

Donaldson Run Civic Association

July 23, 2024

Libby Garvey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Conceptual Site Plan Application
1501 Langston Boulevard

Dear Chair Garvey and Board Members:

On behalf of the Donaldson Run Civic Association (DRCA), I am writing to express our serious concerns about the foregoing proposal to demolish this four-story building and replace it with a 12-story structure that would appear to be five times as large -- and over three times the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) permitted by the Zoning Ordinance for C-O-1.5 properties.

DRCA sharply criticized the heights contemplated by Plan Langston Boulevard (PLB) as much too high, not reflective of actual input from many residents served by the corridor, and inconsistent along the length of the corridor. Nevertheless, the County Board determined to adopt a very generous height framework for evaluating PLB-covered properties. For this property, the County staff reduced that framework from a 10-7-5 story stepdown toward local residences in June 2023 (p. 67) to a 7-5 story stepdown in December 2023 (p. 71). In doing so, the County reflected the concerns about height expressed by over 130 residents of the Palisades Park Owners Association. Apparently under the view that the Board is free to disregard this PLB framework, this proposal now far exceeds even those generous limits.

To be sure, the height limits recommended in PLB were not codified in the Zoning Ordinance. But they reflected a compromise the County made to limit intense development along this corridor, and to require site plans seeking special exceptions from the Zoning Ordinance requirements to identify specific community benefits *even to build as high as contemplated by PLB*. For all practical purposes, entertaining this proposal *for even greater height* would render meaningless the "comprehensive planning framework" contemplated by PLB. Staff Report p. 6 (Nov. 3, 2023). Instead, it would return the County to a case-by-case planning (or non-planning) process that led to the problematic height of the Bergmann's site redevelopment. This kind of ad hoc negotiating approach was precisely what precipitated the entire PLB process over ten years ago.

For these reasons, DRCA urges you to reject this plan as proposed.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "B" and a long, sweeping tail.

Bill Richardson
President