

## NOTES: WILSON BOULEVARD SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

### BLUEMONT CIVIC ASSOCIATION

JULY 1, 2002

Carl Hallinan chaired the meeting.

Several persons noted that few of the households in the immediate vicinity of the Safeway knew about the last meeting. Carl said that the Association made a good-faith effort to notify everybody, including posting posters on telephone poles and dropping leaflets.

Carl also informed the group that Mark Silverwood had met with county planning and zoning officials earlier that day, and discussed the possibility of townhouses vice apartments. The County may want the civic association and the developer to meet. Mr. Silverwood would like a group of association members (one or two) to meet with him throughout this process.

For the benefit of newer members of the subcommittee, Carl gave a two-year overview of the subcommittee's work. It was first convened to discuss the condition of the Safeway, to resolve sidewalk and traffic concerns, and to address expansion of Arlington Traditional School and the firehouse. Several years ago, Safeway made a proposal to put a gas station where the restaurant site is on Wilson and Edison, but the community rejected that idea.

Administrative matters. Since Carl Hallinan has just been elected President of the Civic Association, he can no longer chair the subcommittee. Don Sheehan was nominated as a replacement, and a vote will be taken at the next subcommittee meeting, in around two weeks' time.

Charrette review. Much of the information from the charrette has been analyzed, and the subcommittee reviewed the results from the different groups. The main conclusion was that people wanted wider sidewalks along Wilson Boulevard, control of traffic speed, and traffic calming. People wanted to be able to cross Wilson Boulevard safely. There was consensus that whatever became of the commercial area, it should not become "a destination" pulling people from outside the immediate community, or a magnet for additional traffic. It should not be a Ballston, but rather perhaps a Westover, or perhaps maintain the status quo, with only neighborhood-serving retail.

There was a discussion on traffic flow and volume in the context of the Safeway proposal, also taking into consideration the traffic impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

One member summarized the charrette in five points:

- a combination of revitalization and redevelopment;
- a time line from as soon as possible up to five years;
- opposition to any change in rezoning that was not scrutinized extremely carefully;

- a grocery store; and
- a mixed-use project, within the height limit.

### The Safeway Proposal.

The subcommittee reviewed the revised plans for the Safeway redevelopment proposal. Mr. Silverwood spoke with county officials earlier that day, although we don't know what he said. The project proposal has been redesigned, and now consists of an undetermined number of stacked townhouses instead of the 240 - 280 apartments, along with the retail. However, the area covered and overall orientation of the project remained unaltered.

A general discussion of the merits of the project, and its impact on the immediate neighborhood, was held. One member observed that the developer was not giving us enough information, especially about the design of the project. It would be helpful to seek expert advice to determine what the developer's break-even point might be in order to evaluate the costs and benefits of the development to the community. One person asked why developing the strip between George Mason and Edison was not being considered.

There was a general discussion of the project. Most people who spoke out were against such a massive project. It was pointed out that the project, especially its intrusion of single-family residences, when against not only the county's land use plan, but Bluemont's own neighborhood conservation plan of 1999, which recommended against any incursion on or loss of residential units for commercial development. Questions were raised as to how putting such a large project on a small piece of land would improve traffic. Several pointed out that this would seriously increase traffic on surrounding neighborhood streets inadequate for the task. One person argues that the proposal was inappropriate for any kind of neighborhood, not only Bluemont, but any residential neighborhood in Arlington, and that if it were to be permitted here, these massive projects would spread and threaten other neighborhoods in the county. Another referred to the Bluemont Neighborhood Conservation Plan that recommended against loss of the residential neighborhood or change in zoning [Carl noted that the plan does not say this].

Carl Hallinan cautioned that this project could change further, and that Silverwood was not the only developer out there, although he is the only one who has expressed any interest up to this point.

Carl closed the meeting by announcing that the next subcommittee meeting would be scheduled within two weeks.

drafted: Martin B. Tatuch