentives that could be provided that might allow the developer to preserve any of the larger mature trees onsite?</p> <p>If the developer was able to wait until after the zoning updates that might come out of the Missing Middle Study (circa 2022), this site might also become eligible for additional units such as a triplex or a fourplex, or perhaps a more streamlined approval process for the current project (just speculation at this point of course).</p>
SPRC-O-7	N/A	Community member or neighbor		X	X	X			<p>Although I would be happy to see this lot become more than an eyesore, we neighbors will not forget that since this group brought the property several years ago, it has been a problem. The lawn was not cut nor maintained and squatters have been living in it. I am strongly against granting the variances this project requires. We already have a parking problem as the townhouses on the west side of the street provide more cars than spaces, those same townhouses were built above code (according to my next door neighbor who lived here at the time) and this wall of duplexes is going to further box us off, making our street look not like part of the single family home neighborhood it's part of. The codes are there for a reason and there is no justifiable reason for granting these variances which will just add to our problem.</p>
SPRC-O-8	N/A	Community member or neighbor				X			<p>This appears to be a good infill project, but I have concerns with the sidewalk along Washington Blvd. Ideally this should be widened to to at least six feet and the proposed fence along Washington Blvd and Vernon St should be setback from the sidewalk by at least 6 inches but preferably 12 inches. Also at the corner of Vernon St and Washington Blvd the fence line should be chamfered (around five feet) to allow for a more pedestrian space to more easily turn the corner and increase the visible space for drivers at the stop sign of Vernon St to see westbound Washington Blvd</p>

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									traffic. Also if the bus stop remains at that corner, even more space should be set aside for waiting passengers.
SPRC-O-9	N/A	Community member or neighbor					X	X	<p>Thank you for reaching out with feedback on this property. With the exception of the below two items, we will leave the merits of the application to County staff and the committee; however, this applicant does not deserve the benefit of the doubt on any request that is made. Quite simply, from 2019 through today, the applicant has let the house fall into a state of disrepair and become a blighted eyesore to the immediate neighborhood. No maintenance has been performed during these years except once right around the time the pictures on this application were taken (please note, one of our neighbors cut the grass in the front yard himself when it got over knee high). We, along with our neighbors, have called the police and County code enforcement more than a dozen times to address these concerns, most significant of which were to report squatters that used the house for drug use and to hide stolen goods (the police found evidence of this activity). The front and back doors were boarded up by the Fire Marshall as a result of these efforts, which was critical since within half a block of this property reside 11 children under the age of 12. Regardless of how SPRC proceeds, we emphatically recommend that the applicant move forward with demolition of the existing house as soon as possible to rid the neighborhood of this unsafe structure. The specific concerns we have to the proposal include the below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parking is extremely limited on our street as it already serves as overflow for housing on the south side of Washington Blvd as the parking zone is the same. A variance to limit parking would further exacerbate a significant neighborhood issue.</li> <li>- Tree cover. There are five notable, old growth trees on the northern edge of the property line. They provide valuable shade and coverage to the adjacent neighbors. We recommend the applicant save these trees as part of their site plan, at minimum the three largest trees.</li> </ul>

