

CRYSTAL CITY INSIDER

The monthly newsletter of the Crystal City Civic Association



December 2024

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A new park in the works along 15th Street

It's been in the pipeline for five years, but work appears likely to begin in 2025 on a small garden park along the stretch of 15th Street between South Clark-Bell Street and Crystal Drive. How will this happen? It's complicated:

- 15th Street will be compressed into four lanes without a median strip.
- Clark Street will be extended to directly cross 15th Street, after which it becomes Bell Street.
- The road that now swerves past the Crown Plaza Hotel to meet 15th Street will be eliminated.



Part of the park will sit above the hotel's underground parking garage. Questions over property rights to that land had snarled the project along with the usual county delays.

Another outgrowth of the project will be a new walking/cycling path along Clark Street from 12th to 18th streets.

The graphic on the left offers a rough look at the project. Bids are expected to go out within a few months with construction beginning late next year. For more details, visit [here](#).

Prodding the county on the Underground

Our treasurer, Steve Miller, urged the County Board last month to take up the cause of the Underground. During the public comment period, Steve talked about the store closings, concerns about safety, and uncertainty of the Underground's fate. A board member may appear at our January meeting to discuss what the county could do. Our worst fear is that JGBSmith will seal off the Underground once the Crystal Drive entrance to the Metro is open. Stay tuned.

The green area represents the new park, with a condensed 15th Street below it. Note, too, the walkway in green along Clark.

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County says it can make up delay in airport bridge project

With so many players involved in building the pedestrian/bicycle bridge between Crystal City and the airport (CC2DCA), we should not be surprised by delays. The latest lasted more than half a year and involved the new VRE station. The county claims it can make up for the lost time, but we remain skeptical. Our best hope is that construction begins at the end of the decade and wraps up in 2031. On the positive side, the county is open to a design/build option, which would put the project into the hands of a contractor who would be motivated to complete it on a reasonable schedule.

Annual meeting elects membership liaison, hears from county

Matthew Fuzi was elected to a two-year term as membership liaison at last month's annual meeting. We also marked our 10th anniversary and heard from two county representatives, one discussing new parks and the other landlord/tenant rules. Newly elected County Board member JD Spain Sr. appeared via Zoom. After the meeting, Andrew Damitio volunteered to be communications director.

Renew your CCCA Membership for 2025

CCCA dues of \$10 are on an annual basis, Jan. 1-Dec. 31. You can renew your membership online via [PayPal](#) or by check to our treasurer (see last page of the newsletter). The deadline for renewals to continue receiving newsletters and emails is Feb. 28, 2025. Although our sister civic associations in 22202 charge \$20 or more for annual dues, we have not increased ours since the CCCA was established in January 2014. For more information, visit [here](#).

- Eric Cassel, CCCA President

INFORMATION AND EVENTS – ARLINGTON COUNTY

County faces increased budget challenges, outgoing board member says

Arlington County faces a growing challenge of making ends meet as compared with previous annual budgets, warns outgoing County Board member Libbey Garvey. In her newsletter, Garvey cites depressed property tax revenue because of the persistently high commercial vacancy rate, a steep drop in federal aid as Covid relief fades, and a greater need for housing and food assistance for low-income residents whose wages have not kept up with inflation. She also notes that the Metro will be looking for increased dedicated funding and that the school budget can no longer rely on one-time funding sources to close budget gaps.

The county is becoming shadier – in a good way



A new county report shows an increase in Arlington’s tree canopy. As of last year, coverage was 35.2 percent, up from 31.7 percent in 2014. The county’s goal is 40 percent coverage. The tree canopy – land area that is covered by tree trunks, branches, and leaves – is measured using satellite imagery and elevation data. Benefits of a larger canopy include improved air and water quality, and heat mitigation. The county reviews the tree canopy every three to five years. A virtual information session will

be held on Dec. 12 to review the latest study and discuss plans for the future; register [here](#). A short video about the study can be seen [here](#).

A local environmental group is prodding the county to do more. “We don’t know if we trust your data. We trust our eyes,” Elizabeth Grossman of the [Arlington Tree Action Group](#) told the County Board last month, as quoted by [ARLnow.com](#).

Virginia is for headquarters

Twenty-four Fortune 500 companies are headquartered in Virginia, not counting [Amazon.com](#), which officially opened its East Coast headquarters, HQ2, in Arlington in June 2023. Additionally, since 2020, large companies like ASGN, Boeing, RTX, and CoStar have announced headquarters moves to Virginia. Winning Amazon’s HQ2 in 2018 was a coup for Virginia, which triumphed over nearly 240 competing bids from other cities and states. ([Virginia Business](#))

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DEVELOPMENT

Amazon plans for PenPlace tower appear on indefinite hold

Don't expect Amazon's dramatic helix-shaped headquarters building to rise anytime soon from the fenced-in parcel opposite Whole Foods. As recently as summer 2023, Amazon officials projected breaking ground this year on PenPlace, the second phase of its HQ2 in Crystal City. An Amazon representative told the Washington Business Journal last month that even with workers being called back to the office full time, the company has plenty of room in its existing space at Metropolitan Park. The completed first-phase buildings now employ 8,000, with room for 14,000 more. At the outset of its move to Arlington, the company projected creating 25,000 jobs by 2030.

With no timeline for PenPlace, Amazon is seeking permission to replace the chain-link fence surrounding the site with an 8-foot-high board fence. In addition, the company has formally applied to the county to establish its new high school temporarily in Met Park; it was originally slated for PenPlace.

New policy eases way to put old office buildings to new use

In response to rising vacancy rates, the County Board last month approved a policy to promote transforming outdated office buildings into multi-use spaces. The policy, which aims to streamline the review and approval process for adaptive reuse projects, is the cornerstone of the county's Commercial Market Resiliency Initiative. [Read more here.](#)

Commuter Store may pop up on a street near you

The county is considering on-street locations to park a mobile Commuter Store to replace the brick-and-mortar branch in the Underground. "Since the Crystal City Shops will be closing, we do not believe it will be effective to continue operations in an environment of high vacancy and intend to shift operations to ensure we are serving the most customers," wrote Wendy Klancher, bureau chief of Commuter Services. In addition to a pop-up site, the county is looking at re-opening the Pentagon Commuter Store. Fare information and passes can also be obtained through the [Commuter Direct website.](#)

Height, historical questions raised about Melwood project

A controversial proposal to construct a five-story, mixed-use building at the Melwood site will undergo its second site plan review this month. The project, proposed for 750 23rd St. S. in Aurora Highlands, calls for 105 units of affordable housing and ground floor institutional space for Melwood services, which provide occupational and educational training for people with disabilities. Sixty of the proposed apartments would be two bedrooms, with the remaining split between one and two bedrooms. Up to 30 percent would be reserved for people with disabilities.



Artist rendering of Melwood proposal

Melwood and Wesley Housing Development Corp. are collaborating on the project. They face opposition from the Aurora Highlands Civic Association, which has raised height and density concerns. The building would replace the Melwood Horticultural Training Center, which is housed in the former Nelly Custis School. No changes are proposed for the adjacent Nelly Curtis Park. Together, the parcels cover 1.9 acres.

An initial review of the proposal last month focused on land use and density, building height, architecture, and historic preservation. As to historic value, the applicants noted that the century-old building has undergone numerous changes that have transformed its appearance. At last month's review session, a representative of the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board encouraged revisions to the design to better capture the essence of the original school and recommended historic markers in view of passers-by. A separate historical review of the plans is being conducted.

Updated designs, transportation, open space, and community benefits will be discussed at the second site plan review on December 19. For more information, visit [here](#).

County Board votes to appeal Missing Middle ruling

The County Board last month voted to appeal a court decision that squashed the "Missing Middle" policy designed to promote multi-unit housing. The Expanded Housing Option (EHO) Development allowed construction of duplexes, townhouses, and multifamily buildings on single-family lots, provided plans met county design standards. In September, a circuit court judge ruled in favor of a homeowners' lawsuit that alleged the County Board "was not forthright with County residents in explaining the purpose of the Missing Middle Housing proposal, the scope of the changes it contemplated, and the studies and analysis it claimed would be done before the proposal was advertised and submitted to a vote."

Revised plan for townhouses at Crystal Houses advances



The revised plan for townhouses at Crystal Houses received County Board approval last month. It calls for three 3-story buildings containing 42 units. Each will have three bedrooms and 2.5 baths and sell for around \$1.2 million. The 17-acre site is located at 1900 S. Eads Street. For more information, visit [here](#).

Site of three townhouse buildings planned for Crystal Houses

Expanding boutique dentistry chain prepares to open in Pentagon City

A dentistry chain that touts a “spa-like” ambience is readying a second Arlington location. Tend, which plans to open in February at 1421 S. Hayes Street, offers general dentistry, orthodontics, and cosmetic services, among other services. The chain is located in retail spaces and refers to its locations as soothing “studios.” ([ArlNow.com](#))

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TRANSPORTATION



A bump up in intersection safety

Drivers may have noticed that turning at some Arlington intersections has become bumpier. Last spring Arlington launched a pilot project to install hardened centerlines at five intersections. They consist of small, raised bumps along the yellow centerline that are designed to encourage drivers to make left turns at slower speeds. The result: a 16 percent increase in cars turning at speeds under 10 mph. In a [survey conducted](#) in September, respondents reported feeling safer walking, biking, or scooting at the intersections. Five more intersections are due for the refit, including South Eads

and 23rd Street S. The program is part of a series of measures to improve transportation safety under the Vision Zero umbrella. For more information, visit [here](#).

County considers changes to towing regulations

Have you had your car towed? If so, you may be interested in the changes proposed to the county's trespass towing ordinance that go before the County Board on December 14. The county manager is proposing:

- Increasing the maximum base towing fee from \$135 to \$150
- Adding a \$20 fuel surcharge to each tow with an expiration date of July 1, 2025
- Increasing the "Drop Fee" from \$10 to \$20
- Implementing a permitting system with an appeal process
- Requiring 48 hours' notice to owners before a vehicle's removal from a multifamily lot based on an expired registration or inspection sticker
- Clarifying requirements around vehicle release, receipt production, and photographs.

PARKS & RECREATION

Expect changes for Long Bridge drivers, cyclists with new bridge

Long Bridge Park's Esplanade is a great place to walk. Its wide width makes it especially popular with seniors and families with small children. But high-speed bikes present a safety issue – not the occasional leisure cyclists, rather the serious, long-distance bikers.

In 2030-31, the new pedestrian/bicycle bridge to DC is expected to attract a large increase in the number of bikers coming to Long Bridge Park. The question then becomes how to encourage them to use Long Bridge **Drive** and not the Esplanade.

Anticipating the problem, the county has found a solution: a multi-use trail along Long Bridge Drive. Formally called the [Long Bridge Drive Multimodal Connection](#), it will connect the [Crystal City Bike Network with the Virginia side of the new bridge, which lands just behind the Aquatics and Fitness Center](#).

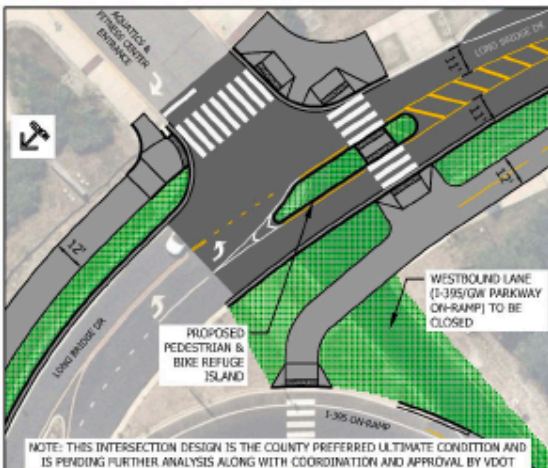
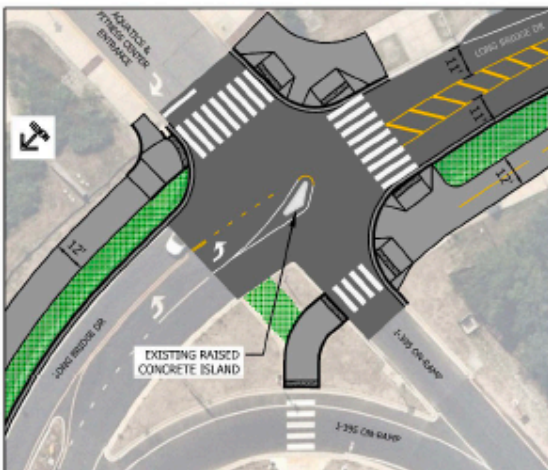
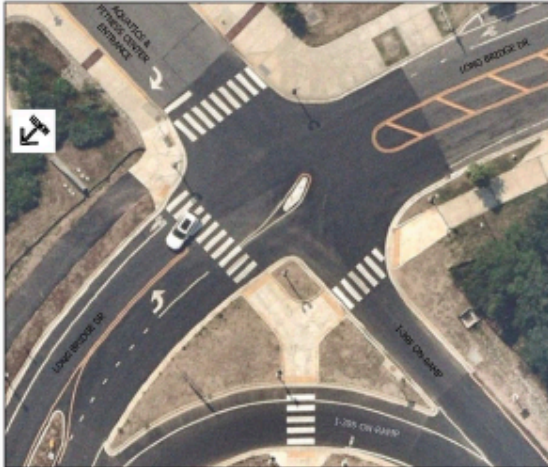


In the above picture the yellow represents the proposed bikeway between the terminus of the new Potomac bridge and 12th Street. The dotted white line at the bottom of the picture roughly represents the Esplanade.

The project would likely mean that northbound drivers will no longer be able to turn left from Long Bridge Drive onto the ramp leading to I-395. Instead, they will have to go around the traffic circle further down the road and head back to get to the ramp.

The graphic on the next page shows the choices. Based on community feedback, the county is leaning toward Concept 2. Work on the project is due to start in 2030, although county construction schedules are anything but predictable. For more information, visit [here](#).

LONG BRIDGE DRIVE at LONG BRIDGE AQUATICS & FITNESS CENTER PARKING LOT



What's Here Today:

- Existing sidewalk connection to Boundary Channel Drive / Mt. Vernon Trail
- Crosswalk conflicts with vehicles turning left into the parking lot

Intersection Concept 1

- Relocate crosswalk across Long Bridge Dr to remove conflict with turn lane
- Curb extensions to reduce crosswalk distances and slow turning vehicles
- Wider curb ramps for trail users

Intersection Concept 2

- Relocate crosswalk across Long Bridge Dr to remove conflict with turn lane
- Eliminate north-bound left turn from Long Bridge Drive on to I-395 on-ramp
- Create refuge for trail crossing at Long Bridge Drive, narrowing lanes to slow vehicle speeds

Making a key crosstown route safer for cyclists

Plans are in the works to make travel safer and easier for cyclists along the heavily traversed block of 18th Street S from S. Bell Street to Crystal Drive.

Because of the many superblocks in Crystal City, Pentagon City, and around Route 1, 18th Street is one of the few east-west connections in 22202 for drivers and pedestrians, as well as bicyclists. Currently 18th Street is still grade-separated from Route 1 – making riding and walking on it especially safe, comfortable, and convenient. (This may change with [VDOT's Route 1 Multimodal Improvements study](#). We hope not.)



The 18th Street stretch connects Crystal Drive to such areas to the west as the Aurora Highlands and Arlington Ridge neighborhoods, the Pentagon City area, and Columbia Pike.

The completion and opening of [The Grace](#), a new JBGS high-rise apartment/commercial building at the southwest corner of 18th Street South and Crystal Drive added wider sidewalks, trees and other plantings, and seating areas. Plans for the new [East Entrance to the Crystal City Metro](#) and the [Metro Market Square](#) park on the north side of 18th Street include sidewalk and landscaping improvements along the north side of 18th.

However, 18th Street between Crystal Drive and S. Bell currently has no safe place for cyclists and micromobile riders. Separated, safe bike lanes are a core, effective tool for eliminating severe crashes, among the primary goals of the county's [Vision Zero](#) program.

The 18th Street project plans call for protected bike lanes along both sides of 18th Street between Crystal Drive and S. Bell. They are part of the [Crystal City Bike Network final plan](#), as well as a continuation of the recently completed [18th Street S. Complete Streets project between S. Fern and S. Eads](#). They also are a continuation of the older protected bike lanes along S. Hayes to Army-Navy Drive.

Are the proposed plans for 18th Street perfect? No. Of particular concern is the narrowing of both the sidewalk and bike lane approaching Crystal Drive on the north side of the busy intersection. Since plans are still in their early stages, we hope the sidewalks and bike lanes will be enlarged.

Review updates to [county transportation plans](#) in Crystal City-Pentagon City. Keep up with the [National Landing BID's transformation quarterly program](#) for a great review of area construction plans.

County updates map showing roadway conditions for cyclists

The Arlington County government has just unveiled an [updated map](#) showing roadway conditions for bicyclists. The county has previously inventoried sidewalk conditions, mapped [here](#).

Enhance your mind and body with county classes, programs

Interested in exploring Feldenkrais or learning how to build a Civil War fort? Arlington Parks and Recreation begins winter registration on Dec. 3 for recreation classes and programs in nature and history. Here is a link to the [catalog](#). For more on all the county's recreation programs, visit [here](#). FYI: Feldenkrais, according to the catalog, "is an educational system centered on movement" that helps you relax, limber up, and shed nagging pains.

To learn more about county programs geared for people 55 and older, see the winter guide [here](#).

FUN STUFF IN CRYSTAL CITY (AND NEARBY)

Getting in the holiday spirit ...

Dress up for the first-ever Giving Gala and Auction

Dress up and enjoy great music, food, and a silent auction while supporting local nonprofits at the first ever Giving Gala at Movement Crystal City, 1235 S Clark St., on December 7, from 6 to 10 p.m. Proceeds will benefit environmental, social, and recreational programs. For more information, visit [here](#).



Winter Wonderland at Met Park.

Winter wonderland at Met Park

The Lodge, a ski-inspired festival, turns Metropolitan Park, 1400 S. Eads St., into a winter wonderland with train rides, photos with Santa, cozy drinks, holiday market vendors, and live performances. The event takes place on December 7, 1-7 p.m. Admission is free, but registration is recommended. [Grab your free lift ticket here.](#)

Add a natural touch to the holidays

Dreaming of a Green Christmas? Drop by Plants in the Park: Holiday Terrarium Crafting, on December 11, from 11 a.m.- 2 p.m., on the central green in Met Park. [PlantHouse](#) provides the materials and instruction for people of all ages and skills to create a festive terrarium.

Melwood hosts Miracle on 23rd Street holiday celebration

Melwood's annual Miracle on 23rd Street celebration will feature food, crafts, live music, a virtual reality experience, a tree lighting, and photos with Santa. Sponsored by Regency Furniture Showrooms, the celebration takes place on Dec. 13, 5-8 p.m., at 750 23rd St. [Register here.](#)

Wine and cider festival at the Water Bar, with musical serenade

The Water Bar in the Water Parks hosts a wine and cider tasting on December 7 from 2 to 8 p.m. The \$40 entry fee covers tastings of all wines and ciders, charcuterie pairings, and a discount on wine bottle purchases. Music by members of the Arlington Philharmonic. Visit [here](#) for more information.

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Do-it-yourself holiday crafts

Create your own holiday crafts on Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., at the [Innovation Studio](#), 525 14th St S. The free drop-in program is sponsored by [MoCA](#) (Museum of Contemporary Art, Arlington) on the Move. Coming up:

- Dec. 4, Ornament Painting, led by artist [Margaret Jacobson](#)
- Dec. 11, Festive Candle Decoration for your holiday table
- Dec. 18, Super-Size Snowflakes, assembled from scraps of paper

Buy a Christmas tree, help a good cause

Looking for a Christmas tree? You can order ahead, pick one up, or have it delivered. *Arlington Magazine* has collected a list of places where you can buy a tree and help a good cause. Find it [here](#).

Drop a toy off, make a child's holiday

The annual Arlington police toy drive seeks new, unwrapped toys for children ages newborn to 17. For more information, visit [here](#). Besides donating at collection events, you can drop toys off in boxes at the following sites:

- Cathedral of St. Thomas More, 3901 Cathedral Lane
- Long Bridge Aquatics & Fitness Center, 333 Long Bridge Drive
- Freddie's Beach Bar, 555 23rd Street S.

Elsewhere on the food and fun scene ...

Asia Bistro closes in Pentagon City, but its dishes, sushi will live on

After 22 years in Pentagon City, Asia Bistro closed last month. Some of its signature dishes will live on, however. The bistro's full-time staff will continue working at nearby sister establishments, owner Jessica Arbaugh told [ARLnow.com](#). At 1101 S. Joyce Street, Saigon Saigon will offer Asia Bistro's happy hour items and such popular items as chicken wings and steamed bao buns. The restaurant is debuting a sushi bar, with Asia Bistro's long-time sushi chef at the helm. ([ArlNow.com](#))

Water Bar among top places to munch on mussels

Crystal City's Water Bar has been named one of the 13 best places to eat mussels by [Eater DC](#). The Water bar serves mussels during happy hour, from 4-6 p.m. Diners can feast on a steamed bowl of garlicky PEI mussels with chunks of chorizo sausage and shallots for \$12.

New Crystal City taqueria features Mexican family's recipes



With its entire menu coming from family recipes, Taqueria Xochi (pronounced “so-chee”) opened last month on the ground floor of Amazon’s HQ2 at 1450 S. Eads St. Co-founders Geraldine Mendoza and Teresa Padilla say their restaurant will serve Mexican cuisine, as distinguished from Tex-Mex. (ARINow.com)

Washington Post names top Arlington restaurants

Three nearby restaurants caught the attention of *The Washington Post* in its [latest review of Arlington’s dining landscape](#), including eight restaurants it considers to be among the best in the county:

Queen Mother’s Kitchen 1711 Crystal Drive, a kiosk at the Water Park, with crunchy chicken breast sandwiches

Padaek, the new Laotian “hot” restaurant at 2931 S. Glebe Road, “home to some of the fieriest flavors in the area”

Our Mom Eugenia, 4044 Campbell Ave., Shirlington. See our new Crystal Palate feature review on Page 17 of this newsletter

Trivia, standup comedy, and karaoke – all in one night

[Highline RxR](#), 2010 Crystal Drive, hosts the monthly Comedy Karaoke Trivia Funtime show on December 14 at 7:30 p.m. The three-part event begins with trivia (compete solo or as a team), followed by standup comedy performances, and concluding with the top three trivia teams sending a contestant to compete in a karaoke contest. For details, visit [here](#).

Open Rewards encourages local shopping, dining

[Open Rewards](#) offers a way to earn cash toward purchases at shops and restaurants in National Landing. National Landing is offering a 10 percent match to encourage patronage at small businesses. Sign up [here](#).



Outdoor ice skating returns to Pentagon City

[Westport Outdoor Skating](#), 1201 S. Joyce St., has returned for the 2024-2025 season, offering lessons and public skating hours every day. The venue claims to be the largest outdoor ice rink in Northern Virginia. Reservations to skate for up to two hours are recommended.

For more activities, visit ...

[Events at National Landing](#)

[Arlington Parks and Recreation](#)

[Arlington arts events](#)

[Arlington Convention and Visitors Services](#)

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The Crystal Palate

This is the first of a potential series of restaurant reviews in our area. Let us know if there's a restaurant you would like reviewed. Submit ideas [here](#).

Our Mom Eugenia

4044 Campbell Ave., Shirlington, (571) 970-0468

When was the last time you enjoyed really good Greek family cooking? This was my third visit to this restaurant in Shirlington, and I was blown away by the flavor and tenderness of the lamb dishes. Whether it's lamb shank, roast lamb, or lamb sauté, they know how to do it and how to flavor it well.



On this last visit, we started with Saganaki. What's not to like about this flaming cheese appetizer prepared in a small, two-handled, heavy-bottomed frying pan? Various medium-hardness yellow cheeses with a mild nutty flavor can be used, but my favorite is haloumi. The dish is made with flour and cheese, deep fried in plenty of olive oil and brought to the table with flaming bourbon—quite dramatic. We caused a bit of a stir around us as the flames reached almost two feet above the pan. What's important is the thin crispy crust and a soft and melty interior.

The special was Arni Riganato: lamb, seasoned with oregano and slowly roasted until tender, accompanied by oven-roasted lemon potatoes and green beans. Since my companion ordered the vegetarian plate with three vegetables, we were both able to savor the tender, juicy lamb with a roasted tomato baste. Yum. Dessert was Galaktoboureko, a milk-custard pie with phyllo pastry that we shared. Added to this was a delicious bottle of the Greek wine Oenotria Land (mostly cabernet sauvignon) for \$70. Most wines start at \$52.

Shirlington is a hopping place on Saturday night. We couldn't get online reservations, but we showed up at 5 pm after seeing a play at Signature Theatre, and they took us right away. The owner suggested calling if you can't get a table online. Noise level is pretty high, but hey, with good wine and good food, you really don't care.

5 out of 5 stars rating; moderate price

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ABOUT CCCA

The Crystal City Civic Association (CCCA) was formed on January 28, 2014. We are a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization with the express purpose of advancing the common interests of the residents of the Crystal City neighborhood in Arlington County, Virginia. CCCA gives a voice to our residents. CCCA officers represent community members at county meetings, function as liaisons to state and local lawmakers, coordinate with the Crystal City BID on important issues and projects, and ensure the needs of residents are met.

CRYSTAL CITY CIVIC ASSOCIATION BOARD

President Eric Cassel

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Meeting Secretary Sheryl Eaton

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Membership Liaison Matthew Fuzi

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