

MEETING MINUTES: North Ridge Citizens' Association (NRCA) Monthly Meeting April 12, 2021 – Zoom Virtual Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 PM. This meeting had 50+ individual virtual attendees.

Board Members in Attendance

- John Fehrenbach, President
- Amy Burwell, 1st Vice President
- Jennifer Dougherty, 2nd Vice President
- Chuck Kent, Past President
- Tack Richardson, Treasurer
- Kay Stimson, Scribe
- Russ Bailey, Parliamentarian
- Jaqueline Coleburn
- Jeanne Snapp
- Bruce Snapp
- Lyn Gubser
- Sunny Yoder
- Bill Clayton
- Chris Gay
- Moira Buzby
- Fowler West
- Amy Krafft
- Kate Crawley
- Sean Gallagher
- Rachel Newhouse
- Bradley Kinder
- Joe Costigan
- Kylie Payne

NRCA President John Fehrenbach noted that ACP Sgt. Tommy Ground was not in attendance, so there was no monthly crime report. He added that separately, Acting Captain Sean Casey had reached out from the Alexandria Sherriff's Department to let the association know that he now the department's liaison to North Ridge, replacing Tim Gleeson.

Meet School Board Chair Megan Alderton

Mr. Fehrenbach then introduced ACPS School Board Chair Meagan Alderton, who was elected to [Chair by the Board](#) in January 2021. Ms. Alderton gave opening remarks covering capacity, budget, and colocation overviews, then gave more specifics on the planned renovation of George Mason Elementary (expected for 2023) and the redesign of Minnie Howard High School (in progress). She also noted plans to reopen ACPS COVID-19.

Re-entry update for COVID-19: ACPS will add an additional 3,000 returning students on April 29th. Additional students re-entering on April 26th. Prioritization matrix for kids is [available online](#). Additional information: Check out School Board [web page](#) or: <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/>.

Comment that residents would like to make sure that the community gets to see the George Mason feasibility study, which was promised for release in 2020. Ms. Alderton said she would find out what is happening with it and follow up with NRCA. *(UPDATE: Ms. Alderton followed up with NRCA on April 19th, writing, "We are planning on providing a Board memo on the feasibility studies for the May 6th Board Meeting. We will also have subsequent community meetings after this update is shared.")*

Comment regarding school re-entry survey. Q: What is the School Board going to do to make that a more even playing field (re families that filled out their form and told it was non-binding, but then did not get the chance to change their minds?)

A: Ms. Alderton agreed that the Board needs to address this issue. She noted that ACPS had originally planned to re-open in January, but got delayed based on COVID-19 data. She again referred residents to the re-entry prioritization matrix, noting that some things are dependent on kids and their families.

Comment from attendee about child in first-tier group having five days of instruction. The resident was frustrated about responsiveness from ACPS to concerns about her student not receiving enough instruction.

Q: When are "Seal Mondays" going to be implemented and what will happen for that Tier 1 group?

A: Ms. Alderton acknowledged that she didn't think ACPS communicated the right things on this issue. She added that the Board has been talking about Seal Mondays for some time, and they are still looking at ways to serve more students in this way.

Q: When will families have the opportunity to change their decision from all virtual to hybrid?

A: Ms. Alderton stated that they are trying to check in with staff to see what childcare options were needed for returning to on-campus learning. Some teachers may have to take leave. Healthcare is also an issue for some teachers, she said. She added the City cannot require people to be vaccinated for COVID-19.

Q: Can you discuss the recent school board decision to align ACPS with CDC recommendations on 3ft distance between desks? Is there any hope to get more than 2 days per week of in-person instruction for all kids?

A: Ms. Alderton said this had been a big discussion and there are trade-offs to both, including: Three feet does allow more students to come to school, but it doesn't equate to additional days for attendance. Ms. Alderton said the School Board would like to have kids back in school five days a week in the fall, for those that want in-person instruction. Summer school will be offered as well. ACPS is still finalizing the plans and will release information soon. Thinking half-school half-camp type of format. Families will have to opt "out" if they don't want to participate.

Comment from resident whose kids are excited about going back to five days of school in the fall. Q: What is the outlook for fall and teachers being present on campus? (Q in Chat: With more students coming back, will more teachers be coming back as well, or will we have even more kids in connection centers at GW?)

A: Ms. Alderton said the plan is for in-person learners to have an in-person teacher, while virtual learners will have a virtual teacher. She added that ACPS will be looking at this kind of hybrid model for next year.

Q: What are you doing to add to school capacity regarding TC Williams High School (now Alexandria City High School)? Ms. Alderton said the Board is thinking about flexible spacing. She mentioned they have a new site in Potomac Yard and are trying to think about how to partner with new Virginia Tech Campus. She added, "Will that solve for this issue? No, we are going to have think about expansion at every level."

Q: One of the impediments to getting more children back to school was the lack of transportation. Has that been solved? If so, how?

A: Ms. Alderton said not entirely. Transportation is a big obstacle, she added. She said that some people are thinking about DASH use, for both high schoolers and possibly middle schoolers. COVID-19 made it complicated. Classroom guideline changes from CDC are the focus at this moment, but she added that ACPS will need to follow recommended CDC guidance for bus use as well. She said there is a new Director of Transportation at ACPS who is amazing.

Q: Could we get an update on the McArthur build & timeline? Does that affect the swing space the students are in now?

A: Ms. Alderton said that Patrick Henry will not be a swing space beyond the committed deadline. Looking at January 2023 for students to be in the new MacArthur space. So far, no expected delays with this project.

Q: Is summer school available to students who have been in private school during this pandemic school year?

A: Ms. Alderton said that she will ask and get back to NRCA. *(UPDATE: Ms. Alderton followed up with NRCA on April 19th, writing, "Summer Learning for All is available only to students enrolled within ACPS.")*

Transportation Mobility Plan Update

Ms. Jennifer Slesinger, Principal Planner, T&ES

Overview about [Transportation Mobility Plan](#). She also noted the availability of a short [Executive Summary](#) covering the plan's five main chapters. Ms. Slesinger said AMP is designed to be "flexible for things. such as COVID-19 impacts." She added that it offers "choices for mobility." A brief discussion of challenges for Central Alexandria occurred, where residents noted there are few transit options, making cars the dominant form of transportation. Ms. Slesinger noted the AMP seeks to address traffic congestion and neighborhood cut-through through solutions such as smart signals, telework, and "making sure that traffic stays on highways." She added that the City would hold a hearing on the AMP on April 21, 2021, and the AMP public comment period lasts through April 30th. Get the [Feedback Form](#).

Q: What is plan to increase ridership on DASH following the pandemic?

A: Ms. Slesinger said the City is looking at how to do that, including free or reduced fares for low-income residents.

Q: Is it correct that the AMP's chapter on Bike & Pedestrian plans was not updated in this latest effort?

A: Ms. Slesinger said yes, that chapter is based on plans from 2016, which T&ES staff felt was recent enough to keep.

Comment by resident who felt that civic associations should have been given more input, since North Ridge has plenty of bicyclists and pedestrians in the neighborhood. Ms. Slesinger noted that T&ES had heard this feedback from a number of civic associations.

Q: Was there consideration of electric vehicles and micro transit strategies in the AMP?

A: Ms. Slesinger said yes, there is an electric charging station planned for Old Town with plans for more to follow. She said micro transit is a bit more complicated, but staff is looking at options.

Q: A resident asked about the status of a grant for the Upper King Street Road Diet proposal from Menokin Drive to N. Quaker Lane and why there is still no information about it (in contrast, Arlington County reached out to civic association prior to grant submission in July 2020 for input). Why is the City applying for grants without resident input, and when with North Ridge get a chance to weigh in on this latest road diet plan?

Chat comment: It seems it should be possible for the City, in applying for a grant, to be open and to provide information for the potentially impacted neighborhood.

Mr. Fehrenbach noted the grant application submitted by the city also references increased density as part of the proposal and said that residents will want to know where that might occur as part of the initiative.

Q: Is the increase to density indicated in the King Street grant related to a possible redevelopment of Bradlee Shopping Center to a mixed use residential/retail complex?

A resident stated that it could be related to new housing being added adjacent to Menokin.

Mr. Fehrenbach asked if NRCA could get a copy of the Upper King Street Multimodal SMART SCALE grant application. Ms. Slesinger said she would try to get that to NRCA, noting it was a long application. She also offered to get information on the public comment period for the Smart Scale grants.

More: <http://smartscale.org/>

(UPDATE: Ms. Slesinger sent a copy of the grant application, which is now posted to the NRCA website. On April 16th, T&ES Head Yon Lambert sent a memo to City Council informing them that the grant application would be put on hold for a year in order to comply with state grant requirements for SMART Scale funding and to provide more time to seek public input and engagement for the project.)

Resident comment that Alexandria roadways are looking very shoddy with potholes and need repaving.

Q: What's wrong with taking care of these things first?

A: Ms. Slesinger said that the City does have a repaving program schedule and tries to address roadways in an organized and efficient manner.

Mr. Fehrenbach acknowledged this program, and added that he knows North Ridge residents who are afraid to request repaving for their street, because they fear the removal of parking spaces for bike lanes and other uses.

Treasurer's Report – Tack Richardson

Tack Richardson said he is working with Amy Krafft to take over association financial accounts and records, noting the bank balance is healthy. Mr. Richardson is working to prepare a NRCA annual budget for approval, including in-person events at some point in the future. He said that he is going to reach out to Board members to gather input and ideas.

Planning & Zoning Update – Sunny Yoder

Sunny Yoder provided a brief summary and update on plans to consider a [Co-Housing Initiative](#) (by right) for Alexandria (see addendum to minutes). According to the City, the initiative is intended to expand housing choices in the City. She noted that the process includes a community survey regarding special use permit criteria and other considerations. The draft recommendations are to be presented to the Planning Commission in June.

Resident comment that her street currently has a rooming house and the noise and constant coming and going outside the house are issues and the city is largely unresponsive to neighbor complaints.

Another resident questioned the process to be used for enforcing the rules for rooming houses. Ms. Yoder said she would ask about this, but the current plan was to allow it by right in single-family zones.

Ms. Yoder added that NRCA is currently soliciting comments from the Board for a letter to Planning & Zoning, and thanked Board members who had weighed in on this issue.

506 N. Overlook Update – Chuck Kent

Chuck Kent provided a summary of the Planning & Zoning Commission hearing from April 8, 2021. He discussed the neighbor petition for the owner to allow access to the property by the City Archeologist, an online petition, and a NRCA letter to P&Z supporting the access request for historical determination. He reported that to everyone's surprise, the Planning Commission thanks to Dave Brown voted unanimously to approve the subdivision with a condition that the owner give access to the City experts to do a historical assessment of the property. He added that some Commissioners spoke openly about residents appealing the decision. The next steps will need to be an appeal filed by residents living near the property (due April 22nd). Mr. Kent said there is low likelihood of the house being determined to have historical value based on the current process.

Schools Update – Amy Burwell

Amy Burwell said that Board Chair Alderton had covered a lot of the hot topics, with the exception of the recent renaming of two ACPS schools. She announced that Matthew Maury Elementary is renamed as Naomi Brooks Elementary and TC Williams High School is renamed to the City of Alexandria High School.

Transportation – Bruce Snapp

Bruce Snapp gave a DASH update for Central Alexandria. Beginning this fall, the AT3, AT4 and AT9 bus routes will have the same schedules as before, but will be renamed as Lines 103, 104 and 36A/B, respectively. He reminded NRCA that service on the AT3/4, which provides weekday, evening and weekend service for North Ridge is being eliminated due to low ridership. A brief discussion ensued over DASH changes.

Taylor Run – Russ Bailey

Russ Bailey announced that he and other citizens sent a new letter to City Council with alternative suggestions for pollution reduction to the Potomac River and ultimately, to the Chesapeake Bay. Mr. Bailey

requested the ability to draft a similar letter of support for NRCA to send to the City that would be reviewed and approved by the Board. There was a brief discussion about whether the Board had to approve the request by vote. It was decided that a draft letter would be prepared for circulation to the Board by Mr. Bailey, where the Board could give input and then take an approval vote.

Following up on the Upper King Street road diet grant discussion, Ms. Yoder asked and noted for placement in the meeting minutes, "Isn't this yet another example of policy-making by grant?"

Membership Update – John Fehrenbach

Mr. Fehrenbach said that he had a call with several officers to discuss membership activities and tracking for the association, noting that membership numbers are down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that several ideas were discussed, and they will be working on strategies for membership in coming weeks.

Bill Clayton offered to help with North Ridge Lore distribution, if the effort includes door-to-door efforts.

Earth Day – David Peabody

David Peabody said that a group of concerned citizens will offer two one-hour webinars on Earth Day (April 22nd) to introduce people to what other cities are doing in their building environment to curb climate change and promote sustainability. One will focus on hospitals, and the other will focus on how developers are working to achieve Net Zero. Mr. Peabody said that he would submit a flyer to NRCA with details.

New Business – Russ Bailey

Russ Bailey said the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has yet to disburse a check for grant funding to NRCA. Mr. Bailey said he would reach out to Tack Richardson to arrange the transfer.

Respectfully submitted by KS
April 25, 2021

Addendum to Minutes:

NRCA Land Use Report April 2021

Tonight, I'm only going to report on co-housing, a new city initiative. The City is looking to make it much easier to establish co-housing by making it by-right (as opposed to requiring a SUP), at least in some parts of the city, and expanding the areas where it would be allowed, possibly including single-family zoned neighborhoods such as North Ridge.

We know of very few examples of co-housing in the City—three rooming houses, three congregate dwellings for special populations, and one apartment hotel. As of now, all of these require a Special Use Permit (SUP) and are not allowed in areas zoned residential. (There also are informal "group house" residences, including some in North Ridge. These are legal in residential areas if, for example, they include no more than 4 unrelated individuals and thus meet the definition of "family" under Sec. 2-143).

Commissioned by P&Z, grad students in the Virginia Tech Urban and Regional Planning Department studied Denver and Salt Lake City, two cities that are moving toward zoning amendments that would enable more co-housing. A key policy issue is how to define who may live in a single structure. Alexandria uses "family." Denver uses "household." As living arrangements evolve, defining "family" and "household" takes more and more words in zoning codes, so some jurisdictions just limit the number of people and don't worry about how they are related.

As John Fehrenbach stated in his email, the City posted a presentation on co-housing and a survey to solicit the views of residents. Yesterday was the survey deadline, and we will be watching for the results. I suspect that the City is set on allowing more co-housing, but may still be considering some details, such as where, and under what rules, if any, it would be allowed.

A virtual open house on co-housing will take place April 20 at 7pm, followed by another survey. That Zoom link is on the city web site under the label 'Co-housing Initiative'.

Based on comments received from Board members on a draft, the NRCA Executive Committee is preparing a letter stating NRCA's position on issues raised in the City's co-housing presentation, especially co-housing by right. If you have views on co-housing that the board should take into account as it develops the NRCA position, please email me or any of the officers.