



An Update to the Bluemont Neighborhood Conservation Plan:
The Commercial Village Center

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INTRODUCTION

The Neighborhood Conservation (NC) Program in Arlington County, Virginia, serves a central role in making neighborhood infrastructure improvements in the county while at the same time fostering opportunities for community involvement for Arlington citizens. This citizen-based approach is a mechanism for enhancing and maintaining areas where residents indicate a desire to achieve an improved neighborhood and to fulfill a broader vision of the modern “urban village” through coordination of public and private endeavors.

An aspect of the NC Program is the Neighborhood Conservation Plan (NC Plan). This document, created by residents to commit to conserve and improve their neighborhood, is occasionally (about every ten years) updated in order to more accurately reflect the changing needs of a neighborhood. NC Plans are reviewed by the Arlington County Planning Commission and accepted by the Arlington County Board.¹ This document is considered in decision making and actions that affect the neighborhood in terms of development and other land use measures.

The Bluemont Neighborhood in Arlington County contacted Urban Affairs and Planning faculty at the Alexandria Campus of Virginia Tech in search of assistance with their commercial core in anticipation of the next NC Plan update. The people spearheading this project included the Bluemont Civic Association executive board as well as other concerned residents. The purpose of this Capstone research was to work with the residents of the Bluemont neighborhood in Arlington County and to provide them with information to be used in updating their 1999 Neighborhood Conservation Plan. While the residents will be working towards updating their entire plan, the scope for this project focuses on the portion of the plan dealing with the main commercial area within Bluemont, on Wilson Boulevard from N. Greenbrier Street to George Mason Drive. See Figure 1 and Figure 3 for area maps.

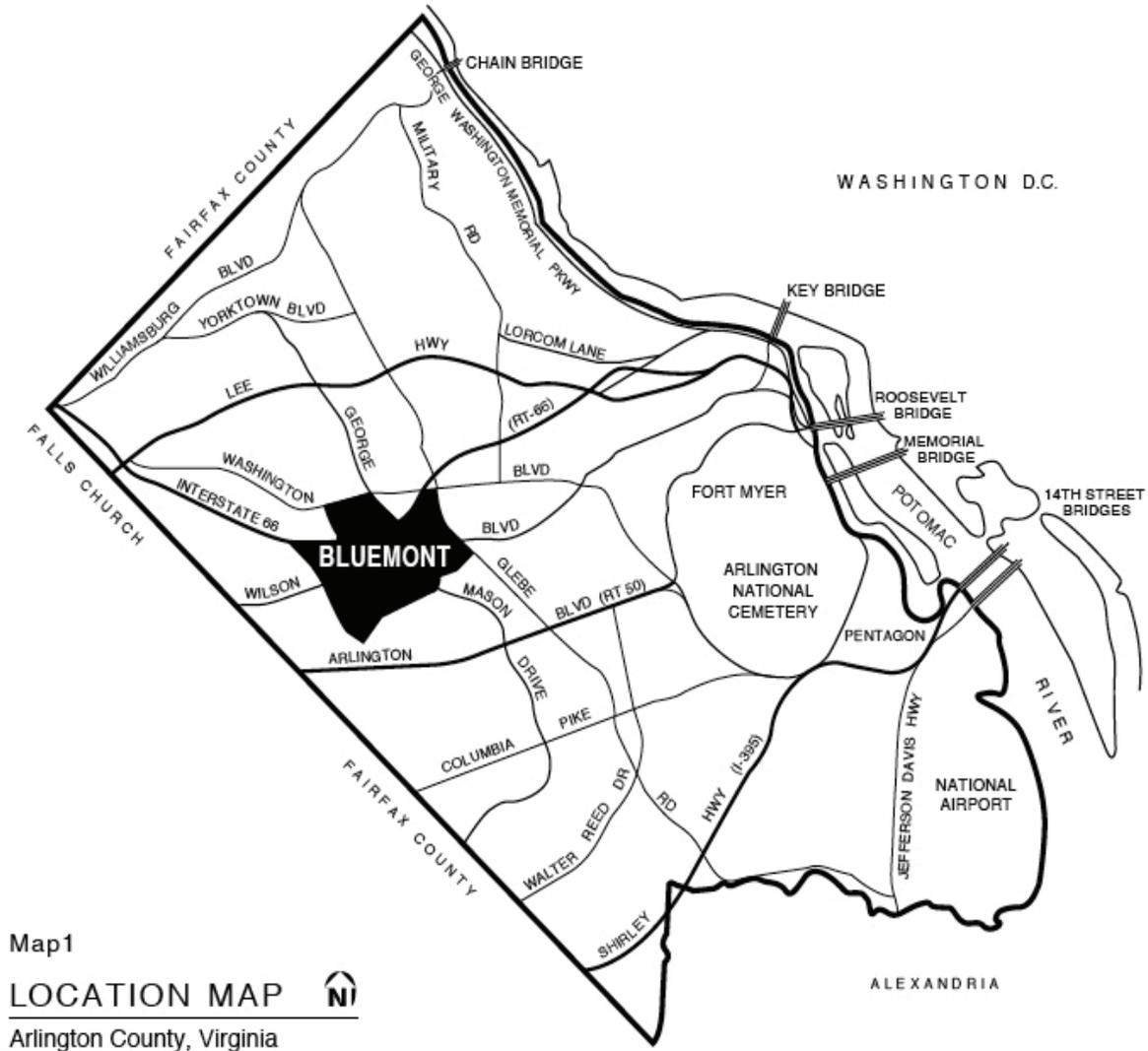
BLUEMONT

Located in west central Arlington County (See Figure 1), the Bluemont neighborhood is generally reflective of the demographics of Arlington County as a whole with a diverse mix of people and places. The 2000 Census population for the Bluemont neighborhood was 5,516 people, an 18 percent increase from the 1990 Census population of 4,657.² Bluemont is a diverse community with 22 percent minority population (Figure 2). Roughly half of the households in Bluemont are made up of “non-family households” and about 20 percent of the households include children according to the 2000 Census (Table 1). Arlington County as a whole is made up of about 45 percent family households and 55 percent non-family households. About 66 percent of the households in Bluemont are 1- or 2-person households (Table 1) and more than 60 percent of the housing units in 2000 were owner-occupied (Table 2). The County’s average household size in 2000 was 2.15 people per household and had 43 percent owner-occupied units and 57 percent renter-occupied units Countywide.

With over 2,000 households in approximately 580 acres, Bluemont is one of the largest neighborhoods in terms of area in Arlington County. It is a vibrant, family-oriented community with neighborhood attractions including gardens, a wetlands refuge, noted schools, historic sites, a university campus, trails and parks. In contrast to neighboring Ballston, ninety percent of

Bluemont’s land is devoted to low-density residential development and parks and other public or semi-public spaces. The remaining 10 percent of Bluemont is made up of commercial development.

Figure 1. Location Map³



The main commercial area (See Figure 3) within the Bluemont neighborhood consists of approximately four blocks along Wilson Boulevard from N. Greenbrier Street to George Mason Drive. This area was the focus of this project research. Surrounded by low-density residential (single-family homes), school, and park uses, the existing commercial corridor consists of a variety of neighborhood-serving retail and service uses as well as some office use. Existing businesses within this area include: two service (gas) stations, several restaurants including a fast food establishment, a Safeway grocery store, and other retail and office uses in relatively older buildings.

The existing commercial area, while a valuable amenity for the Bluemont residents, is made up of many older buildings that the residents would like to see revitalized. While there are some successful business establishments, portions of this area also suffer from transient tenants and run down building structures. The Bluemont residents would like to guide the future redevelopment of the area to include more and varied uses, a cohesive design character, and a vibrant, energetic atmosphere that better reflects the character of Bluemont as a whole.

Figure 2. Bluemont Race Distribution (2000 Census)⁴

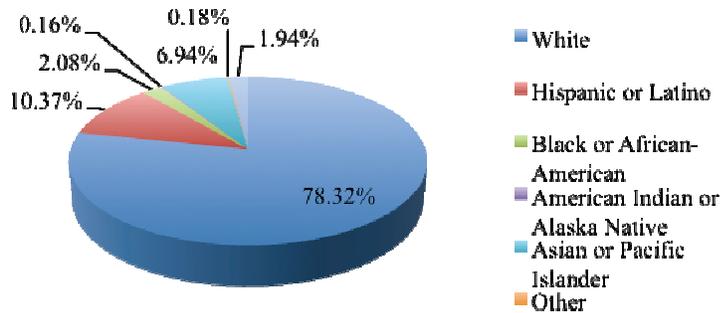


Table 1. Bluemont Household Information (2000 Census)⁵

TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	2,316	
FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS		
Married Couples with Children	420	18.13%
Married Couples without Children	610	26.34%
Female Single Parent Households	57	2.46%
Other Family Households	145	6.26%
NON-FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS	1,084	46.80%
HOUSEHOLD SIZE		
1-Person Households	668	28.80%
2-Person Households	845	36.50%
3-Person Households	370	16.00%
4+ Person Households	433	18.70%

Table 2. Bluemont Housing Unit Distribution (2000 Census)⁶

TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS	2,373	
Owner-Occupied	1,480	62.37%
Renter-Occupied	836	35.23%
Vacant Housing Units	57	2.40%

Figure 3. Neighborhood Map⁷



SCOPE

The goal of this research was to collaborate with the residents of Bluemont in updating their Neighborhood Conservation (NC) Plan. Specifically, the portion of the plan dealing with the commercial corridor (the Village Center) along Wilson Boulevard will be updated to include the residents' vision for this area of their neighborhood. By utilizing several research methods including case studies, and a brainstorming session (design forum), the end result of this research was a set of recommendations and conceptual land use maps for the future development of the Bluemont Village Center that is representative of the desires of the area residents. These recommendations do not include any market analysis nor has a study been done on the economic feasibility of the proposed recommendations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Literature reviewed for this project included texts on neighborhood planning as well as resources describing physical design including New Urbanism, Main Street design, and design elements that establish a sense of place.

Neighborhood Planning

Neighborhood planning is “responsive to local problems, increase[s] citizen participation, improve[s] physical conditions and public services, increase[s] local interactions and sense of

community, foster[s] social integration, increase[s] trust in local government, and bring[s] about a more equitable distribution of public goods”.⁸ Neighborhood plans generally provide recommendations as written statements (plan language) as well as maps that depict the desired future conditions for a neighborhood.⁹

Neighborhood plans are usually created for several interrelated reasons:¹⁰

- As a guide for future development in the area based on shared visions.
- To identify improvements that may be needed in the neighborhood.
- To give weight to residents’ arguments when projects inconsistent with the neighborhood plan are proposed by developers.
- To justify requests or proposals to the jurisdiction for services or funding.

Additionally, there are other benefits of neighborhood planning that can be referred to as “community development. These benefits include “increased citizen involvement, the development of leadership among the residents, and an increase in knowledge about and commitment to the neighborhood.”¹¹

Neighborhood planning should aim to be a fully democratic process with many of the residents and stakeholders directly involved in the decision-making.¹² There are generally three critical methods of participation: outreach, data-gathering, and actual participation. Outreach participation methods include personal contact, media, and utilizing existing organizations such as the neighborhood civic association. Data-gathering methods are used to obtain information about people and the neighborhood. These include surveys, interviews, direct observation and walking tours. Participation methods include large community meetings, smaller focus group meetings and workshops. Workshops include a large variety of participation techniques where interaction is fostered and discussion can occur. Examples of workshops include design charettes, debates, and brainstorming sessions.

Physical Design

The physical design of a place helps to affirm an identity associated with a specific location.¹³ Urban design “is no more and no less than the design in three dimensions of the public infrastructure of the city and its relationship to the natural environment. Urban design is the intersection of architecture and planning, and one of its main foci is the way buildings relate to each other to create the public domain of cities, towns and villages.”¹⁴ Catherine Johnson states, “in America, the street is our preeminent form of public space and Main Street is our preeminent type of street. Buildings meet the sidewalk edge, forming a wall that gives Main Street the feeling of an outdoor room. Ample sidewalks give pedestrians equity with automobiles. People can live and work in the upper stories above the shopping.”¹⁵

The physical elements of a place, buildings, landscaping, public art, pedestrian environments, and gateways that indicate entering a new or different place, all strengthen a person’s sense of place.¹⁶ The built environment of a specific place should have distinctiveness that makes it unique. Different physical elements as described by Kevin Lynch (see below) can help to define such a space. As Timothy Beatley states in *Native to Nowhere*, “place is an essential element in all human existence and living: all lives are lived in relation to actual, physical places, and thinking about what constitutes a good and healthy place is an important undertaking.”¹⁷

There is a lot of planning literature available pertaining to what makes good urban design and placemaking. Specific design elements from New Urbanism, Main Street, and Kevin Lynch were reviewed in order to provide background sources on physical design elements that make up a successful community or development. These examples were chosen because their application can be seen in the case study examples that were studied for this project. Many of these elements were expressed by Bluemont residents as characteristics of nearby areas that they enjoyed.

New Urbanism

The Congress for the New Urbanism states that: “A growing movement, New Urbanism recognizes walkable, human-scaled neighborhoods as the building blocks of sustainable communities and regions.”¹⁸ The characteristics of New Urbanist design (also called Neo-Traditional design) aims to recreate the best of old-fashioned towns and cities in the development of new places. The neighborhood should be “limited in physical size, with a well-defined edge and a focused center.”¹⁹

New Urbanism includes the following design elements:²⁰

- Mix of housing types
- Cars hidden from view
- Narrow streets with pedestrian-friendly streetscapes
- Walkability
- Public open space
- Mixed-use development – commercial, residential, and office uses
- A discernable center – public square, transit center, etc.

Main Street

The National Main Street Center²¹ of the National Trust for Historic Preservation has published *Guiding Design on Main Street: The Professional’s Manual for Managing Design*, which discusses building design in traditional commercial downtowns and neighborhood business districts. Included in the Building Design Section is guidance on the critical components for making new buildings compatible with the existing environment:²²

- Building height, scale and proportion
- Building orientation, setback, spacing and site coverage
- Façade proportions and window patterns
- Size, shape and proportions of entrances, porches, and awnings
- Materials, textures, colors, details, roof shapes

Compatible design should also include landscaping, streets, sidewalks and public spaces, which help to define the overall physical character and appearance of the commercial district. Three major purposes of including public improvements to a neighborhood commercial district are as follows:²³

1. *Public improvements should support the functions that take place within the district.*
Public improvements in the commercial district should facilitate pedestrian and vehicular

circulation as well as provide for multi-modal transportation options such as bus service and bicycle paths.

2. *Public improvements must be properly maintained to help create a pleasant environment.* The physical appearance of the commercial center conveys a message about the value of the area.
3. *Public improvements should provide orientation.* These improvements include well-placed signage, maps, and other orientation devices.

The design should also address landscaping, paving materials for streets, parking lots and sidewalks, street furniture, lighting and signage.²⁴ Utilizing different paving materials (hardscape) can provide an aesthetic appeal as well as increase awareness of pedestrian or other designated areas for the users of the space. Street furniture, including benches, plants, fountains and other elements found in public spaces help make a neighborhood business district a safe, enjoyable place. Lighting can help to create a safe and pleasant environment and signage can provide way finding or help to identify the space. Good landscaping also contributes to the visual quality of the environment and can create visual interest and beauty to a space and may encourage users of the neighborhood commercial district to also utilize the space for recreational activities.

Sense of Place

As described by Lynch and Hack, people look for a “landscape, technically organized so that its parts work together, but perceptually coherent as well, one whose visual image is congruent with its life and action.”²⁵ While there have been many different styles in site design over the years, there are five key elements of cities (and communities) as defined by Kevin Lynch: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks.²⁶

Paths (including streets) are a significant element of community design. When well planned, street networks can provide efficient, easy to navigate routes for automobiles and other transportation means. While there are numerous street configurations (radial, grid, etc.) that can be used, an important element for successful city design would be to provide more than one option of transportation of its residents. Well-designed roads are important not only for automobiles, but also for public transportation vehicles such as buses and shuttles. In incorporating other means of travel, bike lanes along roads as well as sidewalks would provide for an ideal community path network. Besides major roads and avenues, smaller scale neighborhood streets and the accompanied sidewalks allows for casual public contact, which can foster a sense of community. As Jane Jacobs wrote: “The sum of such casual public contact at a local level ... is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need.”²⁷ This level of trust among neighbors allows for the building of relationships and a communal identity that ties a person to a place.

Edges in a city or community are the boundaries between areas. Examples of edges include streams, rivers and other bodies of water and roads, which are also a path. Edges help to delineate communities from one another but sometimes also isolate them. Depending on the scale of the edge, it can become a focal point for a community and even a place to gather.

Districts are the larger areas that have a common character that an “observer can mentally go

inside of.”²⁸ Districts each have their own characteristics that differentiate them from others. These characteristics can include visible elements such as building architecture or style or they can be characteristics of the people who live there such as different ethnic or cultural communities. Examples include Chinatown in New York City or artists or musician communities.

Nodes are typically at the junction point of paths, but are also focal points in a community that can vary in size. Examples of nodes include transit stops (bus, subway, train) as well as the famous Italian node, the Piazza San Marco in Venice. The Piazza San Marco is a discernable node and is recognizable by many people, even those who have never been there.

Landmarks are physical elements that can be used as a frame of reference in a community. Oftentimes directions are given in relation to landmarks and in a city like Washington, D.C., the monuments are very obvious landmarks. The key physical characteristic of landmarks is that they are unique and singular, and therefore they stand out in the midst of everything else. Landmarks can also be significant buildings such as a large shopping mall or a community center. Landmarks are sometimes given spatial prominence and are set up to contrast surround elements or structures.

A successfully designed community should incorporate all of these elements. Residents and observers alike should be able to recognize the key features of a city and through these physical characteristics, differentiate one city from another. In today’s mass produced communities, these elements are often absent. “This is ... why a subdivision in Moline, Illinois, has the same dreary look as a subdivision in Burlington, Vermont.”²⁹

Physical Design of Bluemont

The existing Bluemont commercial area has several of the discussed physical design characteristics. The main path through the area, Wilson Boulevard, is designed to be a pedestrian friendly street, but falls short of being a truly walkable street due to varying sidewalk widths and placement. In the perimeter of this area is an existing bicycle trail and open green space, but these areas are not destinations for residents or visitors and would not be considered a node. The scale of the existing commercial area is in line with the surrounding residential neighborhood in that the buildings are of appropriate height and proportion. The existing Safeway grocery store and parking lot provide an amenity for residents; however, the building itself is older and run down and the large parking lot is not well maintained. Some of the buildings in this area are an eyesore and do not have aesthetically pleasing facades. There are really no landmarks in this area and nothing to really distinguish the commercial district as such.

RESEARCH METHODS

Several research and participation methods were used in order to gauge the interest and vision of the residents of Bluemont for the future development of the commercial district. The research methods used include case studies, a brainstorming session (design forum), and a survey. Case studies depicting “village center” design were presented at the design forum in order to promote discussion. A brief survey was also distributed during the design forum.

Participation Process

Upon meeting the executive members of the Bluemont Civic Association (BCA), the scope of the project was introduced to the residents of Bluemont at BCA monthly meetings as well as in the quarterly neighborhood newsletter. Several site visits were made to the Bluemont commercial district and the site was walked with several residents in order to get a general impression of the area. Additionally, fliers advertising the design forum were distributed to the residents as well as posted throughout the neighborhood. (See Appendix A for the flier).

Case Studies

Case studies of local Main Street and urban village design examples were prepared for this project. Design elements described in the reviewed literature as well as by Bluemont residents were sought out and visuals of these elements were presented to residents during the design forum. The residents have indicated several areas located in close proximity to Bluemont that they believe exude a unified sense of place. The places included in the case study research are:

Del Ray in Alexandria, VA
City of Falls Church, VA
Old Town Alexandria, VA
Shirlington in Arlington, VA
Westover in Arlington, VA

Del Ray

Founded as the “Town of Potomac” in the late 1890s and early 1900s, the Del Ray neighborhood, in present day Alexandria, Virginia, has a mix of housing stock as well as commercial activities centered on Mount Vernon Avenue, Del Ray’s “Main Street”.³⁰ Boasting a slogan, “Where Main Street Still Exists”, Mount Vernon Avenue is home to many unique shops and businesses as well as numerous community-wide events held every year.³¹ Additionally, Del Ray also has a Saturday farmer’s market located along Main Street. Del Ray is approximately seven miles southeast of Bluemont.

Falls Church

The City of Falls Church, Virginia is located approximately 3.5 miles to the west of Bluemont. The “City Center” area of is centered on the intersection of Maple Avenue and Broad Street, two major roads in the city. The housing in the area consists of older detached homes built in the 1940s and 1950s as well as many newer townhouse and mid-rise condominium developments. The area on Broad Street to either side of Maple Avenue has a commercial strip of locally owned shops, restaurants, and offices and further west on Broad Street are several multi-story mixed-use residential developments.

Old Town Alexandria

Old Town Alexandria is a historic neighborhood in the City of Alexandria, Virginia. The heart of Old Town stretches along King Street to the Potomac River and is about nine miles southeast of Bluemont. King Street, Old Town’s “Main Street”, has numerous restaurants, bakeries, gift shops and boutiques in addition to offices housing non-profit organizations and other businesses. There is a mix of both locally owned establishments as well as regional and national chain restaurants and retail stores. The buildings along King Street are generally two or three stories

tall and have retail space occupying the ground floor and office or other uses in the upper stories. The housing stock includes two to three story historic rowhouses from the 1800s as well as high-rise apartments, condominiums, and newer townhouses.

Shirlington

Approximately four miles to the southwest of Bluemont, Shirlington is an “Urban Village” in Arlington County. Originally developed in the 1940s, the Village at Shirlington has been redeveloped within the last ten years with the addition of over 650 housing units (apartments and condominiums), a Harris Teeter grocery store, public library, and theater.³² Campbell Avenue, Shirlington’s “Main Street” is extremely pedestrian friendly and boasts wide sidewalks and an open plaza space.

Westover

Located approximately two miles southeast of Bluemont, the Westover Urban Village is centered on Washington Boulevard in Arlington County. Westover, a mid-century urbanist neighborhood, is on the National Register of Historic Places and boasts a pedestrian friendly commercial area where residents can easily access restaurants, shops, offices, civic space, and public transportation.³³ Constructed in the 1940s, Westover Village is home to many locally owned and operated establishments. In terms of location, commercial area size, housing stock and neighborhood amenities, Westover is the most similar case study example to Bluemont.

From the case studies, unifying elements in these spaces including architectural details, signage, density, building height, and building siting. Also observed was the relationship between vehicles, pedestrians and transit for each of these places, and how they compare to the existing and future conditions of Bluemont. The factors that give these places their unique identity were explored. While physical attributes are easily measured and recorded, the “feeling” that these places evoke is also an important element that will hopefully be captured in the case study research. Visual examples of the land-use and architectural elements of these case studies were valuable in helping the Bluemont residents define the character of their neighborhood and their vision for the future commercial area.

Design Forum

A design forum, a collaborative brainstorming and design effort among stakeholders, was held with interested residents and local business owners to discuss the future of Bluemont’s Village Center. The design forum assumed that all things are possible; rezonings can occur and market forces are not a factor. It also differed from a previous “design charette” that was held with community members (within the last five years) that was more of a presentation from potential developers of the Safeway parcel. Due to some negative reactions to the previous design charette, the brainstorming session for this project was called a “forum”. Additionally, all members of the Bluemont community (residents, business owners, other interested parties) were encouraged and invited to attend the event in order to voice their opinions on the future development of the Bluemont commercial area, which was not necessarily the case with the previous design charette.

The goals of the design forum included the following:

1. Define the community vision and neighborhood character.
2. Identify uses (commercial, retail, office, etc.) that are desired and that will complement the community.
3. Determine how the future of Bluemont's commercial area will look and feel.
4. Describe the ideal relationship between vehicles, pedestrians, and transit within the commercial core.
5. Propose a design that the majority of the residents will support.

The design forum included a presentation of the case studies and graphics of the case study examples were provided so that forum participants could better envision what the physical elements looked like. Specific examples include unifying architectural features and signage, building massing and orientation (for example, business oriented toward the main thoroughfare with parking hidden in the back), open space such as sidewalk cafes and gathering areas, and prominent gateways at the entry to the community or commercial district.

Discussions also occurred to help define the vision and character of the community and to think of ways that this can be portrayed in the land use and the design of the commercial area. Further dialogue included the preferred uses that the residents would like to see in terms of neighborhood serving retail, services, and restaurants, especially as compared to the existing uses in the commercial corridor.

In order to determine future land use design, the design forum participants were separated into six smaller groups (approximately 6-8 people per group), with each group tasked to "design" one block. (See Figure 3) Each group was provided with a large aerial photograph of the existing land use and materials to discuss and to physically re-draw what they would like to see in the future. Building orientation and massing were supposed to be the key outcome of this design exercise as well as potential uses and building heights for the proposed developments. Participants had to consider issues such as parking, pedestrian access, and open space in addition to building design. Ultimately, all of the groups presented their thoughts and ideas about their block designs and discussions ensued.

Items that were addressed as a larger group included the pedestrian connectivity between blocks as well as the connectivity to both the existing trails and parks and to neighboring Ballston. Other design elements discussed include the area's traffic patterns and the residents' needs and wants for transit and other non-vehicle modes of transportation. Additionally, unifying elements such as signage or building façade/frontage recommendations were deliberated upon.

Survey

As a part of Neighborhood Conservation Plan update, a neighborhood-wide survey will be administered from April through May 2010 by the Bluemont Civic Association. The survey will include every household in the neighborhood and will be hand delivered with the quarterly community newsletter. The survey itself will be available both online as well as on paper (See Appendix C). Working with the civic association, a 100% response is the goal. The survey is a part of the Bluemont neighborhood's information gathering efforts and will include questions relating to demographics, income, and other household information. Also included in the survey will be questions regarding the future development of the commercial corridor. Questions about

behavior include how often the residents frequent the commercial area as well as the preferred uses and services that are desired. Development questions such as density and building height will also be included, as will design factors such as parking and pedestrian connectivity.

Since the results of this comprehensive survey will not be available until the summer of 2010, a brief questionnaire (See Appendix B) was handed out to participants during the design forum meeting for the residents to fill out during the course of the evening.

CASE STUDIES: DESIGN ELEMENTS

Key design elements identified at the case study sites (Del Ray, Falls Church, Old Town Alexandria, Shirlington, and Westover) were:

- Mix of uses
- Appropriate building density/height
- Variety of neighborhood servicing uses
- Public/Open spaces
- Pedestrian connections
- Multi-modal transportation
- Cohesive design character
- Community identity

Mix of Uses

An important element in New Urbanist design, many of the case study sites exhibited mixed-use development generally with commercial uses such as retail or restaurants on the ground level and offices or residential use on the upper levels. These types of developments allow residents and employees the ability to live, work, and play in the same area. In addition to the potential variety of uses that can occur in a mixed-use development, by allowing the “stacking” of spaces, potential developers are able to get more leasable square footage for a given building footprint which makes the development opportunities more attractive.



Figure 4. Shirlington
Office over retail/restaurant uses



Figure 5. Old Town Alexandria
Offices over retail uses



**Figure 6. Old Town Alexandria
Residential above grocery store use**



**Figure 7. Falls Church
Offices over Restaurant use**

Appropriate Building Density/Height

The case study sites had varying building densities and heights, but the buildings on the “main streets” were in line with the character of the surrounding neighborhoods, which is a design component discussed in Main Street design. Where the surrounding neighborhoods consisted single-family homes, the higher density mixed-use townhouses or single-story buildings generally buffered developments so that the newer developments could seamlessly blend into the existing neighborhoods.



**Figure 8. Del Ray
2-story buildings in line with surrounding
residential neighborhood**



**Figure 9. Westover
2-story building adjacent to
2-3 story single family homes**

Variety of Neighborhood Serving Uses

A majority of the case study sites had locally-owned retail and restaurant uses as well as smaller shops and offices. In general, there seemed to be a good mix for different uses, but restaurants and other food service establishments were the most popular use in these areas. Other uses included retail shops and offices as well as some service uses.



**Figure 10. Falls Church
Shops including a hardware store**



**Figure 11. Del Ray
Retail uses including a bank**

Public/Open Spaces

Public space, another Main Street design element, in the form of gathering places and open space were a common element in many of the spaces studied. These spaces are also potential nodes of the studied urban villages and can serve as destination locations for the commercial district. These included open courtyard-type spaces in addition to benches and outdoor eating areas.



**Figure 12. Shirlington
Plaza area with benches and landscaping**



**Figure 13. Del Ray
Paved corner used for a farmer's market**



Figure 14. Old Town Alexandria Founders Park on the Potomac



Figure 15. Shirlington Westover Branch public library

Pedestrian Connections

Sidewalks, marked crosswalks and awnings are all design elements that promote pedestrian movement within the case study sites. Many of the sidewalks in the case study sites were very wide which would accommodate outdoor eating spaces in addition to people walking by.



Figure 16. Shirlington Brick Crosswalk



Figure 17. Falls Church Covered walkway in front of restaurant/shops

Multi-modal Transportation

In addition to the pedestrian-friendly access in and around these sites, emphasis is also placed on public transportation by way of shuttle, transit (bus) and metro (rail) services. Additionally, regional bicycle trails are easily accessed from the village centers.

Cohesive Design Character

One of the biggest aspects of the main street designs was cohesive design throughout the site area. Similar building façade treatments as well as consistent design elements across buildings creates a cohesive character for many of the village center areas. Building setbacks also help contribute to a cohesive feeling even with different building facades and designs.



Figure 18. Westover
Similar building facades



Figure 19. Shirlington
Separate awnings hung at the same level



Figure 20. Falls Church
Shared awning



Figure 21. Del Ray
Signs hung at the same level

Community Identity

Establishing a community identity is a vital aspect of the “main streets” that were observed. This was done mostly through signage but also through cohesive design where the buildings appeared complimentary in style and massing.



Figure 21. Old Town Alexandria



Figure 22. Falls Church



Figure 23. Del Ray



Figure 24. Westover Community Bulletin Board



Figure 25. Shirlington Map of Shirlington Village

The following matrix compares the design elements from the case study sites with those presented in the reviewed literature. Also included is the existing site condition of the Bluemont commercial area, as it exists today. Housing mix refers to those communities with 2 or more different types of housing (single-family, town/rowhouses, apartments, condominiums). Mix of uses indicates those developments with multi-story buildings with complimentary uses. Hidden cars indicates the absence of large parking lots viewable from the main thoroughfare. Walkability includes the presence of marked crosswalks, easily accessible sidewalks, and obvious pedestrian connections to the buildings. Transportation includes access to public transit (metro, bus) as well as infrastructure for bicycles, automobiles, and pedestrians. Building façade proportions and entrances & awnings indicates that there is a cohesive design for the building frontages and identifying details include community marking and signs (flags, banners, posted signs).

Table 3. Design Element Matrix

Design Element	Old Town Alexandria	Del Ray	Falls Church	Shirlington	Westover	Bluemont
Housing mix	X		X	X	X	X
Mix of uses	X	X	X	X	X	
Variety of uses	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hidden cars	X	X	X	X		
Narrow streets	X	X				
Walkability	X	X	X	X		X
Transportation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Public/open spaces	X	X		X	X	X
Discernable center	X			X		
Building density	X	X		X	X	X
Building orientation	X	X	X	X		
Façade proportions	X	X	X	X	X	
Entrances & awnings	X	X	X	X	X	
Identifying details	X	X	X	X	X	X

DESIGN FORUM

A brainstorming session, called a “design forum” was held on February 17, 2010 at 6:00 pm. About 35 neighborhood residents and business owners participated in the discussions. Landowners of the existing commercial area properties were not present. A presentation was made on the area case studies that were prepared. The key design elements of “successful” main streets that were discussed were: mix of uses; appropriate building density; variety of neighborhood servicing uses; public spaces; pedestrian connections/transportation options; cohesive design character; and community identity. Examples of these elements were shown from the following nearby communities: Shirlington, Arlington, Del Ray, Alexandria, Old Town Alexandria, City of Falls Church, and Westover, Arlington.

The design forum participants formed six groups and each group focused on one “block” of the commercial area as shown in Figure 26. Each group was encouraged to discuss its parcel and to “design” the future layout of the space on tracing paper over an aerial map as well as to take notes on their vision for its space. After the individual group discussions, each “block” presented to the rest of the participants and questions and further discussions occurred.

Each group was tasked with the following:

- Describe your vision for this parcel.
- What kind of space/place would you like to see here in the future?
- What features or characteristics are important to include in the future village center?

Figure 26. Bluemont Village Center Blocks³⁴



Block A

The majority of this block is currently residential properties (townhouses) with some commercial use to the south and southeast of the block. The commercial uses include offices in townhouse-

like buildings as well as a gas/service station (Texaco). The townhouses and offices on this block are relatively new compared to the rest of the Bluemont Village Center. Potential redevelopment in this area would most likely not affect this block since the buildings are denser than the surrounding neighborhood (single-family homes). The Texaco gas and service station is considered by many residents to be a key business in the community. Many of the residents would like to see this use remain with any possible redevelopment of this block.



Figure 27. Existing Texaco Station



Figure 28. Offices Facing Wilson Blvd.

Block B

This existing use on this site is a grocery store (Safeway). As it is rather large, single-owner property, the likelihood is high that this site will be the first in the village center to be redeveloped. Residents have voiced very strong opinions about the future of this block including the point that they would very much like to keep a grocery store use on this property. Residents at the design forum opined that they would like to see mixed-use development on this block with a grocery store and other restaurant or retail uses on the ground levels and offices or housing above with the buildings set closer to the street (Wilson Boulevard). It was suggested during the design forum that this block be the location for an underground parking garage that would serve the entire village center. Due to its central location, design forum participants also suggested that this site have some public or green space as well. One concern was brought up about screening the adjacent residences on N. Frederick Street and N. Edison Street from any proposed development. The idea of having a townhouse buffer between the any new development and the existing single-family homes was brought up.



Figure 29. Safeway Grocery Store



Figure 30. Safeway Parking Lot

Block C

Block C is made up of retail and restaurant uses. On the east side of the property is a McDonald's fast food establishment and on the west side is a building with several tenants including locally-owned (non-chain) restaurants as well as a nail salon and barber. To the north of this block is Arlington Traditional School, a public elementary school. Existing parking and pedestrian accessibility on this site was something that residents would like to see improved. Residents would like to see more neighborhood serving retail and services in this block with any future development.



Figure 29. Small Strip Center



Figure 31. Existing McDonald's

Block D

This southwestern block currently has a veterinarian office as well as a dry cleaner, restaurant, and office space. On the eastern portion of this block, on the east side of N. Florida Street, is a watch repair shop and an insurance office. Participants in this group spoke about wanting to keep the "historic" character of this block, but would like to see more community serving uses such as a bike shop and a bank. They expressed interest in including more architecturally interesting buildings with a maximum of 2 stories in terms of building height. Adding landscaping was also a priority for the residents since much of the existing site area is currently paved.



Figure 32. Ballston Animal Hospital



Figure 33. Cleaner's and Restaurant



Figure 34. Existing Offices



Figure 35. Insurance Office

Block E

Block E, bounded by North Frederick and North Emerson Streets is a single-owner parcel that currently has a two-story office/commercial building that houses the Federal Lock and Safe Company. The participants in this group designed for this entire block as a completely new development. They would like to see mixed-use development on this lot built at the road (Wilson Blvd.) with residential uses on the upper floor. It was also mentioned that since the bike trail is located on the southern border of this block to incorporate some sort of green space and other amenities to make this block a “destination” within the Bluemont village center.



Figure 36, 37. Federal Lock and Safe Building

Block F

The southeastern gateway to the Bluemont village center, Block F has several buildings and uses including a 7-Eleven convenient store, and a three-tenant strip center adjoining a gas/service station (BP). The existing strip center currently has two restaurant uses and a small butcher/grocery shop. There is an existing bike path on the southern border of this block that participants discussed making a focus point for this block. The residents would like to see the existing gas/service station at the eastern most point of the block be redeveloped into green space serving as a gateway into the Bluemont Village Center. Preferred future uses include local restaurants or cafes and other neighborhood serving retail. Ideally this block will also have mixed use development built out to the outer limits of the block with an inner courtyard for pedestrian access.



Figure 38. 7-Eleven Store



Figure 39. Three-Tenant Strip



Figure 40. BP Service Station



Figure 41. Bike Trail

The results of the design forum were land use concepts, but not designs. Each of the groups presented ideas for uses on their sites as well as their visions for the Village Center as a whole. On the whole, the block visions related to one another; some of the uses that each of the six groups came up with were redundant (several blocks wanted a café or coffee shop), but the participants generally responded positively to one another's ideas.

SURVEY RESULTS

The design forum participants were also asked to fill out a brief questionnaire (Appendix B) about their opinions on the existing village center area. Questions included those about frequented usage as well as characteristics of the area that the residents both liked and those that could be improved. Thirty questionnaires were filled out in some form. Of those who filled in the information, twenty-four participants indicated that they owned property in Bluemont (homeowners) with 15 years being the average number of years that they have lived in Bluemont. One participant indicated on his questionnaire that he was a business owner in the commercial area.

Figure 42 and 43 show the responses obtained from 30 surveys. Many of the participants indicated numerous responses for each of the questions. Additionally, future improvements that survey respondents indicated were:

- Curb appeal (7 respondents)
- Pedestrian friendly (6 respondents)
- Green space (5 respondents)
- Cohesive design (4 respondents)
- Pedestrian safety (3 respondents)
- Diverse retail (2 respondents)
- Façade improvements (2 respondents)
- High quality commerce (2 respondents)
- Traffic calming (2 respondents)

Figure 42. Frequented Uses

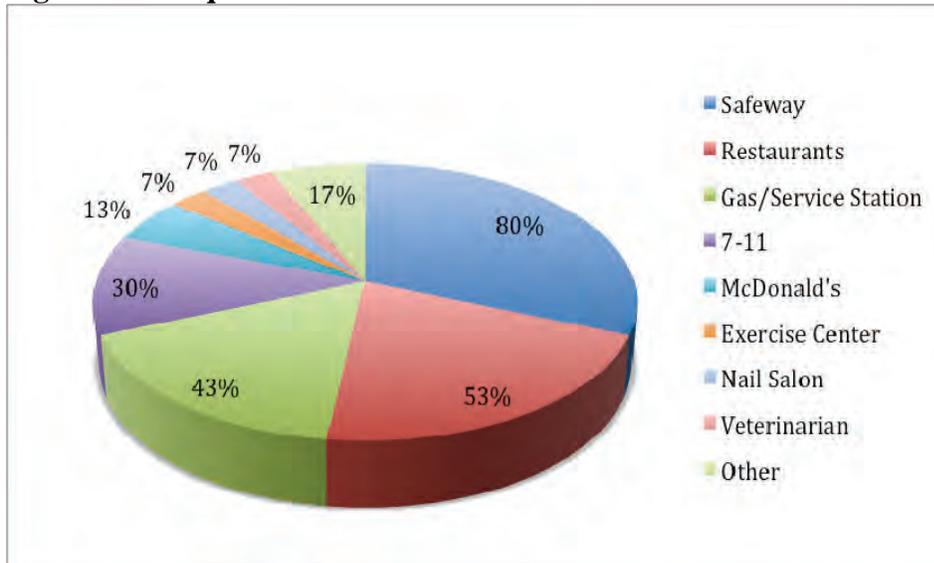
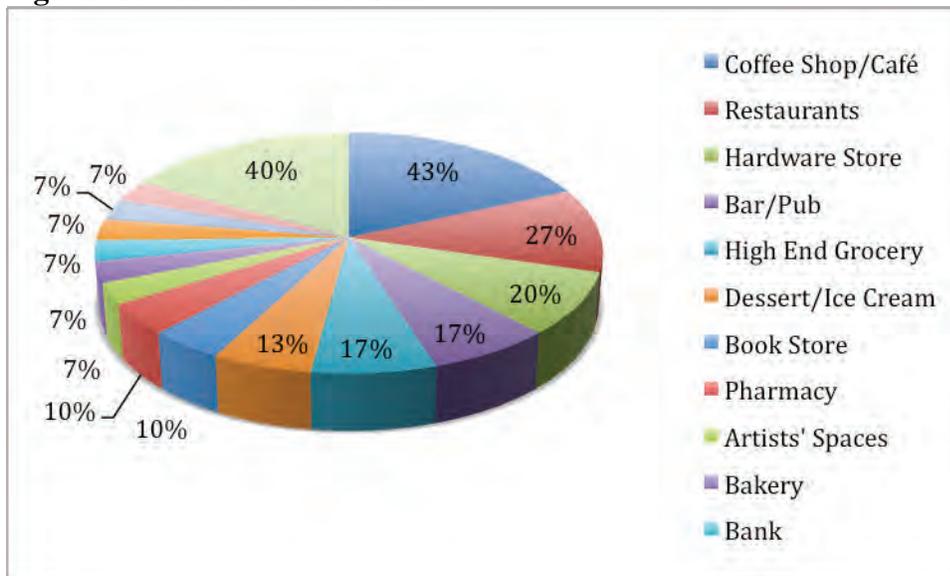


Figure 43. Desired Future Uses



Almost all of the design forum participants frequent the neighborhood grocery store, a Safeway. The next most popular responses for frequently used establishments in the Bluemont commercial area were the restaurants (~75 percent) and gas/service stations (~50 percent). There was a strong consensus that the residents want these uses to stay with any future redevelopment. Other establishments listed include the convenience store (7-11), veterinarian office, nail salon, barbershop, and exercise center. The residents listed features of the existing Bluemont commercial area that they liked. These features included:

- Proximity to Ballston [Metro station] (6 responses)
- Convenience and accessibility [to their homes] (4 responses)
- Variety of establishments (3 responses)

- Low building heights and low density (4 responses)
- Access to bike trails (3 responses)

Future uses that the surveyed residents would like to see in Bluemont include a coffee shop or café (50 percent), neighborhood bar/pub and hardware store (~25 percent), as well as more locally owned restaurants and shops. Green space and/or public space was mentioned by many of the residents who would like to see better landscaping as well as open spaces for people to enjoy and gather.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions from the design forum and the questionnaire results, the following elements are desired for the future Bluemont Village Center:

- Mixed-use (retail/office/residential) up to 3 stories high
- Consolidated parking (underground garage) on the Safeway lot (Block B) to serve the entire Village Center
- Undergrounded utilities
- A large variety of uses including neighborhood serving retail and services; locally-owned (non-chain) restaurants, shops
- Buildings set closer to Wilson Boulevard with wide pedestrian walkways along the entire length of Wilson to promote both pedestrian access as well as open space
- Green and open spaces (parks, benches, courtyards) for residents to gather and for restaurant/café seating; connection with the existing bike trail
- More landscaping both on the parcels but also in the median on Wilson Blvd.
- Sustainable building practices integrated into the land design including stormwater management techniques (green roofs)

Based on the design forum, questionnaire feedback, and the literature reviewed on successful commercial area design, the following maps depict the recommended land use (Figure 44), building density in terms of building height (Figure 45), and phasing (Figure 46) for the Bluemont Village Center.

Overall Village Center Design

The recommended design of the Bluemont Village Center places the focal point at the Safeway Parcel (Block B) which would have the tallest (3-5 stories) building(s) in the area. The proposed buildings in the Village Center should be mixed-use development with retail or commercial uses on the ground level and either residences or offices on the upper level. Wide sidewalk widths (Figure 44, orange shading) would provide for ample pedestrian access as well as accommodate both outdoor seating for restaurants and cafes as well as landscaping (tree pits, raised beds, planters, etc.).

Any re-development in the Wilson Boulevard Corridor should incorporate green building practices and strive for sustainable design. Green and open space is shown on Figure 45 and includes the existing bicycle trail to the southeast as well as proposed plaza and park space. New

buildings should also be reconfigured to face Wilson Boulevard with all parking hidden behind buildings or in garages (Figure 44, parking highlighted in yellow).

Sight defining elements such as lighting and signage should also be incorporated into the Village Center design and building facades should be aesthetically pleasing and cohesive for the Village Center as a whole. Further recommendations are provided for each “Block”.

Block A

The recommendation for this block is to leave it as it currently stands. The majority of this block consists of townhouse development that is not along Wilson Boulevard. The office uses adjacent to Wilson Boulevard are currently located in town-house style office spaces and provide a cohesive appeal for the block. The existing Texaco service station is a use that is supported by many residents and should therefore stay. The sidewalks along the Wilson Boulevard side of this parcel should be consistent with the sidewalks in the Village Center providing pedestrian access as well as housing an underground conduit for buried utilities.

Block B

This block, with the existing Safeway grocery store, would potentially be the first to be redeveloped as it is in Phase 1 at less than 10 years down the line. It is recommended that this block have the tallest mixed-use building with a grocery store use to remain on the lower level(s). Above would be condominiums or apartment residences. Parking on this block should be provided in a garage behind the mixed-use building with 1-2 levels below grade and 2-3 levels above grade. It is also recommended that a green roof design be incorporated into the buildings on this block. Finally, a buffer of three-level townhouse or condominium developments should be placed along the northern border of this property, directly adjacent to the single-family homes in the neighborhood on N. Frederick Street and N. Edison Street. This would provide a transition between the existing neighborhood and the proposed mixed-use development.

Block C

The recommended phasing level for this block at Phase 3 would put development 25+ years away. The layout shown in Figure 45 has a one- to two-story development built to the back of the proposed sidewalk along Wilson Boulevard and a parking lot behind. The uses in this block will most likely remain similar to what currently exists- neighborhood serving retail, restaurants and services. If they are built to the sidewalk, there could be room for outdoor seating.

Block D

Part of the western gateway into the Bluemont Village Center, Block D is very similar in terms of building heights, phasing, and use to Block C with mixed use development facing the road and proposed parking located behind the proposed building.

Block E

Located across from the focal Block B, this block will most likely see development within the next 10-25 years (Phase 2) as the majority of it is currently under one owner (Federal Lock and Safe building). This block would have a large green space (pocket park) at the corner of Wilson and N. Emerson Street. Facing the green space and Wilson would be a mixed-use development building with retail and commercial on the bottom and residences or offices above. Similar to

what is shown on Block B, this parcel will also have a buffer of townhouses facing the adjacent residential neighborhood on N. Florida Street and N. Emerson Street.

Block F

This block is part of the eastern gateway into the Bluemont Village Center. It is recommended that the easternmost corner be green open space connected to the existing bicycle trail.

Hardscape such as benches or a plaza type area may find a home in this location. The proposed building on this site would be stacked with 2-3 stories adjacent to Wilson Boulevard and staggering down to 1-2 stories adjacent to N. Emerson Street and the existing bicycle trail. A courtyard feature is also recommended on this block to provide users of the space access and connectivity to the existing bicycle lane. Parking for this block (and for Block E) would be provided in an underground garage.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

These recommendations are generally in line with what the Bluemont residents have expressed at the design forum and on the questionnaire. There is slight variation in that the recommended building heights have a higher end range (5 stories) as opposed to the most Bluemont residents' wishes that it have a maximum of 3 stories. Another slight difference in the recommendations is with the recommended land uses. Figure 44 depicts more area for residential development as well as parking infrastructure than was discussed during the design forum. Overall, however, the recommendations shown are consistent with the opinions of the majority of the residents that participated in the design forum process.

Since this project process did not include any market studies or land use rezoning feasibility analysis, it is likely that the plans and recommendations as shown will differ from any potential developer's plans. The purpose of this project was to merely represent the residents' vision for the future Bluemont Village Center. Bluemont residents are well aware of the potential redevelopment that may occur within Bluemont Village Center area. In order to obtain all of their desires for this space, there will most likely have to be some sacrifices (mainly building density/height) from the neighborhood in order to provide an incentive to potential land developers. Bearing that in mind, there is opportunity for community members to work with Arlington County and potential developers in order to create a vibrant and sustainable Bluemont Village Center.

The next steps for the Bluemont community would be to update the entire Neighborhood Conservation Plan. In this plan update, residents should include any of the information that has been provided in this report that supports their future vision for a Bluemont Village Center. A more thorough land use plan could be developed by the residents in conjunction with current land owners or potentially with any prospective developers. The Bluemont community should contact Arlington County Planning staff to create a more definitive Bluemont Village Center Plan that would serve as a sector plan or small area plan.

Figure 44. Recommended Land Use for Bluemont Village Center

Legend

- Open Space
- Sidewalks
- Mixed Use
- Surface Parking
- Underground Parking
- Townhouse/
Condominium
- Existing Use



Figure 45. Recommended Building Heights for Bluemont Village Center



Figure 46. Recommended Phasing Plan for Bluemont Village Center



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*All photographs taken by author.

Appendix A

Bluemont Design Forum Flier

BCA

B L U E M O N T C I V I C A S S O C I A T I O N

NEIGHBORHOOD

Bulletin

ENVISION THE FUTURE OF BLUEMONT'S "MAIN STREET"

Bluemont Village Center Design Forum

Saturday, February 6, 2010

10:30 am to 12:30 pm

Arlington Traditional School

855 N. Edison Street.

Use entrance #5 located
on N. George Mason Drive

A second forum will be held
Wednesday, 2/17/10, 7:00 pm,
as part of BCA's February
general membership meeting.

All Bluemont residents, property owners, and business owners are invited to participate in a design forum sponsored by the Bluemont Civic Association (BCA).

BCA's Bluemont Village Center Committee, led by Design Engineer Jane Kim, will discuss and solicit ideas from all stakeholders to assist in creating a community vision to guide the future revitalization of Bluemont's Wilson Boulevard commercial corridor. Input will be incorporated into a design framework for a unified Bluemont Village Center and used to update Bluemont's Neighborhood Conservation Plan.

More information is online at www.bluemontcivic.org.

PLEASE PLAN TO ATTEND THIS IMPORTANT COMMUNITY MEETING!

Appendix B

Design Forum Questionnaire

Bluemont Village Center Design Forum

February 17, 2010

What uses do you frequent in this commercial corridor?

What uses would you like to see in Bluemont's commercial area?

What features of this area do you like?

How do you think this area can be improved?

Describe your ideal Village Center:

Do you: own rent business (circle one)

How many years have you lived/worked in Bluemont?

Appendix C

BCA Neighborhood Conservation Plan Update Survey

B L U E M O N T C I V I C A S S O C I A T I O N

BCA

NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PLAN

Survey

WE NEED YOUR INPUT

For the Bluemont Neighborhood Conservation Plan Update

The Arlington Neighborhood Conservation Program is a County effort where we as residents of Bluemont produce a plan that presents our vision for our neighborhood. Once completed and accepted by the Arlington County Board, the Bluemont Neighborhood Conservation Plan (NCP) is used to guide the County, potential developers, businesses and others to better understand what Bluemont residents believe now and in the future will make our neighborhood livable and lovable. It also encourages their decisions to be consistent with our plan.

Bluemont's original plan was approved by the Arlington County Board in August 1999. (A PDF copy of that plan can be found on the Bluemont Civic Association's (BCA's) Website at http://www.bluemontcivic.org/nc_archive.php#conservation.) At the County's request, the BCA is updating the plan. This new plan will reflect what has been achieved since 1999 and what we would like to have addressed in the future.

This survey is an important step in revising the Bluemont NCP. Your response will help to produce a plan that reflects Bluemont residents' current opinions and wishes. When complete, a proposed plan will be presented to the BCA membership and, if approved, to the Arlington County Board for its acceptance.

The BCA will need assistance in compiling survey results and updating the NCP. If you would like to volunteer to help tabulate the results of this survey or to assist in the writing of the new plan, please contact David Van Wagner at either 703-524-5068 or dpvanwagner@mindspring.com.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS VITAL!

We urge you to complete the survey online at www.bluemontcivic.org. You may also complete this paper survey and bring it to a BCA meeting on April 21 or May 26, or mail it to BCA Survey, PO Box 5134, Arlington VA 22205, by June 1, 2010.

Thank You!

TAKE THIS SURVEY THE EASY WAY AT BLUEMONTCIVIC.ORG

2 | BCA NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PLAN SURVEY

I. GENERAL NEIGHBORHOOD INFORMATION

1. What are the three (3) top attributes or advantages of living in our neighborhood? Please check or list no more than three (3) reasons.

- Convenient to DC
- Close to my work
- Close to retail businesses that I patronize
- Close to public transportation
- Close to parks and recreational areas
- Reputation of schools
- Neighbors
- Amount of green space
- Character of neighborhood as primarily single-family, detached homes
- Neighborhood is safe
- Other

Other

Other

II. LAND USE AND ZONING

1. Do you believe that Bluemont should remain primarily a neighborhood of single-family detached homes?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion

If not, please explain:

2. Is the extent of non-owner-occupied (i.e., rental) housing of concern to you?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion

3. Would you want to allow any land currently zoned as low-density residential to be converted to low/moderate density commercial zoning to allow for more commercial or mixed-use development in the neighborhood?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion

4. In what ways does the new home construction or additions currently occurring in our neighborhood create concerns for you? Please check all that apply.

- No concerns
- Sizes disproportionate with surrounding homes

- Architectural styles do not match surrounding homes
- Site conditions (garbage, dumpster location, building materials)
- Loss of green space/mature tree canopy
- Loss of historic buildings/homes/properties
- Noise
- Drainage/runoff/flooding
- Street damage
- Other

III. BLUEMONT VILLAGE CENTER CONCEPT AND THE WILSON BOULEVARD COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

1. Certain jurisdictions and neighborhoods have welcomed "village center" type development — a development concept calling for a mix of retail, office, residential, and cultural uses in a compact, pedestrian-oriented center — to serve as the focal point for the surrounding residential area. Do you think a village center concept is desirable for Bluemont's commercial corridor (Wilson Boulevard between N. George Mason Drive and N. Greenbrier Street)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion

2. If the BCA were to pursue a village center concept in shaping future development in Bluemont's commercial corridor, how important would each of the following elements of a village center be to you on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important? (circle one number for each item)

	< IMPORTANCE >				
	Not at all			Very	
a. Grocery store	1	2	3	4	5
b. Retail/Restaurants	1	2	3	4	5
c. Professional offices	1	2	3	4	5
d. Residential (located above retail)	1	2	3	4	5
e. Cultural/ Community space	1	2	3	4	5
f. Pedestrian access	1	2	3	4	5
g. On-site parking	1	2	3	4	5
h. Green space/ open space	1	2	3	4	5

continues >

< IMPORTANCE >
Not at all Very

i. Affordable housing (including housing for elderly or disabled) 1 2 3 4 5

j. Pharmacy 1 2 3 4 5

k. Specify _____

3. Thinking more specifically about the make-up of the commercial area, and irrespective of what is already there, what kinds of businesses would you most like to see in our commercial area? (Choose up to five)

- Grocery store
- Pharmacy
- Bank
- Coffee shop
- Florist
- Ethnic food store
- Gas station
- County-owned building/program (e.g., recreation or other facility)
- Auto repair
- Dry cleaner
- Specialty bakery
- Fast food
- Office condos/professional space (e.g., doctor, dentist, lawyer, insurance)
- Independently-owned restaurant
- Chain restaurant
- Video/movie rental store
- General merchandise/hardware (e.g., Ayers-style variety store)
- Ice cream store
- Equipment/truck rental facility
- Bookstore
- Other (describe) _____

4. Village center-style development may not be economically feasible for developers unless they can build modest multi-story buildings combined with street-level retail space and upper-story

office and/or residential space. If this were the case, would you support a village center redevelopment concept for Bluemont's commercial corridor?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion

5. What use(s) would you prefer for the upper stories of such buildings? (check all that are applicable)

- Office
- Residential
- Additional Retail or Service
- Not sure/No opinion

6. What is the maximum number of stories that you would consider acceptable within any such village center design?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- More than 5

7. Regardless of building height, which type(s) of parking permitted by the County for this type of development would you prefer? (choose one answer)

- At grade behind village center buildings
- Below ground
- Street parking combined with at-grade or below-ground parking

8. Is retaining some or all of the corridor's existing businesses important to you?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion

If yes, please list the businesses you would most want to retain (up to three):

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

IV. STREETS, TRANSPORTATION, & PARKING

1. Please rate the general condition of the following items in our neighborhood on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent. Since conditions of each of these items can vary from street to street, please provide for each

continues >

4 | BCA NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PLAN SURVEY

item your overall impression of conditions within Bluemont. (circle one number for each item)

	< CONDITION >				
	Very Poor		Excellent		
a. Streets	1	2	3	4	5
b. Lighting on streets	1	2	3	4	5
c. Sidewalks	1	2	3	4	5
d. Bike/walking trails	1	2	3	4	5
e. Curbs	1	2	3	4	5
f. Gutters/drainage	1	2	3	4	5
g. Street cleaning	1	2	3	4	5
h. Snow removal	1	2	3	4	5
i. Bus service	1	2	3	4	5

2. Indicate your opinion of the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5, as indicated in each section. (circle one number for each item)

< **AGREEMENT** >
Strongly disagree | Strongly agree

a. There should be a continuous sidewalk on at least one side of each street in the neighborhood.

1 2 3 4 5

b. There should be a continuous sidewalk on both sides of the streets in the neighborhood.

1 2 3 4 5

c. There are circumstances where sidewalks should NOT be required, such as cul-de-sacs and dead end streets.

1 2 3 4 5

d. The utility lines along Wilson Boulevard should be placed underground (removing the poles) to make the sidewalks more easily passable for pedestrians and the disabled.

1 2 3 4 5

3. Placing utility lines underground can be very expensive. Who should bear the cost of burying utility lines? (check all that are applicable)

- Arlington County taxpayers
- Dominion Virginia Power
- Developers
- Other

< **CONCERN** >

Not at all | Very

4. How concerned are you with cut-through traffic?

1 2 3 4 5

5. How concerned are you about vehicles exceeding speed limits in the neighborhood?

1 2 3 4 5

6. How concerned are you about the general volume of traffic on the arterial streets (Wilson Boulevard, George Mason Drive, Washington Boulevard, and Carlin Springs Road)?

1 2 3 4 5

7. For each method to control vehicle speed and improve pedestrian safety, indicate the extent to which you favor that approach. (circle one)

< **FAVOR** >
Strongly opposed | Strongly in favor

a. Aggressive enforcement of traffic laws

1 2 3 4 5

b. Increased fines for speeding

1 2 3 4 5

c. Lower speed limits

1 2 3 4 5

d. Road "diet" / lane or lane-width reduction

1 2 3 4 5

e. Four-way stops

1 2 3 4 5

f. Speed bumps

1 2 3 4 5

g. Traffic circles

1 2 3 4 5

h. Raised crosswalks

1 2 3 4 5

i. One-way streets

1 2 3 4 5

j. Nubs/Curb extensions

1 2 3 4 5

k. Restricted turns during rush hour

1 2 3 4 5

l. Mobile electronic speed indicators

1 2 3 4 5

m. Restrictions on truck traffic

1 2 3 4 5

Other methods, please explain:

8. Would you be more likely to use public transportation (including Metro rail) if bus service along Bluemont's major arteries (i.e., Wilson Blvd.,

continues >

Washington Blvd., George Mason Dr., and Carlin Springs Rd.) operated on a more frequent basis?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion
- Not applicable—I already use buses and will continue to do so

9. Would you be more likely to ride your bike to work or to run errands if Bluemont's major arteries included a dedicated bike lane?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion
- Not applicable—I already ride a bike for these purposes and will continue to do so

10. Please indicate your level of concern for each of the following (circle one number for each item, where 1 means the matter is not a concern and 5 means the matter is a big concern):

	<	CONCERN			>
	Not at all				Big
a. Availability of on-street parking for my own vehicles	1	2	3	4	5
b. Availability of on-street parking for guests	1	2	3	4	5
c. Blocked fire hydrants	1	2	3	4	5
d. Multicar households using street parking	1	2	3	4	5
e. Effectiveness of parking enforcement	1	2	3	4	5
f. Adequacy of zoned-parking or time restrictions	1	2	3	4	5
g. Restaurant, retail, or apartment building parking overflow onto residential streets	1	2	3	4	5

Please specify any other concern(s):

11. Even though the residential parking/zoned parking permit system includes an annual fee for residents to use street parking, do you support zoned parking to discourage commuters or others from over-utilizing limited street parking on residential streets?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure/No opinion

12. If you are concerned about a street, transportation or parking problem in a particular area, please identify the problem and the specific street address where it occurs:

V. PARKS AND RECREATION

1. About how often does your family use the following neighborhood parks? (check one for each park/trail)

- a. Bluemont Park
- 4 or more times/month
 - 2-3 times/month
 - Less than once/month
 - Never

- b. Bon Air Park/Rose Garden
- 4 or more times/month
 - 2-3 times/month
 - Less than once/month
 - Never

- c. Washington & Old Dominion (W&OD) Trail
- 4 or more times/month
 - 2-3 times/month
 - Less than once/month
 - Never

- d. Lacey Woods Park
- 4 or more times/month
 - 2-3 times/month
 - Less than once/month
 - Never

- e. Fields Park
- 4 or more times/month
 - 2-3 times/month
 - Less than once/month
 - Never

Appendix D

Bluemont Neighborhood Conservation Plan (August 1999)

[Pages 1, 36-37, 46]

ARLINGTON COUNTY VIRGINIA

AUGUST 1999

Bluemont

NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PLAN





Wilson Boulevard Commercial Area

Overview

The Wilson Boulevard commercial area is Bluemont's downtown. Residents generally appreciate Wilson's blend of small businesses, craft shops, and a few chain establishments. But while neighbors don't want to turn the area into a continuation of Ballston, they are also generally supportive of making the Wilson Boulevard commercial area more cohesive, more attractive, and more pedestrian-friendly. In keeping with the urban village concept, aesthetic and access improvements to Wilson's commercial strip could go a long way toward establishing a traditional town center that pulls together the community.

The Wilson Boulevard Commercial Area extends from Glebe Road west to Jefferson Street. It consists of a narrow strip of commercially zoned properties interspersed with apartments, townhouses, and single family homes. The businesses located here are spread out either in single buildings or in buildings housing two to five businesses. The area includes family restaurants, service stations, barber and beauty shops, dry cleaners, a video store, a convenience store, a former printshop and warehouse, a bakery, a funeral home, an electronic appliance repair shop, and professional offices.

There are also a number of businesses within the Wilson Boulevard Commercial Area that are unique. These include a pottery consignment shop, a well-regarded used book store, a leather and shoe

repair shop, a skate board and roller blade shop, a T-shirt and shoe store, an animal hospital, and a commercial door service company. The main centers of commercial activity in this area are the Safeway grocery store and the McDonald's Restaurant at the intersection of Wilson Boulevard and George Mason Drive.

Challenges

Pedestrian Safety. Wilson Boulevard is grossly unsafe for pedestrians. Local businesses and residents suffer as a result. Many residents have noted specifically that after having made one trial walk to the Safeway, they now drive to non-local stores even for small items. Name a pedestrian hazard, and Wilson's got it: speeding traffic; wide, insufficiently marked crossing points; front-of-store diagonal

parking; and sidewalks that are narrow, obstructed and lacking even the most minimal buffer from traffic. In addition to the 105 telephone poles and other obstructions along Wilson Boulevard, there are 50 dips in the sidewalks for driveways and parking lots, not including curb cuts at street intersections. Wilson Boulevard's sidewalks are impassable for people with special needs, and are hazardous to anyone else who ventures on them. Crossing Wilson Boulevard is dangerous throughout the neighborhood, though residents think that the crossings at Emerson Street (*by the Safeway*) and by the bus stops near Kensington Street are in particular need of improvements.

Store and Parking Alignment.

Parking is generally restricted to the area directly in front of the

Voices of Bluemont: Wilson Boulevard Commercial Area

Two out of three households responding to the neighborhood conservation plan survey thought local commercial establishments met their daily shopping needs, were clean and well maintained, and made a positive contribution to the community. Still, many people suggested improvements. A sampling of survey comments:

"We're fortunate to have small businesses. Let's support them, not destroy them."

"I go to the Lee/Harrison shopping area because the Wilson area seems dreary and seedy."

"Improve pedestrian and bike access."

"Wilson Boulevard shops are cut off from those residents north of them."

"Storefronts look bad, but the services are good."

"Just plant more trees and gardens."

business storefronts. Drivers going in and out of these parking areas can endanger themselves as well as nearby pedestrians, especially if the drivers have to back into traffic on Wilson Boulevard. Front-of-store parking is also a reason the area is generally unattractive.

Appearance. In addition to blocking the path of pedestrians and the sight-lines of drivers, Wilson's Boulevard's forest of telephone poles and utility lines is unsightly. And in a commercial area, appearances count. An almost total lack of landscaping adds to a bleak, uninviting look. There are whole blocks of Wilson Boulevard with no green at all.

The Association understands that at some point the Safeway at Wilson and Edison may be renovated or expanded. Such a project would be an ideal opportunity for owners to make the store more attractive and pedestrian friendly. A renovated Safeway reconfigured on its existing property to allow for behind-store parking, attractive landscaping, and good pedestrian access could serve

as a model for the other businesses of the Wilson Commercial Area.

For all its shortcomings, the Wilson Boulevard Commercial Area is valued as one of the few remaining locations in Arlington County where small businesses, sole proprietors, and crafts-people can still find affordable commercial space. Most neighborhood residents regard Wilson Boulevard as a unique resource that needs to be nurtured, not replaced. Along this line, the Association believes these businesses would become even more of an asset to the community if access were improved and the area given a more inviting look.

Recommendation 32. The County, in partnership with local business owners and the Association, should develop a phased urban village action plan to improve the appearance of the Wilson Boulevard Commercial Area, to enhance vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian access, and to generally encourage the establishment of a traditional town center that pulls together the community. Goals of the plan

should include: burying utility lines using the combined resources of the County, commercial area property owners, and Virginia Power; development of consolidated behind-store parking wherever possible; construction of sidewalks and planting strips on both sides of Wilson Boulevard between Glebe Road and Jefferson Street of sufficient width and design to meet national standards for traditional neighborhood business areas; the addition of trees and other landscaping wherever possible; and the replacement of streetlights with attractive street lamps.

Recommendation 33. Should Safeway company officials decide to renovate or expand the store at Wilson Boulevard and Edison Street, the neighborhood encourages consideration of a new design that is more pedestrian friendly and has more curb appeal. Behind-store parking, attractive landscaping, and welcoming pedestrian walkways should be considered.

Bluemont Remembers

Excerpts from the Arlington County Public Library Oral History Interview in 1989 of Ms. Sarah B. Brugh.

Interviewer: ... We have a map in front of us that shows Stonewall Jackson [school, now Arlington Traditional School]. It's a 1938 map of Arlington County and index of streets and what-not.

Ms. Brugh: The farmhouse was down on Wilson Boulevard right there where McDonald's is now. There was a farm there. Pastures, they had a barn and the pasture was right behind the barn that came up by the school... Then when George Mason [Drive] was built it was on the last addition that they put the principal's office, the nurse's office, the conference room and the gymnasium... When I first came to Arlington, I walked along the cornfield which is now the Stonewall Jackson ballfield playground

Wilson Boulevard Commercial Area

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