

Bluemont Civic Association
Executive Board Meeting
July 14, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
Home of Treasurer Judy Collins
604 N. Illinois Street

Call to Order and Attendance

President Judah dal Cais called the meeting to order at approximately 7:35 p.m. In attendance were Judah dal Cais, Judy Collins, Carl Drummond, Steve Cole, David Van Wagner, Suzanne Sundburg, and Tom Hutchings, the capital project manager for Arlington County's Department of Environmental Services (DES). In Secretary Mary Thorne's absence, Sundburg recorded the meeting's minutes.

Glebe Road Pedestrian Safety Improvements Project

Tom Hutchings presented updated plans to Bluemont Civic Association's (BCA's) Executive Board. These revised plans include some improvements that already have been made (for example, the crosswalk improvements at Wilson Boulevard and N. Glebe Road) as well as future improvements planned for the intersections of Glebe and N. Fairfax Drive, Wilson Boulevard, and N. Carlin Springs Road. The improvements are to be implemented incrementally, and some improvements are tied to the future development of sites located along Glebe Road (for example, the Peck-Staples redevelopment site plan).

Hutchings reported that Arlington's Department of Transportation (ADOT) has been working with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to get approval of the improvements, and VDOT has largely approved the improvements. (Initially, VDOT had problems with some previous design decisions that ADOT, in conjunction with the state's Development Review Board, had made.) VDOT required that lane width on Glebe be 11 feet rather than the 10½ feet originally proposed. The center median will be 6 feet in width from Fairfax Drive to Carlin Springs Road, with the exception of the areas in which turn lanes are present (where the median width will be a bit narrower).

Dal Cais asked about an improved midblock crossing at 7th Street North and Glebe Road (something that BCA members in that area have requested numerous times in the past). Hutchings replied that VDOT would not approve a signalized crosswalk at 7th Street due to its close proximity to the signalized crosswalks nearby at Wilson Boulevard and Carlin Springs Road. He believes that it is VDOT's intent to encourage pedestrians to use the existing signalized crossings rather than to cross midblock, but he didn't completely rule out the possibility of some sort of improvement at that crossing.

Hutchings recapped the highlights of each segment. At the Fairfax Drive intersection, the sidewalk in front of the Holiday Inn down to Glebe Road will be widened. He noted that the sidewalks and median in front of 950 N. Glebe Road already had been widened/improved.

BCA and Planning Commission member Steve Cole asked whether the crossing from the Bluemont Junction Trail (on the south side of Fairfax Drive) to the Custis Trail (on the north side of Fairfax Drive) could be made more bike friendly. Specifically, Cole asked that the crossing be made a 90-degree angle. He also asked that the curb cuts at N. Wakefield Street and Fairfax Drive be extended so that bikers and pedestrians wouldn't have to share the same curb cut. Hutchings agreed to consider these requests.

Cole also noted the drainage problem on the south side of N. Fairfax Drive, east of the Holiday Inn along the sidewalk. That area floods during rainstorms. Hutchings told the group that this problem should be eliminated with the regrading and recrowning of the pavement along that section of Fairfax Drive.

Hutchings also reported that the plan called for the elimination of the free right-hand turn on the northeast corner of Fairfax and Glebe Road. The group discussed the continuing danger to pedestrians at that intersection due to the back-up of vehicles coming off of I-66 now that the free right-hand turn on the southwest corner has been eliminated. Hutchings suggested that perhaps better timing of the lights at that intersection might improve the problem somewhat (Arlington, not the state, controls light timing).

The group told Hutchings that the section of the Bluemont Junction Trail next to the sound wall (as the path heads toward the intersection with Fairfax Drive) is too narrow. Hutchings said that he would consult Arlington's Parks and Recreation Department as well as Bike Arlington representatives to determine whether that section could be widened. Hutchings said that he would be able to report back to BCA and present the final plan to the membership at the September 2009 general meeting.

Notice of the safety improvements has been posted at each intersection, and Hutchings has already received two phone calls. Moreover, Hutchings has sent a letter to Dal Cais with a contact number and e-mail address to which the public can send comments. Dal Cais will forward this letter to Sundburg so that she can send out a BCA e-list notice. He also will forward the letter to Webmaster Dave Leichtman so that he can post this information on BCA's Website.

Hutchings reported that the county could hold a public hearing to discuss the safety improvements but noted that it could add an extra 6-month delay to the improvements' implementation. And although the county currently has assembled funds to cover the public portion of the planned improvements, project delay makes future funding more problematic.

June 9, 2009, Minutes

The Executive Board voted unanimously to approve the June 9 Executive Board meeting minutes.

Meditation Garden

Although Bon Air Park is one of the proposed sites for the meditation garden donated to the county by Whitman-Walker Clinic, the final decision on its placement is still outstanding. Drummond suggested that if Bon Air was rejected, then perhaps the county could consider an existing quiet clearing in Lacey Woods Park near the entrance at N. Frederick Street and 11th Road North.

Dal Cais said that he would meet with homeowners who may have objections to Bon Air as a potential site for the meditation garden.

Wilson Boulevard Village Center Concept/NC Plan Update

Van Wagner reported on the results of the preliminary survey that polled BCA members/Bluemont residents on the village center concept with respect to the redevelopment of the commercial area along Wilson Boulevard. Van Wagner said that roughly 60 percent of respondents did support the village center concept and some level of redevelopment beyond what would be allowed by right (by-right development is limited to structures 35 feet in height under current zoning). Roughly 40 percent of respondents were opposed to any redevelopment beyond what would be permitted by right. Van Wagner noted that those who opposed redevelopment of the commercial area were more vehement and detailed in their opposition.

Cole suggested that perhaps a new zoning category, called Unified Commercial Mixed Development, might be an option. This new category has been proposed for other low-density commercial areas in the county. Essentially, Cole reports, this zoning would allow development up to 45 feet high (no penthouses would be allowed). Cole also suggested that BCA consider asking county planning staff member Matt Matteuszek for assistance now that Virginia Tech urban planning students will not be able to assist BCA this fall.

Dal Cais noted he wants to include the Wilson Boulevard village center concept in the formal survey for the BCA Neighborhood Conservation (NC) Plan update. The formal survey must be delivered or mailed to all Bluemont residents. The county will pay for printing of the survey but not for mailing. Due to time constraints, the Executive Board decided that the formal survey could not be completed and distributed by hand along with the September 2009 newsletter. Instead, it was proposed that BCA cover the cost of mailing and try to mail the survey to Bluemont residents in January 2010, if the county can provide a mailing list for all addresses within BCA boundaries.

Also, as part of the NC Plan survey, BCA/Bluemont will consider what role Arlington Traditional School (ATS) could/should play in Bluemont's future. Should BCA's NC Plan list a walk-zone preference for Bluemont children? Should the long-term goal be the conversion of the current ATS building back to a neighborhood school? The questions center on what would be feasible and desired by Bluemont residents how ATS would fit into overall community goals and plans.

Missing Links Request Submitted

NC Representative Drummond reported that member Larry Smith had submitted an application to the county's Missing Links sidewalk program for 1000 block of N. Edison Street.

Arlington Forest Club Cell Tower Proposal

Cole announced that Arlington Forest Club members are considering a proposal to locate a 100-foot (10-story) cell tower on Arlington Forest Club (AFC) property. Installing the tower would require the cutting of a large number of mature trees. (In late 2008, Arlington Forest Club requested and obtained BCA's support in protecting these same trees. When AFC originally submitted its proposal to renovate/upgrade its pool house, the county initially insisted on additional parking that would have required the trees' removal.) Cole reported that there were questions about the tower's safety (radiation exposure) and the runoff problems/flooding that cutting the trees would likely cause.

The Executive Board made and passed a motion that would allow Cole to draft a letter to the county on BCA's behalf. The letter would urge the county to reject approval of the cell tower should AFC's membership vote to approve the project.

Adjournment

Dal Cais adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:15 pm.