

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

c/o Department of Environmental Services

2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705

Arlington, VA 22201

June 22, 2015

The Honorable Mary Hynes, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Subject: Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study

Dear Chair Hynes:

The Environment and Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2) has reviewed the latest draft plan for the Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study (WRAPS) site and heard a presentation on the plan during its May 2015 meeting. While the current plan is much improved from earlier iterations, we remain concerned about several aspects of the draft plan, in part because so much remains uncertain as the County Board is about to act on the recommendations of the study and because several critical decisions about the site are being considered by the Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC). We are disappointed that planned green and natural open space has been reduced despite the preferences of the community. Moreover, this is being proposed as new residential density is added, thus increasing the demand on a smaller Rosslyn Highlands Park.

WRAPS has been particularly challenging for the County Board, staff and the working group due to the many demands on such a limited space in Rosslyn. Due to the hard work of staff, invaluable input from the community, and guidance from the Board, we believe that the plan has been improved over the last few months. We are encouraged by the plan's incorporation of Arlington's Sustainability and Environment Principles. The shifting of the new street to the east has made possible contiguous open space, and the addition of a pedestrian path from Wilson Boulevard to the new park between the Penzance and APS properties is most welcome. These are substantial enhancements, and we applaud their addition to the draft plan.

However, E2C2 continues to think there is insufficient natural, green open space in the proposed plan, and that what is there does not adequately reflect community opinion. Members of the community have repeatedly indicated a strong desire for such open space; yet Rosslyn Highlands Park is proposed to shrink from approximately 28,000 square feet to between 18,000 and 22,000 square feet. Meanwhile, hundreds of new residential units are expected to be added to the neighborhood, including many on the adjacent Penzance property. Though some have held out the prospect of public use of open space on the Wilson School property, APS representatives have cautioned throughout the WRAPS process that such space on school

property may be heavily programmed and may offer limited access to neighboring residents. For example, through the Wilson School PFRC process, we understand that some of the APS open space may be located on roof terraces of the new school, which may limit accessibility to the community during non-school hours.

Furthermore, the potential for adequate tree canopy is also severely limited. According to County staff's WRAPS site analysis, it is estimated that the tree canopy in the area is currently 28%. This study also indicates that the WRAPS area is considered urban-residential and that its development should be guided by the specific goal of at least 25% area tree cover. The loss of open space makes it very unlikely that the County will meet its stated goal of 25% tree canopy in the area covered by WRAPS, if current proposals are adopted.

There are several actions that the County Board can support to minimize the negative effects from the projected loss of open space.

- Pursue the largest possible Rosslyn Highlands Park. Reject any attempt to reduce the County park below 22,000 square feet and seek opportunities to enlarge it in response to community input.
- Maintain the new street at its current proposed width with no parking lanes. We are concerned that others will urge the addition of a parking lane. Minimizing the width of the street will reduce the impact of the road on parkland and offer greater space for street trees.
- Ensure that the parking garage and other below-grade structures underlying the site are designed and constructed so that there is sufficient soil to support canopy trees in the remaining open space.

Last, as a matter of process, the WRAPS working group and the community were kept in the dark about the County's Letter of Intent with Penzance; the late disclosure of the Letter of Intent undermined community confidence in the public process. Arlington County should strive to surpass its residents' expectations for openness and transparency.

E2C2 will continue to engage with the PFRC to advocate for natural open space to allow for canopy trees and recreational areas for residents. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the WRAPS process, and we urge the County Board to support the measures we have outlined here as we work to realize the vision of a beautiful, greener Rosslyn for all.

Sincerely,



Scott Dicke, E2C2 Chair