**Minutes: Bluemont Executive Committee**

Via Zoom and at the Hickory Room of the Lubber Run Community Center

August 30, 2023; 7:00 PM

1. The President established that a **quorum** was present.
2. The Executive Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the July 2023 Executive Committee meeting without changes.

3. **Reports from Officers and Committee Chairs.**

**President** Henry McFarland provided an update on Bluemont Civic Association (BCA) efforts regarding neighbors’ complaints about increased **noise from I-66** following Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT ) widening of I-66 and changes to the sound walls that left an old section of wall by 9th Street, N and N. Jefferson untouched while raising and changing walls across from this section, and next to it. The President **r**eported on the response of state Delegate Patrick Hope and state Senator Favola to the President’s message following up on the zoom call hosted by Favola with VDOT and Arlington officials, affected neighbors, and Bluemont Civic Association representatives. Delegate Hope and Senator Favola responded that VDOT lacks funds for retrospective analysis of noise from I-66 after the widening and sound wall changes, and will not cover the cost of assessing neighbors’ reports that the noise has increased substantially at homes near the area of wall VDOT left unimproved, and concerns that the higher walls across from this section have amplified and funneled I-66 noise to this section of Bluemont. This was the same response VDOT had given to the civic association and neighbors prior to the zoom meeting. The President noted that in obtaining approval VDOT had forecast that there would be no serious noise problems resulting from widening of I-66 and changes to its sound walls, and VDOT should at least check whether its forecast was correct, or whether neighbors are right about the increased noise problem. He noted that when the Arlington County Board accepted the widening of I-66, it had agreed to an ombudsman for related problems. The President had inquired about this ombudsman, and was told the position did not exist. He said he will check further with Delegate Hope and Senator Favola on follow up to the zoom meeting. BCA civic federation Delegate David Hughes suggested that BCA also ask the County Board, Delegate Hope and Senator Favola why there is no ombudsman to respond on problems from I-66 widening.

The President reported that he had e-mailed the County’s Department of Environmental Services (DES) permitting and inspection office regarding neighbors’ concerns regarding a **large number of trucks going along Kensington and Lexington Streets** to the Wells construction site on Wilson Blvd, where a large number of homes are being built. A neighbor reported that the problem ceased after the President’s contact with DES.

The President reported on the County’s plans to **close lanes and block left turns from several neighborhood streets onto Wilson Blvd** for an extended time period to allow for maintenance of the Wilson Blvd bridge over Four Mile Run. DES had not informed the neighboring Bluemont, Dominion Hills and Madison Manor civic associations of the soon-to-start lane closures and prohibition on left turns. The President told DES that there had been insufficient notice to the community, and asked why the turning restrictions were being imposed, since they could block people from leaving their immediate neighborhood because streets were blocked in the other direction by I-66 and the lack of other connecting streets. DES agreed that insufficient notice had been given, and said the plan for restricting traffic on I-66 during the bridge maintenance was being reworked, and that the DES public engagement specialist for the project would inform the Bluemont Civic Association (BCA) once a new plan had been worked out.

Regarding the request of neighbors to the County that they be allowed to continue the **garden at the corner of 9th Street, N and N. Harrison Street** that volunteers started many years ago and had maintained until the County ordered them to stop, the President said the County said it would require BCA to sign a 11-14 page agreement and get insurance, in order for the project to continue. The County insisted that they would sign an agreement only with BCA. The President had explained that BCA lacked funding for insurance, and volunteers to meet the County’s requirement that BCA assume responsibility for the garden. The County’s Risk Management office said insurance could be obtained cheaply as a rider on someone’s home owner insurance. The President asked the neighbor leading the request to continue the garden, who will ask his insurance company. The President will report back on whether this could be done in a way that did not make BCA liable, or call on BCA resources. The neighbors had already sent the County their proposed design for the garden, and what they would like to plant. Since the BCA General Membership would need to vote before BCA could sign such an agreement, the President said he would ask at the September General Membership meeting whether someone wanted to make a motion for BCA action on the request. He also said he would suggest the neighbor seeking County permission for the garden to talk with the volunteers who established and maintain two gardens at Bon Air Park.

In discussing **topics for upcoming meetings**, the President said the League of Women Voters would make a presentation at the September 27 General membership meeting, and topics that may be raised were the “missing middle” Expanded Housing Options (EHO) project at 6th Street and proposed school boundary changes. The President will ask BCA members about the date of the December General Membership meeting. The President had requested BCA members provide input for the list of questions and issues of community concern the police had requested prior to their presentation at the October 25 General Membership meeting. At the November 29 meeting, Mt Olivet Methodist Church will discuss the major project at their parking lot on Glebe Road and 16th Street, N. The President said he will request a County Board Member come to the January, February, March or April meeting, possibly invite the County Manager to a meeting, seek a meeting with the Arlington groups that promote native plants, a meeting about the County’s new mental health response program, and invite VDOT to discuss their plans for changes to Glebe Road.

**BCA Civic Federation Delegate** David Hughesdiscussed the September 5 meeting of the Arlington County Civic Federation (ACCF). He referred people to the ACCF website www.civfed.org for videos of the biannual candidates’ forum, which included candidates for state delegate, state Senate, County Board and School Board.

**Treasurer** David Smith reported that the fraudulent charges of $1422.27 had been reversed by the bank. BCA also received some membership dues payment, bringing BCA’s bank balance to $2150.75.

Regarding **stormwater**, the Treasurer, who also leads the Lubber Run stormwater working group of neighboring civic associations, asked the President to help send out word about the September 20 DES meeting at 7pm of a Lubber Run focus group. The President agreed. The Treasurer will also inform the Lubber Run stormwater working group. The Treasurer said he and others in the group had agreed to meet in person in Woodlawn Park with anyone interested in the County’s proposal to put a stormwater detention vault in this park. It would take a year to build a detention vault.

Regarding community and County concerns about errors in FEMA’s analysis that would place homes in Bluemont along the west side N. Abingdon St into a 100-year flood plain, the Treasurer reported that FEMA was moving most of those houses into a 100-year flood plain. FEMA added new factors to its consideration. For the past year, the County had been working on a Letter of Map Revision (LOMAR), and at BCA’s request had done a lot of analysis and surveying that indicated most of these homes should not be in the 100-year flood plain. The County will do a second LOMAR that includes the effect of the newly completed Ballston Wetland Park, which should decrease peak stormwater flows by 30 percent that could get the remaining homes out of the flood plain. This LOMAR could take another year.

**Secretary** Laura Kirkconnell reported that she had followed directions of the County’s Office of Public Engagement on County rules for placement of signs advertising civic association meetings and events, but **one sign announcing the civic association August meeting, and three of the four signs announcing the last bell-ringing had been taken**. This is in addition to signs taken in May that announced the Family Fun Day event, after which BCA asked and received guidance from the County of Public Engagement head Jerusalem Solomon that BCA “signage was not an issue, but it has to meet size requirements, height requirements and must be within ½ mile of the activity, in the landscape and utility strip or median at an intersection….” All the signs taken during July and August had been placed according to this guidance and the County’s sign ordinance provided by Ms. Solomon. The Secretary noted that since she had paid $22 to $36 per sign, their continued removal is too costly for her to continue providing new signs.

The **Expanded Housing Options** (EHO) Committee reported on its spreadsheet to show EHO permit requests. Twenty-two permits had been requested across the County, five had been approved, three were submitted for Bluemont (735 N. George Mason, 5630 8th Street, N and 4611 N. Carlin Springs Road), one of which had been approved. All the requests in Bluemont are for six-plexes. The Committee delivered fliers on all three Bluemont projects to inform immediate neighbors that an EHO permit had been requested and where to find County EHO information. The County’s permit tracker does not show the plans for what is to be built under an EHO permit. Some neighbors were trying Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to get that information. The Committee is working on language for the BCA website about its EHO efforts. The Arlington County Civic Federation has raised concerns about the County requirements for FOIA requests.

Alternate Civic Federation Delegate Chris Kuhman reported on the meeting with County Board Member Takis Karantonis on the proposed **County study on reforming the lot coverage ordinance.** A work session on the study is planned for March 2024. The County’s draft Forestry and Natural Resources plan could be an opportunity to move forward on the study. Generally, builders replacing single family homes with larger single family homes are still below the maximum lot coverage allowed by the current Country ordinance, but are covering more of the lots than had been done previously. As a result, impervious surfaces were increasing, as were stormwater flows, including flows onto other properties, and tree coverage was being lost. It would be useful for people to encourage the County to do its lot coverage study sooner.

**Financial Review – Dues**

The Committee reviewed BCA’s long search for a way to accept electronic payment of dues. It was suggested that BCA ask the ACCF for an update on efforts by the Virginia Association of Civic Associations to help civic associations with electronic payments. BCA Civic Federation Delegate Shakti Shukla offered to look into how BCA could accept electronic dues payments, Second Vice President Carla Conover agreed to help her.

The Committee reviewed the analysis by the President of BCA finances, and agreed not to increase dues, but to continue efforts to sign up new members, and encourage existing members to renew their membership.

**Labor Day Bell-Ringing**

The Committee approved the President’s request to authorize $10 for cupcakes at the Labor Day bell-ringing.

**New Business**

Treasurer David Smith raised the issue of large commercial vehicles using N. Abingdon Street while exceeding the speed limit, and breaking the legal limit in Virginia for how long a vehicle can be idling. Suggested ways forward included using the County’s Report A Problem system, calling the police non-emergency number, and raising this with the police during their October 25 meeting with BCA.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.