

March 6, 2022

Ms. Katie Cristol, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA

SUBJECT: Plan Langston Boulevard Process

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future (ASF) asks for a halt to further planning for the Langston Boulevard corridor until the county first addresses some key community concerns by providing guidelines to county staff regarding principles which future Plan Langston Boulevard (PLB) planning needs to follow.

What Does Langston Corridor Look Like with PLB? If the upcoming Preliminary Concept Plan (PCP) for PLB includes land uses as per June 2021 staff projections -- and the Board then approves that scope of land use and new zoning - - developers will be submitting site plans to raze entire areas and offer buy-outs. Existing residents will leave due to a combination of higher tax bills, high profit on their homes, higher rents, evictions, and disruption as owners and developers begin pursuing higher yields on the land. No future board will be constrained against the use of eminent domain, and visions of "main street" will give way to market variables producing more "units," however livable. We need look no further than the Board's February 12 unanimous approval of a 12-story residential tower in Ft. Myer Heights despite Chairman Cristol's concerns that it was "four times denser" and towered over adjacent townhomes to see that quantity, not quality, is assured.

Density Not Delivering What We Need. As we noted to the Board in a letter of September 30, 2021, we believe the PLB process -- and its predecessor Plan Lee Highway -- has density as the overriding objective. We do not believe that accurately reflects community concerns. Unless new guiding principles are adopted, we believe the PLB process will result in a 40-year development churn

(i.e., new construction activity that fits mostly with developers' goals) that will outstrip and poorly address the housing and commercial space needs of our residents. As revealed in the December 13 PLB community forum hosted by Staff Lead Alfonso-Ahmed, there is considerable community opposition to much of the density now proposed along with the failure to adequately provide for needed infrastructure and services, to include:

- Ten-story buildings at Lee Heights Shopping Center;
- A 15-story complex on the west side of Spout Run Pkwy at the Giant/Italian Store shopping center;
- 7-, 10- and 15-story buildings east of Spout Run Pkwy, between Langston Blvd and I-66 in Lyon Village to replace mostly multifamily housing;
- 5-7 story buildings at Langston Blvd and Glebe Rd., transitioning towards Lee Heights Center to 10 stories;
- 5-7 story buildings along a 10-block stretch straddling Langston and Harrison;
- Transportation changes but little new mass transit, narrowing of Langston Blvd., underground/reduced parking, new roads requiring eminent domain;
- Extensive lot consolidation meaning max. lot coverage; little green space; no new parks; limited flood control;
- Displacement of renters from current affordable housing; loss of local-owned business;
- Fewer acres of parkland/green space; more congested roadways; lagging school construction; and other infrastructure deficits.

Site Planning Preempts Big-Ticket Public Investment. ASF believes that the County must promptly and adequately fund all new infrastructure and public services deriving from already-approved sector plans, land use designations, and denser zoning. That has not been done, and it appears the County intends to abdicate this fundamental obligation in the case of the Langston corridor scenarios. PLB Lead Planner Alfonso-Ahmed last July indicated in the attached email that the county has no plans on its own to acquire new parkland, to construct major new stormwater catchments, or to otherwise provide the items its new residents would expect, leaving everything up to developers.

Pushing ever-larger decisions through the rathole of site planning will result either in only small-scale improvements (a pocket park, an access road), or pledges by builders that are never delivered (seen recently in Clarendon). More broadly, site plan processes cannot fully address the broader needs of our population. Infrastructure investments benefit from economies of scale and are ill-suited to

small-scale projects that site plans entail; community benefits currently must be implemented near the relevant site, complicating delivery of systemic solutions as mentioned; and site planning processes (until PenPlace) imposed key constraints on deliverables, such as preventing developers from delivering new classrooms.

Equity Concerns. ASF also takes issue with the claim by CPHD Director Fusarelli to the Board on February 8, 2022, that PLB scenarios as modeled will meet equity goals. Neither Missing Middle (MM) housing (temporarily removed from the PLB plans but still possible via the separate MM process), nor the types of towers going up along Columbia Pike, will significantly boost housing for those earning 30-60% of Area Median Income, which has been most negatively affected by the county's development frenzy. Current PLB models will displace many tenants living in permanently-affordable apartments as higher yields make the older buildings "unattractive investments." Or they may channel a small number into the new "committed affordables" that revert to higher rents after 30 years, while the density traded remains a permanent asset for builders/apartment owners.

Fiscal Planning. [The county's last publicly available long-term fiscal outlook](#) -- for FY 2019 -- projected a deficit, despite a 20-year record of intense residential development. So before moving any further on the PCP effort, we ask that the Board instruct staff to prepare corridor-wide operating budget forecasts based on current zoning regulations and brief these forecasts to the community. Staff should also be tasked with identifying where new school seats and other critical infrastructure will be needed in each of Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 -- through the end of a 40-year buildout. These forecasts are needed as a baseline against which to assess alternative scenarios.

ASF's Asks. To ensure better community-centered outcomes that cover ASF's concerns about fiscal, social/demographic, and environmental concerns, we ask the county compare current zoning outcomes (i.e., number of residents that can be added with no new zoning or denser land use allowances) with up-GLUP-ping for PLB scenarios A and B, or any new scenarios to be incorporated into the forthcoming PCP, in terms of:

1. Long-term operating budget;
2. Long-term environmental impact;
3. Long-term household income by quintiles

Langston is the county's only remaining East-West corridor that has not been scoped for major development. Let's ensure community benefits reflect

community wishes, and let's ensure the county is not fully ceding its own fiscal and public services functions in the process.

Sincerely,

Charles Henkin
Member, Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future

Attachment (below):
July 2021 Email Exchange between Bodine and Alfonso-Ahmed

Bodine Questions are Shown in Black, Replies from PLB Lead Planner Alfonso-Ahmed are Shown in Red

**Email Dated July 8, 2021 from Anne Bodine
To Natasha Alfonso-Ahmed with reply
Subject: questions about plan lee highway**

EXTERNAL EMAIL

Hi, Ms. Alfonso-Ahmed,

I've been digging around in the very extensive and impressive Plan Lee Highway materials and I can't answer a few questions I'm hoping you can help with:

- Projected number of new residents the up-GLUPPING and related up-zoning would accommodate and by what year would you project full build out? what numbers would you project over the first 20 years? What would the school generation factor over the 20 years be? Plus any comparisons to what the population could be if we had only by-right development and no GLUP or zoning change? **We are currently analyzing this.**

- number of acres of new parkland/greenspace/recreation areas that the county would acquire for these new residents **We are currently analyzing how many acres of open space could potentially be added as part of new private development. The County does not anticipate acquiring land to develop open space along the corridor.**

- I know there are a lot of stormwater projects included, some of which aim at resolving existing issues, like Woodstock Park for Waverly Hills. Do both scenarios A and B also include/plan for stormwater projects that would remediate the added density/pervious surface that would come with the prospective build outs shown in the two scenarios?

Some land use scenarios explore minimal height/density increases to enable private investment, tangible site improvements, and some affordable housing. Stormwater improvements in these scenarios are anticipated to be minimal because there is no economy of scale to justify larger investments/improvements. Other land use scenarios explore greater height/density increases to create incentives that spur additional community improvements from private investment in key locations (stormwater management, publicly accessible open spaces, major intersection improvements, street grid expansion, and greater affordability contributions).

- Do you know the number of MARK's currently within the various planning zones, or just the larger zone that shows the 1/4 mile radius being affected? **Page 45, of the Existing Conditions Analysis Report, provides information on the current number of MARKs in the study area.**

- Can you provide a dollar value at current market rates for any single parcel or the entire planning area that would result from a change in GLUP and an attendant change to zoning as being illustrated in the scenarios. If you don't have any ballpark figures for the entire planning area, could you provide just one example what would the owners realize from zoning up to 15 stories at the Spout Run Giant/Italian store complex as shown in the slides, versus by-right zoning for that parcel? **We are not doing this level of analysis.** thanks very much, Anne Bodine