

BVSCA July 24, 2017

- Nia had a clarification on the minutes from last meeting as follows:
  - **CLARIFICATION:** Where the June 26, 2017, minutes reflected that Christian Dorsey stated he was in agreement that the YMCA would remain a YMCA, what he actually stated was that whatever decision the county makes with regard to the current YMCA property and whether it will remain in its current location, Mr. Dorsey made assurances that there will remain a facility that provides services similar to the YMCA.
- Police update by new liaison Officer Levy
  - There have been many calls regarding fraudulent calls from persons claiming to be from a government agency and requesting payment, sometimes in odd forms. A government agency would never call a resident for payment. Just say no and hang up.
    - Per a resident: the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is excellent and you can follow up with them via telephone if you have received one of these calls and/or been a victim of one of these scams.
  - Exercise pedestrian safety; consider using only one earphone rather than two and keep your head up when walking.
  - If using bicycles, please remember to secure them when you leave them unattended.
  - Per Nia's question: If there are problems in an area, please call the department to report it, otherwise they will not be aware of it. Officer Levy can put in a special request if there is a need for additional patrols in a particular area (e.g., Berkeley condos). You can email her directly or call the non-emergency line.
  - Nia would like a status update regarding terminating the bar crawl trolley due to the continuing problems it has caused. Officer Levy will follow up.
- Libby Garvey
  - Broad view: The county is in transition as people become more and more urban. This is a global trend, but it also causes stresses and strains on public services and sometimes conflict between businesses

and residents. The county is trying to respond by allowing urban corridors with high buildings along main roads that then step down to lower density and single family homes. Arlington's tax base is 50/50 between commercial and residential property taxes. The commercial vacancy rate is now just under 20%, which is very high, as opposed to 5 years ago it was around 10%. This also reflects a larger trend among businesses where people are often working in locations other than their offices. County is seeking tech industry and small businesses to fill these spaces.

- Questions from residents
  - Seven residents in attendance like the pub crawl trolley.
  - Why can county not use some of the empty office space for schools or other needs?
    - There are very specific regulations as to the physical space allowed for schools; build out would be quite expensive.
    - More generally, despite their vacancy, these office spaces are very pricey and so would not make financial sense.
    - “We work” in Crystal City is a different model that fixes up vacant buildings and rents out spaces to small businesses/startups as part of the sharing economy. “We live” has expanded this model for residences, somewhat like dorm living with shared space for kitchens, etc. This has been very popular among young people.
  - A Tower Villas resident: Parking for guests/contractors is often unavailable. Commercial space here is a mattress warehouse; not a benefit to residents. Increasing density and lessening green space does not benefit the current residents of Arlington County.
    - Remaining static is not a realistic option. We need a tax base that is sustainable and does not overburden homeowners. Because we are in Virginia, a lot of construction is by right, which means that the county cannot prevent it. This means that if it is profitable,

businesses will continue to build. County enters the discussion when business wants to build beyond what they can by right; county negotiates to split some of that additional profit to get money for affordable housing and other amenities.

- But what about changing zoning along Lee Highway, which actively encourages new development and there is discussion of another streetcar?
  - Ms. Garvey will not support a streetcar. However, as to Lee Highway, some of the change is resident driven because that area does need some work to become a more pleasant place to live. However, we do need to have a broader discussion among residents and the Board in terms of development goals and how much is too much.
- Land acquisition should be pursued more aggressively based on feedback at JFAC meetings. What are your thoughts on this?
  - Ms. Garvey states that as a rule, she never wants to get rid of property. County has been buying up small properties adjacent to public land when they become available, but cost is an issue. The Buck property is something Ms. Garvey has been hoping the county would acquire for years and is glad the price finally became reasonable. She would also love to be able to deck over 66 with fields and reunite the county in that way; also supports multi-use such as garages with fields on top. County is also working on a deal to purchase land in Fairfax County (near Edsall Road) for a bus maintenance facility when more significant maintenance is needed.
- The more development is allowed to increase, the more expensive it becomes to acquire land. County is pricing itself out of the market. As to Lee Highway, though not as attractive, there are many small businesses that serve the community and sell various sundries. Areas that have been redeveloped tend to be more homogenous; restaurants, etc. but no place to buy the things you need.

- There are efforts to preserve some of these small businesses with long history in the county. People want authenticity rather than homogeneity. Efforts like these are driven by residents themselves to preserve businesses that they find desirable.
- What is your vision for the Buck site? Science Focus? Possible land swap with Army near Air Force Memorial ... get them to pay for decking over 66?
  - Army said they would swap the land but put a large number of regulations on what county could do with it. Essentially Army has now taken the land, and the county is trying to negotiate for a fair price. Getting them to deck over 66 is not likely realistic but doing best they can to get the most money possible.
    - A resident that works at Pentagon and has possible connection that might be useful in negotiation and will share it with Ms. Garvey privately.
  - JFAC is working to develop appropriate recommendations for other land use. Ms. Garvey warns that Buck probably can't just be a park because there are other pressing needs. Key questions are: What good? For whom/how many people? At what cost? She will wait to decide on a vision until hears from JFAC.
- Nia: Are you in favor of the Arcland land swap (BVSCA opposes but willing to hear other views)? Also, what recommendations to BVSCA in terms of increasing transparency from school board?
  - Yes, interested in the Arcland land swap because currently paying \$750,000 per year to lease bus parking location. It is well located to Trades Center which is where go for bus repairs. Need to get that land, but now working on possible negotiation to obtain that property without a swap for land on the Buck property.

- A resident expresses strong opposition to the swap because believes Buck property is more valuable due to walkability/proximity to Metro.
- Ms. Garvey states she would rely on county staff to give valuation.
- Resident responds that county staff seems to be very biased in favor of the swap and believes it is skewing their analysis of the total cost of the Buck property acquisition in terms of relocating utilities, etc. that comes out to more like \$70 million.
- Ms. Garvey states that staff has briefed her on these issues in terms of total cost, especially relocating a large gas line that is under the Buck property.
- As to school board, keep inviting board members to come to meetings like tonight. Part of the issue for the school board is that they need to make decisions quickly due to pressing student needs. So ask for clarity on when the window for BVSCA involvement will be for major decisions and make sure to comment during that window. Also keep in mind that many school board members are very new.
- Bush height at intersections of roads are governed by ordinance. Why is county not enforcing?
  - County enforces when brought to attention, so if you let Ms. Garvey know which intersections are a problem she will be sure it is addressed. Unrealistic to expect county staff to patrol county to find problem spots. If send written request, Ms. Garvey will be sure to follow up and respond. If you don't get a response, please follow up with her, as Ms. Garvey is working on with staff on some issues with not letting her know when they have followed up with residents.
- Ms. Garvey asks about the status on two follow up issues: pedestrian safety & panhandling

- Nia notes progress on pedestrian safety issues but still much to do
  - As to panhandling, Dana notes that Metro Transit Police is quite responsive within the station. Notes, however, that as median upgrades are ongoing in Ballston it would be great to consider adding more trees/bushes rather than orange dots, as these help discourage panhandling in the medians.
- Per Nia: one service that is often lacking within BVSCA is services for seniors in terms of transportation and facilities for them.
  - Ms. Garvey responds that the Commission on Aging is involved in this, and county does offer senior tax relief to help residents stay here if they so desire.
- BVSCA will forward this section of the minutes to Ms. Garvey and highlight any issues for her follow up.
- Eric Gutshall, planning commissioner & candidate for county board
  - Became involved in county business through his civic association when Clarendon was developing. If development doesn't add to the fabric of the community, it should not be approved. We need to control and manage growth and approve plans that add to walkability, neighborhood serving retail, etc. Vision for the future includes ensuring seniors remain a vibrant part of the community, green tech/clean tech, strong volunteer community, culturally diverse schools.
  - Theme running on: There is no status quo. We either innovate or stagnate. Our values shouldn't change, but strategies must. Three priorities:
    - Schools and county facilities need a long-term comprehensive plan that includes co-locating services between school and county.
    - As to housing, Lee Highway should not look like these Metro corridors with high-density/high-rise. There is a "missing middle" of medium density/low-rise units where the middle class can afford to live. Need to update the zoning ordinance accordingly to allow, e.g., European-style flats, courtyard centered living, options for seniors and young families.

- To build the kind of economy of innovation and small business we are seeking, we need to create a culture of “get to yes” in the county bureaucracy.
- Questions from residents:
  - Nia: Where do you stand on the Arcland land swap?
    - Need to break out of mold of single uses for land. Not in love with idea of a self-storage facility at Buck, but we could really use the land in Shirlington. Only way Mr. Gutshall could get behind it is if find compromise that can use that land for more than just self-storage (e.g., perhaps allowing gymnastic facility to remain on ground floor).
  - Dawn: I don’t see that single family neighborhoods are being protected. For example, neighborhood by Buck site is being threatened on two sides: Buck and the YMCA site. Some of the modeling for the YMCA site towers over the single family homes. Also, small businesses are struggling and closing because they don’t bring the county enough revenue and the tax rate is so high.
    - As a small business owner, the taxes I pay have not been the issue; it is the rents and the rent structure. We need to determine what is happening in that regard and how we can address it proactively. Arlington Economic Development has commissioned a study to look into this problem as it affects the retail market.
    - As to single family homes, protection has meant retaining the homes themselves although uses around those homes may change. For the YMCA site, Mr. Gutshall has faith in the process for resident input to find the right balance.
  - Rosemary: In NYC, the footprints of the stores are much smaller. Seems that we in Arlington are oversized for small businesses.
    - True that these smaller buildings can create a vibrancy. Real estate developers have a herd mentality, and many

of the buildings along the Metro corridor are owned by just a few developers. Need to look into how to combat that mentality.

- Dana: Wouldn't refusing to upzone be one way to combat that mentality and encourage existing owners to work with existing businesses and retain them rather than razing the buildings and creating oversized spaces?
  - Virginia is a strong property rights state, which makes it harder to refuse to allow special exceptions, etc. Focus on getting to yes and work with the developers in terms of how to "play ball" in terms of how to retain small businesses.
- Latitude is higher than the site plan.
  - The county board approved the modification. Mr. Gutshall voted against that at planning commission.
- In some counties, the board is able to keep out chain businesses. Does Arlington County Board not have that ability?
  - Development is generally either by right or through special exception process called site plan review. Site plan properties do include requirements as to the mix of retail, but developers often find ways to circumvent. "Cannot legislate morality." Better to focus on how county can support smaller businesses and incentivize rather than mandate.
- Neighborhood near Buck is facing three developments in eight blocks. These seem largely uncoordinated. Can these be dealt with in a more holistic manner? Also, what are your thoughts on decking over 66?
  - Much of that area is unplanned. Just continue to be involved and advocate for yourselves. Make use of your planning commissioners.
  - As to decking, long-term goal, but very expensive. Technology can help here in terms of improved tunneling tech and bridging tech. We don't want to be the guinea



pig, but as this tech emerges it might make this more affordable.

- What are your thoughts on streetcar?
  - Absolutely would not resurrect the streetcar proposal. Columbia Pike needs a true transit solution. 1/3 of the county lives there. County has not done enough public investment to attract private investment to make plans come to fruition. Envisions a bus-based solution.
  - November 7 = gubernatorial election. Mr. Gutshall supports a Democratic governor and states that Democratic administration in Virginia is key in vetoing some harmful bills that come out of General Assembly in terms of the things Arlington County seeks to accomplish. Reminder that you can vote absentee in person prior to the election as well as absentee by mail. If you need a ride, Arlington County Democrats can assist in getting you there. Campaign will provide information to BVSCA.
  - Nia notes that this is not a political meeting and the above political views do not necessarily represent those of the BVSCA. BVSCA will also be reaching out to other candidates for the September meeting.
- Pierce Bishop: Ready for 100 is a national campaign supported in part by Sierra Club. Seeking cities to commit to 100% renewable electricity by 2035. Currently working with APS as well. Small changes like LED bulbs can help. Larger changes may be coming in terms of potential changes by Dominion Power supporting renewable resources. Resources are available to help residents make changes such as installing solar panels on their homes, etc. There is a resolution that civic associations can adopt in support of this effort.
  - Nia: please send us the sample resolution for further review.
- Use permit for Dynamic Gymnastics at Buck: currently under review by county to allow them to continue there. Any concerns?
  - None heard. Residents support.
  - In response to questions: unknown what the term will be. As to Jumping Joeys, the various lessees at the Buck site are on different timelines so have not heard anything yet.

- Nia and Collier met with select Quincy Park North neighbors last week, then with the developer for YMCA site. The essence was that low-medium residential was not viable financially for the developer and developer asked for medium residential, a vague GLUP note, and a joint letter of agreement with neighbors. BVSCA is not doing the letter of agreement. BVSCA will let county staff know that neighbors have concerns about the requested density, that neighbors favor a world-class YMCA on the site but the concerns are about how it will be done. BVSCA went on record as desiring investigation of a possible special district in that space.
- High school seats: Hybrid proposal passed. BVSCA tried but was not able to get any change there. APS has been very non-transparent on this.
  - Note from resident to BOLO for coming redistricting for schools.
- Cultural facilities in Virginia Square: executive committee met regarding this issue. Black box theatre is not a viable financial option for county; county is instead seeking money from that developer that could be redirected to other cultural programs at the Latitude site in cooperation with George Mason University. Committee understood but stressed need for BVSCA to be involved in the process and in how the space might be used.
- Officer reports
  - Collier: Neighborhood conservation meeting earlier this month on resource protection areas (e.g., stream beds). The coverage maps for these areas are being updated. BVSCA not really affected because streams here have already been ruined.
    - Question from Dawn: you mentioned last meeting that seeking volunteers to help with survey for full update to neighborhood conservation plan for BVSCA?
      - Survey must have 10% participation in terms of number of households. Will take volunteers to get enough participation.
      - Nia notes that missing many addresses for households renting in high rises and there is sometimes difficulty getting them if they have a “do not mail” request.
      - Let Nia know if interested in working on this project.

- Nia: Dues are due. See back of agenda for list of paid members. We will meet again in September.