



AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Special GLUP Study - Melwood  
750 S 23rd Street  
Presentation to LRPC  
11/28/2023



<https://aurorahighlands.org/>

What are your concerns? Check all that apply.  
158 responses

| Concern                          | Count | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-------|------------|
| Traffic                          | 99    | 62.7%      |
| Parking                          | 95    | 60.1%      |
| Size and scale of the prop...    | 95    | 60.1%      |
| Population density               | 95    | 60.1%      |
| Precedent for zoning chan...     | 108   |            |
| Pollution (light, noise, grou... | 70    | 44.3%      |
| Crowding/overuse of com...       | 80    | 50.6%      |
| Lack of space in schools         | 61    | 38.6%      |
| Proposed residents' ability...   | 44    | 27.8%      |
| Violation of sector plan         | 74    | 46.8%      |
| Lack of community input f...     | 90    | 57%        |
| I have no concerns about t...    | 15    | 9.5%       |
| None                             | 1     | 0.6%       |
| I'm concerned about this n...    | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Already a serious runoff pr...   | 1     | 0.6%       |
| I support the plan.              | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Could Melwood build, then...     | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Drastic change to historic...    | 1     | 0.6%       |
| None Also by only asking f...    | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Despite these concerns, I...     | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Change of historic charac...     | 1     | 0.6%       |
| My concern is that this bui...   | 1     | 0.6%       |
| I fully support this attempt...  | 1     | 0.6%       |
| None                             | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Possible increase in crime       | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Housing shortage                 | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Loss of public zoning            | 1     | 0.6%       |
| none                             | 1     | 0.6%       |
| I am not concerned about...      | 1     | 0.6%       |
| You list "concerns" on the...    | 1     | 0.6%       |
| This is absurd                   | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Building could be bigger         | 1     | 0.6%       |
| This is a pretty bad survey...   | 1     | 0.6%       |
| My biggest concern is abo...     | 1     | 0.6%       |
| There are already several...     | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Why is there no option for...    | 1     | 0.6%       |
| Why is there no option for...    | 1     | 0.6%       |
| The nimby attitude of our...     | 1     | 0.6%       |
| The benefits of adding aff...    | 1     | 0.6%       |

**AURORA HIGHLANDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION**

March 22, 2022

Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Members of the Arlington County Board,

Attached please find a thorough analysis of the Special GLUP Study Application submitted by Melwood Horticultural Training Center, Inc., on December 20, 2021. The analysis was prepared by the Aurora Highland Civic Association's Zoning Committee and outlines numerous concerns regarding the size, scope and potential impacts of the project envisioned therein. Indeed, with nearly 100 members present, our Association was nearly unanimous in adopting the analysis and in its opposition to said project at a Special Meeting on March 14, 2022.

Our concerns are described in more detail in the accompanying report; and, while many of our members do support Melwood's mission and acknowledge Melwood's value to the neighborhood, it is **overwhelmingly clear that this project cannot be allowed to go forward on the site.** We are interested,

Do you oppose the proposed 60 foot building?  
158 responses

| Response  | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Yes, I OPPOSE the proposed new 60 foot structure.       | 75.0%      |
| No, I DO NOT oppose the proposed new 60 foot structure. | 24.1%      |

**Letter from AHCA to County March 2022 opposing this project**

[2022-03-22 Letter to County re Melwood application](https://aurorahighlands.org/wp-content/uploads/Zoning-Committee-Report-and-Cover-Memo-Signed-031822.pdf)  
<https://aurorahighlands.org/wp-content/uploads/Zoning-Committee-Report-and-Cover-Memo-Signed-031822.pdf>

AHCA May 2022 Online Survey Regarding Melwood Special GLUP Amendment Proposal

The association does not support this application because it is out of scale with the neighborhood. The associations overwhelming objection should have been more than enough to stop the application process at Tier 1 over a year ago in 2022, and yet here we are.

THIS DECISION SETS A PRECEDENT FOR ALL OF ARLINGTON

The screenshot shows a petition on change.org. At the top, the change.org logo and navigation links are visible. The petition title is "Stop high rises in Arlington residential neighborhoods" by "Lyon Village Neighbors". A progress bar indicates that 888 signatures have been collected, with a goal of 1,000. A red circle highlights the text "888 have signed. Let's get to 1,000!". Below the progress bar, another red circle highlights the text "At 1,000 signatures, this petition is more likely to be featured in recommendations!". The petition description includes a "CONTRIBUTIONS" section with a red circle around the phrase "is not compatible". A "Sign this petition" button is located on the right side of the page.

[https://www.change.org/p/save-clarendon-presbyterian-church-and-preserve-our-residential-neighborhood-e709cd8c-3f3c-4686-a27a-67ab62e03413/sign?original\\_footer\\_petition\\_id=37703244&algorithm=promoted&source\\_location=petition\\_footer&grid\\_position=8&pt=AVBlGI0aW9uAG96NgIAAAAAZUtdLxvbtqwMDhIOTA4Mw%3D%3D](https://www.change.org/p/save-clarendon-presbyterian-church-and-preserve-our-residential-neighborhood-e709cd8c-3f3c-4686-a27a-67ab62e03413/sign?original_footer_petition_id=37703244&algorithm=promoted&source_location=petition_footer&grid_position=8&pt=AVBlGI0aW9uAG96NgIAAAAAZUtdLxvbtqwMDhIOTA4Mw%3D%3D)

The Clarendon Presbyterian Church has applied for a similar upzoning as Melwood, and the civic associations in Clarendon are in the same situation as Aurora Highlands. People all over Arlington are up in arms about this Special GLUP Study process and the precedent approval of these proposals will set – the change.org petition recently started is nearly up to 900 signatures and legal counsel has been retained.

**Resolution to Improve Public Input for Planning, GLUP and Zoning Change Processes**

**Arlington County Civic Federation**

**Public Services Committee**

**June 14, 2022**

RE: GLUP/Zoning Amendment & Sector Plan Community Engagement

WHEREAS Arlington County has an established a General Land Use Plan (GLUP) that allows for existing single-family residences and high-density, mixed-use development along the high-density, mixed-use corridors;

WHEREAS Arlington County Planning states, "Planning decisions are informed by extensive research, professional expertise and community input." And the planning process "relies on extensive community input. Individual residents can have a say on the decisions that affect their neighborhoods and the County as a whole";

WHEREAS the Covid-19 pandemic spurred changes in technology, increasing remote telework options and altering historic commuting patterns with populations migrating from urban counties to suburban and exurban counties which have not been fully studied;

WHEREAS there are numerous ongoing GLUP studies and amendments, including but not limited to the Crystal City Building Heights Study, Melwood GLUP amendment, the Eads Street Residential GLUP Amendment;

WHEREAS in at least two recent sector-plan-update processes, residents and commissions have raised concerns about community priorities that were not addressed;

WHEREAS the impact of these GLUP studies and amendments and their subsequent up-zonings will affect not only housing density but also parking, public school enrollment, stormwater management and tree canopy preservation in residential neighborhoods countywide;

WHEREAS up-zoning frequently entails encroachment into lower density residential neighborhoods (sometimes referred to as "edge" development), where residents have no approval rights and little leverage for negotiation when proposed up-zonings will affect the use of their own properties;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Arlington County Civic Federation (ACCF) asks the Arlington County Board to request the County Manager **and staff to seek agreement from adjacent-neighbors and the applicable civic associations) when reviewing proposed GLUP amendments and up-zoning requests.** (similar to the Board of Zoning Appeals [BZA] process, which considers adjacent neighbors' input before deciding residential requests for an exception to a rule in the Zoning Ordinance.)

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the ACCF asks the Arlington County Board to authorize a more robust process that provides for more meaningful and active public participation in formative land-use planning and zoning processes, including GLUP amendments and studies, Long-Range Planning Committee (LRPC) reviews of proposed GLUP and zoning studies and amendments, sector plan updates and amendments and similar planning efforts. Such active public participation should:

- a) Give members of affected civic associations and HOAs (if not represented by a civic association) a formal, voting seat at the table for all significant GLUP, sector, and other planning and zoning processes that will amend or change planning and density parameters.
- b) Schedule feedback timelines to avoid conflicts with major holidays and the summer break, when staff, board members and the public are likely to be traveling.
- c) Recognize that community members are volunteers with limited time to devote to planning activities—make technical information clearly understandable in layman's terms and readily available online in a timely manner.
- d) Include basic impact analysis of the proposed changes to give the public clear and accurate projections of the proposed changes' impacts on school enrollment, capacity and staffing; public safety response times and staffing; natural resources/infrastructure (parks, previous green space, existing tree canopy); impervious surfaces, stormwater management and flood risk; infrastructure (road capacity, additional transit needs, land acquisition to expand public services in relation to population changes, etc.) as well as human capital/FTE needs; and fiscal impacts (revenues and expenditures, especially when resulting in an increase in the tax burden).
- e) Ensure mechanisms for **two-way** communication between members of the public and decision makers as plans are prepared, assuring that responses to public inquiries and input are timely and meaningful.



<https://www.civfed.org/archives/resolutions/>

The GLUP Amendment process was taken up by the Arlington County Civic Federation - an umbrella organization of over 80 civic groups, last year, and a resolution for the County to seek agreement from adjacent neighbors and the applicable civic association in upzoning proposals was approved. It is only fair.

Virginia LIS

§ 15.2-2283. Purpose of zoning ordinances.

Zoning ordinances shall be for the general purpose of promoting the health, safety or general welfare of the **public**

Zoning is intended to :

**Promote:** light, air, safety, harmony, convenience, adequate schools & parks, economic development, suitable affordable housing\*

**Reduce:** crime, congestion, overcrowding

**Protect:** historic resources, waterfronts, airports and military facilities

**This proposal will not protect historic resources, will contribute to congestion and will negatively impact Nellie Custis Park.**



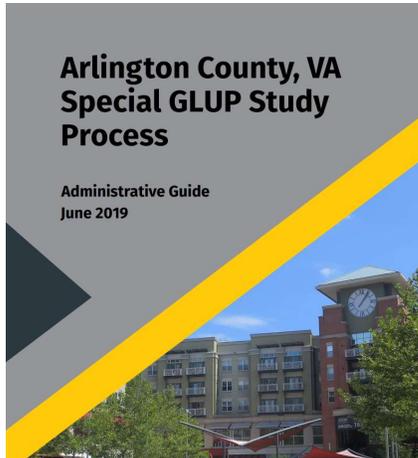
\*Affordable housing in Aurora Highlands Inventory:

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Claridge House       | 300 units existing                     |
| Crystal House        | 655 units committed in 2019 / existing |
| Crystal House Infill | 554 units committed future             |

We have learned a lot in the last two years about zoning.

We have learned, in Virginia, the intent of zoning is to further the **public not the private** interest – and nothing about increasing density in a historic, single family neighborhood that is already subject to several sector plans to maintain its character serves the public interest. Claims of needing affordable housing in this location are not correct even if they were relevant to this application, which they are not. There is a significant amount of affordable in Aurora Highlands especially since Amazon’s investment in Crystal House. Livability22202 in its recent update acknowledges the significant investments made in affordable housing in Aurora Highlands, and is not advocating for more, rather, we are focusing on helping residents maintain existing housing.

## GLUP Special Studies 2019



### Introduction

This document will serve as a process overview to aid applicants, commissioners, community members, staff and elected officials in understanding the Special General Land Use Plan (GLUP) Study process from start to finish.

The GLUP is Arlington's primary policy guide for the future development of the County. The Plan establishes the overall character, extent and location of various land uses and serves as a guide to communicate the policy of the County Board to residents, the business community, developers and others involved in the development of Arlington County. In addition, the GLUP serves as a guide to the County Board in its decisions concerning future development. The GLUP is one of eleven elements which currently comprise the County's Comprehensive Plan. Supporting documents include sector, area and revitalization plans, which detail specific land use, density, building form and other policies.

The GLUP can be amended in two different ways. The first is through a County-led planning process to implement policies from a sector, area or revitalization planning effort. The second is at the request of a developer and/or property owner. When a GLUP amendment request is made in keeping with the recommendations of a relevant adopted plan, it is considered concurrently with an associated site plan or use permit, along with any potential rezoning request.

In 2008, the County Board adopted a new policy regarding GLUP amendments. The "Policy for Consideration of General Land Use Plan Amendments Unanticipated by Previous Planning Efforts" calls for a community review process in those instances where a requested land use change is inconsistent with an adopted plan or when the request

The Special GLUP Study "Administrative Guide" invites private owners like Melwood to request upzoning

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The 2019 GLUP Amendment online brochure invites and accepts fees for private landowners to request zoning changes to serve their private interests. Give it a glossy brochure, but amending the GLUP solely to serve the private interests of the landowner is not in keeping with the intent of Virginia law which requires zoning to serve the **public** interest and not the interest of an individual property owner no matter how good their work is or how righteous they may be. We have asked the county to provide its legal opinion as to how this process is in keeping with Virginia law, but have not gotten a response to date.

**POLICY REGARDING CONSIDERATION OF GENERAL LAND USE PLAN AMENDMENTS UNANTICIPATED BY PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS**

1. Arlington County has a longstanding tradition of carefully planning for growth and development in the County as set forth in various planning policies and documents including in particular the comprehensive plan, the general land use plan (GLUP), and associated documents such as sector plans, area plans, and other planning studies.

2. These planning policies and documents establish a framework for land use decision making and provide predictability to landowners, developers, and the community about the nature and scope of future growth and development on sites throughout the County.

3. While these planning policies and documents fall within the exclusive legislative authority of the County Board, landowners are free to request changes to them, particularly amendments to the GLUP, to accommodate development of their property. However, the County Board is not required to grant such requests, and is particularly unlikely to do so when the property has not been the subject of planning studies conducted outside the context of a specific development application with an opportunity to objectively assess the implications of the proposed changes and whether they comport with the County's long term planning principles and goals.

4. Amending the GLUP without fully identifying the range of issues associated with the proposed change, understanding whether it comports with the County's long term planning goals and principles, and obtaining full input from the Board's advisory commissions and the community, deserves, and may result in decisions contrary to, the County's planning principles and policies.

5. In light of the foregoing, the County Board expresses its intent, and directs the County Manager accordingly, that a proposed GLUP amendment for any sites not identified in a County Board adopted planning study as appropriate for such a GLUP amendment will not be considered until such a planning study or analysis has been completed and presented to the County Board.

Adopted by the Arlington County Board on 6/17/2008

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## 2008 GLUP Amendment Process – to deal with “unanticipated” land use needs



Planning policies provide **predictability** to the community – arbitrary private amendment requests do not



The 2008 policy states GLUP changes will be in keeping with the County's long term planning goals.

The policy sets a high bar for the demonstration of the need for amendment to address an UNANTICIPATED land use need. There is **nothing unanticipated** at Melwood

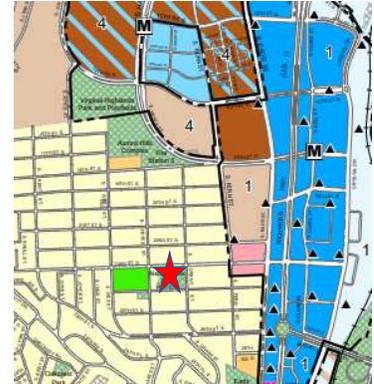
The stated intent of the GLUP Amendment process in 2008 was to account for “unanticipated” planning issues, but nothing about the Melwood site is unanticipated.

# Current GLUP

Melwood in  
Low Density  
Land Use

*nothing here is  
"unanticipated"*

| Land Use                            |   |   |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| Land Use Designation                | Range of Density/Typical Use  |   | Zoning**                            |
| <b>Residential</b>                  |   |   |                                     |
| Low                                 | 1-10 units per acre   |   | R-20, R-16, R-10, R-6, R-4, R-3     |
| Low                                 | 11-15 units per acre  |   | R-2, R-15, R-10                     |
| Low-Medium                          | 16-30 units per acre  |   | R15-S15, R14-20, R4-18              |
| Medium                              | Up to 37-72 units per acre  |   | R4-10, M4-15, M4-11                 |
| High-Medium                         | Up to 24 F.A.R. (Floor Area Ratio) Residential  |   | R4-8                                |
| High                                | Up to 24 F.A.R. Residential<br>Up to 24 F.A.R. Retail   |   | R4-3.2, C-0 (Retail)                |
| <b>Commercial and Industrial</b>    |   |   |                                     |
| Service Commercial                  | Professional and business services. Generally one to four stories, with special provisions within the Columbia Pike Special Foundation District.  |   | C-1, R, C-1-C, C-2, C-2-10, C-7H    |
| Service Industry                    | Wholesale, storage and light manufacturing uses, including those relating to building construction activity.  |   | CM, M-1, M-2                        |
| <b>Public and Semi-Public</b>       |   |   |                                     |
| Public                              | Parks (local, regional and federal); Schools; Public; Libraries; major organized sports; way, libraries and cultural facilities.  |   | S-1A, S-D                           |
| Semi-Public                         | Country clubs and other public recreational facilities; Churches, private schools and private recreation (golf courses and hotels).   |   | S-1A, S-D                           |
| Government and Community Facilities | County, state and federal administration and service facilities (banks, the post office, etc.); Hospitals, nursing homes, and institutional housing; Offices, and law enforcement agencies, etc.                    |   | P-1, S-D, S-1H                      |
| <b>Office-Apartment-Hotel</b>       |   |   |                                     |
| Low                                 | Office Density: Up to 2.5 F.A.R.  | Apartment Density: Up to 120 units/acre | Hotel Density: Up to 100 hotel/acre |
| Medium                              | Up to 2.5 F.A.R.  | Up to 115 units/acre                    | Up to 100 hotel/acre                |
| High                                | Up to 2.8 F.A.R.  | Up to 4.8 F.A.R.                        | Up to 3.8 F.A.R.                    |
| <b>Mixed Use</b>                    |   |   |                                     |
| Medium Density Mixed Use            | Up to 2.8 F.A.R. with special provision for additional density within the "Special Incorporation District" (see Note 12 and the "Special Coordinated Mixed Use District" to the East of Orange Square (see Note 8). |   | C-1, C-1-MU-V                       |
| High-Medium Residential Mixed Use   | Up to 2.4 F.A.R. including associated office and retail activities.   |   | R-C                                 |
| Coordinated Mixed-Use               | This is a high density mixed use district with actual density determined by the site. Up to 4.8 F.A.R. with   |   | C-0.8                               |



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The site is planned to remain in the middle of the existing historic single family neighborhood per the GLUP -

From the Crystal City Sector Plan:

- “Preserve the integrity of the single-family neighborhood to the west” (Page 8 & 27)
- “Tapering down in building height from Crystal City to the neighborhoods” [Aurora Highlands & Arlington Ridge] (Page 15 & 27)
- The GLUP as shown in Figure 1.2.8 of the Crystal City Sector Plan (Page 20)

From the Pentagon City Sector Plan:

- “Development along the southern border of River House should be the lowest in scale to transition to Aurora Highlands and Arlington Ridge.” (Page 42)

From the Pentagon City Master Development Plan:

“lowest densities should be in the south portion of the tract, adjacent to existing single family neighborhoods.” (Page 43)

From the Aurora Highlands Neighborhood Conservation Plan:

- “700 Block: The 700 block of 23rd Street has a combination of office, storefront commercial, and institutional usage. The Sheltered Occupational Center (SOC) [now, Melwood] occupies about half of the south side, facing low-rise office buildings across 23rd Street. The building mix and heights are compatible with the surrounding residential blocks and are of recent construction. *The community would like to preserve this arrangement and continue the existing zoning and height limitations* (a zoning map is provided as an Appendix ).” (Page 14)
- “Preserve the single-family neighborhood, its character, and height.” (Page 19)

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It is planned to be zoned as is in the existing low density historic single family neighborhood per the Crystal City Sector Plan, Pentagon City Sector Plan, the Pentagon City Master Development Plan and the Neighborhood Conservation Plan.

The Proposed development:

- Is 60' tall, over 25' taller than any other building
- Looms over Nellie Custis Park with little separation / setback
- Eliminates mature landscaping
- Construction will impact park landscaping
- Creates congestion on residential streets
- Displaces parking for Calvary Church (Grant St.) and the Latter Day Saints (uses existing lot)
- Driveway / loading will be on Grant Street, impacting children at / approaching the park
- There is no provision for maintaining the existing polling location

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Melwood provided this massing diagram, and states they cannot proceed with a smaller development. We oppose this proposal because it is way out of scale with the neighborhood and it will be a nuisance – it is too dense, too tall and too big. It will generate too much traffic, impose on current parking arrangements with adjacent churches, eliminate mature landscaping and loom over and negatively impact Nellie Custis Park, a small heavily used park which provides much needed natural space and playground space for the surrounding urban neighborhood and daycare centers.

## Special GLUP Amendment Approval Criteria

**a. Would the amendment possibly advance broader County goals?** This Proposal is not compliant with the planning policies, goals, and ordinances established by Arlington County for the Property. It is inconsistent with the Zoning Ordinance, the General Land Use Plan (GLUP), the Clarendon [Pentagon City, Crystal City] Sector Plan, the EHO Amendments, the 2019 and 2021 Zoning Ordinance Amendments and policy. Moreover, this Proposal does not contribute to any of the county's goals stated in the planning documents concerning the Property.

**b. Is there already an existing adopted plan or district designation on the GLUP for the subject area and/or adjacent area? If there is an existing plan or district recommendation for a specific area, a change to the GLUP may be less likely to be recommended. What conditions have changed to warrant revisiting the adopted policy?** This Proposal and Property are governed by multiple planning, zoning and land use overlays, all of which are up to date as of 2023, particularly the Clarendon [Pentagon City, Crystal City] Sector Plan and the EHO Amendments. No conditions relating to this Property have changed to warrant a new planning study at this location.

**c. Is the area currently under study?** No, all planning documents relevant to this Property have been recently reviewed, extensively analyzed and concluded, ensuring their current status and accuracy.

**d. Is this a larger or more complex (i.e., topographical, contextual, etc.) site? Are surrounding properties similar and should they potentially be included in the study? Would it be more appropriate to address the area through a small area plan?**

- No, there is nothing unusual or complex about this Property.
- No, and more emphatically none of the sites surrounding the Property should be included in this study.
- No, this Proposal is not more appropriate for a small area plan.

**e. Is there a Phased Development Site Plan (PDSP)? Would it be more appropriate to undertake a PDSP review as opposed to a Special GLUP Study?** No, the Property is not located in a PDSP and a PDSP is not appropriate.

<Proposal does not advance goals in existing plans – eg Sector Plans, Neighborhood Conservation, GLUP

<Nothing has changed to warrant revisiting adopted policy

<No, the area is not under study

<Nothing unanticipated or unusual

<No PDSP

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The project meets none of the criteria listed for approval of a Special GLUP Amendment application per this excerpt from the letter from Aurora Highlands Civic Association sent to the county Nov 21, 2023.

We ask again that this application be rejected, and this process be stopped now.

- We are still awaiting an answer to our letter nearly two years ago, in March 2022 stating our numerous reasons for opposing the project.
- Rear Admiral Chris Paul is still waiting for a response to his numerous concerns about the project and the problems with the Tier 1 LRPC meeting.
- We are waiting for a response to listed deficiencies in the October 2023 Online Engagement
- We are still awaiting a response to the letter from AHCA President November 21 reiterating the approved planning documents which this proposal violates.

Our civic association has spent thousands of volunteer hours reviewing the Melwood proposal and disseminating it to our neighbors. There is a heavy unnecessary burden that this process places on the neighborhood and its unpaid volunteers.

The civic association's overwhelming objection should have been more than enough to stop the application process at Tier 1 last year. This process continues to be extremely divisive and is a departure from Arlington's tradition of ground up, grass roots planning. Worse of all, sadly, the lack of agency afforded us and the lack of communication from the county has negatively impacted our trust in the planning process and county government.