

December 10, 2019

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

Dear Co-Chairs Iacomini and Gearin,

The Shirlington Civic Association offers the following comments in conjunction with Arlington County's public survey on the future of the Village of Shirlington, in preparation for the next Long Range Planning Committee's discussion of the Shirlington Special GLUP Plus study scheduled for December 11.

We would like to state again our general support for the request from the commercial property owner, Federal Realty Investment Trust (FRIT), to build on its undeveloped parcel at 2766 S. Arlington Mill Drive, which is currently used as a surface parking lot. We are also glad that WETA has joined this planning study in order to consolidate its operations into the Village. To us, this is not just about adding additional density, but about creating the circumstances for major 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 we recognize that local businesses in the Village need more foot traffic in order to continue to succeed. We are a small community; we estimate that there are only 2,200 households within the larger Shirlington civic boundary. Additional residents and office workers will be welcome.

We greatly appreciate the Planning Commission's recognition that the Village at Shirlington is truly a unique urban village within Arlington. It is a quiet, tree-lined commercial area that has the feel of a small town center, with two popular entertainment venues (Signature Theater and the movie theater), a variety of restaurants and interesting small shops, a branch library, post office, grocery store and small hotel and soon expanded park areas nearby. The unique identity or "sense of place" for the Village comes mainly from Campbell Avenue, with its magnificent mature trees, low-rise commercial buildings adjacent to fairly wide sidewalks, and generally slow vehicle traffic, all of which creates an open, inviting, pedestrian-friendly feeling. The county-owned building with Signature Theater and the library is set back from the street behind an attractive open space with trees, a fountain and seating areas, which again creates a lovely quiet and open pedestrian gathering area.

The Shirlington Civic Association and FRIT have been providing our neighborhood residents with regular information about the general proposal to build on the surface parking lot. We have also talked informally with many visitors to the Village to get their responses to this proposal and to hear about what they like about Shirlington. We have yet to identify or hear any opposition to a reasonable amount of increased density around the perimeter of the Village, despite the fact that we have been publicizing and presenting about this for nearly two years at well-attended civic association meetings. Both Federal Realty and County officials have made multiple comments and presentations during this time related to what is now become the Special GLUP Plus process.

The few concerns we have heard are the following:

1. County should maintain the pedestrian-friendly character of the Village.
2. County should not allow the Village to become a dense, noisy and intensely urban center full of massive high-rise buildings similar to Ballston and Clarendon.
3. Free and accessible parking is very important for attracting visitors. The Village needs better access to existing space and better signage to make public parking in the garages more visible and understandable. The surface parking lot is highly utilized, so those free public spaces should be replaced in some way when a building is put on that property, in addition to the need for more parking for occupants of a new residential building.
4. We need to maintain a vibrant streetscape that is visually interesting. The County should discourage blank/vacant window displays by retail businesses. Already Harris Teeter has multiple static window displays, and the soon-to-arrive CVS may exhibit the same problem.
5. Any changes along S Arlington Mill Drive should include connectivity to the improved park areas.

We are pleased to see that DES has just provided the results of a public parking study for the Village, to be discussed during tomorrow's meeting of the LRPC. However since this is the first time we have seen this study, we wish to raise a couple of questions here. First, we find the names of the garages to be confusing. Two garages are listed with the name "Randolph Street Garage," but the FRIT parking map shows only one garage called "Randolph Square Garage." The FRIT map also shows the "Shirlington Garage" to be located across the street from WETA, but that name does not show up in the DES parking inventory. Secondly, it is not clear why there is no discussion of the Campbell Avenue Garage. Although the Campbell Avenue Garage was included in the inventory, there is no discussion in the report of the ongoing problem in this specific garage of high demand for public parking for multiple destinations at that end of the Village, and yet very inefficient use of the available spaces. We suggest that this problem needs to be discussed in the parking study and specifically addressed in the near term with help from the County.

We agree that there is technically an adequate parking supply in the Village, but the supply has limited public access due to legal restrictions and operational inefficiencies. There are five multi-tenant commercial parking structures and one surface parking lot, plus four private parking garages attached to residential buildings. There are numerous unused parking spaces in some of our commercial garages at times, while public spaces in other more well-known garages are full. Visitors need to know where spaces are available at any given time. The Village needs a comprehensive, digital parking wayfinding system.

We look forward to continued fruitful discussions of these various aspects of land use in our wonderful urban village. Notwithstanding Shirlington's success to date, its lack of access to a Metro station puts the Village in a tough position in terms of competing with newer commercial properties on Metro lines in Arlington, Alexandria and Southeast DC. That's why Shirlington Village must go "above and beyond" to attract customers and residents. We must give people good reasons to buy or rent a residence in the Village, or to walk or take a bike, bus or car to our area. This is the fundamental issue we are all tackling in the Special GLUP process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Edie Wilson
President, Shirlington Civic Association

Ellie McCann
SCA Representative for the Shirlington Village Special GLUP Plus study

Ginny Farris
SCA Alternate for the Shirlington Village Special GLUP Plus study