



Bluemont Civic Association

Representing Neighborhoods in and around Arlington Traditional School, Lacey Woods Park, Bon Air, Fields Park, Balls Crossing, West Ballston, and all along the former Bluemont Division of the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad

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May 3rd, 2013

The Honorable J. Walter Tejada
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201
Original sent electronically to countyboard@arlingtonva.us

RE: 5101 Wilson Boulevard

Dear Chair Tejada:

Thank you for leading the walkabout of the Bluemont and Bonair neighborhoods this past Sunday. The very large turnout on a rainy day is a demonstration of the spirit of these vibrant residential neighborhoods. As you were able to see, the Bluemont neighborhood is comprised at its core of single-family and other low density housing. Members of the Bluemont Civic Association (BCA) are intent on keeping it this way. Last week, BCA adopted the following official position regarding redevelopment of 5101 Wilson Boulevard (the Safeway Store site):

"The Bluemont neighborhood is overwhelmingly comprised of single-family and other low-density housing. The residents of Bluemont highly value this community characteristic and the lifestyle associated with it."

"The residents of Bluemont have enjoyed and benefited from the location of the Safeway grocery store on Wilson Blvd and strongly support the modernization of that store and the possible addition of additional retail and services to the location. We recognize that a redevelopment of the Safeway property could bring with it additional community benefits such as a coffee shop, new green space or gathering locations, wider and more convenient sidewalks, undergrounded utilities, street trees and/or additional parking."

"Further, the Bluemont Civic Association (BCA) supports the concept of a Westover-like "village center" that is small scale, pedestrian friendly and has a variety of local businesses and restaurants, and for which a re-developed Safeway could be a centerpiece. In this regard, the BCA also supports its existing local businesses."

"With the exception of the edge development along Glebe Road in Ballston, there are currently no commercial buildings above two stories in the Bluemont neighborhood. We believe that a tall commercial building would be out of character in Bluemont, particularly when it is immediately adjacent to single-family residential homes. This point has been emphasized on two recent surveys of Bluemont residents."

"Absent very careful planning, limits and safeguards, a redeveloped Safeway property would bring with it increased density, traffic, parking issues in adjacent residential streets, noise, large trucks on adjoining streets accessing the loading dock and potentially serious traffic and safety concerns with the Arlington Traditional School. These impacts would negatively impact the quality of life in the Bluemont neighborhood."

"Therefore, the BCA objects to redevelopment beyond the existing C-1 zoning classification. The BCA and Bluemont residents look forward to addressing these important issues with Safeway and its chosen developer throughout the redevelopment process."

This official position was established through an extensive, open, well-advertised and well-attended democratic community process, begun in 2010, when volunteers distributed a survey to all households within the BCA's boundaries. This Neighborhood Conservation Plan survey included several questions designed to help gauge residents' comfort level with the potential redevelopment of Bluemont's Safeway and other nearby commercial sites.

After Safeway issued a request-for-proposals (RFP) to developers last spring for 5101 Wilson Blvd., the Bluemont Civic Association undertook an inclusive and thorough process to provide information and solicit feedback from residents on the development parameters Safeway identified in its RFP. The BCA sponsored two well-attended town halls, in June and December 2012, during which Safeway representatives took questions and comments from the community.

At a third neighborhood-wide meeting on April 3, 2013, Safeway and its chosen developer, Mark Silverwood, presented their draft vision for the Bluemont Safeway site and spent over an hour answering community members' questions. In brief, Silverwood-Safeway propose to construct a 57,000 sq ft store with four stories of apartments above and two levels of parking for over 400 cars below. A zoning change, and possible GLUP change, will be required to accommodate the proposed building height of 65 feet, and the 160 or so residential apartments.

The majority of BCA members present at our April 24th meeting voted against any zoning change for the site. This result tracks closely to the 2010 Neighborhood Conservation survey results, and is consistent with the input and feedback expressed by members and residents throughout the process. The message we have received from the neighborhood is loud and clear: Bluemont strongly supports Safeway and the redevelopment of the Safeway store and site, but objects to the scale and density Safeway and Mr. Silverwood are currently proposing.

Now that the BCA has adopted its official position, representatives from our civic association request a meeting as soon as possible with County Board members to discuss this proposed redevelopment. We also request the Board's help in setting up meetings with County staff, Safeway and Mr. Silverwood, to begin what we hope is a fruitful process that results in an outcome that is favorable to all parties.

Thank you very much for your continued leadership, and thank you in advance for your willingness to engage with the Bluemont Civic Association on this issue—one that has tremendous consequences for our community.

Sincerely,

/s/

George Rovder
President

cc:

The Honorable Jay Fisette, Vice Chairman

The Honorable Libby Garvey

The Honorable Mary Hughes Hynes

The Honorable Chris Zimmerman

Silverwood Group

Safeway Corporation

Arlington Traditional School

Neighboring Civic Associations: Waycroft Woodlawn, Dominion Hills, Boulevard Manor, Westover