

January 23, 2026

Honorable Matt de Ferranti, Chair
Arlington County Board
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Leckey Gardens (RPC#07-010-001, -002)

Dear Chair de Ferranti,

Members of The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) participated in the site plan review process for the Leckey Gardens site at 2031 North Woodrow Street and submit the following comments.

Commission Members

Caroline Haynes, Chair
Bob Benson
Bill Browning
John Carey
Elizabeth Gearin
Connor Goolsby
Josh Handler
Noreen Hannigan
Jennifer Hazen
David Howell
Neal Hunter
Phil Klingelhofer
Lisa Marcellus
Alex Sanders
Stephen Sockwell

A key county priority identified in the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan (December 2023), is to “reestablish and maintain at least 40% tree canopy County-wide.” Arlington is well short of that goal and evidence indicates the county is losing ground on private properties. Therefore, tree conservation and replacement are top priorities for this and all other properties undergoing re-development.

Our tree canopy provides huge value to the county through improved air quality and natural habitat, major economic and property value benefits, improved physical and mental health of citizens, and significant stormwater mitigation. In addition, Arlington recognizes climate change as one of the existential threats of our time. Canopy trees mitigate the major climate change impacts of heat islands and severe storms in our neighborhoods.

The Leckey Gardens project provides an opportunity to demonstrate how Arlington can increase housing density and still maintain a landscaped urban forest setting, with all of the benefits that mature tree canopy will provide. Creating an inviting mini-forest surrounding this building will benefit both residents and the broader community alike.

The FNRC applauds the developer’s efforts to meet the 35% Plan Langston Boulevard canopy target and use green infrastructure on site to mitigate stormwater impacts. These efforts will not only provide a county-wide benefit, but will be directly beneficial to the individuals and families who will call this neighborhood home.

The FNRC also applauds the commitment to preserve and, importantly, protect the trees along the south border greenway. However, the current building configuration likely will impinge on the critical root zone of the proposed preserved tree and should not be counted in tree canopy coverage unless the building footprint is appropriately adjusted. We urge close collaboration with Arlington’s team of expert urban foresters to ensure that essential protective measures are taken throughout the construction process to protect the root systems of the conserved trees.

The FNRC supports plans to plant street trees around the entire perimeter of the site. We recommend the following actions to ensure that the project will maximize its contribution to the county's 40% tree canopy goal:

- (1) **Replacement trees should be native species of tall shade producing trees rather than ornamentals.** Tall shade trees provide maximum canopy. We have an opportunity with Leckey Gardens, the first high density project in this area of Langston Boulevard, to be a model for tree lined shaded streets and a demonstration of the many benefits provided by mature shade trees, as noted above. The final tree selection for this project should fully support the county's goal to increase canopy coverage.
- (2) **All utility lines should be buried, including the overhead lines along North 21st Street.** This project represents a huge investment in site development. The street trees, which are themselves a big investment, cannot grow tall and thrive if restricted by power lines. We urge the county to negotiate with the 21st Street property owner to reach an agreement, with county investment if necessary, to bury these lines. The multiple long term benefits of mature shade trees will greatly outweigh short term costs of burying power lines.
- (3) **All planter strips should be at least 8 feet wide where possible to create the best conditions for long-term survival and growth of trees.** The American National Standard Institute's A300 standard for street tree planting recommends 8-10 feet for shade trees. Arlington's current position is that 6-8 feet is acceptable and 8-feet is preferred. We recommend that the developer assess where to make small adjustments in street, sidewalk, and bike lane widths to 'buy' some inches here and there to hit the preferred 8-foot target.

One way to help achieve wider planting strips for street trees would be to eliminate street parking along the 20th, 21st, and Woodrow Street sides of the property, if not all four sides of the site. With over 220 spaces in the building garage, including publicly accessible spaces, the creation of a relatively small number of additional street spaces is not essential when balanced against the considerable benefits of a wider tree and landscaping space.

- (4) **Use bird friendly glass throughout the building.** This is particularly important because of the topography of the site and proximity to natural watershed areas.
- (5) **Avoid a tradeoff between the inclusion of trees and the creation of hardscape stormwater retention cisterns.** It is not clear whether the inclusion of hardscape stormwater retention cisterns in the design will result in any reduction of natural green space and tree canopy. We recommend the use of trees and green infrastructure be maximized to the greatest extent possible and not limited by hardscape stormwater capture installations. Trees and green infrastructure are widely recognized by EPA's stormwater program as an excellent stormwater retention strategy, in addition to providing additional benefits that cisterns do not.
- (6) **Aim for LEED Gold or Platinum status.** The FNRC joins other commenters in encouraging achievement of LEED Gold or Platinum status for this development. LEED certification standards include landscaping, tree canopy, reduction of heat island effect, and green infrastructure as valuable ways to earn LEED certification points.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Haynes". The script is cursive and fluid.

Caroline Haynes, Chair
Forestry and Natural Resources Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Members, Planning Commission
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager