

February 5, 2013, Civic Federation Meeting Highlights

Present were delegates Bob Atkins and Suzanne Sundburg and BCA member David Hughes, who has volunteered as a Civic Federation alternate delegate and is awaiting the Executive Board's confirmation.

President James Schroll notified delegates of a proposed change to budget report special rule that governs the annual county budget review meeting in April. Visit <http://civfed.com/home/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Newsletter-2013.2.pdf> (p. 2) to read a copy of the proposed change.

County Board Program

Board members made opening remarks and then answered delegates' questions. Chair Walter Tejada noted that real estate assessments are "flat," hinting that there would be some belt-tightening in the 2014 budget. He listed the following priorities for the board in 2013: 1) affordable housing, 2) 10-year plan to end homelessness, 3) fitness and healthy living, 4) urban agriculture, and 5) pedestrian/cyclist safety.

In response to questions about affordable housing and reduction of homelessness goals, the board blamed "market forces" on the loss of affordable housing. Tejada noted that the board's goals are "aspirational."

In response to a question about how the board might accelerate a west entrance to the Ballston Metro (new funds will be sought in FY2022), the board said that the "best hope" would be for a developer to propose a large project on the site (of the old INS building) and to pay for the needed infrastructure. Barring that, Chris Zimmerman suggested that a surcharge might be charged to riders using the Ballston station to obtain funding and/or Ballston Improvement District (BID) commercial members might be charged an additional tax to raise money.

One questioner expressed concern about the transfer of development rights (TDRs)—over 600,000 sq ft of density—from Long Bridge Park to the Penn Place site (in Crystal City), asking whether the zoning was designed to accommodate TDRs or vice versa. Board member Chris Zimmerman replied that this density transfer is a "tool" that is consistent with the General Land Use Plan (GLUP).

Another delegate asked the board to define what "community" meant with respect to the site plan development term "community benefits" was concerned, as her neighborhood hadn't seen any benefits from recent development and was mystified as to what these "benefits" were and who got them. The board responded that the benefits weren't always obvious and included streetscape improvements, crosswalks, contributions to affordable housing, contributions to the distributed energy plan, public art, transit subsidies, etc.

Members of the board took opposing sides (Libby Garvey on one side, the rest of board members on the other) when answering a question on the Columbia Pike streetcar. Garvey insisting that bus rapid transit should be more thoroughly investigated and that the process should be made more open to allow for public input and debate. Hynes and others insisted that the decision had already been vetted and approved by the commissions and the board and would not be reconsidered. An informational "town hall" on the streetcar will be held on March 27 at Kenmore Middle School.

A delegate living near Lee Highway expressed concern that dense redevelopment was slated for that corridor. Board members said that there was no "plan" but that "some people" are "beginning to look at a better way" for the corridor to be redeveloped. The same questioner asked when the 35-foot height limit on residentially zoned property would actually be something close to 35 feet—complaining about the excessive height of McMansions in her neighborhood. Jay Fisetle replied that height was calculated based on an "average" of the "topography" of the lot.

Homelessness Program

County staff member Tony Turnage gave a presentation on homelessness. In response to multiple questions about outsiders coming to Arlington for housing services, Turnage assured delegates that the county documents residency status by asking for eviction notices or utility bills in the client's name, finding out where clients are obtaining other services (usually, they are getting some other kind of public assistance), determining whether they have children enrolled in Arlington Public Schools, etc. For those living on the streets, county staff must be able to document that the person can be found consistently at a particular outdoor spot in Arlington for at least 90 days and are not collecting public assistance benefits elsewhere. Turnage noted that the rapid rehousing program has been successful in rehousing the chronically homeless, and he asked all present to do more to help reduce the serious problem of homelessness.