



CRYSTAL CITY CITIZENS REVIEW COUNCIL

2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 314, Arlington, VA 22201  
TEL 703-228-3525 FAX 703-228-3543 [www.arlingtonva.us](http://www.arlingtonva.us)

June 23, 2014

Terry Savelle, Chair  
Christer Ahl, Co-Chair

Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard  
Suite 300  
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Margaret Tulloch-Rhodes,  
Staff Coordinator

Dear Members of the Arlington County Board:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Arlington County 2015 to 2024 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and its impact on the implementation of the Crystal City Sector Plan (CCSP). The Crystal City Citizens Review Council (Council) appreciates the magnitude of the task before you as you weigh priorities and balance the needs of the community. The Council has a few concerns for the Board's consideration during its deliberations.

Crystal City's vitality is crucial to the long term fiscal health of Arlington County. The Crystal City sector has long served as the greatest generator of tax revenue for the County, while simultaneously placing minimal demands on Arlington County public schools and other services. Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) legislation passed in 2005, however, put at risk this reliable source of revenue, creating high vacancy rates in the large stock of declining Class B and C office buildings in Crystal City amidst a regional real estate environment of robust competition for tenants.

In response, County leadership took bold action in the form of a four-year community process involving hundreds of meetings that culminated in the 2010 adoption of the CCSP. The adopted plan continues Arlington's nationally-recognized leadership in transit-oriented development, outlining a vision for a new urban neighborhood with a more desirable public realm set amidst new Grade A office space, a better office/residential balance, and more retail space along with the necessary transportation and open space infrastructure improvements to attract and support more workers, residents, and visitors. The accomplishment of this vision and the resulting financial benefits to the County rely upon the careful balancing of public and private investment. ***Without demonstrable and consistent County commitment to its obligations under the CCSP, the private investment, as well as significant state and federal matching funds, will fail to materialize. Notably, enhancements to the existing transit network combined with the significant capacity expansion produced through the addition of a new streetcar line connecting Crystal City and points south to Columbia Pike and Fairfax are, we believe, necessary catalysts for Crystal City's long-term success.***

The CIP sets forth the implementation timeframe and the financing mechanism for critical infrastructure needs identified in the CCSP. The Council reviewed the previous CIP cycle (FY 2013 to FY 2022) and made a number of recommendations. These recommendations included the creation of a dedicated section where Crystal City-related projects are identified, clarification

of when and how much TIF funding is being used for specific projects, and leveraging TIF revenues through the use of bonds. The Council would like to applaud County staff in implementing the changes in the latest CIP cycle.

In reviewing the current CIP cycle, the Council is encouraged to see inclusion of a number of key parks and transportation investments. On the parks side, both Garden and Gateway Parks are included for implementation on 15<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets South, respectively. In terms of transportation projects, the inclusion of the Arlington Streetcar (Columbia Pike and Crystal City Lines) and the acceleration of the addition of a second Metro entrance go a long way towards facilitating the realization of the Sector Plan. These two transportation projects serve as backbones for a transportation network that will be key to serving the trip generation demands of a transformed and redeveloped Crystal City. Given the political discourse and conversation surrounding the streetcar, the Council again emphasizes that project's role in achieving the vision set forth in the CCSP. Without transportation infrastructure of an appropriate capacity to serve the envisioned development, Crystal City's transformation is likely to stall. As such, these improvements are absolute necessities in the context of seeing the vision of the CCSP realized.

There are a few projects still absent from the CIP cycle that the CCSP phasing outline<sup>1</sup> suggests should be included.

- First, with the removal of the Crystal Drive ramp from the airport flyover as part of the streetcar project, a key pedestrian route to the airport will be eliminated. The Council encourages County staff to incorporate a replacement into this construction plan to prevent the removal of a route heavily used by travelers, airport workers, and airline crews.
- The addition of covered bicycle parking throughout Crystal City was also included in the phasing schedule of the Crystal City Multimodal Transportation Study (Multimodal Study) as a "pre-redevelopment" project. To our knowledge, no plans for this project have been developed, and we do not see funding for this project in the CIP.
- Although no longer separately identified, the Four Mile Run Trail Connection to Potomac Yards/Crystal City, we understand, has been included under BikeArlington in the latest CIP (see CIP, p. E-65), with construction now slated for FY2016. We understand the delay in this project and are eager to see this project accomplished, and applaud staff's success in getting 80 percent of this project funded by VDOT and TPB, with a 20 percent TIF match.
- The length of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street South between South Eads Street and Crystal Drive is slated for major improvements to improve traffic flow through this heavily travelled intersection, enhance the pedestrian experience, and begin transformation to its desired cross-section. These improvements are included in the Multimodal Study as

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<sup>1</sup> See section 4.2.4 of the CCSP and its supporting document, the Crystal City Multimodal Transportation Study, beginning on page 64.

part of Phase 1 (defined as 2011 through 2015 at the time of the study). The need for improvements to the intersection of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street South and Route 1 is particularly important yet is absent from the CIP. We encourage the County Board to investigate the status of this project and include a placeholder in the CIP's out-years. We also encourage staff to initiate discussions with VDOT to permit inclusion of a more definite timeframe and financing scheme in the next CIP cycle.

- The Council urges the County to continue to identify a path towards implementation of Center Park. The planning process recognized that development of this park, expected to take multiple decades, would require an acquisition plan utilizing a creative combination of County tools, with some components likely to require inclusion in the CIP. We also request the County Board direct the County Manager to consider ways to enhance the quality and utilization of the existing open space while the community awaits the acquisition of Center Park.
- The integrity of one of the CCSP's key financing mechanisms, the Crystal City-Tax Increment Financing Fund, must be protected. The County Board created the TIF as an additional funding mechanism that could contribute toward the extraordinary public infrastructure investments necessary. TIF expenditure on such routine expenses as the Commuter Store runs counter to the original intent of the TIF to fund Sector Plan infrastructure projects. Even more troubling have been the conversations had at the County Board level about the possible elimination and reallocation of TIF funds to the general fund. Such an action would signal a departure from the strong commitment and promise by County leadership to support the CCSP and add an undesirable level of risk to developers and investors planning for redevelopment of private assets.

The infrastructure projects contained in the current CIP cycle and the funding mechanisms established to finance them are key to achieving the goals and objectives of the CCSP. The Council urges the County Board to adopt the CIP with modifications that protect the TIF and include other CCSP infrastructure projects currently absent.

Respectfully,



Terry Savela  
Chair



Christer Ahl  
Vice Chair

c: Barbara Donnellan, County Manager

