

Crystal City Citizen Review Council 2016 Annual Report to the Arlington County Board

March 22, 2016

Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Dear Members of the Arlington County Board:

The original vision of the Crystal City Sector Plan (CCSP) was to develop Crystal City into a mega center with new Grade A office space and a better office/residential balance. This vision is not happening. A comprehensive dialogue with the County and an adjustment to the CCSP is required in order that a realistic redevelopment plan for Crystal City can be adopted and implemented by the land owners and embraced by the community.

BACKGROUND:

The Crystal City Citizen Review Council (CCCRC) was created as an advisory body by the County Board to provide periodic monitoring, evaluation and identification of emerging issues and potential solutions on all dimensions of the Crystal City Sector Plan (CCSP) and to monitor that the goals and objectives of the CCSP were achieved during implementation.

The current CCSP was approved on September 28, 2010. This document provided long-range planning guidance for the redevelopment and revitalization of Crystal City over the next 40 years. The main driver for this CCSP was the recommendation of a County Board-directed study to determine the “Arlington Strategy” to address the impact and opportunities of the Federal Government’s Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) decision that would result in a major economic impact on Crystal City. The BRAC Transition Task Force report was completed by the Arlington Economic Development Staff in conjunction with a study group made up of members of the Economic Development Commission with additional community representation.

In conjunction with the CCSP, the County Board also approved relevant amendments to the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) and the Master Transportation Plan (MTP). In addition, the County Board established a set-aside tax increment fund (TIF) for Crystal City, Pentagon City and Potomac Yard. Subsequently, the County Board adopted Zoning Ordinance amendments to create a new redevelopment and zoning district. This new district would make sites within the Crystal City Coordinated Redevelopment District, as designated in the GLUP, eligible for additional development potential to incentivize redevelopment. The establishment of the “C-O Crystal City” zoning district is unique in that, for the sites east of Jefferson Davis Highway, a “block plan” is included as a newly established element. The “block plan” requirement was established for each block and requires that Site Plans filed for a block must initiate and then conform with the “block plan” as may be amended, in the sense that it does not preclude the completion of the CCSP vision through subsequent Site Plans. This was in lieu of Phased-Developed Site Plans due to multiple property owners on each block.

The current CCCRC was reinvigorated in September 2015 after several months of inactivity. As such, the synergism of continual CCCRC quarterly updates and reviews of the status of the CCSP

were lost. With the resuscitation of the CCCRC and appointment of new members, the main drive of the CCCRC since September 2015 has been to update the council members with Staff briefings. These briefings were in regards to the current status of the CCSP implementation and related County documents.

The recent County Staff CCSP updates and discussions with the CCCRC clearly points to the reality of short term market conditions and long term structural changes in commercial real estate trends causing development to not occur in the manner or rate envisioned at the time of the CCSP adoption. The current CCSP is not creating the desperately-needed incentives and opportunities to help facilitate the transformation of Crystal City at the rate or form previously contemplated. The current CCSP does not support the current economic realities nor does it support what is economically viable now.

An adjustment to the current CCSP is recommended so that a realistic Crystal City development plan can be implemented. The CCCRC believes that a comprehensive dialogue/ conversation on how the County should respond to the market realities in the context of the CCSP is critical to moving towards implementation of the vision for Crystal City.

CCRC CONCLUSIONS AND CONCERNS:

Parks and Open Space

- Reassess park and open space priorities given new awareness of shifted redevelopment phasing
- Acknowledge the challenge of realizing Center Park as envisioned in the Plan, as evidenced by the County's inability to devise a funding strategy
- Develop concrete plans to fund, design, and deliver other new, high quality open spaces and parks that meet the intent of CCSP Goals & Objectives while improving the quality and utilization of existing open spaces and plazas throughout Crystal City

Transportation Capital Projects

- Prioritize delivery of those transportation capital projects outlined in the CCSP's-Multi-Modal Study that can be completed independent of private development
- Address any and all staffing needs within DES that may be slowing project delivery
- Assess DES organizational and process changes that may aid in more rapidly moving through planning, design, engineering, and construction

Tax Increment Fund (TIF)

- Maintain the Crystal City TIF as a valuable mechanism to fund CCSP infrastructure projects
- Maximize the use of TCP and TIF funds for all Crystal City transportation projects
- Consider new TIF structures for individual projects (as was done for Ballston Mall)

Transit

- Complete the TDP process as quickly as possible
- Prioritize implementation of TDP recommendations connecting Crystal City to Columbia Pike to ensure implementation before 2020
- Prioritize improved connections between Crystal City and the R-B corridor by implementing extended hours of operations for ART 43 and by improving more reasonable connections to Ballston through an extension of ART 42, or in other ways, a revised ART 92 alignment.

Community Facilities, Amenities and Service

- Introduce interim or “pop-up” facilities to fill the complete void in terms of community facilities; for example a library and/or a community gathering space
- Ensure rapid approval of a down-scaled indoor facility in Long Bridge Park
- Start siting and planning for a new elementary school in the 22202 zip code area to deal with the current over-capacity situation and a projected increase in demands. The location should be convenient to high-density areas of Crystal City and Pentagon City
- Strengthen support for Crystal City retail which is floundering due to office vacancies and the quicker than expected change in the land use mix towards residential which creates added retail demands

Maximize Economic Competitiveness

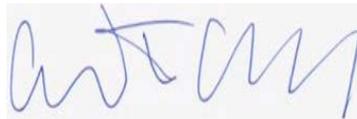
- Support Arlington Economic Development (AED) efforts to retain and attract businesses
- Continue to simplify site plan and permitting processes to eliminate risk and uncertainty for developers and speed approvals without sacrificing the quality of public discussion
- Leverage partnership with the Crystal City Business Improvement District (BID) by allowing new creative retail signage, relaxed comprehensive sign plan requirements, temporary event/promotional/marketing signage, and creative branding for new innovative tenants

The County Board needs to re-evaluate the County’s investment strategy for Crystal City; investment is the catalyst that would create an economic engine for the County. The redevelopment of Crystal City must be done within terms of existing economic conditions and have the flexibility to accommodate changing economic forces as the timeline of implementation moves forward. When the current CCSP undergoes review the CCCRC will provide requested inputs in its crafting. The CCCRC will become a viable arm for the County Board in the evaluation of its implementation to ensure that the revised Plan achieves the Goals and Objectives over the life of the plan.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jerry D. Norris
Chair



Christer Ahl
Vice Chair

C. County Manager

