Dear Chair Gearin, Vice Chair Lantelme, and Ms. Rhodes,

Re: Shirlington Special GLUP+ Study

Attached please find documentation about (A) the viewshed from Green Valley to the Village and (B) the shadows study. Statements made at the July 6 Planning Commission meeting regarding both issues require clarification, if not correction. Please post these comments and exhibits to the project website for easy reference in future.

A. Question of Viewshed from Green Valley Homes

Residents on the southern edge of Green Valley who have a view over the Four Mile Run Valley toward Shirlington are concerned. Wanting to understand the possible impacts, we took photos from their vantage point towards the S. Arlington Mill Drive area.

Here are the viewshed exhibits we developed, containing:

1. Map of SCA, FCA, and GVCA boundaries, annotated to show our estimated area of GVCA homes with a view of Shirlington, based on topography and intervening tree line (mostly Fort Barnard Park);
2. Google aerial map showing the same area, outlined;
3. Photo from Shirlington side showing those homes;
4. Google street-level photos showing the view within that area, from several (out of many that we examined) points where the Shirlington skyline is most visible;
5. Photo of existing gateway to Shirlington at Campbell Ave and S. Arlington Mill Drive, showing existing 11-12 story buildings and the 6-story Hilton Garden Inn; as proposed by the developer, the gateway at Randolph St would have the same respective heights.

As demonstrated, the viewshed from homes in this southern portion of Green Valley is not substantially impacted by the addition of a new Shirlington building on the surface parking lot, even at 12 stories commensurate with existing buildings. The distance (roughly ½ mile) across the "buffer area" of two 4-lane roads and a 2-lane road, three different parks including the W&OD Trail, and a wide stream channel is just too great. In addition, the topography rising from S Arlington Mill Drive causes buildings further into Shirlington and Fairlington to be integrated into the skyline view.

Regarding views from Jennie Dean Park: for most of the year, the double lines of mature trees on either side of the stream inside Jennie Dean and Shirlington Parks create a natural filter that screens views of S. Arlington Mill Drive. In addition, more trees will be planted in that stream buffer area as Jennie Dean Park is renovated.
B. Question of Whether Proposed Density Creates Shadow to the North Side

The one-page shadow studies section (GLUP report p. 107) is included with the attached. These studies were done at noon. Shadows along S. Arlington Mill Drive would be smaller in the morning and afternoon, while shadows cast by mature trees along the Four Mile Run Trail predominate. Shadows cast by buildings would only be apparent in portions of the narrowest part of Shirlington Park and only in the winter, when the trees that shade the park are bare. No shadow touches Jennie Dean Park that we can see. At noon in dead of winter, a 12-story building could shade a 4-lane road, a short length of trail on the narrowest, most inhospitable section of Shirlington Park, and about half the width of the stream.

As stated in the Staff report itself (p. 107):

“Additional height in the northeast corner of the study area, as well as along Arlington Mill Drive, has an impact on adjacent sidewalks, but otherwise does not negatively impact existing or planned open spaces."

Please note, I added to the report’s shadow studies illustrations: (a) blue shading to show where the stream is, (b) labels for Jennie Dean Park, and (c) labels for the 10- and 12-story buildings that Staff recommended on S. Arlington Mill Drive. Without these additions, the illustrations are confusing. Please consider duplicating in the final report diagrams.

After the shadow studies page, I’ve included a few photos of the area on S. Arlington Mill Drive, directly across from the surface parking lot parcel in question. This shows the portion of Shirlington Park that would be affected by shadows in the winter. As you can see, it’s a very narrow strip of green next to the Four Mile Run Trail. No people are allowed inside the fenced area - it’s too narrow and dangerous.

Conclusion: We understand and respect these kinds of questions raised at the Planning Commission. We should all regret the lack of time for this kind of response and clarification at that abbreviated meeting and for consideration of a substantial staff report. We hope this is helpful.

Sincerely,

Virginia Farris

Shirlington Civic Assn. Neighborhood Conservation Representative/Vice President Environment & Parks