

## **Remarks to County Board regarding Langston Blvd Plan**

**November 11, 2023**

My name is Amanda Weaver. I am the Second Vice President of the Donaldson Run Civic Association, and I'm speaking on behalf of the DRCA board. I want to follow up on the October 13 letter filed by Bill Richardson, President of DRCA. That letter flagged several important issues that we urged the County Board to consider, which do not appear to be addressed in the staff's November 3 report.

Before I do, I'd like to make three general observations. First, an overwhelming majority of Arlingtonians demonstrated this week that they are very concerned about the Board's making critical housing decisions directly affecting them without adequate planning in advance. Second, as a court has recently indicated, it is not sufficient for the County to wave off concerns about its lack of analyses of the long-term costs and benefits of such decisions simply by asserting that staff are the experts. Third, there is very little incentive for future civic engagement in Arlington, like showing up to express concerns at these meetings, if affected residents' thoughtful comments are consistently disregarded.

I refer you to our October 13 letter and the comments of others on the problems with the plan's assumptions about likelihood of affordable housing, adequacy of parking, impacts on infrastructure, and abdication of public responsibility in favor of "privately-owned public spaces" and privately funded stormwater retention. In my limited time, I want to focus on three other issues.

### **Building Heights**

It is beyond frustrating that since the onset of this project, DRCA and many other civic associations have objected to the seven, ten, and fifteen story buildings now proposed for this corridor. Most recently, the Langston Civic Association has urged that heights be limited in their neighborhood to four stories. Omitting Cherrydale from the plan (while now promising to follow up on that later) also means you have little input on what the building heights should be there. We agree with staff that it would not be appropriate to have inconsistent building heights in different neighborhoods. Yet the plan would make a canyonland of Lee Heights alone, based on a decision by staff now to anoint it as "the heart of the corridor." We prefer the ease of access to the shops as they are, and would urge the County to replicate this success story along the entire corridor. We support Langston, and believe four or five stories should be the limit in all our neighborhoods, with the possible exception of the existing tall buildings at Spout Run.

### **The "Vision" Thing**

The staff report now makes clearer that the plan here is a three-step. First, amend the General Land Use Plan (**GLUP**) now to put a thumb on the scale for densification beyond the Metro corridor, without any documented study of the costs and benefits of doing so. Second, follow up later with amendments to the Zoning Ordinance providing new development rights that cement this "vision" into law, by arguing that such amendments are now consistent with the new vision of the revised GLUP. Third, explore ways to promote even greater height than 7, 10, or 15 stories, by making it easier to obtain approvals in exchange for additional commitments. While such special exceptions are always available, the key is

what role, at what stage, the affected neighborhoods will play in review of these requests. In the past, we understand that their role has been minimal and very much after everything is baked in. If the Board does proceed with this plan today, it should build in meaningful protections for affected neighborhoods. Not strip away what limited protections we have today.

### **Lot Coverage Review**

Finally, as the Board is well aware, almost 10 years ago staff recognized the need to address the Monster House problem by reviewing the 2005 lot coverage limits. So did the Board over a year ago. Now, however, staff have been disinclined to pursue that Board request, while we see large teardown redevelopments each week doing irreparable damage to mature trees, stormwater management, and established neighborhoods. Now staff would like to prioritize instead its study of the new questions of how to implement PLB. In any orderly planning process, these are questions that should have been considered before – not after – adopting the plan. But in any event, they should not be permitted to jump the queue on any study of lot coverage reform.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these views.