# **MINUTES of Bluemont Civic AssociationGENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

# **May 25, 2022**

1. **A Quorum** was established at 7:30 PM.
2. **Minutes** of the April 2022 meeting were approved by unanimous consent.
3. Kate Mattos, Second Vice President and member of the Nominating Committee, gave the **Report of the Nominating Committee.** The slate of nominees is below.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **PRESIDENT** | Henry McFarland |
|  | **FIRST VICE PRESIDENT** | **No candidate** |
|  | **SECOND VICE PRESIDENT** | Matt Harrison |
| **4.** | **SECRETARY** | Laura Kirkconnell |
| **5.** | **TREASURER** | David Smith |
| **6.**  | **CIVIC FEDERATION DELEGATES (4)** | Dave Hughes |
| **7.**  | David Smith |
| **8.** | Allen Norton  |
| **9.**  | Shakti Shukla |
| **10.**  | **NCAC REP (1)** | Nick Pastore |
| **11.** | **CIVIC FEDERATION ALTERNATES (4)** | Christopher George |
| **12.**  | Nick Pastore |
| **13.**  | Dorothy Patton |
| **14.** |  Bruce Leighton |
| **15.** | **NCAC ALTERNATE DELEGATE (1)** | Christopher George |

The President urged members to considering volunteering for the open spot as first vice president, and noted that nominations for First Vice President would be taken from the floor at the June General Membership meeting.

1. Henry McFarland, First Vice President, gave the report of the **Missing Middle Working Group**. The County issued its report from Phase 2 of the Missing Middle Housing Study on May 2. The report, a 30-page power Point presentation, and supporting material is also available on the website:

<https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Housing/Housing-Arlington/Tools/Missing-Middle/Community-Engagement>

That website also offers an opportunity to make comments.

The report recommends changing the zoning standards in neighborhoods now zoned for single-household development (R-5 to R-20 zones) to structures with 2 to 8 units in one single-family lot. These structures would have to fall within the limits on height, setbacks, and lot coverage that apply to single-family homes. The parking requirement would be reduced to one-half (0.5) parking spaces per unit. You could also build townhouses, but only in groups of three.

The working group submitted questions about missing middle to Housing Arlington, the county staffers who are looking at the issue. They were told that responses would be posted on the web site.

The President noted a more extensive discussion of the Recommendations of the Missing Middle Housing Study is planned for our June meeting.

1. **Reports of Officers:** The **President** reviewed information she’d reported in the May email update to members on the letter sent by Bluemont and other civic associations to the Washington Post on the need for more time for public engagement on the **Missing Middle Housing Study** Phase 2 recommendations. She reported that Bluemont is one of several civic associations seeking meetings with County Board members regarding the Missing Middle Housing Study. She reported on an email exchange with the County regarding **follow up work on the feeder stream leading into Four Mile Run near 4th Street, N**. The President reported that the County had completed its first round of public engagement on the future use of athletic courts for **pickleball**, and that the next round of public engagement would include locations for a permanent pickleball court, the criteria to identify existing athletic courts that are candidates for permanent pickleball courts, and identifying an “amenity” to convert to pickleball. The May 25 County announcement is here: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/VAARLINGTON/bulletins/31890fb>

The **First Vice President** reported noted that the Association put in letters of support for County grant requests to both NVTA and NVTC for grants to fund the west entrance.

He said there was nothing new to report on the Macy’s site redevelopment or on the Upper Bluemont Park project.

The Treasurer’s report ion the BCA budget is below:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Previous Total: | $2,269.15  |   |
| Out: | ($125.00) | Newsletter layout fee, Cindy Matlack |
| Out: | ($276.00) | Mail box Fee |
| In: | $140.00  | Dues |
| New Total: | $2,008.15  |   |

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The report recommends changing the zoning standards in neighborhoods now zoned for single-household development (R-5 to R-20 zones) to structures with 2 to 8 units. These structures would have to fall within the limits on height, setbacks, and lot coverage that now apply to single-family homes. The parking requirement would be reduced to one half parking spaces per unit. You could also build townhouses but only in groups of three.

The Working Group submitted questions about missing middle housing to Housing Arlington, the county staffers who are looking at the issue. They were told that responses would be posted on the web site.

The President noted a more extensive discussion of missing middle is planned for our June meeting.

1. **County Board member Takis Karantonis** then spoke. He provided answers to questions sent to him in advance by BCA, and promised written responses to all the submitted questions.

He first discussed various **traffic issues**:

**Questions BCA members had submitted relevant to traffic issues were:**

 (1) Do you have any further updates or views on the joint Bluemont and Arlington Forest resolution regarding N. Carlin Spring Road safety improvements?

(2) With the current 10-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process underway, will the County Board be considering funding for recommendations made by the Bluemont and Arlington Forest neighborhoods?

(3) Does the County’s study of streets with 30 MPH speed limits include sections of Wilson Blvd and N. George Mason Drive that go through Bluemont? If not, could these streets be included in the County study given the danger from vehicles traveling these streets above 30 MPH?

**(4)** Do you have any information about funding under the CIP, or other County programs to improve safety, and reduce speeding and careless turns by drivers at N. Lexington Street and Wilson Blvd?

(5) Our community are grateful for your help in addressing community concerns regarding the Safe Sidewalks to Schools Project along 8th Road N, and N. Lexington Street, and would appreciate any updates on when that project is expected to start, and be completed.

(6) Are there any County efforts underway to address problems with speeding or lack of a pedestrian crossing in this section of N. George Mason Drive?

(7) How could the County address speeding along N. George Mason Drive?

Mr. Karantonis said yes, the Board would be considering funding for improving safety of N. Carlin Springs Road. **North Carlin Springs Road** is a high priority for safety improvements as it is an arterial with three schools, and improving safety along Carlin Springs Road would benefit the whole County. As of March, County staff started a review to see if the intersections on North Carlin Springs Road raised in the Bluemont/Arlington Forest civic associations resolution (2nd Street, N. Jefferson, N. Greenbrier) needed crosswalks. It could take up to 6 months for the review. He hopes the review will be done sooner. Speed limit reductions are generally controversial. He supports them, but staff is now reviewing a proposal looking at all streets with speed limits of 30 mph or higher, which may or may not call for reducing those speed limits. Vision Zero calls for more speed limit enforcement. He said he would get back to us on the Vision Zero survey.

He is holding the issue of a **bike lane on Wilson from Glebe to George Mason** for further discussion.

He said the **North Lexington and Wilson Blvd intersection** is under safety review, having been identified as an injury hotspot under Vision Zero safety effort.

He reported that the **Safe Routes to Schools Sidewalk project at N. Lexington Street and N. 8th Road** is delayed by the need to move a gas main, which should be done in the next few weeks. He said he had left a message with Washington Gas, which usually helps. He said he will be in touch the civic association, and it could be two to three months.

**George Mason Drive** will get more analysis, which will concentrate on the area near the hospital.

He then addressed BCA questions about **stormwater management and flooding risks**.

Questions submitted by BCA were:

(1) Do you support increased funding in the Capital Improvement Plan or from bonds for infrastructure and other projects to reduce stormwater and flooding risks in Bluemont, including flooding risks along Lubber Run as requested of the County in a March 11 letter from the Lubber Run Watershed Group?

(2) Do you support zoning and other regulatory changes to manage stormwater and flooding risks, including addressing stormwater problems on private property caused by development on other properties?

(3)Will the stormwater management team be able to review the planned redevelopment’s potential effect on Lubber Run, and possibilities for controlling storm water from this development?

Mr. Karantonis said the latest ten-year **Capital Improvement Plan** (CIP) has a very high amount for stormwater issues, almost $300 million covering all five watersheds, including Lubber Run. That money is on top of the $200 million the Board has already committed. Stormwater issues are a very high priority. Lubber Run is one of the most affected and in need of infrastructure improvements. The County is using lessons learned from the 2019 flooding, and anticipates more heavy rain events. Many streams were covered in the 1950’s, the County will be mitigating that.

Regarding 4600 Fairfax Drive site process, he said it will have a high standard for mitigating stormwater problems. He referred BCA to his written answer which describes how he is trying to get them to mitigate stormwater as much as possible.

He noted that the ordinance for land disturbance was updated about 18 months ago for single family homes and new buildings, with very tough requirements.

Mr. Karantonis then discussed the **Neighborhood Conservation Program**.

BCA had submitted this question**:**

**(1)** We appreciate your work as the County Board's Liaison to the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC). What is your opinion of the longevity of the Neighborhood Conservation program? Will funding for future projects will continue to be available over the next 5 years?

Mr. Karantonis said the loves the Neighborhood Conservation Plan. He said that thanks to lobbying by civic associations, the new ten-year Capital Improvement Plan will increase Neighborhood Conservation funds by $9 million. $85.2 million is proposed, $64 million from bonds. He said this is a good proposal in the right direction, but he wants a conversation on whether that is enough, and thinks we can go a bit higher given the significant back log in funding NCP projects, and how inflation has affected the program.

Mr. Karantonis then addressed BCA questions about **police enforcement of traffic and other laws**.

BCA questions were:

(1) How serious is the police staffing shortage?

(2) How does the staffing shortage effect police efforts to enforce traffic laws, and protect people from crime?

(3) What is the County doing to address police staffing shortages?

Mr.Karantonis said the **police staffing shortage** is very serious. They want the best officers, but so does everyone. Arlington was not offering enough money, and the culture was not supportive of being a cop. He said he was not alarmed by the temporary increase in crime, but encouraged Bluemont residents to let him know if we have concerns, if there is something that is not okay that needs to be addressed. He said he would send us related statistics.

Mr. Karantonis then answered questions on **taxes**.

BCA’s questions were:

(1) Will you commit to working with the Board to lower the car tax?

(2) Will you commit to working with the Board to lower the property tax rate?

(3) My property taxes have gone up more than 35% since I bought my house in 2015; in dollar terms, the annual tax bill is now $2,000 higher than in 2015. The increase far outpaces the rate of inflation. What will it take for the County Board to end its annual tradition of raising taxes? Why hasn't Arlington's economic growth translated into economies of scale that allow for a reduced tax burden on homeowners?

(4) I am pleased that the County Board voted to eliminate the regressive and unnecessary $33 motor vehicle fee. Will the Board consider eliminating the regressive taxes and fees that were instituted to shore up the budget a few years ago? For example, the $3-per-bill utility tax or the annoying surcharges for paying the County with a credit card?

Mr. Karantonis said that on **car taxes**, the County is trying to keep the car tax at last year’s level as much as they can given the increase in used car values. The County is therefore taxing at a lower percentage of car value for this year only. The County does not want to increase its revenue at the expense of used car owners as long as the market is inflated. He said that if our car tax bill increases, please let him know because he is interested in any outliers affected by a calculation. Please let them know about specific problems with a car tax bill.

The County eliminated the sticker fee.

He said they recognize for people with fixed incomes, the increase in real estate values and thus taxes can be devastating, but they are not planning tax reform. He noted the County’s program offering relief to low-income seniors unable to pay their property tax bills, and said he was always available to talk about it. He said they do not want anyone to lose their home over taxes, especially people who are aging in place. Regarding fees, he said he would have to see how the County uses the fees raised in BCA questions, fees like the utility tax and credit card fees are often dedicated to specific purposes. He said it in the budget to create a new unified system for Arlingtonians to access county government on the web, including an account where you can see everything in a unified system, which will make managing payments less cumbersome.

He noted that our community expects a lot of services. The tax base used to be 50% commercial. In the last 10 years that fell. To increase the commercial share, he will encourage development and support small businesses. He said he will be available to discuss and justify why it is hard for the County to reduce its tax rate.

He then answered questions about public school funding.

BCA had asked:

(1) County Public Schools' enrollment is still below pre-pandemic levels, yet the County Board continues to increase the amount it provides to APS every year. Cost per pupil is about $25,000 at current enrollment levels, which is much higher than tuition at a good private school. I think APS should have a lower cost per pupil than private schools--are there no economies of scale? Will the County Board consider imposing budget discipline on APS, rather than automatically giving them half the County's revenue?

Mr. Karantonis said the County Board does not supervise or manage public schools. He said it is the School Board, not the County Board, that is elected to discuss operational school spending. There is collaboration on capital spending between the County and the School Board.

Given the shortage of time, and need to address questions about the **Phase 2 Recommendations of the Missing Middle Housing Study**, Mr. Karantonis said he would address other questions in writing.

BCA had sent the following questions on the Missing Middle Housing Study:

(1) Will the County ensure that its timeline for receiving input from the public be sufficient to ensure that civic associations can effectively provide input on the Phase 2 recommendations before they go to the County Board for

(2) What do you hope the Missing Middle Housing Study will achieve, and what changes in County policy and regulations might result from the study?

(3) How does the County plan to fund the building of schools, improvement of streets, transit, provision of policing and other essential services as missing middle housing brings increased density to new parts of Arlington?

Mr. Karantonis discussed the motivation for the **Missing Middle Housing Study**. Around 1938, Arlington outlawed missing middle housing. Now most new housing is in high rises or is a single-family home. It is almost impossible for a family with a household income from $110,000 to $200,000 to find housing. He wants those people to have a chance.

He expects to learn how big the barriers are and the opportunities to look at the supply of housing for families.

McMansions are a profitable product. They are done by-right, which gives the County zero-leverage. It is not a new trend, but the average single-family home is over $1 million in price. Every day the County has to approve or turn down an application to build a McMansion.

The Missing Middle Housing Study does not address affordability.

Nationally 25% of single-family houses are under corporate ownership, and rented out to people. He said he is investigating what this means for Arlington.

Young people who live in Arlington pay a premium to do that, over one-third of their income.

The current construction pipeline in Arlington is for large town homes and McMansions.

He is available to discuss Missing Middle Housing at length, and in detail. The process is still staff driven. He is thinking very hard about it, but there is a long way to go towards a conclusion.

In response to questions about whether the County Board, rather than County staff, should be leading the Missing Middle Housing effort, he said that the Board asked County staff to do this, he gives staff questions to answer, and the Board will have the last word and the responsibility for what’s done on Missing Middle Housing.

In response to BCA members noting that they had just learned about the Missing Middle Housing Study recommendations, and needed time to consider them before providing feedback, Mr. Karantonis said there is no appetite in County government to change the process for engaging with the public and moving forward on Missing Middle Housing. He said the survey that ended on May 27, 2022 was just the end of the survey to measure the degree of comfort with housing types and locations. After May 27, people can still write the County Board with their views and questions about the Missing Middle Housing Study. He encouraged people to write the County Board, noting that he is getting five to ten emails a day about Missing Middle Housing. 50% of the emails raise substantial questions. He keeps a list of unresolved topics. He noted that he is visiting civic associations for discussions.

Regarding questions about the budgetary impact of Missing Middle Housing, he said he had read the economic analysis and it is basically sound.

In response to questions, he said that changing or reducing what is allowed in lot coverage is not covered in the Missing Middle Housing Study, which concerns him and two or three others on the Board. He thought the County could do more to protect trees under Virginia law, and was not doing enough to encourage developers to work with nature.

Regarding a question on whether decisions on Missing Middle Housing had already been made, and whether public will make any difference, Mr. Karantonis said there are no preconceived ideas, and the devil is in the details.

BCA members noted that upzoning is permanent, and asked why there is such a rush, shouldn’t the County start with something smaller that is more temporary and reversible, so it could be adjusted if it does not turn out as expected? Mr. Karantonis said he does not favor blanket upzoning, and if the downsides are too big, we have to revisit. He said the County is not rushing, and we do not want an extended process because of what is happening now in Arlington’s hot housing market.

Mr. Karantonis ended his remarks by asking attendees there three biggest objections to changing zoning to permit more missing middle housing. Members said it was difficult to respond because people were just seeing the Missing Middle Housing Study recommendations, they needed to learn about them, discuss them, and develop views. Concerns noted included that fact the Bluemont has extremely narrow lots, narrow streets, and already has parking problems. There was concern that there could not be a County-wide solution, the solution needed to be tailored to actual conditions in neighborhoods. Concerns were noted about stormwater impacts. Concern was expressed that changing zoning had not and would not lower housing costs. Several members expressed concerns with increased congestion, including problems with traffic, parking, and school crowding. Other concerns included a loss of tree canopy—Mr. Karantonis indicated he found the staff report’s handling of that issue insufficient. Finally it was suggested that the zoning change would not stop the tearing down of smaller houses to build larger ones and might make such changes worse.

The remaining questions submitted by BCA prior to the meeting are below. These could not be addressed due to time limits, but Mr. Karantonis said he would be providing written information.

-- The FY2023 budget projects that ART buses will only recover 13% of their costs. Changes to Metro's transfer policies have made ART buses less attractive to price-sensitive riders, since a Metrorail-to-ART transfer costs $1.50, but a Metrorail-to-Metrobus transfer is now free. What will the County Board do to reduce wasteful spending on lightly-used bus routes?

--What do you expect the fiscal impact of collective bargaining will be?

-- What is your opinion of the proposed redevelopment of the Ballston Macy’s site, and at 4600 N. Fairfax, the site of the Holiday Inn and an adjacent building? What do you see as the benefits, or costs from this increased density?

-- How do you plan to prepare Arlington to meet the costs that come with increased density such as funding for additional policing, schools and other essential services?

-- Is there a point at which you would want to limit the growth in population density in the County? If so, how much growth in density would be too much?

-- Are you concerned about increased site coverage on residential lots, reduced land permeability, loss of mature trees, loss of smaller/more affordable home options, and changes to community character?

-- What measures such as permeability taxes/fees, zoning code changes, tree ordinances, property tax relief programs etc. might the County use to address potential negative impacts from redevelopment while still permitting homeowners to renew housing structures?

-- It has been suggested that a tax related to the share of a lot that is impermeable surface would discourage the building of very large houses. Revenues from that tax might be used to reduce real estate taxes, which would reduce the financial pressure on senior citizens to sell their smaller older houses to developers who would tear them down to build very large houses. What are your thoughts on instituting some form of impermeable surface tax?

-- What are your views on the possible widening of the W&OD trail?

-- What is the status of funding for the Western entrance to the Ballston metro?  When is it likely to go forward?

-- The traffic analysis for the 555-additonal residential units and grocery store from the Ballston Macy’s redevelopment assume that this second entrance will be built. What are the plans to manage the traffic impact to Wilson Blvd and N. Glebe Road in the absence of a second entrance when the new residential units and grocery store come on-line?

**VI. Meeting Adjourned 9**:15 PM

Minutes prepared by First Vice President Henry McFarland