

Bluemont Civic Association, General Membership Meeting
September 27, 2006, 7:00 pm
Arlington Traditional School

Call to Order

President Judah dal Cais called the meeting to order at approximately 7:04 pm.

In attendance were Judah dal Cais, Suzanne Sundburg, Sam Ferro, Wendy Dean, Terry Serie, Dan Laredo, Sam Ferro and Lisa Byington. Also in attendance were 9 Bluemont Civic Association members and 5 Bluemont residents who are not BCA members.

Arlington Commission on Transportation

Peter Owen, Chair of the Commission on Transportation, described the Commission's role in Arlington County and some recent developments. The Transportation Commission is a Citizen Advisory Commission that enables citizens to become involved in County affairs and allows the County to tap the expertise of its residents.

The Commission released for public comment a draft revision of the Master Transportation Plan for Arlington County in July 2006. This was the first revision of the Plan in nearly 20 years. After public comments have been received, the revised Master Plan will be submitted to the County Board.

In response to a question from a BCA member, Owen described the work of the County's transportation engineers. They attempt to monitor traffic conditions throughout the County. They also collect input from citizens to learn of problem areas. Owen encouraged residents to call the Transportation Division with any issues or concerns (703.228.6570).

The Commission is also involved in the many redevelopment efforts across Arlington County. It holds informational meetings and hearings during the Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) process to learn of the traffic impact of a proposed redevelopment. The Transportation Commission then provides a recommendation to the County Board on whether a site plan should be approved. The Transportation Commission attempts to resolve traffic issues as early as possible during the SPRC process.

Owen stated his belief that the traffic engineers' studies used by developers are generally not very helpful. Owen believes that it is nearly impossible to predict future traffic patterns or growth, particularly in a county such as Arlington where alternative means of transport (*e.g.*, Metrorail, bus, biking, walking) are readily available. In fact, Owen stated that, despite the extensive redevelopment that has occurred in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor (including Clarendon) causing density to quadruple (and causing planners to predict that traffic levels would increase by 300%), traffic has increased by only 10%. Because predictions are so difficult, Owen believes it is better to focus on ways to encourage people to drive less and take alternative means of transport more. Therefore, during the massive redevelopment efforts in Clarendon, he focused on ensuring safe bikeways and facilities, retail within walking distance of many people's homes, adequate

and safe bus shelters, and ensuring that parking rates are not subsidized and reflect the true cost of real estate in the neighborhood.

In response to a member's question for tips on how BCA should rebut the report of the traffic engineers hired by JBG for the Peck/Staples redevelopment, Owen reminded BCA that neighbors have significantly more ability to challenge development when a change to the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) is proposed. When the development plan is beyond what the County has already determined is acceptable for the neighborhood (as is the case with JBG's proposal for the Peck/Staples site), the County must reassess what is acceptable to the neighborhood. This gives neighbors a lot of ability for input and impact on the County's decision during the SPRC process. In return for any GLUP changes, the neighborhood must insist on really big concessions from the developer.

BCA member Larry Smith asked Owen why a left-turn dedicated light from east-bound Wilson Boulevard onto north-bound Glebe Road hasn't been installed yet. Such a light has been proposed for 5 years, before all the recent redevelopment in Ballston, and the County continues to insist that it will wait until the latest redevelopment proposal (currently, the Peck/Staples site) is completed. [Reader's note: The counsel for JBG reviewed the site plan for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) II building, which is located on the northeast corner of Wilson Boulevard and Glebe Road. JBG's attorney reported that the NRECA II site does not include a requirement to install a left-turn light signal at this intersection, only a requirement to eliminate the free right-hand turn lane from westbound Wilson Blvd.] Owen had no answer, but he suggested the BCA member contact Dennis Leach, the head of Arlington's Transportation Division.

In response to a question from a member about the widening of I-66, Owen stated that widening was not yet a *fait accompli*, but that it is important for residents to speak out at every opportunity for public comment during the planning process. Owen also reminded BCA that Arlington County has no formal role in the project. It is a state initiative, run by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). The County works in an activist capacity, like so many County residents, and remains united in ensuring that the impact to the County is minimized.

President dal Cais thanked Owen for his insights and service to County residents on important transportation issues.

Wilson ATM Plan

Richard Best was scheduled to present the 90% design plan for the Arterial Traffic Management (ATM) project along Wilson Boulevard (between N. Edison and N. Frederick Streets). However, Best was unavailable and will instead speak at the October BCA general membership meeting.

Update on Development Projects

Following Owen's discussion of traffic issues facing Arlington County and Bluemont, President dal Cais issued a call to action to all Bluemont members to get involved in the many redevelopment projects facing the neighborhood.

Glebe 25/Silverwood

President dal Cais cited the success of BCA member Terry Serie and others who were able to generate a lot of citizen involvement and action in expressing concerns about the proposed redevelopment of the Exxon station (in conjunction with a proposed 9-story condominium building) on the west side of Glebe Road at Carlin Springs Road. During the SPRC process for Glebe 25, Serie reported that the County Board members had privately told him that the Board's decision is based largely on the citizen involvement. If a large number of neighbors are involved during the process (*e.g.*, are on the County's "interested parties" list for the project during the SPRC process), the County Board is more likely to question the developer's proposal and demand more concessions for the community. Because 100 neighbors were interested parties and 50 neighbors appeared at the SPRC hearing, the County Board would be compelled to heed neighbors' concerns. [As noted at prior BCA Executive Board meetings, Silverwood is down-sizing its redevelopment plans and will resubmit a smaller site plan proposal to the County.]

Peck/Staples Site

BCA Peck/Staples Site Redevelopment Representative and Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC) Representative Wendy Dean reported that JBG is preparing to file its application to redevelop the Peck/Staples site, and it will probably go to SPRC in about three weeks. President dal Cais restated the need for a large number of BCA residents to attend the SPRC hearings and voice their concerns about the proposal. The more residents who attend the hearings, the more likely the SPRC process will extend over several weeks to ensure that all residents are heard.

BCA member Serie again stated the importance of having a large number of interested parties in the County's records for the site plan. Newsletter Editor Suzanne Sundburg distributed a sign-up sheet for neighbors who want to be included in BCA's interested party list. Serie agreed to notify those neighbors on when and how to sign up for the Arlington County interested party list for the Peck/Staples site plan.

Serie reminded everyone of the precedent that would be set if JBG or any other developer is able to exceed the GLUP density and height restrictions to the west of Glebe Road. If one redevelopment proposal is approved to exceed the GLUP, then more will likely follow, as the County will have little basis on which to deny additional rezoning requests. Dean stated that any redevelopment on the Peck/Staples site affects the entire Bluemont neighborhood, not just those who live closest to the site.

Newsletter Designer Sam Ferro called for BCA to develop a strategic plan to organize all the neighbors and list all of the concerns that the neighborhood has about the Peck/Staples site plan proposal. In addition to traffic, neighbors have concerns about the negative impact on air quality (because of additional cars), aesthetics of having tall office

buildings crowded on top of residential housing, and safety for pedestrians. Serie described the plan that he had used to enlist neighbors in the fight against the Glebe 25 proposal and how he had framed the issues during the SPRC hearings.

Goodyear Site

BCA member Larry Smith asked if anyone heard about the possible redevelopment of the Goodyear site (located on the corner of N. Glebe and Carlin Springs Roads). Smith stated that he had heard someone mention the possibility of a large redevelopment project for that site. While no one present had seen or heard of the project, one member did promise to investigate and help determine whether there is something in the works.

October Newsletter

Newsletter Designer Ferro stated the need for advertisements for the newsletter to be finalized more quickly, at least two weeks prior to the newsletter going to the printer. Newsletter Editor Sundburg stated that articles would need to be submitted a couple of days sooner (*e.g.*, on Wednesdays instead of Fridays) to ensure that the Executive Board members have adequate time to review the draft newsletter and make any changes before printing.

Committee Chair Updates

Secretary's Report

Secretary Lisa Byington distributed minutes from the June membership meeting that had been prepared by former Secretary Laura Kirkconnell before she resigned. A couple of corrections were noted, and the Secretary agreed to amend the minutes accordingly. A motion to approve the minutes, as amended, was made and seconded. The membership voted unanimously to approve the minutes as amended. The final amended minutes are to be distributed to the Executive Board and posted to the BCA website.

NCAC Report

NCAC Representative Dean reported on the unfunded status of many neighborhood conservation projects. A number of projects were funded by bond issues several years ago. However, since then, construction costs have increased, and there are no funds remaining for the outstanding projects. A BCA member reported that the County often under-estimates costs during the bond issuance process, and it also fails to factor inflation (from the time between the bond issuance and when construction commences) into its bond amounts. This causes the projects to be over-budget before construction even begins.

Dean also reported that Arlington County is reconsidering its traffic-calming program. Residents who believe that traffic calming is good for neighborhoods should let the County know. A member asked whether traffic accidents have decreased because of traffic calming. Dean noted that the main goal of traffic calming is to lower speed on residential streets, and it is doubtful that anyone has assembled statistics on traffic accidents before and after traffic calming has been implemented.

The County is also reviewing its infrastructure master plan. All civic associations, including BCA, will be receiving a survey to help them identify the infrastructure projects that are important to the neighborhoods.

Another Candidate's Night has been scheduled for Thursday 10/26 at 7:00 pm at the Reed School.

Old Business

President dal Cais called for a review of old business. There were no motions from the last general membership meeting in June that need to be recorded or discussed.

New Business

President dal Cais called for any new business.

A BCA member reported that she would be requesting that the County install a dedicated right-turn-only lane on south-bound Glebe Road to turn onto west-bound Washington Boulevard.

Another BCA member reported on his efforts to ensure that the County sewer lines do not continue to back up into his basement during heavy rains. The County has indicated that this is a somewhat common problem in the Lubber Run area where bathrooms in the basements are below grade. It is exacerbated by the fact that in-fill housing construction on top of old foundations does not need to comply with the more stringent building code requirements for new construction. The member requested feedback from other BCA members on this issue. Newsletter Editor Sundburg agreed to include a short article in the next newsletter.

Adjournment

President dal Cais adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:50 pm.