

September 2022

SUBJECT: Langston Boulevard Preliminary Concept Plan of August 2022

Langston CA Presidents,

On August 18, , the County released its [Preliminary Concept Plan for Langston Boulevard](#), updated from the June 2021 versions that showed actual modeling and “visioning” for expansive redevelopment of the entire boulevard west of Rosslyn.

No doubt you’re aware of the initial vision; if not, we recommend you review a host of documents on [our PLB page](#), but especially [ASF’s initial analysis](#), a [short summary of what the plan would produce](#), and [resident comments](#) on the first phase of planning. With key caveats: The areas have been renamed from phase one, so you may have to compare phase one Area 1 with PCP area 2, just check the geography; Area 1 (East Falls Church) and Area 4 (Cherrydale), according to the PCP, need further study, as does part of new Area 4 (the intersection of Military and Langston/Quincy).

The updated August 18 vision – 135 slides, which ASF is still analyzing – outlines effects across the expanse of Arlington development: density, infrastructure such as stormwater and transportation and schools. It does NOT project increased CIP spending nor total population growth that would be enabled with full building, which ASF believes is a critical yardstick for public awareness.

## I. Key Elements of the PCP

**Building Heights/Density.** The PCP shows the following prospective building heights/density.<sup>1</sup> ASF encourages Civic leaders to fully assess true outcomes that will emerge from dozens upon dozens of separate site plans.

- Harrison St. area (Harris Teeter Shopping Center) up to 7 stories;

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<sup>1</sup> The PCP indicates that height allowances may change. One prominent civic activist debunks the staff’s claim the PCP is reducing building heights compared to June 2021 modeling. She reminds that Form-Based Code on parts of Columbia Pike capped buildings at five stories, but we see today much taller structures. This reflects site planning granting bonus density over and above base zoning and overlays. As the Board recently gave itself extreme discretion to add height for affordable housing, ASF expects possibly 10-20% increases via approved site plans on Langston Blvd.

- Up to 15 stories (remains unchanged from earlier drafts; e.g., Spout Run Shopping Center and also north of Langston and east Spout Run in Virginia Highlands which now has 10-story apartments);
- Lee Heights area has “up to” 10 stories to the south of the shops and transitions to 7 stories as far south as 21st St.

**Population Increase.** ASF has not seen any information regarding likely total population that new land use and denser zoning enables.

**Transportation.** The PCP will *reduce* the number of lanes for car traffic along Langston Blvd, and reduce from 6 to 4 lanes the access from Spout Run to Veitch St. The PCP contains extensive walking/biking options along Langston. It projects that increased traffic flows will be “largely offset” by “proposed mobility enhancements (biking/walking). ASF notes that [a 2022 report on a 2017/2018 oversample of Arlington transportation shows only 2% of trips are taken on bicycle](#). Despite that green-friendly transportation, ASF projects they will not come close to mitigating ADDED traffic, much less with a narrowed roadway.

We anticipate intense congestion, disruption along streets that will become new feeder routes, and do not believe that gains in air quality we may expect from greater use of low emissions vehicles can be shown to offset either the increased volume of pollutants caused by slowing down traffic, much less the large uptick in daily trips made by more people on fewer lanes. In addition, **VDOT controls Rt. 29/Langston Blvd.** and may take a dim view of the narrowed access to the GW Parkway or other changes that could preclude future evacuation options.

**Stormwater Management.** The plan [infographic](#) boasts “a 10% net reduction in impervious surface.” A civic group notes “the August 2022 [PCP] shows flood mitigation planning on areas that are for the most part privately held land” and has asked if the County plans to use regular budgeting (CIP) funds to acquire easements/land to mitigate runoff. The group further cautions that private investments envisioned in the PCP are notional and do not include engineering details without which no judgment about private stormwater mitigation efficacy can be made.

Arlington’s General Land Use Plan and attendant bonus density given to developers through zoning lack mechanisms to cover major systems such as those now required to manage stormwater. Indeed, the courts have decided that developers need not provide community benefits beyond the site or its adjacent perimeter. When site plans *are offered* to address minor stormwater needs, residents have opted instead for other benefits, making infrastructure goals more remote. Developers might have an option to contribute to a common utility “fund” rather than to build the desired infrastructure, but as with affordable housing, the funds they contribute would not cover full costs so the project remains undone.

Indeed, county staff assert outright that private property (or county) investment is UNABLE to address decades of not providing adequate underground conduits; they indicate the only feasible approach available to them now is to moderate the flow into conduits from surface waters. The county approach will address the most vulnerable communities first, such as areas of major 2019 floods in Westover. We understand that over the current CIP 10-year horizon, the county plans to allocate 331\$M million to address this surface water issue. This may by no means be

sufficient, but relying on private development for fully effective storm water management is not only fraught with uncertainty at this point but also fails to address the consequences of higher populations (see below).

**Greenspace, Trees, Impervious Surface.** The Plan [infographic](#) promises 12+ acres of green space. ASF has not yet analyzed these claims. Much of the space in the shopping strip malls is paved now, but the majority of older garden apartments (Wood-Lee Arms, Leckey Gardens, etc.) are surrounded by open space and mature trees which site plans will fill in fully, excepting for small park-lite cutouts. ASF projects, based on similar development seen elsewhere, that these will represent a net loss of green space when developed.

**Affordable Housing.** The infographic notes 1600 affordable housing units “anticipated” by 2040. (We have not yet found any info on the number of market rate apartments that will be redeveloped, and thus lost, as affordable units.) ASF is certain that the 1,307 market rate affordables identified as part of the 2021 planning area are threatened, and knows that the county’s efforts elsewhere to provide adequate replacements have come up very short. There are no new solutions offered here; so ASF anticipates no better outcomes, but more gentrification as seen along Columbia Pike and other upzoned locales

## II. Flaws in the Planning Paradigm

Note we did not even mention schools. The county only says that impact will be “monitored to assess ...[future] needs.” This comment illustrates how false reassurances and obfuscation permeate the PCP. The documents are the latest illustration of the Board ceding most of the functions of government to the private developers – and counting on residents to ignore the Potemkin Village irony of Langston Boulevard infill newly imagined as “Green Main Street.” The County ballyhoos that the “draft plan ultimately presented to the Board as part of the final phase of this process (Phase 4) will identify”

- “Community benefits . . . , including sidewalks. . . , undergrounding of utilities, new/improved roadways, public spaces, and stormwater management solutions.”
- “Public projects that should be included in future Capital Improvement Plans to support private development and manage growth;”
- “Areas that are appropriate for increased height and density to provide incentive for developers to contribute the needed improvements, provide other community benefits, and support the . . . goals for affordable housing and sustainable and energy efficient buildings.”
- “Redevelopment is already occurring with no community benefits. [This] is an opportunity to . . . achieve diverse interconnected priorities and results in predictable ways.”

These “deliverables” demonstrate that our government is simply cheerleading for private sector visions. As civic leaders know, community benefits are prospective and can be modified or pulled back, while the density bestowed is eternal. As noted above, community benefits may well not include adequate stormwater improvements, and will not include new school seats, nor major upgrades to transit, all of which are pressing. Historically, community benefits do not ensure delivery or compatibility of the sub-systems they deliver. Each site plan requires intense neighborhood engagement, and we’ve seen increasing frustration with process – as recently as

this month when inputs of three civic associations with regard to Courthouse West were ignored by the Board and the Planning Commission.

The PCP vision will provide even more ammunition for projects that will alter the nature of the corridor, but not at all in ways that are sustainable or desirable---without a lot more analysis and further revision.

**PLB: Time to Call the Bluff.** ASF believes this PCP is devoid of community benefits or real budgeting that will deliver the needs of the population growth it envisions. It is time to stop fairy-tale projections of biking/walking/Ubering to address congestion and to dismiss the yawning need for new schools, new ball fields, public safety and other key community centers. And to address the existential threat posed by climate change.

**We hope you will:**

- Review the PCP for impact on your neighborhoods;
- Attend your area's [engagement session](#) on either September 14, 21, or 22;
- Engage your residents, including those in apartments who often aren't aware of development plans;
- Request a briefing from ASF;
- Give us your feedback;
- Insist on better data (to quantify displacement, school/transportation/other major infrastructure needs such as parks/ public safety, community centers) as well as engineering details on stormwater improvements developers would agree to provide.

**ASF will continue to insist for Plan Langston Boulevard that nothing be approved absent core studies that include, at a minimum:**

- **Scope of full population of maximum approved via new land use and zoning**
- **Analysis of the long-term impacts:**
  1. **on our environment (tree canopy, warming, runoff, air pollution, etc.);**
  2. **on our fiscal position that admits to and incorporates the cost of new services and infrastructure for the added population;**
  3. **on demographics, to analyze whether the development eases growing income inequality and displacement of some of our most diverse populations.**

**Thank you for your attention and your efforts on behalf of a sustainable Arlington.**