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MINUTES OF THE HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD

Wednesday, January 15, 2025, 6:30 PM

This was a hybrid public meeting held both in person and through electronic communication means.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Omari Davis
Nan Dreher
Alex Foster, Vice Chair
Gray Handley
Gerald Laporte
Joan Lawrence
Rebecca Meyer
Kaydee Myers, Chair
Andrew Wenchel
Richard Woodruff

VIRTUAL MEMBERS: None

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Robert Dudka
Carmela Hamm
Mark Turnbull

STAFF PRESENT: Mical Tawney, Historic Preservation Associate Planner
John McNair, Historic Preservation Specialist

CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

The Chair called the meeting to order and asked Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff to please call the roll. Ms. Mical Tawney called the roll and determined that there was a quorum. After the roll had been called, Ms. Rebecca Meyer and Mr. Gray Handley arrived at 6:34 PM.

EXPLANATION OF PUBLIC HEARING PROCEDURES

The Chair explained the in-person and electronic Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB) public hearing procedures. Ms. Myers described the logistics of participating virtually in the hybrid meeting via the Microsoft Teams platform and/or the call-in number.

APPROVAL OF THE DECEMBER 2024 MEETING MINUTES

The Chair asked for any comments on the December 18, 2024, draft meeting minutes. Mr. Dick Woodruff made a motion to approve the minutes; Ms. Joan Lawrence seconded the motion. Ms. Tawney called the roll, and the motion passed 7-0; Ms. Nan Dreher, Ms. Meyer, and Mr. Handley abstained.

QUEEN CITY MARKER REVIEW

Mr. John McNair began his presentation for the proposed Queen City aluminum historic marker. In the summer of 2024, the HPP staff were asked to develop a historic marker to commemorate the Queen City neighborhood. HPP staff recommended the creation of a double-faced, cast-aluminum marker to match existing historical markers across the County and by January 7, 2025, HPP staff had completed the draft text of the marker. Mr. McNair shared that the current iteration of the marker was a collaborative effort between the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington (BHMA), the HPP, and the HALRB's Marker Subcommittee. He continued by saying that the Queen City marker text ranged from 100 to 120 words which was in conformity with the standards of previous aluminum historical markers created by the County. Due to space limitations, the narrative outline of the marker was limited in scope to focus on the neighborhood's origins, its composition and destruction, as well as the survival of the community. Following a review from the HALRB Marker Subcommittee, the HPP staff incorporated several of the recommended changes while refraining from incorporating others until the final review by the HALRB. He pointed out that on the screen was an image that showed an example of a recently created County aluminum marker for those who may not be familiar with the marker type.

He continued his presentation to further discuss the proposed text for the marker. He noted that Dr. Scott Taylor, who was a partner on this project through his role at the BHMA was participating virtually in the meeting that evening. Mr. McNair shared that the text on the screen was the result of edits by both the HPP team, the HALRB Marker Subcommittee, and Dr. Taylor. He shared that there was room to add an additional sentence or text to the marker since it currently was at 99 words and that he hoped the HALRB would discuss that evening what could be added to the marker's text. Mr. McNair continued by sharing three examples of topics the HALRB could add to the marker. The first was a sentence highlighting the marker's proposed location. He shared that they were considering placing the marker somewhere near the intersection of Columbia Pike and S. Joyce Street because this was one of the only locations within the historical bounds of Queen City where there is still regular foot-traffic and because the intersection, while not in the exact same location but located nearby, would have also been a part of the historic Queen City neighborhood. The second example was a sentence highlighting Queen City's connection to Freedman's Village and the history of that historic community. The third and final example was a sentence that highlighted the additional buildings located in the Queen City neighborhood such as the fire station and movie theater.

With the conclusion of the staff presentation, Mr. McNair asked if Dr. Taylor would like to share any thoughts about the marker before the item was before the HALRB. Dr. Taylor shared that the only thing he would have liked to see was the development of a tabletop historic marker with photographs, but that he was overall excited about the project. Mr. McNair thanked Dr. Taylor for his remarks and shared that it brought up another point he wanted to make before the HALRB considered what to include in the marker. He noted that this marker would not be the only way in which the Queen City neighborhood would obtain recognition and interpretation. He shared that the National Park Service was asked to include Queen City interpretation with some of the work they were doing for the 9-11 Visitors Center being constructed in the area.

Ms. Myers opened the conversation up to the full HALRB. Ms. Lawrence asked Dr. Taylor if he had a preference of the three proposed additional sentences that could be added to the marker. Dr. Taylor shared that the fire station had burned down and that the people in Queen City had not known what date the government was coming to take their land; he noted that it was a sad story, but that he was unsure how to capture that in words for the marker. He continued by saying that the wording of the proposed marker was good, but that the people reading it should have an understanding that the situation was a devastating one for those who lived in the neighborhood. He noted a few additional buildings and sites that were in the neighborhood such as a cemetery, a church, and a social hall. He said it was a thriving neighborhood and

it should be noted that the people who lived there were relocated to make way for the construction of the Pentagon.

Mr. Laporte shared that he had a few additional edits to the text since it had been updated from when he first reviewed it on the Marker Subcommittee. He said that the development of the community occurred in two stages: the first was when the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church bought two acres and called it Queen City and the second was when another development bought 28 acres which was called East Arlington. He felt it was inaccurate to state at the beginning that “members of a former Freedman’s Village congregation purchased about 30 acres to build a new church” because of the way the neighborhood had developed. He said that the previous draft had that point correct. Additionally, he noted that he had suggested in his initial review that some contextual information about Freedman’s Village might be beneficial to the reader of the marker, especially those who may not know about Freedman’s Village. He also pointed out that Mt. Olive Baptist Church originally had another name and that the previous draft highlighted the name change of the congregation which he preferred for historical accuracy. Finally, he shared his suggestions for the final sentence. He noted that it was accurate to state that “many residents relocated to other Black communities elsewhere in Arlington” but that the other elements of the sentence were nostalgic or would no longer be accurate in the future (i.e. “many of which exist today” may not be true several years from now).

Mr. Woodruff stated that he agreed with the points Mr. Laporte shared. He added that if a sentence discussing Freedman’s Village was included on the marker that it would need to include information about what happened to Freedman’s Village and how that community was displaced as well. He also offered that the term “imminent domain” should be replaced with “seized” because it was a more accurate description of what occurred. Mr. Laporte agreed that the marker was long overdue and that it coincided with the stated goals of the Historic and Cultural Resources Plan (HCRP). Ms. Dreher shared that she had also previously looked at the marker as part of the subcommittee and noted that it would be good to note how abruptly the displacement had occurred for the residents. She offered that the marker could say something about “wartime” to give it some additional context that this occurred during World War II. She appreciated that the last sentence was trying to end the marker on a positive note but that, perhaps, the sentence implies it was more positive than it was given that this was a bad situation for the residents. She offered “memories” as an alternative to “legacy.” Mr. Handley said he agreed with Mr. Woodruff and Mr. Laporte, but that he felt it could go further. He felt it was essential to express that this was a community that had suffered in slavery, that had lived in Freedman’s Village and were forcibly removed from there, and that they were then forcibly removed from Queen City several years later. He felt the marker was too gently worded and that it was not being honest about what happened in history. He agreed that the word “legacy” should be removed. Dr. Taylor offered that stating the facts would be best and shared some additional history about the community, specifically that a lot of the houses were constructed by the residents themselves and that they were proud of their community.

Ms. Tawney asked the HALRB if it was accurate to state that they wanted the additional room in the marker to address Freedman’s Village more and not for the inclusion of the other proposed sentences about the movie theater or the fire station. Several HALRB members agreed with this assessment. Ms. Myers said she did appreciate the potential inclusion of the movie theater and the fire station because it helped convey the establishment of the community and suggested that those could be listed in the sentence which notes the houses, businesses, churches, and the trolley stop. Ms. Myers asked if anyone else had comments. Mr. Handley reminded staff to clarify the statement about the 30 acres in the second sentence. Mr. Woodruff agreed with the suggestions to add the movie theater and fire station to the listing because it would help further convey that Queen City was a community. Ms. Lawrence also offered, if space allowed, that the marker could reference that the community was built by the residents. Mr. Davis seconded the opinion shared that the marker should convey that this was a community that was built twice and that it was taken away twice.

Ms. Myers asked if the HALRB would want to review the marker again or if everyone would be comfortable with HPP staff working on the marker with the suggested edits and having the HALRB Marker Subcommittee review it again. Ms. Lawrence asked if there was a deadline staff was trying to meet. Mr. McNair said there was not a specific deadline at the moment, especially since further conversations would need to be completed with the County's federal partners and the Department of Parks and Recreation about the exact location of the marker, but that they were working to keep things moving along. Mr. Woodruff asked if there was a specific location of the marker. Mr. McNair referred to the slide with the possible location to speak to that again. He noted that they had a broad area where he would like to propose the marker be located. Ms. Myers shared the two motion options again to the HALRB. Ms. Tawney noted that the option providing conditional approval and allowing HPP staff to continue working on the marker with the HALRB Marker Subcommittee would help staff continue to move the process forward. With that, Ms. Lawrence made the following motion:

I move that the HALRB conditionally approve the marker based on the staff and the Marker Subcommittee working on the language to come up with what we discussed and circulated to everybody before final approval.

Ms. Dreher seconded the motion. Ms. Myers asked staff to call the roll. Ms. Tawney called the roll and the motion passed 10-0.

Before the next agenda item was discussed, Dr. Taylor offered that he believed Mt. Olive Baptist Church might have once been called Antioch Baptist Church, but he was unsure if they were called that when they purchased the land in what would then become Queen City. Ms. Tawney thanked him for attending the meeting and for working with HPP staff on the marker.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM: 750 23rd STREET SOUTH – MELWOOD SITE PLAN PROJECT

Ms. Tawney offered some contextual comments for the next agenda item before turning it over to the project team to present. She said that the Melwood Site Plan project team was in attendance to provide a summary of the project and to receive feedback from the HALRB; the meeting was requested by Ms. Dreher, who was serving on the Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) as one of the HALRB representatives, during one of the SPRC meetings for the project. She noted that Mr. Woodruff was the other HALRB representative for the SPRC. She reminded everyone that the project involved the Nelly Custis School building which was nominated to become a Local Historic District (LHD) last year and which is in the HPP staff's LHD study queue. She noted that the discussion at the meeting was informational only and that the HALRB would not be making a motion at the end of the discussion. Finally, she shared that there was one public speaker for the item and that they would share their remarks after the presentation by the project team and before the full discussion with the HALRB.

Mr. Woodruff asked if the other County commissions that the project team was visiting over the next few weeks were also viewing the project as "informational only" or if they would get to formally vote on the project. Mr. Kevin Lam, the County's principal planner managing the Melwood Site Plan project, introduced himself and said he could offer an answer to the question. As part of the site plan process, he said that other commissions (Housing, Transportation, and Planning) vote after a project is presented to them as to whether or not they recommend the item be adopted by the County Board, but he noted that other commissions that have interests in the project would also be viewing the project as an informational item, such as the Disability Advisory Commission. Mr. Woodruff said that this was interesting given that the HALRB is one of the only commissions in the County with regulatory authority. He said he felt that the HALRB should vote on the project at some point. Ms. Tawney said she could discuss that with additional staff, but that her understanding of the process was that the HALRB was not one of the

commissions that makes a formal recommendation for site plan projects. Mr. Woodruff continued by saying this project has more significance for the HALRB considering the inclusion of a historic building that is being considered for a LHD overlay and that the project was proposing that building's demolition. Ms. Tawney said she would make note of Mr. Woodruff's requests but said she would like to move on in the conversation to give the project team a chance to give their presentation.

Ms. Lauren Riley with Walsh Colucci introduced herself along with Mr. Scott Gibson from Melwood and Mr. Taylor Stout with Wesley Housing who were all representing the project that evening. She reminded the HALRB that the project had undergone a Special General Land Use Plan (GLUP) Study for the project area and that that study was approved in May 2024 by the County Board. The 4.1 Site Plan application was submitted right after the GLUP Study was approved. She shared that the project team had an online engagement in August 2024, a walking tour of the site and the first SPRC meeting in November 2024, and the second SPRC meeting in December 2024. She reiterated that they were giving an informational overview of the project to the HALRB because it was requested at one of the SPRC meetings. She also reminded the HALRB that the LHD process and the site plan process are two separate procedures in the County.

She started the presentation by showing a site plan for the project. She reminded the HALRB that the site was the location of the former Nelly Custis School which was constructed in the early 1920s and 1930s. The County closed the school in the 1970s and around that time, the Sheltered Occupation Center and the County entered a land swap: the Sheltered Occupation Center traded the property they owned in Ballston to the County in exchange for the site of the former Nelly Custis School where they utilized the building for their programming. Melwood purchased the site in 2018 and have been using it as a community services center to provide training and other services for people with disabilities. Since then, they began exploring ways in which to upgrade the building and decided to partner with Wesley Housing, an affordable housing company, to create a new development to collocate affordable housing with Melwood's services that they provide to individuals with disabilities. She stated that both entities were aiming to help an underserved community in Arlington.

She continued by saying that the proposal was to demolish the existing building and to redevelop the site with a new five-story multi-family building with space for Melwood at the ground floor. All 105 units in the building would be affordable with most of them being family units (2- and 3-bedroom units). She shared that a parking garage would be located underneath the building and that cars would enter it from 23rd Street South. She said after hearing feedback from the community, they relocated the front entrance of their design to the area where the historic façade interpretation would be situated. The project would also include the upgrading of street sidewalks, an upgrade to the bus-stop area to make it more accessible, and the planting of new street trees. She noted that a concern of the community was having the Nelly Custis Park impacted by the design of the new building and as such, they have kept the bulk of the mass of the building away from the park by creating additional setbacks on the rear elevation in the location of the patio and outdoor courtyard.

The parking garage would provide one level of below grade parking. She noted that the footprint was the necessary one needed to support the building and its activities and residents. On the first floor of the building would be residential communal spaces, some residential units, and the spaces necessary for Melwood's operations. While discussing the upper floors, Ms. Riley shared some additional information about the various setbacks on the façade and how they would help differentiate between the new building and the interpreted historic façade portion. She continued by sharing elevations of the proposed development and pointed out the design's rhythm as articulated by the various setbacks on the elevation along 23rd Street South. She noted the main material would be brick and that a mansard style roof would be utilized to soften the roofline; along the other elevations (South Grant Street), she shared that there would be the use of different colored materials and variations to help break up the design.

Next in the presentation was an exploration of the project's renderings to show how the building would fit into the context of the surrounding neighborhood. Ms. Riley then presented a drawing that depicted the different years in which the building was constructed. The original building was built in 1923 and had two wing additions added in 1931. Subsequent additions occurred in 1962 and 1995. She noted that the additions had compromised the architectural integrity of the building and provided some specific examples of how the building had changed from its original design to what is there today, such as the infill of original windows with non-compatible brick and the replacement of original windows with modern windows. Next, she shared the progression of the design of the historic façade's interpretation and offered details about how they landed on the current design. Previous feedback on the design noted that the interpretation looked "squat", so the design team added windows at the basement level to enhance the connection to the historic building and to help it appear to be more like a one-and-a-half story building. Finally, Ms. Riley noted a few additional details, such as soldier-course brick detailing and the design of the entry awning on the historically interpreted portion of the new building, that would tie the new building to the historic school. This was the conclusion of their presentation.

Ms. Lawrence asked if they had additional streetscape views and noted that the building was massive and would be bigger than other buildings already in the area. Ms. Riley went back to the streetscape rendering they included in their presentation and said that, through the County Board-approved GLUP Study for the site, a five-story building was recommended as appropriate for the location provided there is appropriate tapering towards the park and the neighborhood. She also pointed out the landscape buffering the project would have along the back side between the building and the park and how this would provide additional screening between the building and that portion of the neighborhood.

Before the conversation progressed, Ms. Myers invited Ms. Stacy Meyer to share her public comment with the HALRB. Ms. Meyer, who was speaking on behalf of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association, said the following:

I'm Stacy Meyer, I'm a representative on the SPRC for the Melwood project and Vice President of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association. So aside from the specifics of the application, there are serious process conflicts related to the site plan amendment that involve HALRB as Mr. Woodruff started to discuss earlier. In June 2024, the HALRB authorized the County study required to designate Nelly Custis as a Local Historic District. However, the County has not completed the study and meanwhile, the site plan continues to show demolition of the school. The County views the Local Historic District application and the site plan application as two separate and, by extension, unrelated processes. However, these two processes are now running in parallel and can result in the situation where the demolition of the school is approved prior to the study being complete. The possibility of this happening is likely since the County Board will be reviewing the application in five weeks with no time frame given for the completion of the study at all. It appears that the County is attempting to bypass HALRB by delaying the study and allowing the site plan amendment process to move forward before the HALRB can act on the historic district application. It's highly unusual for the County to proceed in this parallel manner which is why site plan usually don't come to HALRB. The rezoning of Gilliam Place for affordable housing did not begin until after HALRB acted. The County has given no reason for the differences between the Melwood site and the Gilliam Place process. The Melwood site plan process should have pause to allow HALRB to act once it authorized the study last summer to be consistent with County process. Virginia 15.2-2306 was enacted last year in the wake of the Rouse site demolition to stop the County from issuing future demolition permits before a LHD application is acted upon in a situation like this. The civic association, the Aurora Highlands Civic Association, supports the application, the LHD application and proposed an alternative envelope in May 2024 in a nearly unanimous vote of 100 members that allows development on

the site to proceed at an appropriate scale for the neighborhood while preserving Nelly Custis School which is an occupiable and in excellent condition for being 100 years old, over a 100 years old. The applicant claims that because of Virginia LIHTC rules, they must build this massive structure but has presented no evidence that this is the case. Virginia changed its LIHTC scoring system so the old cost-per-unit incentive to build bigger is no longer a measure of competitiveness and they encourage smaller, not larger, projects in their rating system. The August 2024 HALRB meeting included an interesting discussion regarding Arlington 2050, the minutes were posted online, we looked at them. At this meeting, most members expressed great concern over the numerous historic structures lost to development and the need to ensure the extent of buildings remain in 2050. Here we have Nelly Custis School in front of us which presents a unique opportunity to preserve a historic public building that is in excellent shape and one of the very few non-residential historic buildings left east of 395 in Arlington an area where most non-residential historic structures have been demolished not the least of which was Queen City as you discussed tonight. Nelly Custis is now also under threat of demolition. If you were here in 1942, would you have done something different? Times change, but demolition is permanent. Will Nelly Custis School still be here in 2050, will it be here in 2026, or will it just be a marker as the applicant proposes on a faux façade? That depends on whether the County and the actions the HALRB takes now to stand up for historic preservation and process and comprehensive planning in Arlington. The civic association is now asking is it possible for you to raise these issues and get clarification from the County Board's intent in relation to the site plan approval happening in advance of HALRB acting on the Local Historic District application and a clear understanding of how the County Board views the 15.2-2306 law in relation to the site plan application. Most importantly, can HALRB ask the County to commit to not approving this site plan application that proposes to demolish this historic asset prior to the study being complete. Thank you.

Ms. Tawney let Ms. Meyer know she had a remaining 30 seconds if she wanted to say anything additional. Mr. Woodruff asked if he could use that time to ask Ms. Meyer a question. Ms. Tawney found this allowable. Mr. Woodruff asked Ms. Meyer if the civic association was opposed to the project. Ms. Meyer confirmed that the Aurora Highlands Civic Association was opposed to the project and outlined how they have voiced that objection to the County and the applicant and how they offered an alternative envelope for the building which proposed an alternate solution to the project. Ms. Myers thanked Ms. Meyer for her remarks and opened the discussion up to the HALRB.

Ms. Dreher asked if Ms. Tawney could clarify the new Virginia state law and how it relates to the site plan project. Ms. Tawney confirmed that the new Virginia law restricting the issuance of demolition permits for buildings under consideration for historic designation would not impact the site plan process from moving forward. She reiterated that there was no procedural mechanism in place at the County that required a LHD designation be considered by the County Board before they reviewed a site plan project. She continued by saying staff's understanding of the new law was that if a building permit or a demolition permit was applied for a building under consideration for designation, that the permit could not be issued until 30 days after the designation was considered by the County Board. She also mentioned that she was unaware of any instances in Virginia, as of yet, where this law has been utilized or tested. Ms. Dreher followed up by asking if a site plan would be on hiatus, then if it were approved in a situation like the one with Melwood. Ms. Tawney said that it would not stop the site plan process but said that if the project team applied for a demolition permit, then the law would come into play, and they would not be able to obtain their demolition or building permit until after the LHD designation had been considered by the County Board.

Ms. Myers asked if there were any additional questions about the new Virginia law or about the project's LHD component. Hearing none, she directed the HALRB to provide their comments about the project.

Ms. Tawney asked Ms. Riley to share the slides again on the screen so the HALRB could look through them again. A few HALRB members asked specifically to see the slide that showed the 23rd Street South entrance to the building. Mr. Davis asked if the brick for the reconstruction of the building would be taken from the original building and re-purposed; Ms. Riley said that the building would be made entirely of new materials. Ms. Lawrence asked why they were not repurposing the materials. Ms. Riley said that there was not much historic fabric left to the original building due to the additions over time and reiterated that there was nothing unique about the existing brick. She also noted that there is a substantial cost that comes with re-using materials and that that cost could not be included in the project's budget. She did note that a Planning Commissioner in an SPRC meeting recommended that the project team donate the existing materials to those who may want to reuse them, and they are exploring that as an option. Mr. Woodruff asked if there was anything in the building that the project team deemed to be usable. Ms. Riley said she had already discussed the exterior and shared that there are a few elements on the interior, such as transoms, wood doors, and existing blackboards, that they will not be re-using, but that they would also be donating.

Ms. Myers asked if Ms. Riley could share the dates of the building's additions again. Ms. Riley shared that Mr. Gibson had reminded her that during the 1990s renovation of the building, the property owners had infilled areas on the historic portions of the building with new, non-compatible brick which further complicated the historic integrity of the building. The HALRB members asked Ms. Riley to zoom in on the image showing the dates of the additions. Ms. Riley noted that it is only the 1923 and 1931 portions of the building that are contributing to the Aurora Highlands National Register Historic District and reiterated some of the changes made to the building over time, such as the relocation of the main entrance, which impacted the historic integrity of the building. She shared the historic images and images of the existing windows to further illustrate the changes made to the building over time. Ms. Lawrence shared that the photos were helpful to her understanding of the proposed canopy design over the new building's main entrance but noted it still did not evoke the same feeling.

Ms. Myers said she appreciated the interpretation of the main entrance on the new building but noted that she took issue with projects that proposed mimicking something when the original could just be used and specifically called out the location and design of the corner of the original school building. She felt the "interpretation" of an old building might trick people years later into thinking that the project did incorporate the original building when in fact they did not. She continued by saying she felt that the additions were all over 30 years old now and expressed that she believed when people thought of the building, they thought of it in its current iteration and therefore, the argument for why the additions had compromised the historic integrity of the building fell flat for her. Ms. Myers then asked for clarification on the project's proposed setbacks in relation to the current building's setback. Ms. Riley said the new building would be setback 20 feet from the property line and pointed out where on the drawing the outline for the existing building's footprint was located. She noted the new building would come up towards the road more than the existing building along 23rd Street South, be about the same along South Grant Street, be setback farther from the current setback along Nelly Custis Park, and then would cover the surface parking lot that exists today on the west side of the building.

Ms. Riley also took this moment to mention the historic marker, which is a site plan condition, that they would design as part of project. She said they were thinking about placing the marker near the front entrance and said that they would come back to the HALRB to have them review the historic marker. She shared that the historic marker would make it clear to the reader that the new façade is an interpretation of the existing building and not the original. Ms. Lawrence asked if the team considered using the 1931 corner of the existing building into the design. Ms. Riley said the team was balancing concerns in the community about parking and providing enough parking which is why they want to include the parking garage in the design. It is due to the parking garage that they cannot keep the current façade in place; they need to demolish the building so they can construct the below grade parking. Ms. Lawrence asked if the

project team considered making the building less than 5 stories. Ms. Riley said that the entire proportion of the building would not be five stories and noted specific setbacks, but Ms. Lawrence interjected to say that the height of the building would still be five stories. Ms. Riley continued by reiterating the various setbacks and design elements the team was proposing to diminish the visual impact of the five-story building on the neighborhood. She noted that the density in the plan would allow for Melwood to have a meaningful and upgraded space for their programming combined with an affordable housing project that allows them to have a competitive low-income housing tax credit application in line with the recommendations of the Special GLUP Study.

Ms. Lawrence asked how long the units would be considered affordable. Ms. Riley said there would be a covenant on them for a minimum of 30 years; Ms. Lawrence interjected to say that was a short period of time. Ms. Riley said that was the standard amount of time as she understood it. She continued by saying there were a few different elements ensuring the affordability of the building in the future. She specifically cited the Special GLUP study only recommends a re-zoning in a site plan for a project that prioritizes affordable housing. This would limit projects that do not have a significant commitment to affordable housing which this project is providing since there would be committed affordable housing units for 30 years, likely 50 years which would last through the life of the building. Ms. Lawrence asked for clarification on the lifespan of the proposed building. Ms. Riley asked Mr. Stout how long these buildings typically last. Ms. Lawrence interjected again to express dismay that the project was demolishing a 100+ year old building and replacing it with a building that was projected to last only about 50 years. Mr. Stout said it was a good question and that they would do renovations to the building to help extend its lifespan to 50 years; Ms. Lawrence said she found that appalling. Ms. Riley said the affordability term is standard in Arlington County. Mr. Woodruff said there were some projects that had 99 years of affordability. Ms. Lawrence seconded that saying she knew of projects that had longer covenants. Ms. Riley said that projects like Barcroft and others are exceptions due to the significant County investment in those projects.

Ms. Meyer asked for clarification around what in the design was interpretation and what was mimicry of the original building; she said she felt that the entire section was mimicking the original building because it looked the same as the original building. Ms. Riley clarified that the entire portion in red brick was the architect's historic interpretation of the original building and shared that the historic marker would be located in front of that portion and provide a description of the building. Ms. Meyer asked about the window materiality. Ms. Riley said the project team thought that the original windows were steel although they could not confirm that detail. Ms. Meyer asked if there was a material selection proposed yet for the new building's windows on the interpreted portion. Ms. Riley and Mr. Stout said there would be storefront windows at the ground level and likely vinyl elsewhere. Ms. Tawney asked if, like with the Barcroft project, there are specific material requirements for housing tax credits that would apply to this project. Ms. Riley confirmed that they were not applying for historic tax credits, but that there are some minimum construction and design standards they must adhere to for the affordable housing tax credits.

Mr. Woodruff asked if they could discuss how the façade was developed for the interpreted portion of the building. He said originally it was one-story in height and asked if the latest version was taller. Ms. Riley said they had increased the height of the parapet to evoke more of that one-and-a-half story feel and look that exists on the building today. Mr. Woodruff asked why they could not increase it to two-stories in height saying that that was what existed today. Mr. Gibson said that the existing building was actually one-and-a-half stories in height, not two, and explained that the basement level was below grade. He continued by saying that, in the new building, the space above the interpretation was residential and that they had bar-width considerations. Ms. Riley explained that the floor-to-floor heights would not line up and the units above have windows so the section below could not be taller and obstruct those windows. Mr. Woodruff asked if they were suggesting that the height of the new design was the height of the existing building. Ms. Riley said she did not have the exact one-to-one comparison and reiterated that

they increased the height to evoke the proportionality that they heard was desired by the public and other feedback received. Mr. Woodruff said that the new design still looked squat and horizontal. He said he appreciated their efforts to try to address it, but noted that it still did not look right, that it did not recall the original building, or evoke the memory of the original building. He offered that they could redesign the sections behind the interpretative portion to allow for the floor heights to line up and make the interpreted part taller. Mr. Stout explained why they could not make those changes and reiterated that the entire building would have to shift, and it would be a complete redesign of that corner of the building.

Ms. Dreher asked to see one of the street view renderings of the project saying that it offered a better view of how the interpretation fit in with the rest of the building. Ms. Myers asked if anyone else on the HALRB had questions noting that there were a few people who had not chimed in to the conversation. Hearing none, Ms. Myers asked a question about the flagpole. She said the project team had said the existing flagpole was original and asked if the new building would cover the space in which the flagpole is currently located now. Mr. Gibson clarified that the flagpole's current location is where the flagpole had originally been located, but that they could not verify if that pole itself was original. Ms. Myers said it would be a nice touch to the project if the flagpole could remain in its original location and offered that the historic marker could be located nearby.

Mr. Laporte asked what kind of historic marker they were considering for installation. Ms. Riley said they had not worked through the design of the marker, but that the marker was part of the site plan conditions. She said it might be a tabletop marker with photographs and reiterated that the HALRB would review its design and content in the future. Mr. Laporte said that the tabletop markers last about 10 years and said he thought that, as part of the site plan conditions, the applicant should contribute money into a fund to maintain the tabletop markers. He felt that the County should explore starting that fund for marker maintenance. Ms. Tawney noted that, as stated in the site plan conditions, that the property owners would be responsible for maintaining the marker in perpetuity or for at least the lifetime of that site plan. Ms. Riley concurred and said that the site plan condition requires that they have the marker in place and if they did not, then they would be in violation of the site plan conditions. Ms. Riley and Mr. Laporte discussed the conditions of historic markers and how they age over time.

Ms. Myers asked if anyone had any other comments. Mr. Woodruff said he reserved the right to make a motion in the future to have on the record how the HALRB felt about the Melwood project. Ms. Tawney asked if Mr. Woodruff would like to write a letter. Mr. Woodruff said he would be willing; Ms. Tawney offered that the HALRB could work with Ms. Farris to write a letter sharing their concerns about the project with the County Board. Mr. Woodruff continued by saying he wanted to make a motion that also stated how the County should not move forward with one project (the site plan) while not moving forward on the other (the LHD study) claiming that it was set out in state law. He expressed that the HALRB would be whipsawed and that buildings would be demolished before they could present anything to the County Board.

Ms. Tawney thanked Ms. Riley and her team for coming to the meeting. As they were leaving, Mr. Handley asked if he could say something. He said, addressing Mr. Woodruff, that he was troubled by the process and timing of when items are considered by the County Board. He said he did not feel that the new law was completely clear and noted the point Ms. Tawney made earlier about how it has not been tested yet in the state. He was unsure if the law required that the HALRB conclude their deliberations about the historic nature of a property before the site plan process can proceed or does the study just have to come before the HALRB. He reiterated that the language in the law was unclear. Ms. Myers noted that the law applies to situations where a demolition permit is requested and that a final decision has to be rendered for that permit to be issued. Mr. Handley asked if that was what the law said. Ms. Tawney confirmed that that was their interpretation of it and that a final decision would need to be made on the designation request.

Mr. Woodruff said that that assumes that the designation has been submitted to the County Board by the HALRB. He said that the HALRB never acts because they do not have a study and that that is the applicant's loophole. Ms. Myers said they started the process by requesting the study be done by HPP staff. Mr. Woodruff said he did not think this was relevant to the law. Ms. Myers said that was her interpretation of it. Ms. Tawney offered that this topic would come up again, and Mr. Handley said it would be nice to have it resolved. He continued by saying that he felt that the crux of the issue with the project proposal was balancing the affordable housing and Melwood office space components of the project, which he felt were important, with appropriately interpreting the historic property, if it was indeed historic which he believed was a question that had still not be resolved. Mr. Wenchel stated that it was not a unified opinion of the HALRB that the building was historic and reminded the HALRB that there were some members who did not request that the building be studied by HPP staff.

Ms. Dreher asked Ms. Tawney when the study might be started for the Nelly Custis School building. Ms. Tawney reminded the HALRB that this item was third in their LHD study queue and that two other requests were ahead of the one in question. Her estimate, based on current resources and other projects, was that the study would start at the end of 2025 and go into 2026. Mr. Wenchel said he felt it would be advantageous to have someone look at what is being proposed for historic interpretation and what is currently in place now. Mr. Handley asked if it would be beneficial to the HPP staff if someone and/or the County were able to augment resources towards them for the assistance of completing these different LHD studies in the queue to move things along faster. Ms. Tawney offered, having never been involved in the budgeting process for the team, that she was unaware what was allowed and what would not be allowed in a situation such as the one Mr. Handley offered. She said she was not comfortable offering a definitive answer, but appreciated the line-of inquiry and offered that she would mention it to Ms. Farris.

Mr. Davis asked if it would be possible to make the LHD boundaries of the Nelly Custis School only around the historic core of the building or if the boundaries of the LHD are pre-ordained by the application. Ms. Tawney said that it would be based on what was in the original application and what was in the original application for this building was the entire building. She also noted that it was best and standard architectural history practice to look at a building as a whole rather than piecemeal. She said she was unaware of a LHD where only a portion of it was preserved. Ms. Lawrence said that they had done that; Ms. Tawney asked her to explain. Ms. Lawrence offered Westover as an example, but Ms. Tawney noted that that was not a LHD and explained that she meant a building, not a complex of buildings. Mr. Woodruff said that what the HALRB voted on was what was proposed in the HPP staff study of the property, not necessarily what was in the original application and so if the study offered that only a portion of a building was historic than that was what they would vote on.

Mr. Laporte offered Central United Methodist Church as another example of where only a portion of the land became a LHD, not the whole site. Mr. Woodruff said they needed to have the study and continued by saying it was amazing the number of resources the Planning Department and Planning Commission had devoted to the site plan process in comparison to the resources the HPP staff had access to for their work. Mr. Handley seconded this notion. Ms. Myers offered that the HALRB could work on the letter they mentioned earlier to express their concerns, specifically about the site plan and LHD processes. Mr. Handley said he agreed and felt that this could happen again in the future. Ms. Myers noted that had the HALRB had a LHD study for the property, it would have offered more guidance for the discussion that evening and said she hoped that the applicant also wanted more guidance specifically on the new law. Ms. Tawney said she would have Ms. Farris reach out to Ms. Myers, Mr. Woodruff, and Ms. Dreher about writing the letter to the County Board about the project. Ms. Myers offered that Ms. Dreher and Mr. Woodruff would have more knowledge on the specifics of the project considering their role on the SPRC. Mr. Handley offered that the letter should discuss the general issues at play in this situation, and Ms. Dreher seconded this idea.

Mr. Woodruff asked when the site plan was scheduled to go to the County Board. Mr. Lam confirmed the date of the February meeting at which the site plan would be discussed by the Board. Ms. Riley asked if there were any other questions about their project; it was confirmed there were not.

CHAIR’S REPORT

The Chair said that they did not have any updates or other items to share as part of the Chair’s Report.

STAFF REPORT

Ms. Tawney said that staff did not have anything specific to share as well, but wished everyone a happy new year and thanked them for their participation in the conversation that evening. With no other business for the good of the order, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:16 pm.