###### Bluemont Civic Association

*Representing Neighborhoods in and around Key school/Escuela Key, Lacey Woods Park, Bon Air, Fields Park, Balls Crossing, West Ballston, and all along the former Bluemont Division of the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad*

#### P.O. Box 5134 Arlington, Virginia 22205

**www.bluemontcivic.org**

**General Membership Meeting Minutes**

at the Key School Library 855 North Edison Street and on Zoom

February 28, 2024; 7:30 PM

1. The President established that a quorum was present and read the politeness statement.

2. Members unanimously approved the minutes of the January 2024 meeting without changes.

3. Presentation by Alonso Abugattas, Natural Resources Manager and head of Arlington County’s deer management team. Alonso’s presentation included the following discussion (The slides he used have been posted to the website.)

* Project Background
* Project History
	+ Problems with over browsing, aerial drone ‘browse’ surveys in Fall 2022, 80-90% of the native plants are being over browsed.
* Deer Population
	+ Found out that the deer are concentrated in specific parks, including Glencarlyn
* Forests Have Too Many Deer
	+ 12 out of 12 surveyed parks showed damage from overpopulation; densities 1.9 to 17 times the recommended levels in 11 of 12 surveyed parks
* Tale of Two Forests
	+ Lacey Woods - mostly untouched; noting that ground vegetation feeds insects and birds
	+ Barcroft Park – vegetation mostly eaten by the deer
* Suitable Options for Arlington
	+ **Sharpshooting** – humane, can quickly reduce deer levels, requires state approval and changes to Arlington code on firearms. All meat would be tested and if no chronic wasting disease is found, would be donated. Cost would be $500-600.
	+ **Surgical Sterilization** – in 2-3 years, the population can double, especially if there are not any natural controls. We have no more wolves, cougars, bears, very few coyotes. Have to sterilize at least 90% to be effective. In 4-5 years you can reduce your population by about 40%. Noting there are no studies to back up this approach. Considered experimental pilot project. Would require state permission, and require a university to support the study. Costs about $1000 to $2000 per deer.
	+ **Controlled Archery** – There has never been a bystander injured by an archer. There are several caveats with this approach.
	+ **Fencing –** This method fences trees to protect them from the deer. To be effective, need to be at a minimum of 8 feet.
	+ **Deer Repellent –** This is a method where vegetation is sprayed with repellent. The repellent has to be re-applied periodically and re-applied after it rains. Already in use in the Rose Garden. Believe this approach is impractical.
* Fencing and Archery have the least support among Arlingtonians
* Methods already in use in Arlington:
	+ Arlington: Repellents, Fencing
	+ Army Navy Country Club – has been using Archery hunting since 2012, 97 culled to date
	+ Private Lands – fencing, plants, repellents, scare techniques
* Methods used in Adjacent Jurisdictions:
	+ Washington DC: USDA sharpshooting, has resulted in tree seedling densities tripling
	+ Maryland: uses a combo of sharpshooting, public hunting, have seen deer vehicle collisions go down, endangered plants returning
	+ Virginia: Example Fairfax has been managing deer for 20 years.
* **ALL** the areas surrounding Arlington and Alexandria have deer management programs. This includes Loudoun, Montgomery, Fairfax, Washington DC, PG, Prince William.
* Project Timeline
	+ The first drone survey was performed in 2021
* Other notes:
	+ The state will allow Arlington to bait the deer, and this can be used to support the option chosen to reduce the population.
	+ Deer fawns form interlacing home ranges
	+ Expect first year of program will be expensive, but follow-on years will get cheaper
	+ Oak trees, being impacted by the deer population, support 557 different types of caterpillars, which feed 96% of our birds, and a large % of bats. Over 40 types of mammals feed on oaks.
	+ It will be a few months before a final recommendation is made on how to manage the deer population.

4. Reports from Officers and Committee Chairs

* The President Henry McFarland reported:
	+ The budget letter, approved by the membership, was sent to the County Board and was acknowledged as received.
	+ We had a successful Bell Ringing for President’s Day and he thanked everyone who helped at it
	+ Henry reviewed the meeting schedule plan:
		- March - Dave Pearson, Arlington Historical Society
		- April - Caroline Haynes, will speak about the Forestry and Nature
		- May – Takis Karantonis, Vice chair of the Arlington County Board
		- June – Delegate Patrick Hope, will talk about Arlington County Governance
	+ Henry met with other Civic Association leaders and Arlington County Board members Suzanne Cunningham and Maureen Coffee and asked them to put priority on the lot coverage study. The board members expressed support for the study but did not commit to a resolution.
	+ Some further issues with Ballston Parking Garage were discussed, the county has promised to do more to improve the situation.
	+ He will put together a nominating committee for approval at the March meeting.
	+ He solicited newsletter article suggestions.
* The First Vice President, Matt Harrison reported:
	+ Family Fun Day – reservation for Lacey Woods Park, Saturday May 18th, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., $170
		- Nora will do a ‘tree walk’
		- Shakti is doing prelim research on food trucks
		- Laura is looking into the ‘freebees’
		- There is an open question on liability insurance. Last year it was required, but this year it is not.
		- Matt noted that the Exec committee approved a motion earlier to approve liability insurance (approx. $100) for the family fun day.
* The Treasurer and Chair of the Lubber Run Working Group of neighboring civic associations, David Smith reported $135 incoming dues, $168 Zoom fee, resulting in a bank balance of $2,053.92.
* The Second Vice President summarized approaches identified for getting an online payment system in place. These included:
	+ Establishing a 501(c )(4), would also allow BCA to be tax exempt
	+ Use Taxpayer ID of a member – not preferred
	+ Have dues Venmo’ed to a BCA member (Shakti) to consolidate and then provide to the Treasurer
	+ More discussion on this topic will occur at next month’s meeting.
* BCA’s Civic Federation delegate David Hughes reported on the January CivFed meeting which was a panel of the Arlington County Public School Board and the Superintendent. Covered issues included:
	+ Projected enrollment
	+ Curriculum development
	+ Budget challenges due to State not yet identifying how much money would be provided to Arlington
* BCA’s Expanded Housing Options (EHO) Committee, Chair Kate Mattos reported:
	+ 3 properties were approved in BCA, now just 2:
		- 735 N. George Mason – has two approved permits
		- 4611 N. Carlin Springs – approved
		- 5630 8th Street North – permit was revoked with no public information about why
* BCA member Jerry Howard, report that the county board approved a 2.5 – about $582 per year increase. April 2nd and 4th, there will be a meeting on the budget.

5. New Business:

* Henry provided a brief description of the February 5th, Arlington 2050 kickoff event that was held at the new Amazon building in the National Landing area. The event included a panel discussion on emerging trends with business, climate change, demography and education experts. Postcards were provided to BCA meeting attendees that they could use to document their view of Arlington in 2050. Residents can also visit: https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Departments/County-Board/Arlington-2050
* William Barratt presented a proposed resolution on property taxes. A motion was made to advertise the proposed resolution for a vote at next month’s meeting. The motion passed 11 yea, 0 nay, 1 abstention.
* The resolution text as presented at the meeting is below.
* WHEREAS Arlington County’s assessments of residential properties, including those in Bluemont, have risen continuously over many years, with some properties in Bluemont seeing a faster rate of increase than the county average;
* WHEREAS the Arlington County Board raised or left unchanged the property tax rate over each of the last seven years, thereby substantially increasing the tax burden on homeowners;
* WHEREAS Arlington homeowners, including those in Bluemont, have suffered increased household expenses due to inflation;
* WHEREAS changes to the United States Internal Revenue Code have limited the deductibility of state and local taxes on federal tax returns, making the burden of Arlington County's taxes heavier;
* WHEREAS increased real estate taxes are a factor that drives homeowners of limited means, including retired seniors, to sell their homes, especially if they are unable to qualify for Arlington County's tax deferral or relief programs;
* WHEREAS Arlington County's high real estate taxes accelerate the loss of affordable single-family homes, which are often torn down and replaced by more expensive homes;
* RESOLVED, that the Arlington County Board should reduce the real estate tax rate for calendar year 2024 so that once rising assessments are considered, the total amount of real estate taxes paid by homeowners is the same or less than the amount paid in calendar year 2023;
* RESOLVED, that the Arlington County Board should seek savings in its fiscal year 2025 budget beyond modest cuts and efficiencies;
* RESOLVED, that in future years, the Arlington County Board should seek to reduce the property tax rate as necessary to offset rising real estate assessments.

It was suggested the resolution might be amended to also discuss other taxes and fees.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Minutes prepared by David Smith