



Nancy Iacomini and Elizabeth Gearin
Co-Chairs, Long Range Planning Committee
Arlington County Planning Commission
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

7/22/2019

Dear Co-Chairs Iacomini and Gearin,

The Shirlington Civic Association offers the following comments on the first session of the Arlington County Planning Commission's Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) about the Special GLUP Plus (SGP) study for Shirlington held on June 26th. All references to "Shirlington" pertain to the Village of Shirlington area, unless otherwise noted. Shirlington's Civic Association area is much larger.

1. To conceptualize the process ahead, it is helpful to describe the Village as composed of two parts, "Old Shirlington (Village)" and "New Shirlington," per a comment made on 6/26. The existing development in Old Shirlington dates to the 1980s Site Plan. This area is where this planning study is focused, which makes sense. It's time.
2. Our overall, positive attitude to the request from Federal Realty Investment Trust (FRIT) is consistent with my remarks to the Planning Commission on Feb. 14, 2018 (previously circulated and posted). To us, this is not about adding a building or two, it is about creating the circumstances for reinvestment in the Village property and guaranteeing its future success. We do not want to overwhelm the Village or spoil the character of Campbell Avenue, but in order to fill our businesses, we need more residents and more foot traffic.
3. Planning Commission members and staff noted that the Village of Shirlington is the only non-Metro urban village in the County. It does not even have a major thoroughfare running through its business district. The Village of Shirlington is a unicorn; increasing density here is unlikely to set a precedent for other areas – unless they also are non-Metro urban villages.
4. Notwithstanding Shirlington's success to date, its lack of Metro has always put us in a tough position. That's why Shirlington must go "above and beyond" to attract customers and residents. We must give people reasons to buy or rent a residence, or to walk, take a bike, bus or car to our area. Density and multi-modal public transportation have been vital to our success but we walk a thin line.
5. After 30 years, this area is in major need of updating and reinvestment. Realtors tell us that our competition is much newer commercial properties, including Downtown Clarendon, Ballston Quarter, and The Wharf in Southeast DC. Local examples of what Shirlington of the future could look like (on a smaller scale, of course) include Mosaic District in Merrifield, Bethesda Row, and Pike & Rose in North Bethesda. All of these have Metro within walkable distance (<1 mile). We hope the LRPC will focus not just on examining Shirlington as it appears now but will compare it to properties such as these. We encourage the Committee members to visit some of the developments we mention here.

6. Through this process, we hope to see improved transportation connectivity to established and emerging employment and residential centers (i.e. Pentagon City and National Landing, and to Downtown DC). This needs to be a comprehensive strategy that is multimodal – bikes, dedicated circulator routes, improved bus access. How can the County leverage these to ensure Amazon and related employees have access to great neighborhoods like Shirlington? How will the county ensure that workers will have convenient public transportation to the Village?

7. We are glad that WETA has joined this planning study and we have no objection if Signature Theater (which operates in county-owned buildings) is added as well. It is important to accommodate their expansion and operational needs within Shirlington for the long-term. Both non-profit organizations and their employees, visitors, patrons and members are critical components of the Village's brand, economic viability and cultural life.

8. Increasing density in the Village is unlikely to spill into surrounding areas. The Village is circumscribed by a public park, highway, a county facilities depot and a steep hill with a large rental apartment complex. Furthermore, the County Board's endorsement of the Four Mile Run Valley (4MRV) Plan has settled a key issue by retaining the industrial zoning close to us in the valley.

9. There is no lack of parking in the Village, despite what some well-meaning people say. There are five multi-tenant commercial parking structures and one parking lot, in addition to four private parking garages attached to residential buildings. There are numerous unused parking spaces in our commercial garages. (Whole floors full of empty spaces at times.) Visitors just need to know where spaces are available at any given time. The Village needs a comprehensive, digital parking wayfinding system and this has been explored. Unfortunately, implementing this is expensive and we understand that it is not a cost that Federal Realty (which owns only 2 of the garages and one lot) can afford to bear independently. We would like to discuss how this can be achieved, and how the original Site Plans and governing agreements for garages approved by the County have contributed to some of our parking issues.

We look forward to seeing everyone for the site visit on July 23, and to discussing these and other aspects of land use in our wonderful urban village.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Edie Wilson

Ginny Farris