

January 26, 2025

Mr. Takis Karantonis, County Board Chair, and Members of the Arlington County Board

Subject: Request for CB Responses to Arlington Civic Federation Resolutions to Improve Public Input for Planning, GLUP and Zoning Change Processes, June 2022, and to Restore Public Confidence, March 2023

Dear Chair Karantonis and Members of the Board,

In June 2022, CivFed sent the County Board a “GLUP resolution” that calls on the County Board to encourage vigorous community engagement on neighborhood development changes with a process intended to promote dialogue of all parties and is aimed at resolving issues. In March 2023, CivFed sent to the County Board the “public confidence” resolution to express CivFed’s strong commitment to strengthening the transparency and authentic engagement that are the hallmarks of open government and effective good government. Both of these resolutions draw on our core belief that our government works best with an informed community to seek solutions to our critical shared challenges.

These resolutions suggested basic methods that we believe will promote transparency and effective collaboration. We believe these changes would improve the predictability of outcomes for all parties.

Key specific recommendations from our two resolutions include establishment of:

- mechanisms for two-way communication between members of the public and decision makers as plans are prepared, assuring timely responses to public inquiries and concerns;
- a formal seat at the table for impacted civic associations and HOAs in significant planning and zoning processes and procedures such as GLUP changes and site plan reviews;
- procedures that include and address the submitted comments of civic associations and the public as part of the formal deliberations and the record prepared by the staff for the Board.

Arlington now faces significant challenges to our economy and, as Arlington updates policies and practices to address evolving conditions, most visibly in land use, we ask that you move to ameliorate the current, often adversarial dynamics by including as partners the civic associations and community representatives at the table as decisions are made, and by intentionally recognizing and responding to community input. Our civic associations and the community consistently raise these issues.

An example is at hand. The Aurora Highlands Civic Association (AHCA) has brought to our attention their concerns regarding the Melwood Special Site Application which is on the agenda for the County Board’s February 22 meeting. AHCA believes that few if any of their concerns have been addressed, including precedents that change current policies to allow inappropriate height, inadequate tree canopy and parking and lack of tapering, among several other issues.

Specifically, we respectfully request that the County Board carefully review and address the questions and concerns raised by AHCA prior to taking any action on the Site Plan Application. We also urge you to address the broader issues raised above.

Sincerely yours,

John Ford  
President, Arlington County Civic Federation

CC: Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager