

Lyon Village Citizens' Association

RE: Clarendon Presbyterian Church Special GLUP
Application and Clarendon Sector Plan

November 18, 2023

Dear County Board Members,

We are writing to urge you to confirm your support for the policy in the current General Land Use Plan (GLUP), and the Clarendon Sector Plan. The Sector Plan was adopted by the Board in 2006 and recently updated in April 2022 through years of extensive processes that included agreements between the County and the five civic associations that border and are part of the Sector Plan - Lyon Village, Lyon Park, Clarendon-Courthouse, Ballston-Virginia Square and Ashton Heights civic associations. These Civic Associations agreed to accept additional height in the center of Clarendon with the County's written assurance that the surrounding neighborhoods, as defined in the plan, would continue to be planned and zoned for their current use. Based on years of thorough review, these neighborhoods should be able to rely on the vision statement which explicitly provides: *"The integrity of surrounding low-density residential neighborhoods is protected, and higher density development tapers up from neighborhoods toward Clarendon's core."*

In order to maintain the policy objectives of the GLUP and the Clarendon Sector Plan, we request that you reject any proposal that would undermine the integrity of these adopted plans and policies. We believe that a primary purpose of the Comprehensive Plan and the supporting GLUP and Sector Plans is to codify reliable planning policy.

An application has been submitted by the Clarendon Presbyterian Church through the Special GLUP process that proposes to change the current Clarendon Sector Plan, the General Land Use Plan and the low-density R-5 Zoning District north of 13th Street to high-density uses through loopholes in the proposed RA8-18 District. This proposed change is for a single owner in an area less than a block in size and that is entirely within the low-density R-5 area, including several single family homes on the same block and immediately adjacent to the proposed site. This is internal to an area specifically designated by the Sector Plan for "Continued Neighborhood Conservation" The proposal also includes eliminating the current General Land Use Plan designation as "semipublic," for uses such as open space and parks, to instead allow zoning for high-density multifamily uses in the future.

The arguments made by the applicant for this complete policy change are that the property owner (a church) needs money through increased density and that the location is near a Metro station. The applicant makes additional arguments about the good uses that they plan but, since these are not relevant to GLUP consideration, they are technically not under consideration on their merit. The critical policy issue for your

consideration is that, if these arguments are considered sufficient to change the established GLUP, this will set the precedent that areas near a Metro stop designated as low-density residential neighborhoods, are subject to change for that reason alone or in combination with an argument based on a prior use that was previously permitted within R-5 and other low-density neighborhoods. Since all of the neighborhoods in the Rosslyn – Ballston Metro corridor are near Metro stops, and many have churches within their low-density neighborhoods, this precedent would, in effect, eliminate the current low-density neighborhoods that are near Metro stops and potentially other areas identified as “transportation corridors” in the future. This is essentially most of Arlington and potentially all of Arlington. This would render the GLUP and the different zoning categories meaningless.

The County recently concluded a multi-year process to study, debate, and ultimately establish Expanded Housing Options (EHO) as a by-right means for increasing density on properties that historically have been zoned for single-family homes. The Clarendon Presbyterian Church site is precisely the type of property for which EHO is intended to provide additional density. There are several single family homes on the same block and immediately adjacent to the proposed site. Through years of study and planning, EHO was developed to increase density while maintaining an appropriate building height and lot coverage so that the additional density would have less impact on neighbors and neighborhoods. The Clarendon Presbyterian Church proposed structure would be over twice the height of a comparable EHO building and tower over the existing homes. Furthermore, according to church leadership, utilizing EHO would actually provide it with **more** financial benefit than the Special GLUP proposal currently under consideration.

With respect to the argument that potential good uses should be considered as part of the GLUP and policy change, LVCA supports the good uses referenced by the applicant of LGBTQ-plus “friendly” housing and “senior housing.” However, these uses are not identified uses for GLUP or Arlington Zoning and can and should be available as part of Fair Housing and welcoming good neighbors everywhere, not used as a reason for zoning changes. Moreover, this site is well short of the minimum site area the County requires for the zoning use identified as Elder Care (a defined zoning term) that includes independent living and some retirement communities.

As an indication of our support, we have attached a position paper independently developed by Tad Lunger, Esq. on behalf of some of our residents that details the support for the current Sector Plan and the areas where the proposal would undercut the current GLUP policy and the Clarendon Sector Plan.

For these reasons, we believe that sustaining the adopted GLUP and Clarendon Sector Plan and rejecting the proposal to replace the plans for a single property owner is critical to maintaining the integrity and reliability of the planning implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. Clarendon Presbyterian Church now has by-right development options via EHO that increase density, provide greater financial benefit to the church, and reduce the impact to its neighbors and neighborhood. We urge you to advise the property owners and developers to find appropriate alternatives for this property that meet the approved low-density requirements for the adopted Plans.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason D. Harrier". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jason Harrier
President, Lyon Village Citizen's Association

cc: Mark Schwartz, County Manager
Devanshi Patel, Planning Commission Chair
Anthony Fusarelli, Planning Director
Jennifer Smith, Comprehensive Planning Manager
Margaret Rhodes, Principal Planner
Clarendon Civic Associations