

February 13, 2022

**Re: February 12, 2022 Regular Hearing Item 29 Pentagon City Sector Plan**

**ASF Request to Defer Vote on Pentagon City Sector Plan Updates**

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the County Board,

### **SUMMARY**

This letter is submitted on behalf of [Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future](#) (ASF). ASF requests that the Board defer a final vote on the proposed updates to the Pentagon City Sector Plan (the “Plan”).

ASF was formed in mid-2019 by a group of Arlingtonians concerned about the **accelerating pace** of development and density in Arlington. The current General Land Use Plan (GLUP) for the Pentagon City Planning area already enables very substantial by-right growth, development and increased density. However, Arlington County is doing a [woefully inadequate job planning for this by-right growth](#).

If adopted, [the Plan](#) will enable massive new growth in the Pentagon City sector. According to the Plan, the sector currently has approximately 8,200 residents in 5,380 units. [According to its own range of projections](#) (Draft v.4 at PDF pp. 41-42), the Plan could result in a total population at the end of the planning period of 20,800 residents living in a total 13,500 units--**a population increase of approximately 12,500 or 150%**. This would add new residents whose number approaches the entire population of the City of Falls Church. If development ultimately produces a higher percentage of residential units with more residents per unit than assumed by the County in the Plan, these numbers could be even higher.

**Before** the Board votes to approve these irreversible changes, the County should **first** prepare objective expert studies that weigh the long-term impacts of the proposed changes against alternative courses of action—including no-action alternatives. The County should then engage in a fair and open discussion with all stakeholders and the community. Following that, we can then fairly decide as a community whether to adopt the Plan.

### **Infrastructure to support an additional 12,500 residents**

ASF endorses the views expressed by some community members and best explained by the group [Dense that Makes Sense](#) (DTMS) that we will achieve much better results for the County and its residents if we first understand how the Plan would impact our existing infrastructure,

e.g., transportation, water, energy, parks, communications and fire protection services, police, and schools. ASF has made similar requests for several other development plans across the county in the last 3 years and sees similar needs for this very expansive project.

For example:

- The County should explain quantitatively and in detail all of the density/community benefits tradeoffs implicit in the Plan. We ask the board to lay out where, when, and how new infrastructure will be necessary, what the benefits are, and who will pay the costs.
- The County should conduct and share a legitimate, comprehensive traffic study at the level of detail and maturity of VDOT plans.
- Specific plans for **new school seats at specific sites** must be developed jointly with Arlington Public Schools and explicitly integrated into the County's plans for all other public infrastructure.

### **Transportation**

ASF also agrees with DTMS in its comments that the transportation section of the Plan raises concerns more by what it omits than what it includes. The only hard data presented in the Plan are in a [flawed bar-chart](#) (Draft v.4 at PDF p. 46) outlining traffic trends without the context of the major changes in Crystal City office leases through the 2000's.

Amazon's arrival will absolutely increase traffic in this area, including private trips by car. Unfortunately, the Plan does not attempt to discover whether this is likely or to project alternative scenarios. This does not serve the interests of either current or future residents.

Before enabling the massive density increases proposed in the Plan, a comprehensive transportation study should be conducted integrating the entire National Landing business district. That transportation study should include at a minimum: traffic, pedestrian, transit, and multimodal trends and their necessary supporting infrastructure. Without these data, ASF agrees with DTMS that it is irresponsible to move forward now with this Plan as configured.

### **Lack of innovation for quality of life**

Deferring a vote on the Plan also will enable the development of metrics to ensure the adequacy of other critical features such as open spaces among others.

### **Public engagement has been inadequate and unrepresentative**

The County has utilized poor public engagement strategies, ill-suited to the pandemic era. Only a tiny fraction of affected residents is aware of the substantial impacts of this Plan. Hundreds of residents of just one impacted building (River House) were unaware of the proposed density increases until very recently.

As DTMS [explains in its own analysis](#), public engagement began on the same day the first patient with COVID-19 was identified in the U.S. The pandemic stalled planning until

September 2020 and has continued sporadically with little regard for the challenges posed for residents who did not support the county's plans to weigh in, organize and properly engage.

ASF understands that a focus group of 18 members included **only five** 22202 residents. Two of the 18 (11%) represented JBG Smith, the developer of the site. (JBG Smith owns over 50% of the developable land in Crystal City.) **Half of all focus group members represented corporate interests.**

## **Conclusion**

We urge the County Board to defer a vote on the Plan to enable:

- inputs from many more residents
- much more thorough planning for impacts on Arlington's critical infrastructure

The Board should utilize the services of its newly-engaged consultant, TischlerBise, together with transportation and other experts, to assist in analyzing the infrastructure impacts of the massive new density proposed in the Plan.

Finally, the Board should direct the Manager to use his staff and his extensive public engagement organization in objective, unbiased, community-sensitive ways to ensure adequate community engagement and to develop a further revised plan.

Sincerely,

Peter Rousselot for ASF

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