

Comments to City Council Public Hearing 18 Dec 2021
Sunny Yoder on behalf of North Ridge Citizens Association
Docket item #15 Arlandria-Chirilagua Small Area Plan

Good day Mr. Mayor and Members of the Council:

My name is Sunny Yoder. I own a home in Braddock Heights. I serve as chair of the land use committee of the North Ridge Citizens Association and speak on behalf of the Association.

We believe the enormous near-term impacts of the changes to Arlandria-Chirilagua that are contemplated in the proposed Small Area Plan are being drastically underestimated and downplayed. Not only that, we fear the City is not giving enough consideration to second- and third-order effects down the road. Therefore, we make three requests:

First, City Council needs to defer approval of the proposed Small Area Plan to allow more time for both the careful, rigorous study of the short-term and long-term implications of large-scale redevelopment, and meaningful citizen and taxpayer input.

Second, the City needs to scale back the Alexandria Housing Development Corporation (AHDC) mega- project that is contemplated for the Safeway site and the adjacent lot on Mt. Vernon. Two buildings of 10 and 7 floors, respectively, with 475 new housing units, are much more than could possibly be handled by the infrastructure that exists or is achievable.

Third, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) and citizen's associations must have the opportunity to provide explicit and transparent input to the planning process. Schools and students bear much of the brunt of redevelopment, and, after all, ACPS has the authority over the use of school sites.

The reasons for our requests are our concerns about the following:

1. Substantial increases in the number of housing units—and thus the population—in Arlandria.
2. The accompanying increases in the population of school age children, likely more than proportionate to the total population compared to other sections of the City.
3. Increased school enrollments that will add to the overcrowding of City schools. And the City is not ruling out the conversion of school property to housing or other potential uses in violation of Commonwealth law.
4. Increased traffic and congestion, especially on Mt. Vernon Avenue and Glebe Road, and cut-through traffic in the surrounding neighborhoods, especially North Ridge.
5. Dramatically increased density, even though the streets in the neighborhood are narrow and already quite congested, there are no Metrorail stations within walking distance, and no easy access to major un-clogged traffic arteries. (This is in stark contrast to other parts of Northern Virginia where density has been, or will be, substantially increased.)
6. Loss of parking that serves Arlandria-Chirilagua residents, shoppers, restaurant-goers, churchgoers, and others, with a substantial increase of spill-over parking in surrounding neighborhoods, which will undoubtedly lead to related stresses and disputes. Instead of improving the area, the Plan will create a traffic and parking mess that will put the area on the list of places to avoid rather than visit.

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7. Radical alteration of the streetscape, with the loss of the characteristic Art Deco style on Mt. Vernon Avenue.
 8. Maximum permitted heights that would, in many locations, be double what is permitted under existing zoning and would dwarf existing structures.
 9. Loss of tree canopy as developers take the option of planting required trees elsewhere in the City.

The scale of what is being proposed simply does not fit the context of the Arlandria-Chirilagua neighborhood. We recognize the City government's desire for building more affordable housing there, as well as the economic pressures and profit-motives to redevelop that area. We also recognize that the City has tools to encourage additional, affordable housing—including the authority to trade off against greater density, but we believe that in this instance those tools are being misused to overdevelop the area to the detriment of both current and future residents.

If you approve this plan, in our view you will be responsible for helping to destroy—or at least overwhelm—the very neighborhood you claim to want to preserve. It is a bad trade-off.

Thank you. I will send these comments to Ms. Sitton so they can be placed in the record.