

March 19, 2020

Arlington County Board
Ellen Bozman Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd. 22201
Arlington, VA

Madam Chairman, Members of the Board:

Arlingtonians for our Sustainable Future (ASF) (www.ASF-Virginia.com) is a group of concerned residents who want the County to adopt and share with the community more transparent and longer-term planning tools, including a multiyear operating budget used by many jurisdictions of our size and composition. We understand that the County already has a 3- to 5-year operating budget that it uses for "internal purposes." It's time to share it with the public!

We are concerned that Arlington leaders are accelerating growth without considering the full range of consequences, after this board and its predecessors have approved multiple increases in density over the last 15 years, leading to increases in population at the expense of our environment, our sense of community, our mobility, our diversity, and our livability.

Arlington comprises only 26 square miles, some of which is controlled by the federal government. We are the smallest county in the United States. Once we fully pave or develop it, there is no going back. Between 2000 and 2018, Arlington, at 28%, has built more housing units as a percentage of existing stock than Alexandria (18.7%), than the District (16.3%) and more than Fairfax County (15.6%). Yet this board is promoting even more vigorous steps to decrease our green space and add density that will stress and overload our infrastructure, including schools, transportation, water and sewage systems, and parks.

Instead of adding density and removing parking requirements for new developments, instead of pursuing unproven "Missing Middle" strategies, instead

of seeking to reduce tree canopies as part of "Housing Conservation District" policies, we are asking you for novel policies to preserve our sense of community and the natural ecosystem on which we all depend.

One such policy would be for the county to acquire property it could shield from purely market-rate development and the land speculation it promotes. ASF has learned that a 9-acre parcel of land — 6407 Wilson Blvd. (corner of N. McKinley St.) — may be on the verge of sale/transfer and redevelopment. Given the development pressures undeniably spurred by existing allowable density, there is no denying extreme vulnerability of acreage that is still undeveloped. In fact, we note the County Manager in October 2019 provided Arlington Public Schools with options to locate new schools on public parkland, even while this parkland itself is insufficient to serve the current population's recreational needs, much less to meet flood-mitigation/stormwater management needs.

ASF believes that the county could procure the property on Wilson Blvd. (currently owned by the Rouse family trust) as a hedge to help deal with the needs of the 50,000 additional residents who are expected to move here, based upon building plans adopted as of October 2018. In fact, since that date, the County has approved significantly greater allowable density (and low parking ratios that will clog our streets) for *future* and impending redevelopment:

- 1) bonus density for senior-living facilities, approved December 17, 2019;
- 2) bonus density at Crystal City (Metropolitan Park, Crystal Houses), approved December 14, 2019;
- 3) more bonus density for site plan development in exchange for affordable housing contributions, approved December 2019, approved November 16, 2019;
- 4) by-right zoning for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) of up to 750 square feet, on approximately 44% of single-family zoned lots (approved May 18, 2019)

This means we lack adequate plans to accommodate those 50,000 residents, PLUS an *undefined additional number* who will be generated by these newer, increased density policies. Even today, the board will consider adding density to several projects, as it does almost every month, while citizens increasingly grapple with an increasingly overstretched public safety system, burst water and sewer lines as well as road closures, recurrent flooding, undrinkable water, school boundary relocations, overtaxed parkland, and more.

Therefore, ASF requests that the county acquire the Rouse property, by negotiating with the property owner and offering any necessary inducements or incentives, and then consult with key stakeholders countywide to determine the best use of the land. Uses to consider include public parkland, school facilities, an affordable housing land trust or flood mitigation — or a combination of these uses. As one example, the need for more public parkland is urgent based on the April 2019 Public Open Spaces Master Plan (“POPS plan”) that the Arlington County Board [approved](#). The POPS plan includes a commitment to “add at least 30 acres of new public space over the next 10 years.” It has proved an empty promise as no funds are committed, while open/available land disappears.

The county's own Park and Recreation Commission states that, "As the county grows ... the need for open space opportunities, both for casual use and recreation purposes, and for natural resource preservation, continues to grow...." Furthermore, a 2016 Arlington County Civic Federation [report](#) notes that Arlington lags its neighbors in this metric. In 1995, Arlington had 10.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. By 2014 the parkland/population ratio had declined to 7.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. In contrast, Washington, DC, which many would define as more urban, has 13.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents.

Arlington (Profile 2019) [projects](#) that its population will rise from the current 226,400 to well above 270,000 by 2040. Without adding inventory, our ratio of parkland to population will continue to degrade. More people fighting over limited green space creates social tension. As we are seeing with the Covid-19 pandemic, parks are also one of the few outlets for physical and social well-being during crisis. Parkland is but one example; any of the other proposed uses could be equally justified.

What cannot be justified, we believe, is permitting this unique large parcel of undeveloped land to be plopped onto the conveyor belt of the usual zoning and development process, no doubt with "bonus density" and reduced parking requirements thrown into the mix. Indeed, if the county were to pursue its usual course and allow maximum market-based development of the Rouse property, this would add new school populations that cannot be accommodated even with the new school under construction at Reed/Westover.

When will the county recognize that it cannot achieve a balance for its population's needs under current planning parameters? Buy the Rouse property and show that you are there for your residents who believe growth needs to adequately take into account the needs of the people who already live here as well as those of newcomers. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future