



Fairlington Citizens Association
P. O. Box 6182
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March 20, 2020

Elizabeth Gearin, Co-Chair
James Schroll, Co-Chair
Long Range Planning Committee
Arlington County Planning Commission
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 700
Arlington VA 22206
Submitted Electronically

Dear Co-Chairs Gearin and Schroll:

I am writing to express the views of the Fairlington Citizens Association (FCA), the civic association that represents more than 3500 households in North and South Fairlington, Park Shirlington, and Shirlington House, on the Shirlington Special GLUP Study Plus. FCA's territory is adjacent to the area that is subject to the study.

FCA understands and supports the importance of maintaining the Village at Shirlington as a vibrant commercial area. It's part of the extended Fairlington neighborhood. Our residents shop there, frequent the restaurants, go to Signature Theatre. We want the businesses to thrive. We recognize that preserving, and enhancing, the small-town character of Campbell Avenue will require both additional private investment by Federal Realty Investment Trust (FRIT) and a robust customer base for the stores along the avenue.

At the same time, we know the concern our residents have about the effects on neighborhood traffic and school enrollment that come with additional density. We also believe there are aspects of the GLUP that could make Shirlington even more attractive to Fairlington residents, including improving accessibility and incorporating components that appeal to families with children while strengthening Shirlington as an arts and culture center.

Our views fall into four general areas:

Regionally Connected Impacts

In considering changes in Shirlington, the county needs to look more broadly at a larger geographic area than just Shirlington. Its analysis must include both North and South

Fairlington, as well as Green Valley, Parkfairfax, and adjacent parts of Alexandria. Developments in Shirlington will not happen in a vacuum.

The question isn't just the impact of additional density in Shirlington. Rather, it's the cumulative impact of additional Shirlington density, combined with the proposal to double the density just up 31st Street in Park Shirlington. On the other side of Fairlington, we are monitoring the development at West Alex (Beauregard and King Streets), as well as the conversion of the two Park Center office buildings to apartments. We also anticipate the revitalization of Green Valley. All of those will likely feed off of each other, with significant implications for Fairlington. Failure to consider how these developments are interrelated concerns us and may overlook opportunities for boosting Shirlington.

Crowding at Abingdon Elementary

A key concern is the impact on our neighborhood school, Abingdon Elementary. FCA enjoys an exceptionally close relationship with Abingdon. We note with alarm that less than three years after the school was expanded, it has once again become the most overcrowded elementary school in Arlington. The addition of density in Shirlington, and Park Shirlington as well, may only exacerbate this problem as they are both currently zoned for Abingdon. We encourage the Committee to give additional thought to the impact of increased regional density on Abingdon Elementary.

Traffic and Transit

A serious look at interconnected traffic impacts—and here again not just in Shirlington itself but in the surrounding neighborhoods—is required. As Shirlington becomes a more popular destination—which is in part an implicit goal of the GLUP proposal—the streets of the surrounding neighborhoods will likely become more congested. It is not sufficient to look just at the four or five intersections in Shirlington itself (though the analysis of one of them is problematic). Rather, it is important to consider as well what the impact, if any, of additional density will be at other key intersections in the larger neighborhood (e.g., Walter Reed and Arlington Mill, 31st and Abingdon, and 28th and King).

The GLUP needs to recognize the importance of the Shirlington Transit Station and lay the foundation for interjurisdictional collaboration between Metrobus, ART, and DASH in meeting the area's transit needs. The transit issues are not just about getting out of Shirlington to the Pentagon, Ballston, or the District during the morning rush, but also about providing options for people who are coming into Shirlington (or Fairlington) from other areas for work in our community. This will benefit both Shirlington and Fairlington.

The GLUP should also acknowledge the proposal by VDOT for major improvements to the Shirlington Circle. The VDOT study itself states that a component of the plan may result in additional congestion at Campbell and Quincy. While we recognize that a formal traffic study generally does not consider changes that are proposed but whose likelihood of being implemented is uncertain, we do believe that county staff should at least informally factor the VDOT observation into the planning for that area.

Accessibility and appeal to Fairlington residents

Part of the economic success of the Village at Shirlington derives from its popularity with Fairlington residents, who outnumber Shirlington residents. The GLUP needs to build upon, and enhance, that popularity.

Improved accessibility to Shirlington is needed by residents living in South Fairlington. Sidewalk improvements for access from North Fairlington are already in the works through funding from the Neighborhood Conservation program. But there has not been a similar focus on improving access from South Fairlington by pedestrians and bicyclists. Part of the challenge, of course, is the boundary between Arlington and the City of Alexandria. But improving the pedestrian bridge—through better safety markings and aesthetic improvements—can be an important component of a strategy for increasing foot traffic for Shirlington businesses. The bridge also could become an attractive gateway to Shirlington for both South Fairlington and Parkfairfax.

FCA supports a focus on arts and culture as one of the attributes of a vibrant Shirlington, anchored by WETA and Signature Theater and buttressed by this emphasis in the Four Mile Run Valley plan. We endorsed WETA's application for bonus density to allow it to relocate its studio to Campbell Avenue, and we encourage the County to consider carefully any concerns and needs expressed by Signature Theatre.

Families with children are a significant demographic in Fairlington. They are more likely to frequent Shirlington when there are multiple opportunities for activities, shopping, or eating with kids. While the specifics of these are more properly left to site plan discussions, we do think that the GLUP should recognize the value of these in ensuring the commercial success of Shirlington.

We generally defer to the residents and businesses in Shirlington on questions of scale, height, and massing. They are the ones who encounter the buildings daily and are better able to gauge the impact of these decisions on livability and financial viability. We do, however, encourage the study to maintain an emphasis on preserving Shirlington's historic character. Fairlington is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. Homeowners in Fairlington, through their condo fees, have collectively invested literally millions of dollars in maintaining the historic character of our neighborhood. We take historic preservation seriously and we believe a similar emphasis in Shirlington is integral to its broad appeal.

We are pleased to have been included as full partners in the Shirlington Special GLUP Study process, and we welcome the chance to participate as these discussions move to the Planning Commission and the County Board. This effort can enable all of us to enjoy a vibrant Shirlington for decades to come.

Sincerely,



Guy Land
President