

## Summary of CCCA General Meeting January 20, 2016

**Arlington County Board member John Vihstadt began his presentation** by highlighting his own priorities for Arlington County, explaining some current topics facing Arlington County, and exploring specific concerns for Crystal City.

His own priorities included expanded transparency for the County government, a new focus on promoting small businesses, and stronger control over budget and personnel decisions. To improve transparency, the County has hired an independent auditor, created a Waste, Fraud, and Abuse Hotline, and begun a two-way information sharing project with citizens. In addition, he noted there are at least forty County commissions open to volunteers and urged citizens to participate. In 2016, the County will host a Small Business summit to hear directly how the County can better assist these enterprises to succeed. On the budget, the commissioners have instructed planners to prepare their recommendations on the assumption that there will be no increase in the property tax rate. New priorities will have to be balanced by cuts in existing programs. At the same time, the County must address the challenge that, despite recent population growth, there has been no increase in police, fire, sheriff, or school personnel. This cannot continue.

To give the audience a sense of what is currently going on in Arlington County, Vihstadt explained that the County was exploring a possible land swap with the Virginia Hospital Center that would give the county useable space and allow the Center to expand. He summarized the on-going revisions to the Ballston Shopping center (noting that Pentagon City was going through a refresh but not on as big a scale as Ballston Mall), as well as efforts to update the County's Master Plan for public space, including Waste Water. (Note: The CCCA is participating on the review and update of the various Master Plans.) Plans are underway to upgrade property at the intersection of Columbia Pike and George Mason and to rework an area along Four Mile Run, adjacent to the DMV which the State government has agreed to keep open. (The CCCA president expressed appreciation for Virginia Delegate Alphonso Lopez's effort to not move the DMV in Shirlington which with his help will not be moving to Fairfax.)

Work in Crystal City, Vihstadt noted, was in line with the Sector Plan. Although the reconstruction permit for 1900 Crystal Dr. had expired, permits have been filed for 1720 S. Eads and 400 Army Navy Drive. The Post Office building at 1750 Crystal Drive is being reskinned. CCCA president and Judy Freshman addressed the proposed early plans to the Century Building to add approximately a 24 floor residential building at the corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Crystal Drive near/over the Buffalo Wild Wings Restaurant. On the "We Work/We Live Project," leasing for the "We Work" section was going well. The County was disappointed with progress on the Transitway, but the project is still within budget, thanks to a modification in the design of the station roofs. The completion of two-way traffic on Crystal Drive as well as the modifications to Clark/Bell are coming. A design proposal for the 15<sup>th</sup> Street Park is due for 2017, but construction will not begin until 2019, when the Clark/Bell work is completed.

The County is looking to find a way to install the Aquatic Center planned for Long Bridge Park. Since proposals for both the construction and annual maintenance costs exceeded the budget, the County must explore ways either to scale back the project or to find funding partners such as the City of Alexandria, local universities, or private enterprises.

Audience questions and comments focused on traffic and pedestrian safety concerns. Several complained that bicyclists on the sidewalks are a threat to pedestrians, especially the elderly and disabled. They described accidents and near misses, particularly around the Water Park and along Crystal Drive from 12<sup>th</sup> Street to 18<sup>th</sup>

Street. Vihstadt noted that bicycle regulations are a controversial issue for the County. He explained that the Virginia law does not prohibit bicyclists from using sidewalks. Although the County could do so, it has, thus far, chosen not to. When told that complaints to the County about bicyclists have been routinely ignored, Vihstadt suggested citizens could create a petition to show County officials that there was wide-spread concern; they should also join the Pedestrian Safety Commission to better advocate for change. He promised, however, that he would report these comments to other County officials and noted the names of those concerned.

One resident voiced concern that some of the newly installed lane markings on Crystal Drive did not make sense. Another observed that motorists often make illegal U-turns on Crystal drive that imperil pedestrians trying to cross the street. There was also broad concern about transit buses and vans that park on the northern section of Crystal Drive, sometimes with engines running and impeding traffic. Vihstadt took note of these concerns, and commented that there is an ongoing police effort to more vigorously enforce traffic regulations.

**The second presentation** was made by Mike McGurk of Transurban, the Virginia Department of Transportation's private partner on the I-95 Express Lanes project, concerning plans for the express lanes on I-395. There were also two attendees from VDOT. McGurk provided all attendees a brochure "395 Express Lanes Extension" and shared a Power Point presentation showing that the project extends the I-95 Express Lanes for eight miles onto I-395 to the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. McGurk emphasized that the project was only a proposal and was completely independent of the on-going discussion concerning possible express lanes on I-66. McGurk noted that, despite a slower than expected start, the ridership on the I-395 and I-495 express lanes was increasing, and was now generating enough revenue to cover the cost of the project. He explained that the express lanes were encouraging people to carpool. Statistics show that they significantly reduce travel times for those who choose to use these lanes, while also reducing travel times on the regular lanes.

The goal for the toll lanes is to provide reliable transit option. Most of the people who choose to pay use the lanes once or twice a week or even less frequently, apparently when they have an important appointment or meeting. Carpools with three or more riders use a special flex pass, and do not have to pay. Similar toll lanes are now in use in other states like California and Florida. Old EZPass transponders can be exchanged for free, new, flex transponders.

The VDOT officials noted that studies indicated that the success of the Express lanes was helping to reduce the burden on alternate routes, such as Route 1. The Federal government requires that the Express Lanes have a minimum speed (55mph). Because of the goal of maintaining the speed on the Express Lanes, during high occupancy times, the tolls will increase to discourage use of the Express Lanes. This concept did not seem to be understood by most attendees.

Audience members expressed concern about the proposed Eads Street terminus, noting congestion and complex lane issues that already exist. They were reassured that any proposal would have to take these concerns into account and no project would proceed without a full exploration of the impact on this area. In addition, any future construction would only take place during non-peak travel times. Another requirement of the Express Lanes is revenue sharing with the local community for transit improvements.

At the meeting's end, residents were asked to email suggestions to [board@crystalcitycivic.org](mailto:board@crystalcitycivic.org) for topics/presenters for future meetings.