

Bluemont Civic Association, General Membership Meeting
October 25, 2006, 7:00 pm
Arlington Traditional School

Call to Order

Vice President Carl Drummond called the meeting to order at approximately 7:10 pm.

In attendance were Carl Drummond, Suzanne Sundburg, Wendy Dean, Judy Collins, and Lisa Byington. Also in attendance were nine other Bluemont Civic Association members.

Candidates Night

Vice President Drummond reminded BCA members of the Candidates' Night scheduled for the next evening (October 26, 2006).

NC Funding

Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC) Representative Wendy Dean reported that the prospects for funding any new NC projects would be highly unlikely over the next 10 years. All NC projects in the Bluemont area are over budget (because they were funded at less than their projected cost) and at least two years behind schedule. Two Bluemont projects (N. 9th Street and N. Frederick Street) have not yet been approved, so there is no funding for those projects. As originally envisioned, the NC program was to approve one project per neighborhood per year, but now the schedule is more like one project every 2.5 years.

Similarly, the County's traffic-calming program is in a funding crisis, and the County is proposing to cancel the program. All residents who support traffic-calming efforts should let the County Board know. (Contact information for the County Board is at <http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CountyBoard/meetings/members/CountyBoardMeetingsMembersMain.aspx>.)

County Board Vice Chairman Paul Ferguson

Paul Ferguson, Vice Chairman of the Arlington County Board, addressed issues of concern to BCA and its members.

Redevelopment Proposals

BCA members first raised concerns about the proposed redevelopment of the Peck/Staples site. Ferguson pointed out that BCA members had earlier requested redevelopment of the empty Pecks site, and that neighbors may need to accept redevelopment in order to have better-looking property in the neighborhood. Ferguson also pointed out that, if the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) for the western side of Glebe Road were created today, it would probably provide for buildings taller than the currently permissible 45 feet. Nonetheless, he believes that the Ballston area real estate market is so good that the neighborhood can afford to demand the right level of development for the site. BCA members whose houses are near the proposed redevelopment sites stated their concern that they had bought their houses based on the GLUP being enforced, and

the County needs to honor the existing, agreed-upon land-use plan when considering any transfer density proposals or requests to exceed the GLUP.

Ferguson stated that the Board did not specifically solicit a redevelopment proposal along the lines of JBG's proposal and said the Board will listen to input from BCA and its members. Ferguson reiterated that the Board has made no commitments to JBG to approve the proposed rezoning ("upzoning or up-GLUPing") of the Peck/Staples site. Furthermore, unlike the proposed Fairmont development (on the site of the old INS building on N. Fairfax Drive), where JBG had committed to provide funding for a western elevator entrance to Metrorail, there are no particularly attractive enticements for the Board's approval of the Peck/Staples redevelopment proposals. JBG has included with its application the usual benefits to the community (*e.g.*, affordable housing, money for Metro, green building materials, etc.), but the County Board will need to balance these benefits to the County against any possible harm to the immediate neighborhood.

In response to a question from a BCA member, Ferguson said the County and BCA have some ability to request the developer (*e.g.*, JBG) to reduce the size of a redevelopment proposal, but that too much reduction could cause the developer to conclude that the proposal is not profitable enough to proceed, leaving the neighborhood with an empty site that is not maintained. As an example, Ferguson stated that JBG has likely concluded that it will not proceed with its proposal to redevelop the Fairmont building because of changes in market conditions.

With respect to the Glebe 25 proposed redevelopment, Ferguson admitted that he never saw the community benefits of the project. He also noted that the County's legal loss with respect to the Baptist Church site in Clarendon would cause the County Board to be more careful about forcing redevelopment proposals on neighborhoods that are opposed to the project.

Property Taxes

A BCA member expressed concern about Arlington property taxes being so high as to drive elderly and low-income residents from the area. Ferguson stated that the County provides a 25% reduction in property taxes for low-income residents. Ferguson also stated that Arlington's taxes are the lowest in the DC metropolitan area when consider the quality of schools and public safety initiatives.

NC Funding

NCAC Representative Dean asked Ferguson to explain the funding crisis for NC projects. Ferguson first pointed out that 20 NC projects were completed last year. But there is a backlog of projects because of a shortage in bond funding, causing the County to decline to approve new projects. Ferguson summarized his proposal to take curb and gutter proposals away from the NC program and instead make such neighborhood improvements part of the County's general maintenance budget. The County is concerned about the types of flooding that can occur when there are no curbs and inadequate storm drains. (Ferguson stated his belief that the recent excessive rains and flooding may not be such an anomaly anymore, as the effects of global warming begin to

be felt.) The County may also amend its current requirement that all curb and gutter projects include sidewalks on at least one side of the street; doing so would reduce the cost of curb and gutter improvement projects.

Paving

One member noted that the paving fund (which was moved to the NC program) was exhausted by March of this year and asked how paving would be accomplished. Although Ferguson acknowledged the shortfall, he insisted that there was “plenty of money” and that repairs to existing roads could be made via funds in the general maintenance budget. However, he did say that extensive repaving projects could not be funded through general maintenance.

Traffic

A BCA member expressed concern about the lack of a left-turn arrow for cars proceeding east-bound on Wilson Boulevard that are turning north-bound onto Glebe Road. Ferguson expressed concern about a number of left-turn signals in the County and said that he would be soliciting feedback from civic associations for a list of intersections where left-turn arrows are necessary.

Wilson ATM Plan

Richard Best presented the 90% design plan for the Arterial Traffic Management (ATM) project along Wilson Boulevard (between George Mason Drive and N. Frederick Street). The design plan includes (i) a landscape strip in the middle of Wilson Boulevard as a pedestrian safety zone; (ii) landscape strips in front of 7-11 and Safeway; (iii) bus shelters in front of Safeway and Federal Lock & Key; (iv) reconfiguring the Two Chefs parking spaces to make the parking lot easier to navigate; (v) widening sidewalks on both sides of Wilson Boulevard, thanks to easements granted by the BP gas station and the owner of the Two Chefs building; (vi) the removal of street parking spots on the south side of Wilson Boulevard in front of the Federal Lock & Key; and (vii) cross-walks at N. Edison, N. Emerson, and N. Frederick Streets. Best anticipates that construction will begin in November 2006 (weather permitting).

A BCA member expressed concern about speeding traffic not anticipating, or heeding, pedestrian crosswalks in front of the Safeway. Best noted that the narrower lanes on Wilson Boulevard should slow traffic, but he agreed to review the possibility of additional signage or warning lights.

A motion was made to approve the proposed 90% design plan and seconded. The membership voted unanimously to approve the 90% design plan. BCA Executive Board members thanked Best for his progress and continued commitment to the project.

Update on Redevelopment Projects

Vice President Drummond reported that there was no news in connection with the proposed redevelopment of the Peck/Staples site, the Fairmont site, or the Glebe 25 site (other than what had been discussed with County Board Vice Chairman Ferguson).

Secretary Lisa Byington reported on the Ballston Row proposed redevelopment. The site includes two apartment buildings on the southwest corner of Fairfax Drive and Buchanan Street and the northwest corner of N. 9th Street and Buchanan Street. (A third apartment building on the southwest corner of N. 9th Street and Buchanan Street is apparently not included in the proposed redevelopment). The developer (Larry Wingard of HJL Properties) proposes to build 16 townhomes on the site.

Byington reported that the County Zoning Office and the developer have concluded that the proposed redevelopment is “by-right,” meaning that no County Board approval is required. However, BCA member Bob Atkins has stated the possibility that the proposed lot size for each of the 16 townhouses may not be within the zoning requirements; therefore the project may not be by-right. Byington also expressed concern for the several very large, mature trees that may be damaged by the demolition and construction. Newsletter Editor Suzanne Sundburg noted that the County should at least request that the developer meet with the County’s arborist to discuss tree preservation.

At the request of Vice President Drummond, Byington agreed to confer with the County’s zoning office regarding the proposed lot size for the 16 townhouses. Byington also agreed to contact the developer to discuss BCA’s concerns for the trees. Byington noted that BCA may want to enlist the assistance of Vice Chairman Ferguson, given his concerns for global warming and flooding.

November/December General Membership Meetings

Because of the holidays, the general membership meetings for November and December will need to be rescheduled. The BCA Executive Board members agreed that the November meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 29, and the December meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 20.

November Newsletter

Because of the Thanksgiving holiday, the schedule for production of the November newsletter will need to be pushed up. Articles must be submitted to Editor Sundburg by November 9. The final newsletter content must be sent to Newsletter Designer Sam Ferro by November 10. Ferro should ensure that the newsletter is printed and delivered to Judy Collins by November 20.

Committee Chair Updates

Secretary’s Report

Secretary Byington distributed copies of the amended minutes for the general membership meeting held on September 27, 2006. Byington reported that numerous BCA officers and members had provided edits to the minutes, all of which she had made. A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded. The membership voted unanimously to approve the minutes as amended. The final amended minutes are to be distributed to the Executive Board and posted to the BCA website.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Judy Collins reported that BCA has approximately 285 members, including 6 new members who joined following the neighborhood-wide distribution of the newsletter in September. Collins agreed to prepare a list of advertisers who have not paid for their advertisements in previous newsletters.

Old Business

Vice President Drummond called for a review of old business. There were no motions from the last general membership meeting in October that need to be recorded or discussed.

New Business

Vice President Drummond called for any new business.

BCA member Terry Serie distributed a draft proposal outlining options for BCA to ensure that it has full information on JBG's proposed redevelopment of the Peck/Staples site. The plan includes (i) a request that the Site Plan Review Committee hold its public meetings in the Ballston area, (ii) the designation of an "Information Coordinator" authorized to obtain information from the County and the developer on behalf of BCA and its members; and (iii) a recommendation that specific reports and materials to be requested and distributed to BCA members. (A copy of the plan is attached to these minutes.)

At the request of NCAC Representative Dean, Serie agreed to act as Information Coordinator for the project. A motion to nominate Serie as Information Coordinator for the Peck/Staples site was made and seconded. The membership voted unanimously to name Serie as its Information Coordinator for the redevelopment project and to authorize Serie to obtain information regarding the project and disseminate such information accordingly to BCA members and Executive Board members.

Adjournment

Vice President Drummond adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:55 pm.

Peck-Staples Site Plan Information Gathering Options for BCA

1. Request that all Site Plan Review Committee meetings for review of the Peck-Staples project be held in the National Rural Electric Cooperative (NRECA) building or another Ballston location.
2. “Information Coordinator”: BCA should designate (authorize) one or more members to be an “Information Coordinator for the Peck-Staples Project” to seek information from the project applicant and the county. The “information coordinator” would be authorized to request project information for dissemination to the BCA officers and the BCA web site. This would include requests for information such as”
 - a. Changes or revisions made to the site plan application after the initial filing
 - b. Clarification of site plan materials
 - c. Questions about information distributed between SPRC meetings
 - d. Additional information needed to understand the proposal and prepare for SPRC meetings
3. Request the following site plan application materials:
 - a. Two copies of the full set of site plan application drawings (24 x 36)
 - b. Six complete sets of reduced, legible site plan application drawings measuring 11 x 17 inches in size
 - c. JPEG file with aerial photographs of the full site and neighborhood to the west and south of the site
 - d. JPEG and PDF files of site plan application and drawings suitable for posting on the Web
 - e. An electronic copy of the full Traffic Impact Analysis report prepared by the applicant’s traffic consultant.
4. Request from the applicant a report that shows the proposed building heights (the Peck site, Staples site, townhouse site, and the street elevations for:
 - a. East of the project site:
 - Glebe Road -- immediately adjacent to the project site
 - b. West of the project site (between Wilson BLVD and Fairfax DR., going west to George Mason Dr.)
 - N. Wakefield St., N. Woodrow St., N. Abingdon St., 8th Rd. N.
 - N. Buchanan St., N. Burlington St., 9TH St. N., Fairfax Dr.The above data should be plotted in a graph. There is a significant drop in elevation from the Glebe Road portion of this site down to the properties located west of the project site. This data is needed to understand the full impact of the proposed building heights.
5. Request a county staff evaluation of the value received by the County in developer concessions for other recent upGLUPings.
6. Request a county conducted analysis of how the applicant’s proposal would affect wastewater runoff including the capacity of adjacent storm drains.
7. Request that the applicant provide BCA with electronic files of all presentations made to the SPRC.