



October 27, 2021

James Schroll, Chairman,
Long Range Planning Committee
Arlington County (jmschroll@gmail.com)

Dear Chairman Schroll:

I am writing on behalf of the Ashton Heights Civic Association (AHCA) regarding the Clarendon Sector Plan update led by the Planning Commission and Long-Range Planning Committee (LRPC).

Our Association has raised a number of concerns in our previous statements and correspondence, many of which, to our disappointment, have not been addressed in the latest iteration of the sector plan. As there has been a lot of back and forth, we want to be perfectly clear as to our top priority as this process comes to a close.

Our top priority is ensuring that active recreational space is provided for on the County-owned land on 10th Street N., through one or more of the following: (a) an approximately 19,000 square foot park adjacent to a new fire station, or building housing a fire station, (b) recreational space on top of any such new buildings on those lots, or (c) meaningful public recreational space within any new development on those lots. It is critical to provide for active recreational space in the plan to address the needs of both existing residents and the residents that will populate these new buildings.

The AHCA strongly opposes eliminating the planned 10th Street Park as depicted in the proposed changes to Clarendon Sector Plan Maps 2.5, 2.7, and 2.9. An active park at that location would provide an essential public benefit that has yet to be addressed in the LRPC discussion or online documents. It is important to develop options now.

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- There is a notable absence of active recreational or play space in Clarendon. The nearest parks are Zit-ka-sala Park (.4 miles from the metro, 10-minute walk, one basketball court, field, and playground), Rocky Run Park (.5 miles, 10 minute walk, two basketball courts, field, and playground), and Lyon Village Park (.5 miles, 10 minute walk, one basketball court, two tennis courts, and playground). Clarendon has a passive urban park in Clarendon Central Park, a dog park, and another passive park on 11th Street N. The nearest community centers with indoor recreation options are Lubber Run (1.5 miles, 32-minute walk) and Thomas Jefferson (1.5 miles, 30-minute walk).

According to Arlington's Public Spaces Master Plan (PMSP), Clarendon is in one of the high-density areas of the county; as such, the amenity standards for playgrounds and casual use space, community gardens, multi-use trails and basketball courts are 5 minutes travel time. None of these meet this standard.

- We know there is significant demand for such spaces, as evidenced by the crowds at each of these existing parks, and demand will only grow as these sizable multi-family buildings open.

- Our first choice for this county-owned space would be to include a significant, unique playground for children from the new, residential buildings, along with some basketball, racquet or pickle ball courts in the space adjacent to the fire station, as it would be centrally located to serve Clarendon and nearby residents. One could come up with any number of creative uses for such space, such as an outdoor climbing wall or structure, or sand volleyball court that would fill an underserved need.

- We believe there is an opportunity to elevate some of those offerings to a rooftop, or to include a small community center with some recreational offerings, such as an indoor playground, single basketball court, or racquetball courts in that space below or on top of a rebuilt fire station building.

- We also believe that the proposed Fairfax Drive Park linear park will be underutilized if it is merely a passive park with a shared drive and attractive landscaping. It would be best utilized if it also included active recreational uses that could complement those on 10th Street N. Thus, if 10th Street included only courts, a playground should be on Fairfax.

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- To maximize available space on Fairfax Drive, we recommend thinking creatively as to how to provide access to the sides of the existing T&J Auto and Northside Social buildings through the existing driveway between the building or through a small parking area that would not necessitate a street running the entire length of the proposed park. Even if this park was maximized, we think the recreational space there should supplement, rather than replace, recreational space on 10th Street N.

- We believe the financing for these projects should be the primary extraordinary community benefits that the County seeks in exchange for permitting higher density on the Wells Fargo and fire station sites, as it would be a direct investment into the betterment of the neighborhood. We note that if the County chose to sell or develop the 10th Street land, the sale or development could also help pay for such amenities. Contributions should also be sought in return for bonus density at the Joyce Motors, Bingham Center, and St. Charles sites.

While the activation and preservation of open space is our top priority, as has previously been communicated, we remain concerned about several other aspects of the plan. In particular, we would like to highlight the following:

- We would like the step-backs on 10th Street N. to begin at 55' rather than 75' to be consistent with the buildings to be built across the Street. As we are unaware of any developer requesting the higher step-back, we think this would be a reasonable change that would not significantly impact these future developments.

- We support the “Draft Sector Plan Guidance for Step-backs,” as articulated in the July 27, 2021 staff presentation (Presentation for LRPC Meeting #5, page 8), which proposes to “maintain Sector Plan step-back depth of 20 feet – allow flexibility with additional review during SRPC.” Insisting on a minimum 20' step-back remains very important at some locations, for instance along Wilson Boulevard where the proposed hotel would tower over Northside Social and on N. Irving Street opposite the Wells Fargo site and Verizon building.

- We remain concerned about the parking that will be provided in and around these buildings. In particular, we think the plan should require the church and commercial buildings to have public parking available to make up for lost parking around Northside Social to serve both existing and future businesses.

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We appreciate your continuing efforts to adjust the plans to consider the needs and wants of existing and future residents of Clarendon and the surrounding neighborhoods in order to make West Clarendon a success.

Sincerely,



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