

Bluemont Civic Association, General Membership Meeting
June 13, 2006, 7:00 pm
Arlington Traditional School

President Judah dal Cais called the meeting to order at approximately 7:07 pm.

Elections for the Civic Association Offices

Lisa Byington was elected to replace departing Secretary Laura Kirkconnell.

The remaining Executive Board Members were re-elected:

- Judah dal Cais, President
- Carl Drummond, Vice President
- Judy Collins, Treasurer

Civic Federation representatives: Kate Mesches, Talmadge Williams, Ed Fendley, Rob Waffle. Alternates: Adrienne Pilot, Ellen Armbruster, Judah dal Cais, Dan Laredo.

NCAC Representative: Wendy Dean. Members approved the suggestion of the Executive Board that Executive Board members share duties in attending Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC) meetings, which are held on the second Thursday of each month. Each Civic Association is only allowed three absences, so the Executive Board will help ensure that the Civic Association is represented at these meetings.

The Civic Association priority for the next funding round will be the project on North 9th Street.

JBG Plans for Peck and Staples Sites

JBG representative Dean Cinkala reviewed information JBG had presented at the May 2006 Executive Board meeting about JBG's plans for the Bob Peck and Staples sites on Glebe, and the sites of two single family homes. JBG consultants Steve Smith, Richard McWilliams and Alistair McIntosh also presented JBG plans for the site. Cinkala said JBG was trying to work with the Civic Association prior to the first site plan meeting. He said JBG wanted to work with the Civic Association Executive Board prior to the Site Plan review meetings.

Cinkala said the total area covered is 170,000 square feet with a variety of zoning designations, C-2, R-5, and RA-18. JBG wants a substantial increase in density and building height from the current zoning and the General Land Use Plan (GLUP). (They may be seeking CO 2.5). Plans include a 12 story building of 285,000 square feet; an eight-story building of 145,000 square feet and 28 town houses along North Wakefield. The office buildings would be a bit taller once air conditioning units on the roof were considered (for example, the 12-story building would be about 178.5 feet tall.)

Cinkala said the townhouses are currently planned to be 44 feet tall. He noted that plans were very much in the “concept stage.” The townhouses would all be accessible from Wakefield, and have individual garages. They would have loading from Wilson and the 24 foot wide (two-way traffic) access road to be built between the office buildings and the townhouses. People would also use this access road to reach parking. Each townhouse would have two parking spaces, one behind the other. Townhouse guests would use retail parking. The complex will have pedestrian entrances from Wilson and from the park.

A parking garage would be under the entire development, with its entrance from Wilson Blvd, and a side entrance near the Regent Building.

Cinkala reviewed concerns Civic Association members had expressed when briefed on the JBG plan in December or November 2005. One of the Civic Association concerns, Cinkala said, was permeability and green space. He described how JBG had addressed this concern with a park with almost 15,000 square feet and increased green space at the corner of Glebe and Wilson. This green space on the corner would have a lawn and trees, and the park would be accessible 24 hours a day to the general public. JBG would be looking for a restaurant with outdoor seating for this location. Cinkala noted that the proposed buildings were stepping back and down in height as they approached the residential part of the Bluemont neighborhood.

In response to concerns about the loss of the neighborhood landmark Bob Peck building, JBG said it was trying to integrate a Peck-style facade into its 12 story building. JBG said the materials of the actual Peck building could not be used because the materials would not last another 20 years.

In response to Civic Association concerns about service traffic on Wakefield, Cinkala said JBG had added a 24-foot service road between the office buildings and the townhouses. JBG said they were working with traffic engineers, and wanted to keep traffic off Wakefield. People could enter parking from the service road, rather than from Wilson.

Members expressed concerns about backups on Wilson from people turning left into the parking garage. Some members asked about an additional traffic light on Wilson for people entering parking for this new development. Cinkala said JBG had not done a traffic study on Wakefield. He said JBG would look at how townhouse residents would get onto Wilson. Cinkala said the County would not let JBG get a break in the median on Glebe.

Members noted the immediate need for a left turn signal at Wilson and Glebe.

Members discussed concerns about traffic, estimating that the project could bring 800 to 1000 office workers a day. JBG said it was providing the County required 746 parking spaces. JBG explained that the County limited the number of parking spaces to encourage use of metro. JBG said it would start a traffic study.

In response to a member's question, JBG said they were aware that the County Transportation could require that an additional street be added to the grid in this section of Bluemont. JBG said such a road would likely be between the proposed park and the building proposed for the Peck site. Members suggested that the Civic Association and JBG oppose such a road.

JBG responded that a BCA-JBG discussion would be the only way to resolve the issue. Members noted that the County had told the Civic Association not to come to County meetings with JBG. JBG responded that they were working to create a forum for discussions with all three parties (County, Civic Association, JBG.) Cinkala said JBG would prefer not to have a street, and it had submitted a plan without the street.

Members noted that mixed use buildings would bring less traffic than office buildings. JBG said they did not think the County would want residential buildings; the County wanted office buildings. JBG also noted that zoning could allow residential buildings to be taller than the office buildings currently proposed.

JBG explained that the park was very preliminarily planned to have a lawn of 120 feet by 70 feet, and flowers, trees and possibly a shaded structure. JBG said the park would be part of the 9th Street Greenway. This green corridor would narrow when it approached the townhouses at Wakefield.

Members expressed concern about the hours of construction, requesting that it start at 7:30 or 8 am, and not start earlier than agreed times.

Members noted that according to the 3D scale model presented, the proposed building at the Peck site was taller than buildings in Ballston. The current zoning, C-2 allows 45 feet at the Peck Site. Members noted that Glebe is designed as the dividing line between Ballston and Bluemont, which is why zoning at the Peck site is for 4-story buildings. Members were concerned that if a 12 story building were built at the Peck site, developers would seek to build similarly tall buildings at other sites in Bluemont along Wilson Blvd, including the funeral home and Safeway site. The Mazda site already has higher a GLUP zoning than the Peck site, so members voiced concern about how high a building at the Mazda site could be if the County increased the Peck site zoning from 4 to 12 stories.

Members noted that Wakefield was zoned at R5 for single family homes, not townhouses. The land behind the site of the proposed 8-story building was also zoned at R5 for single family homes.

Members said this huge increase in density would require a huge public benefit, and they did not think JBG was offering a significant public benefit. JBG responded that it was aware it was requesting a large increase in density and a community benefit would be expected. JBG said the public benefit would evolve as the plans went through the Site Plan Review Process.

JBG said they knew that during the Site Plan Review process they could be asked for things like funds to undergrounding utilities, affordable housing and public art. Members expressed interest in undergrounding utilities along Wilson from Glebe to George Mason. JBG suggested that the Civic Association express that interest to the County.

Members questioned what the view from Bluemont would be of the new construction, since the rear of office buildings could pose an unattractive view. JBG noted the importance of a handsome building facade and stepping down the building sizes as the development approached the rest of Bluemont. JBG said it was deliberately playing down the side of the buildings facing Bluemont in order to make them less obvious. JBG agreed it should do view studies to see how the proposed development would look from the east side of Wilson, since it was at the “gateway” to Bluemont.

Other members asked that JBG trim the proposed building heights. JBG said this would be discussed during the Site Plan Review Process, which would probably not start until September. JBG said it would work with the Civic Association Executive Committee on these problems.

JBG said it had done one preliminary submission to the County, and had a preliminary meeting with the County staff.

JBG and the Civic Association discussed ways to facilitate discussion with JBG-the County and Bluemont. JBG said the philosophically it was on the same page as the Civic Association.

Members were encouraged to send comments and recommendations regarding the JBG proposal to President dal Cais. Members were reminded that the Executive Board would discuss this project and other Civic Association business during its summer meetings on the second Tuesday of each month at 7pm at Two Chefs restaurant. Members are allowed to join these meetings.

Pedestrian and Vehicular Traffic by the Regent Construction at Fairfax and Glebe

Members thanked JBG for restoring pedestrian access along Fairfax Drive in front of the construction of the Regent Building at the corner of Fairfax and Glebe, but noted that there remained a dangerous gap in the sidewalk.

Members said JBG needed to do an updated projection for total traffic for this area, and should ask the County for the projection in order to have a better bench mark to evaluate the traffic impact of the newly proposed construction.

ATM Project

Richard Best of County Staff updated members on the Arterial Traffic Management project along Wilson, and presented the 50 percent design plans for the section along

Wilson to Frederick. He noted that the plan was in the “very draft stage,” and the engineering process would be done over this summer.

In order to slow traffic and improve pedestrian access, Wilson would generally be narrowed to four lanes, with the outer lane 11 feet wide, and the inner lane 10 feet wide. Best said Wilson is currently designed for a speed of 40mph, but the ATM will reduce the designed speed to 30 to 35 mph.

Best discussed the challenge of getting right-of-way from the owners of the shopping strip with Two Chefs restaurant and Video 95 given the business’ concern about parking. Since the County could not obtain enough land for green space or tree planting, the improved sidewalk along this shopping strip would be only a six foot continuous sidewalk. The County still needed to negotiate a one-and-a-half foot easement to do this.

Safeway was working well with the County on right of way for its property, which would allow an eight-foot landscape strip and trees.

The current plan keeps the current entrance ways to the commercial properties along Wilson, but the County can negotiate with the property owners to reduce these entrance ways in order to improve pedestrian safety.

The County is still considering how it needs to reconfigure crosswalks.

In response to a question from Best, members said they preferred landscaping to providing more parking on Wilson.

The medians along parts of Wilson would be four to eight feet wide. At an earlier meeting, the Civic Association approved the County-proposed tree planting plan.

The plan includes a new traffic signal at North Edison, which will be a more attractive mast arm traffic light.

Members asked if the County could move the unattractive junction block it had just placed blocking the view of the Constitution Gardens and Memorial Bell. Best said he would look at moving the box, but we were not at that stage yet. He said the box had been placed in order to minimize blockage of the sidewalk.

President dal Cais reminded Best of the standing Civic Association offer to write property owners stressing our support for the ATM project. Best said he would let the Association know when such letters would be helpful. He said the County wanted to contact the owners first, but would let the Civic Association know so it could follow up with letters thereafter.

Members discussed concerns that restricting vehicle entrances to the 7-11 could force additional traffic onto Emerson. It was noted the Civic Association had requested the raised media to block vehicle access to the 7-11 in order to improve vehicular safety.

Best noted that other ATM changes, such as improving the sight distances and slowing traffic should ease the difficulty of getting from Emerson to Wilson.

Best said he would check back in with the Civic Association later this summer. He said his office wanted the project fully designed by late summer. The Civic Association stressed the importance of Best again consulting with the Association as plans developed. The Association expressed its appreciation for the improvements made to date under the ATM project.

Glebe 25 Project

Members approved a resolution calling for the developer of the Glebe 25 Project (Mark Silverwood) to provide information requested by the Association and residents about plans for the project.

The full resolution should be attached to these minutes. In the resolution, Civic Association members resolved that:

“1. The BCA (Bluemont Civic Association) encourages all site plan advocates to provide timely, complete and user-friendly information on their own initiative and/or in response to requests from the BCA or other Arlington Country civic associations, and individual residents. Said information should be provided 10 calendar days prior to County-sponsored meetings.

1a. and ten days before County Board meetings.

Be it further resolved that:

2a. The BCA encourages the Glebe 25 project applicant to provide timely, complete and user friendly information in response to requests from BCA residents, particularly those who reside in the West Ballston neighborhood adjacent to the project site (north to south, between N. Glebe Road and Carling Springs Road, and east to west, between Glebe Road and N. Wakefield Street) as well as affected residents of the Buckingham, Ashton Heights and Ballston-Virginia Square Civic Associations.

2b. The BCA asks the Glebe 25 project applicant and the Peck/Staples site project applicant to provide requested information in a complete and user-friendly format well in advance of any future Site Plan Review Committee, zoning, planning, transportation or County Board meetings.

2c. The BCA recommends that the Glebe 25 project provide all interested parties with the Exxon station information requested in the attached letter dated June 25, 2006.”

Members reviewed and approved the above-mentioned letter, which requested information of the Glebe 25 project including the location of gas tanks at the service station that are being moved close to residences in Bluemont, location and number of gas

pumps, height and location of the canopy, public services to be located by the brick wall next to residences in Bluemont, lighting, parking, operating hours of the convenience store, hours that beer and wine will be sold, projected increased traffic volume, planned signage, and overall appearance.

Members explained that the developer had originally stressed that he wanted to work with the Civic Association and nearby residents, but once the developer had filed a site plan, it had become increasingly difficult for the Association and/or residents to get requested information from the developer.

Members explained that the information was needed sufficiently in advance of meetings in order for the Association and residents to express informed opinions. The developer is requesting permission to rezone the site to build a nine-story building that is substantially taller than the current commercial zoning allows (forty-five feet) and at the maximum height allowed under the GLUP. The proposed building density of 3.84 is in excess of the 3.24 allowed for the requested "R-C: residential-commercial" zoning.

President dal Cais adjourned the meeting at approximately 9 pm.