



July 26, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Arlington County Board,

On behalf of the Clarendon Alliance and our Board of Directors, we offer the following comments on the proposed alterations of the Clarendon Sector Plan, currently being developed and reviewed by the Planning Commission and its Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC). We have watched the staff's evolution of proposals and planning concepts since the process began last September, and applaud their level of effort to integrate proposals, and note that most of the projects have not submitted full applications yet, potentially changing what has been proposed, reviewed and/or negotiated at some future date.

Since the original Sector Plan planning process, the progressive development and growth along the R-B corridor has proven to be a national model for Transit-Oriented Design (TOD), and is a credit to Arlington County and its ability to plan for appropriate growth while maintaining the character and scale of adjoining neighborhoods and commercial areas. Several current Clarendon Alliance board members participated in the original 1984, 2000 and 2006 Sector Planning processes, and clearly remember both the complexity of those discussions and the breadth of cooperative, highly interactive planning meetings between residents, commercial property owners and County planning staff in framing the original plan, as well as later versions. The process was holistic, comprehensive and visionary; the plans to date have generally proven successful in their consistent management and implementation.

When the current update was announced, we expected a similar public-involvement approach, but COVID and other factors meant that the process has been largely conducted online, using data provided by those who could participate, but without the level of public outreach, and (particularly) interactive involvement of large numbers of those affected by changes in the Sector Plan. In our view, the Sector Plan Update process has moved forward without a parallel and widespread level of participation and interaction between the County staff and the thousands who live and work along the corridor. The Covid-restricted process has limited expansive public participation, analysis and development of a broad consensus. Online confidential surveys with less than 200 responses are inadequate to justify long-term changes in development policy that affect over 30,000 County residents; a broader outreach and participation process is necessary, but has not yet been adequately facilitated. Given that we are now ten months into the 'virtual' Update process, the Clarendon Alliance wants to express concern that a draft report to LRPC is pending and that there are major proposed changes to a Sector Plan that has worked very well since its original conception in the early 1970s; due to Covid, we believe there has been insufficient time built into the process for full public review and participation.

This is an opportunity for Arlington County to display the same visionary leadership in planning and development that has kept our local economy viable, and it should not be rushed. Good public policy rarely results from an accelerated schedule, however well-intended. We believe refinements can be created to adjust some design issues, but should be determined by district-wide goals, not

only by site-specific design proposals. This requires further discussion and wider engagement of the community.

The current Sector Plan update focuses on six pending development proposals, although it has become clear that the 3200 Wilson Boulevard and County-owned sites on 19th Street are not advancing at the same pace as the private developments. Open space and parks proposals for the Sector Plan study area are to be presented at the July LRPC meeting on the 27th, but with elimination of the County site at Clarendon House as open space, uncertainties about where and how to reconstruct Fire Station 4, long-range retention of the Verizon buildings and an unclear future for Triangle Park at Kirkwood and Fairfax Streets, the overall base plan is still evolving.

In aggregate, these issues require more time and refinement than the current Sector Plan schedule allows. There has been limited information available about other open space needs and solutions, either within the Sector Plan Study Area or the greater Clarendon/Virginia Square portions of the R-B Corridor. In our view, the objectives to complete Sector Plan policy decisions in Q4 of 2021 and Q1 of 2022 are not justified by current levels of available data. In particular, there seems to be an imbalance between the amount of additional density requested above the current by-right densities (almost 500,000 SF of additional incremental space above the allowed 3.0 FAR) when compared to limited proposals for public benefits. The few suggested to date do not reach the County policy level of 'extraordinary'; provision of new open space is severely limited within the study area, and requires additional public outreach and planning before policies are changed.

In anticipation of future policy recommendations by the Planning Commission and the County Board, the Clarendon Alliance supports updating the Sector Plan, but have serious concerns about the timing and magnitude of change under consideration. In particular we believe the following issues require more time and discussion:

- Shouldn't the introduction of new density to the area be encouraged, but be balanced by clear guidelines for public benefits (i.e., affordable housing, open space/parks, selected historic preservation components, streetscape enhancements, and sustainable buildings)? Shouldn't benefits be baseline-quantified and understood well before public policy is changed to allow incremental densities?
- Shouldn't refinement of proposed development/design be executed in ways that will continue growth and increase unbuilt density in Clarendon, but in greater harmony with existing scale and neighborhood character?
- Are developer/architect justifications for deviation from setbacks and tapering adequately compelling, and the alternatives proposed for added considerable density with appropriate justification? To date, their cases seemed based site-specific proposals, not on a comprehensive district-wide plan and development program.
- Shouldn't the amount of open space lost in redevelopment be totaled and weighed against what has been proposed? The impact of the suggested linear park on Fairfax is unclear. While it can be attractive and an improvement over the existing condition, is it an adequate response to the increasing demand for active and passive green space in a rapidly urbanizing district?
- The Sector Plan Update focuses on the six primary sites in the designated study area; but shouldn't the updates consider the entire Clarendon Sector as well as a clear connection and transition to the Virginia Square Sector Plan? This is a County-wide planning mechanism and the Clarendon Sector Plan can be a tool to explore better, more transparent solutions for the entire Sector, not just these six sites.

We thank you for your review and attention to these issues and hope you will consider providing more time for detailed study and analysis, for a broader and more comprehensive public participation process and for a better basis in which the public benefits can be secured in these and other developments in Clarendon and County-wide. We look forward to the LRPC open space presentation on July 27. I am unable to participate on that date, learning of its timing after making other commitments. However, I understand several other Clarendon Alliance board members plan to view the presentation. We would welcome additional opportunities to discuss our questions and considerations further with the project staff, County Board, and other Clarendon stakeholders.

Sincerely,

The Clarendon Alliance
Kieran Daly, President of the Board