SUBJECT: 2. Consideration of the adoption of the Phase 1 Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) list of ranked historic garden apartments, shopping centers, and commercial buildings. A list of the addresses and tax map parcel numbers of the affected properties is available for public review in the Zoning Office, and can also be viewed online at www.arlingtonva.us/departments/CPHD/ons/CPHDOnsHistoricPreservation.aspx.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the Phase 1 Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) list of ranked historic garden apartments, shopping centers, and commercial buildings, with the following recommendation: Amend the HRI to move the 4800 31st Street South commercial building from the Important -- Commercial Buildings list to the Essential -- Commercial Buildings list based on the integral role the building played in the development of Fairlington, which is on the Essential -- Garden Apartments list and the National Register of Historic Places.

Dear County Board Members:

The Planning Commission heard this item at its June 27, 2011 meeting. Cynthia Liccese-Torres, Neighborhood Services/Historic Preservation staff, described the Phase I Historic Resources Inventory (HRI). Also present were Christine Nixon, Neighborhood Services staff, and Laura Trieschmann of EHT Traceries, consultant to the County who completed the Phase 1 HRI survey work with Michael Leventhal, Historic Preservation Program Coordinator. Ms. Liccese-Torres described the process and explained that this is the first phase of several to survey and rank historic properties in the County. She presented a brief video prepared by Mary Means & Associates, consultant to the County who drafted the Historic Preservation Master Plan that was adopted by the County Board in 2006.
Public Speakers

Nancy Iacomini, Chair of HALRB, indicated that Dick Woodruff, a Maywood resident and member of the HALRB, had submitted a speaker slip, but had to leave early because of a meeting conflict. He would have spoken in support of the HRI. She further noted that the HALRB commends staff and the consultant for their hard work, and that it supports the HRI.

Edwin Fountain, Board Member of the Arlington Heritage Alliance, commented that the HRI provides a top level survey of the County’s historic resources and he strongly endorses it. It is valuable because now developers can be told up front which resources the County wants preserved and protected. While the tools to preserve the resources are not currently identified, the Alliance will work with staff to develop them. He further noted that staff should market the historic properties featured in the HRI by providing, for example, walking tours, which helps make property owners and citizens more aware and sensitive to the historic nature and value of those properties.

Planning Commission Discussion

Commissioner Hunt commented on the reference to Fairlington properties under Essential – Garden Apartments (page 1 of the HRI list). She noted that the official address for North Fairlington or Fairlington Village condominiums is 3001 S. Abingdon Street, and that the list’s reference to South Buchanan and 29th Streets are irrelevant because it refers to a location in the middle of the development. South Fairlington consists of six (6) separate condominium developments. The addresses identified on the list are not accurate, although the use of RPC numbers may be helpful. Commissioner Hunt also expressed concern about the reference to 4800 31st Street South as an Unnamed Commercial Building under Important – Commercial Buildings (page 8 of the HRI list). She noted that it is one (1) of three (3) commercial buildings in Fairlington that are part of the Fairlington Historic District, the Long & Foster real estate building which was the sales office for Fairlington and is integral to the history of Fairlington. Also a part of the commercial development is the building owned by the Corinthian Construction Company and which houses the Frostee’s Cooling and Heating Repair business. Commissioner Hunt further noted that the Fairlington Fire Station, which is owned by the County, is equally important and is at-risk of being demolished. In addition, the Fairlington Community Center, for which historic renovations were recently completed, is not identified on the HRI. Commissioner Hunt expressed concern for the scope of the HRI. She suggested that a single address representative of the total seven (7) residential villages in Fairlington be used. She questioned what is proposed for the commercial properties, and noted that the fire station and community center should not be overlooked. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that the fire station and community center were not included in this phase because they are not categorized as garden apartments, shopping centers, or commercial buildings. They likely will be included in a future phase and she looks to the Commission and the HALRB to provide input on what should be the next phases of the HRI. Ms. Trieschmann informed Ms. Liccese-Torres that the commercial building which houses Frostee’s is identified in the HRI although the specific address was not mentioned at the meeting. Ms. Liccese-Torres also explained that another version of the Phase 1 HRI list is available that includes all of the individual RPC numbers of the affected properties, including the several hundred in Fairlington alone.
Commissioner Fallon asked for clarification as to whether all of Fairlington is historic or just parts of it. He further inquired about whether whole developments were considered or if the parcels were broken up. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that the intent was that the entire Fairlington neighborhood be listed as Essential. As a point of comparison, in the Buckingham community, the commercial area on North Glebe Road was considered as a whole, although the residential and shopping center developments were ranked differently depending on the integrity of the site and/or buildings. Commissioner Fallon followed with an inquiry about properties with multiple parcels and whether a differentiation was made between parcels required to be preserved versus parcels that would be nice but not required to be preserved. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that the HRI does not require any actions, but is rather a planning tool to include in the planning process and discussions about special exception proposals. Commissioner Fallon asked about how staff addressed property owners who objected to their properties being identified on the HRI and if they were aware of any potential redevelopment in response to the development of the HRI. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that staff conducted a very thorough outreach and community process, and that most of the property owners understand the importance of the HRI and look forward to what the tools will allow them to achieve on their sites.

Commissioner Klein inquired about the types of properties that would be included in the next phase. She also inquired about whether there will be opportunities for other residential garden apartments, shopping centers, and commercial properties to be added to the list in future. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that future phases could potentially include public or community-owned properties, institutional buildings such as churches, and single-family residential large lots that are occupied by historic homes. The inventory will be reviewed by staff twice a year to determine the status of properties or to update information on the properties. As other properties not included in the list come of age, they will be considered for inclusion.

Commissioner Malis asked several questions about the criteria used for listing buildings in the inventory. She confirmed that buildings had to be over a certain age to be listed, and that additional buildings can be added as they age. She asked if differentiation is made between historic buildings and historic sites and whether the inventory lists non-descript places, such as historic forts or sites of historic or important events. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that the current phase does not include forts or sites of historic or important events, but these could be included in a future phase. Commissioner Malis followed that the video provided by Mary Means & Associates pointed out that associated with the historic buildings and sites in Alexandria were historical events and people. In the HRI, that association of buildings and sites to historical people and events is not provided. Ms. Liccese-Torres acknowledged that the County can do better to promote the HRI and historic places in the County. She pointed to the Historic Preservation/HRI website, which provides a narrative physical description of each Essential property listed in the HRI and a summary of their historical significance. This is key to promoting the HRI and the County’s history.

Commissioner Malis indicated that the criteria for ranking properties is different from what has been done in the past with sector plans and on Columbia Pike, for example, and inquired as to whether this is now the new standard and if previous decisions need to be corrected and benefits afforded to owners of historic properties need to be consistent with current thinking. Ms. Iacomini responded that the HRI is one of many tools available and that it is not the recommendation of the HALRB that the sector plans or form based code be reopened or altered from the community process. She
clarified that the HRI is an academic list, with rankings conducted by professionals that provided information on the ranking and integrity of the buildings. It does not address community input, which is achieved through the site plan process. The HRI is an additional piece of information and is not hierarchical.

Commissioner Malis inquired about the preservation of facades, which is important to the Columbia Pike FBC and for which additional density is granted in exchange for the preservation. One site in particular where a facade was preserved is now considered altered and not historic in the HRI list. She asked how facade preservation could be addressed in the HRI. Ms. Iacomini responded that that is a discussion more appropriate for special exception use permits and site plans where there is a give and take for community benefits. The HRI is intended to inform the process. Commissioner Malis followed that facade preservation should be a policy question for the next phase of the HRI.

Commissioner Malis noted that the HRI does not affect the by-right options of property owners, but referred to a HALRB recommendation to try to get property owners to agree to local historic district designation which may affect what they can do with their properties. Ms. Iacomini responded that the process would change in that a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior alterations or demolition would be required, but it doesn’t take away what can be built on the property, but rather adds another layer of approval. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that, while it is within the County’s legislative authority to designate local historic districts without property owner consent, this has not been the County’s practice. In pursuing additional historic district designations, the County would work collaboratively with property owners.

Commissioner Fallon clarified that the HRI is a tool kit to educate the community and can be used on a case by case basis. He inquired about the process for adding new buildings and asked about whether there is a draft list of buildings aging out in the next 10 years. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that there is no such list. However, if a particular building or complex comes of age but does not address, for example, a particular architectural style for that time period it may not be added to the list. Ms. Iacomini commented that the HALRB discussed this issue and that there will be buildings that do not meet certain factors for architectural integrity.

Commissioner Hunt reminded the Commission that the County used its authority to designate a local historic district without property owner consent in Buckingham.

Commissioner Cole, after reviewing the HRI website, noted that only two or three of the Essential properties contained information on their historic relevance other than the buildings’ particular architectural style. He asked if the definition of historic is in fact too narrow. It is not clear to him that the list captures the people or events that help to tell Arlington’s story. He stated that the buildings participate in that story. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that yes, there is more to Arlington’s story than just its historic buildings and their architectural style, but the focus of the HRI is the built environment – the architectural and planning importance of these historic buildings. If time warrants, the Essential properties could be further researched. Many properties, particularly in the Essential and Important categories, are already designated as historic either locally or in the National Register of Historic Places. However, the HRI is a building-focused study, and the people-focus is another important aspect of Arlington’s story. The HRI tells Arlington’s architectural story.
Commissioner Cole reiterated that the story needs to be told about the buildings and the people and events surrounding the buildings.

Commissioner Malis asked if the historic people and events associated with the buildings will be addressed later. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that when the HRI survey was conducted there was the opportunity to add adjustment or bonus points when an important historical fact was known or discovered about a property and that was not automatically relevant in the physical analysis of the site (for example, the Harry Gray House which was built by a former slave of Arlington House). These points allowed the important historical information to be captured in the scoring of the property. The rankings could perhaps be changed in the future if future research reveals additional relevant information. At this point, it was not possible to determine every historical fact about each building within the time and monetary constraints of the project.

Commissioner Hunt agrees with Commissioner Cole and will propose to amend the motion to move the Fairlington commercial building located at 4800 31st Street South from the Important -- Commercial Buildings list to the Essential -- Commercial Buildings list. Information on this site is available at the state and national historic levels, and in a book written by a Fairlington resident who was a historian. It was the rental office of the initial Defense Homes Corporation and should be a part of the residential component. When Long & Foster bought and renovated the building, they took advantage of the tax credits available to commercial historic properties. Either Fairlington Village or Park Fairfax was the first condominium to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Commissioner Fallon inquired about the mechanism that could be used now or in the future to identify the story of the people and events associated with a building. He noted that when the 2201 North Pershing site was studied, some interesting historic facts were presented about the site. Ms. Iacomini responded that one way to learn about buildings or sites is through the local historic district designation process, which provides detailed information about the people, events, and buildings in a community. She also noted that adjustments could be made in the twice-yearly staff reviews.

Commissioner Malis inquired about supporting documentation for buildings ranked in the HRI as Important and Notable. Ms. Liccese-Torres responded that while narratives are only provided for the Essential properties given the scope of the project, many of the Important buildings and several of the Notable buildings are considered to be contributing buildings in National Register-listed historic districts. The full National Register nominations, which provide contextual history and individual physical descriptions of all buildings within the district, are available on the County website. Commissioner Malis asked about the availability of the score sheets that show the rankings of the buildings. Ms. Liccese-Torres indicated that while the score sheets currently are maintained in the consultants’ offices, the County has access to them. Commissioner Malis expressed concern that the score sheets were not available, as she views the Commission’s role as determining whether the ranking criteria were appropriate and appropriately applied. Ms. Liccese-Torres confirmed that the criteria and rankings were reviewed for each of the nearly 400 buildings surveyed and that staff agrees with the consultant’s findings. She also indicated that the score sheets could guide future discussions with property owners regarding the reasons why their properties ranked a certain way.
Commissioner Klein commented that the HRI’s success is already evident by the extent that people are engaged and talking about it. It is an important tool to educate people about what historic resources are important. It is a huge asset for the County, historic preservation staff, and the community.

Planning Commission Motion

Commissioner Klein moved that the Planning Commission recommend that the County Board adopt the Phase 1 Historic Resources Inventory list of ranked historic garden apartments, shopping centers, and commercial buildings. Commissioner Fallon seconded the motion.

Commissioner Cole stated that this is an inventory of “charming” rather than “historic” properties and that little history, other than architectural history, is provided for most listed properties. He expressed concern for the requirement that buildings be at least 50 years old, pointing to other younger buildings that have architectural significance and could be lost to redevelopment before they would be considered for inclusion in the inventory. He also expressed concern about the lack of satisfactory meetings with property owners due to low turn-out. He concluded by stating that he would vote to support the HRI because preservation of these architecturally charming buildings is worthwhile; however, he would like the people-story of these buildings expanded. The public document that presents the list of categories and historic properties within each category needs to include more information, including the survey methodology, the ranking criteria, etc., so that it can be fully understood and useable by all Arlingtonians.

Commissioner Hunt asked for unanimous consent to amend the HRI to move the 4800 31st Street South commercial building from the Important -- Commercial Buildings list to the Essential -- Commercial Buildings list based on the integral role the building played in the development of Fairlington, which is on the Essential -- Garden Apartments list and the National Register of Historic Places. There was an objection. Commissioner Hunt moved to amend the motion to amend the HRI to move the 4800 31st Street South commercial building from the Important -- Commercial Buildings list to the Essential -- Commercial Buildings list based on the integral role the building played in the development of Fairlington, which is on the Essential -- Garden Apartments list and the National Register of Historic Places.

Commissioner Ciotti indicated that she will object to the amended motion because she would defer to the professionals to reconsider the property based on their criteria and evaluation of the building.

The Planning Commission voted 4-2 to amend the motion. Commissioners Cole, Hunt, Klein, and Malis supported the amended motion. Commissioners Ciotti and Fallon opposed the amended motion. The amended motion prevailed and became a part of the main motion.

Commissioner Malis indicated that she supports the motion in a very fundamental way. She believes it was a professional and well-conceived effort, and the criteria have been appropriately applied. She concurs with the comments of Commissioners Hunt and Cole. She notes that rankings may change with the bonus points and she appreciates that the lists may grow as more is learned about the properties. The staff report indicates that this will come back to the Commission in the fall with an analysis of the preservation tools and strategies. When it comes back, she would like more
discussion on what the categories mean. She’s interested in the historic preservation tools and believes there is some synergy between these and the tools being considered for affordable housing.

Commissioner Fallon indicated that the HRI appropriately identifies and informs the community and stakeholders of the County’s historic resources. He viewed the document as non-threatening to property owners. While he indicated sensitivity to individual views regarding the ranking of certain properties, he stated that he relies upon staff and the expertise of the consultants. He encouraged efforts to link historical people and events to the buildings, while acknowledging that this must be done on a case by case basis due to limited resources. He indicated that he will support the motion.

The Planning Commission voted 6-0 to support the amended motion. Commissioners Ciotti, Cole, Fallon, Hunt, Klein, and Malis supported the amended motion.

Respectfully Submitted,
Arlington County Planning Commission

Rosemary Ciotti
Planning Commission Chair