

ASF | ARLINGTONIANS FOR OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

ASF to ArlCoBoard April 5, 2025

2480 S. Glebe Rd. Amended Site Plan, GLUP change, change to MTP

5 minutes – speaker Anne Bodine

I'm thrilled that many residents of Green Valley are here. Green Valley has its own "neighborhood area plan," approved by the Board and with standing equal to the Four Mile Run Area Plan. It got short shrift in this process. Green Valley's plan says they want to keep Green Valley "a primarily single-family neighborhood . . . and "to build on the neighborhood's unique sense of community and history" and "to address social and economic concerns, such as community service program and facility needs and home ownership." Green Valley says it needs community building that follows these principles. But instead, here's project for community busting. Busting, not building. This plan doesn't retain existing uses, it offers no ownership, and it has no agency for Black residents, or Hispanics who make up 42% of this census tract. As you see here, black home ownership has plummeted from 57% in 2000 to 27% in 2020 in 3 historic African American neighborhoods [show chart]. In only 20 years. Yet the planning commission rejects a motion asking the county to study gentrification, and no one questions that it offers only 9 affordable units out of 531? And we keep ignoring the obvious fact that median Arlington black and Hispanic household incomes fall below incomes needed to rent a 2BR after redevelopment? [show chart]

The Four Mile [Area] plan says we should be "enhancing a sense of place and connection to area history" and I don't think they meant by erasing or eclipsing it with a 9-story garage next to a Black church on the national historic register, which the area plan protects with height limits of 45'!! This project is at least 75' plus a top floor they don't want to "count" towards their density! [NOTE: per plan: limit height of buildings

adjacent to the historic Lomax A.M.E. Church and west of and adjacent to Shirlington Road to 45' " p. 63.)

The GLUP. On a technical level, but critical to the general understanding the basic TERMS OF the project, the staff has given short shrift to a part of our zoning code that was designed to “look out” for our most vulnerable residents, reflect our core values. There’s a rule that with GLUP change, the developer should contribute 20% of the delta between base density (the number of units that can be built by right on one acre) and new density being sought. Staff instead claims the Board can ignore this because it’s just “cleaning up” an old error that has the right zoning attached to the wrong land use.

Well, no the board cannot do that. We know of a project in 2018 when a builder was told the board did not have authority to approve a project if the land use did not allow it. And a land use change in that case was then ‘managed” to produce a larger affordable housing component than just bonus density acquired through the zoning code.

That’s what you must do again today. You must calculate the 20% -- on the proper base density – and you must come back to all residents who deserve to get a fair shake for the public space you are awarding this owner.

And a caveat: if the request for 20% affordable units is a legal requirement, you need to follow the law, as we believe applies here. If it’s not a legal mandate, but a conscious decision -- to forego affordable units, you need to change your conscience. Because it is unconscionable to claim 9 units – none at affordability levels and only one family sized – can count as “community benefits.” It cannot.

On process, then, ASF says, don’t give up the GLUP, don’t abandon the 20% affordable housing contribution. And fix the incorrect base density so it comports with the rules of special exception zoning, that sets the base at BY-RIGHT standards. (NOT 400 units per acre)

Others have spoken in past weeks about historic wrongs visited on the black community. That legacy lives on. The Interstate skirts the south flank of the site; one of many Eisenhower-era investments that shot asphalt through the heart of established black spaces. On the east flank is another federal property, Army Navy Golf Course. Its lovely green space is free to "look but not touch." The Bell Arlington Ridge townhomes are lovely, but there's no common area; both they and Alister high-rise apartments sit apart from the Valley, not physically but socially.

So, at 2480 S. Glebe, with its huge parcel of 5 acres, we ask that not happen and you to take a fresh look. Pause for 3 months, have a wide-open dialog that vaccinates the process against side deals and end runs. We can knit a new fabric of black history – or more broadly a history of a more communal and still diverse Green Valley -- that doesn't gentrify.

The Board stepped up a year ago and stopped eminent domain to seize the home of a black homeowner [in Arlington View.] You brought real heart to this forum. We seek another key pivot point. Tell the applicant and staff to reset terms of reference, reopen dialog, and a restore sane planning starting with a straight-line roadway for this project that runs from Shirlington to the EXISTING curb cut on Glebe [that staff wants to ditch] and doesn't dump traffic into the residential area. [show diagram] We should all expect projects that deliver housing types responsive to need, that keep the compact to maintain lower density structures where there is no Metro [or transit corridors.]

To restate the goals of our Mar 31 letter we ask you to pause and

1. Engage Green Valley as a whole;
2. clarify the GLUP and zoning issues we raise
3. Consider ASF's alternate planning guidance outlined in our memo;
4. Buy the smaller parcel [025], and consider it for the "multi use community center" discussed in the Four Mile plan,
5. Begin an action plan to staunch gentrification;
6. And make sure Community Benefits adequately reflect the level of GLUP change and zoning exceptions sought.

ASF looks forward to engaging you and others as you set a course beyond doctrinaire “siteplanning” that sacrifices “community” on the altar of curb cut reductions.

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