



March 7, 2021

Arlington County Board Members
Bob Duffy, CPHD
Jane Rudolph, Arlington County Department of Parks and Resources
Mark Schwartz, County Manager

RE: Livability22202 Concerns About Open Space

Dear County Board Members and Staff,

We, the presidents of the three civic associations in 22202, are writing in support of a letter sent to Andy VanHorn, Senior Vice President for Development of JBG Smith, by one of our members Natasha Atkins on March 5 concerning tree canopy and landscaping. The issues she raises are broader than one site plan or one area of Arlington County. They are in fact indicative of the need for a more holistic and environmental approach to development throughout the County, in accordance with the County's own policies.

We are very appreciative of the ongoing efforts of JBG Smith to promote open space in National Landing and respond to community concerns about individual site plans. It is in that spirit of cooperation that we have encouraged JBG Smith and its landscape designer Hoerr Schaudt to engage in a deeper consideration of the issues raised by Ms. Atkins as details are finalized on their site plans, especially the Water Park and 2000 S. Bell/2001 S Clark Streets. Most of us are not horticulturists or natural resource scientists, so Ms. Atkins' comments at the recent meetings on the Water Park were eye opening and clearly deserve greater attention. We regret not having involved more natural resource experts in the early discussions we had with them.

All of this fits together as a matter of creative, natural design, and improves the viability of landscaping and the functionality of open space. We believe that Arlington County needs to think more holistically about natural resources. Although JBG Smith, as a forward-leaning and environmentally conscious developer, could play a large role in this, it is really up to the County to promote its own policies of sustainability and ensure that all County staff are implementing them in a holistic manner. What do we want to exist here in 25 years, in terms of trees and green space? How can green infrastructure mitigate the impacts of climate change in the coming years?

One of the overarching principles of Livability22202 included in our Open Space report of December 2020 is to "Increase shade trees, plant natives, and use plantings to provide seasonal color and interest year-round." Environmental sustainability is at the core of a livable city. Key components are a robust tree canopy and the incorporation of biophilic design in the built environment and in planned private and public spaces.

We therefore ask the County to work with developers and their landscape architects to ensure not only that biophilic principles are incorporated into site plans right from the start, but also that planting regimens will treat trees as long-term assets. We also ask that County staff coordinate across departments to consider these plans from a holistic perspective. One solution would be for the County to consider a position of Sustainability Coordinator, reporting directly to the County Manager, who is looking at the big picture down the road, such as the position that exists in [Austin, Texas](#). Right now, everything is so compartmentalized that nobody is seeing how interconnected their roles are. The fact that the Community Energy Plan completely ignored trees is telling. Climate change will make life more challenging, in terms of unpredictable weather events, heat, and flooding. Developers and our government all need to be thinking about the real livability of the community in the future. They can't view everything through a lens of planned obsolescence, and that includes the buildings and the tree canopy. Green roofs and solar infrastructure, more sustainable buildings than LEED silver, landscaping that utilizes rather than just controls stormwater—these are all elements that should be required in new developments. Omitting them is irresponsible stewardship and poor fiscal policy, and the consequences will come home to roost.

Finally, we would encourage the County to host a meeting with developers and specialists, including Rob McDonald from the Nature Conservancy, the Biophilic Cities folks, Livability22202, and others like the Arlington Tree Action Group (ATAG) and those who care about natural resource management and the future of the County to discuss these issues.

Thank you,

Sincerely,



Mike Pickford, President
Arlington Ridge CA

Scott Miles, President
Aurora Highlands CA

Carol Fuller, President
Crystal City CA

cc: Andy VanHorn, Senior Vice President for Development, JBG Smith
Bill Ross, Chair, Parks & Recreation Commission
Phil Klingelhofer, Chair, Forestry and Natural Resources Commission
Joan McIntyre, Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2)
Matt Mattauszek, County Planner for 22202

Enclosure: Natasha Atkins' Letter to Andy VanHorn, March 5, 2021