

March 18, 2022

Katie Cristol,
Chair, Arlington County Board
Arlington Virginia (kcristol@arlingtonva.us)

To: Members of the Arlington County Board

From:

Ashton Heights Civic Association
Ballston-Virginia Square Civic Association
Clarendon-Courthouse Civic Association
Lyon Park Citizens Association
Lyon Village Citizens Association

Dear Chairman Cristol and members of the County Board,

Our five civic associations request that the proposed 2022 amendments to the Clarendon Sector Plan and county zoning ordinance be revised to prioritize realizing a significant, contiguous public park space on the county-owned site on N. 10th Street, as planned in 2006 and reaffirmed in the 2019 Public Spaces Master Plan. While we have expressed concerns about a number of other changes in the plan (including increased heights and the reduction and elimination of step-back requirements), in this letter we are focusing on preservation of the vision for a meaningful park space at this county-owned site.

Following are our key points:

(1) Planning for active, recreational space is vital to Clarendon's longer-term success as an urban village:

Our top priority -- as we have advocated in prior letters and in the course of numerous public meetings -- continues to be to secure a commitment to preserve as much as possible of the 50,000 square feet of park space designated for this site, as established in the 2006 Clarendon Sector Plan. Currently, Clarendon is underserved with no active recreation within a half mile of the metro. Clarendon at build-out is projected to have 10 million square feet of office, residential, and retail space. However, this modest N. 10th Street lot is the one remaining space envisioned for active recreation use like a basketball court, a children's play area, or a larger grassy area with trees.

The updated plan is an opportunity to reaffirm this commitment. We are very disappointed that the proposed 2022 Sector Plan update fails to do so, and specifically:

(a) does not explicitly commit that – if the fire station is relocated – the entire site should be dedicated as a park to better satisfy the community’s need for active recreation space; and

(b) does not clearly state that -- if the firehouse remains on this site -- the plan's intent is that any fire station redeveloped there incorporates public recreational space by integrating rooftop park facilities alongside the remaining 10,000 feet of public, open space.

In their letters to the County Board, both the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission have affirmed the pressing need for recreational space in Clarendon at this site. The Planning Commission also has passed a motion supportive of our position. This unanimously supported motion recommends that “the County Board direct the County Manager to make the clear preference for the use of public land within the Clarendon Sector Plan be designated for government facilities, community facilities, or other services provided by the County, **including roof-top and co-located amenities (e.g., parks, fire-station, community garden, tennis, basketball courts, etc.)**” [emphasis added].

But, while the proposed 2022 plan update retains an option for a 43,000 square foot park (Figure 2.19), it does not support this option, and instead contemplates it as only an interim use. In its place, it proposes that “this 10 Street site should be redeveloped with a park of approximately 17,000 square feet with a housing development that prioritizes committed affordable housing units” (p. 15, Figure 2.18). At best, this would leave only a very small park that would fall far short of meeting the need for active recreational space.

(2) Opportunities for Affordable Housing in Impending Residential Developments:

Our associations strongly support affordable housing, and welcome the expanded sections in the proposed 2022 Sector Plan Update addressing equity (p. 8); housing diversity goals (p. 8); and need for childcare facilities (p. 10). In our view, ensuring access to nearby open space is also important to housing goals and the quality of life to those who live in the housing, particularly children. It also

provides some relief from the adverse environmental effects of a high-density urban area that is virtually all pavement and devoid of greenery. Affirming plans for a significant, contiguous park space to be developed on the County site also would serve the future needs of a more diverse population, including younger families, older adults, and less advantaged populations.

Many whole blocks in Clarendon, including blocks close to the park site, are still to be developed. We see a number of opportunities to increase affordable housing units there within immediate walking distance of the Clarendon metro.

(3) Expanding central public spaces, including the proposed Linear Park, while important, will not address Clarendon's active park needs:

We appreciate the creativity and effort that has gone into expanding the plan's designs for central public spaces, including the proposed linear park. Nonetheless, there is a significant difference between active recreational space and the passive linear and pocket parks that make up the bulk of these planned public spaces. Moreover, these smaller parks cannot be expected to offer the level and types of amenities that a larger, contiguous park can provide, including by creatively incorporating rooftop space offered by an updated firehouse. With total build-out of Clarendon projected to increase by an additional one million gross square feet (p. 19, para 3), the proposed Triangle Park and a very reduced park on 10th Street (10,000-17,000 sq. ft.) simply will not meet existing or future active public space needs for this community.

Conclusion:

Accordingly, we strongly oppose the proposed recommendation and associated land-use option (figure 2.18) in the March 3, 2022 Clarendon Sector Plan update document for placing a housing development on the County site (pp. 19, 27, and 33) -- as well as the associated zoning ordinance and map amendments -- that would introduce additional height and density there and change the use designation for the N. 10th Street County-owned property, including the Fire Station site, to another use such as residential.

Our five associations request the County to make a clear commitment to realize the 10th Street Park space in the 2022 amendment to the sector plan, instead of prioritizing an alternative residential development plan that leaves this public need unmet. We ask the Board to not accept the proposal as drafted, and revise the plan

and corresponding zoning maps to maximize potential recreational space on the 10th Street site (attached appendix enumerates specific changes requested).

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Signatories:

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APPENDIX:

We request revision of the proposed 2022 Clarendon Sector Plan update to address the concerns raised in our joint letter of March 18, 2022. Specific changes we seek include the following:

1. Revise the proposed 2022 Clarendon Sector Plan update dated March 02, 2022, to maximize potential recreational space on the county-owned, 10th Street site, and remove provision for additional density and height associated with introducing a new residential building on the site. This requires revisions to page 15 (paras 1-2); page 27 (first bullet under policy point #31); and pages 32-33 (para headed “10th Street Park”).
2. Delete Figure 2.18 on page 15 of the draft, updated sector plan.
3. Revise Figure 2.17 on page 15 of the draft, updated sector plan to clearly depict the option of adding “Rooftop Public Space” above the entire rebuilt firehouse (in the areas labeled “FS4”).
4. Revise the following proposed, updated sector plan maps and figures to correspond to the textual changes requested above (these maps are also found in the document “Proposed Changes to the Sector Plan Maps, draft 3/02/2022”):
 - a) Map 2.1 (Illustrative Plan);
 - b) Map 2.3 (Density);
 - c) Map 2.4 (Receiving Sites);
 - d) Map 2.5 (Use Mix);
 - e) Map 2.7 (Building Height and Step-backs);
 - f) Map 2.9 (Public Open Space); and
5. Revise the following proposed, updated zoning (ACZO) maps (these are Maps 1-3 found in “Attachment 3 – Proposed Draft Amendments, March 2, 2022”):
 - a. In ACZO Map 9.2.5 “Maximum Height Limit and Step-backs,” remove density and additional height provisions from the portion of the County-owned site where the current firehouse stands;”
 - b. In ACZO Map 9.2.6 “Use Mix;” change the designation of the 10th Street county-owned land to “Existing and Proposed Open Space,” instead of the proposed designation as part residential (N. Hudson Street side) and part open space (N. Irving Street side); and

c. In ACZO Map 9.2.7 “Receiving Sites,” remove designation of additional height above maximum building height and additional density above GLUP, from the County-owned site (where the current firehouse stands).