

Final Draft-- Neighborhood Conservation plan: Local Businesses

Introduction

There is already a vast diversity of commercial space within Aurora Highlands.

There are some office buildings at the edge of our neighborhood, near Pentagon City Mall, and on Eads Street

There is large-scale retail- Pentagon City Mall with Macy's and Nordstroms Dept stores
Pentagon Center with big-box stores like Costco, Marshalls and Best Buy

There is small-scale retail- Mixed shops/restaurants/services- Pentagon Row, 23rd St.

There are several large hotels- Along Eads Street- Marriott, Sheraton, Radisson,
Holiday Inn

23rd Street runs through the heart of our neighborhood. In addition to the popular "Restaurant Row", there are several other local businesses located there.

Existing conditions and neighborhood survey

Survey- 91% of respondents favored the present level of development on 23rd Street—Low rise, independent businesses instead of larger-scale businesses

Numerous respondents entered comments indicating their opposition to commercial establishments within the residential area or encroaching upon residential area for property

Description of businesses

The 400 block of 23rd Street (between Route 1 and Eads Street) has presented long-standing problems for the community. Serious parking problems and traffic management issues are foremost at this time, resulting in significant pedestrian safety concerns.

This block is a major entry into the Aurora Highlands neighborhood.

One side of the block contains a low-rise bank branch with a parking lot.

The other side of the block includes a gas station, 2 restaurants and a convenience store.

There is inadequate parking for the existing businesses, with vehicles often blocking the sidewalks, forcing pedestrians into the traffic lanes of 23rd street.

The parked vehicles for these businesses interfere with traffic flow along 23rd street where many vehicles need to be in the right-hand lane to turn.

In addition to the parking and traffic problems, there is a major health concern. Some of these businesses have generated repeated complaints about litter, both in front and in the alley behind the businesses.

Short term recommendation:

The County should study how to improve this block for the immediate future.

Traffic enforcement is critical:

Prevent vehicles from blocking the intersection of 23rd St and Eads street

Encourage use of 18th Street as an entry into Crystal City

Add signs saying "Do not Block the Intersection"

Consider a traffic camera, with ticketing of violators

Control of litter should be addressed and non-compliant businesses should be held responsible.

Long term Recommendation: This block is a key block for the Crystal City Re-development Task Force to plan. Whatever new development occurs on this block:

1- Should have retail at ground level to improve continuity between Aurora Highlands and Crystal City

2- Should be of a height that steps down from Route 1 to the low-rise neighborhood at Eads Street.

3- Should have adequate underground parking for tenants and visitors

4- Should have additional parking to serve nearby low-rise businesses on 23rd Street

5- Should not impede the flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic

The 500 block of 23rd Street and the 2300 block of Eads Street have many commercial establishments which are an important, integral part of the community.

These highly-valued businesses include independent restaurants and pubs, a dry cleaner, nail and hair salons. These popular local businesses have been troubled by insufficient parking space availability.

Businesses on the south side of 23rd street back up to the yards of single family homes on 24th street.

We want the Aurora Highlands/ 23rd St Business row to be:
inviting and appealing from the street
an active part of the neighborhood
independent small businesses that cater to residents needs and
add neighborhood character

The community does not encourage new businesses/buildings that would increase density and building height. We want to keep the height and nature of buildings compatible with surrounding residential neighborhood.

The community would support the development of a parking facility, to serve the needs of the businesses along 23rd St. Such parking should ideally be below grade or hidden, and be available to patrons at affordable rates.

The community supports improvements to the intersection of Route 1 and 23rd street that will improve pedestrian movement in a safe manner. Such interventions should be of the highest priority, and should not be postponed until implementation of the Crystal City revitalization plan.

The community supports the efforts of the Crystal City Business Improvement District and the 23rd Street Business Association to control litter and improve the appearance of this commercial area, which will help to assure the economic viability of the local businesses.

The 600 block of 23rd Street is residential, and has been plagued with parking problems due to proximity to the nearby businesses. Relief will only be realized with the addition of a parking facility that will serve nearby businesses.

The 700 block of 23rd Street is zoned C-1 (low-rise commercial). This is the location of the Sheltered Occupations Center, a workshop that employs residents with significant handicaps. The block includes a small low rise commercial development with a realtor, daycare center and salon on one side of 23rd St. , and three small office buildings on the other side. The present development is low-rise, appropriately landscaped and is compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhoods. We do not encourage new businesses /buildings on this block that would increase density or building height.

The 800 block of 23rd Street is zoned residential and includes several church buildings as well as daycare centers established by use permit.

Recommendation for the 600-800 blocks of 23rd St:

We do not encourage increased density

Keep height and nature of buildings compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods.

EADS STREET-

Eads Street, from Army-Navy Drive South to 23rd Street, is lined largely by high-rise apartments and hotels. Future development is planned for the street between Army-Navy Drive and 15th Street.

Recommendations

2000 block (Crystal Houses)

Proposed new lofts buildings on this block have been approved and will add considerable density. We recommend that there be no further increases in density on this block, due to concerns about transition to the adjacent single-family residential neighborhood along Fern Street.

There is already a planted median on Eads street from 23rd Street to Fort Scott Drive. Extending that median north to 15th Street, if planted with trees and shrubs, would serve to soften the appearance of this very broad street, and the appearance would tend to encourage traffic moving at speeds closer to the speed limit. Such a median would improve safety for pedestrians who must cross Eads street to access the entrance to the Crystal City metro station.

We recommend that the County investigate the possibility of extending the planted median on Eads Street from 15th St to 23rd St.

The blocks between Route 1 and Eads Street lie within the Crystal City Redevelopment area, and are along the eastern border of Aurora Highlands. These blocks may be subjected to redevelopment in the coming years. Because these blocks serve as a transition to a residential community, there is concern about new high-rise buildings producing an abrupt wall at the edge of the neighborhood. New high-rises would have significant traffic and parking impacts on the adjacent residential neighborhood.

Facades along Eads Street should step up gradually to Route 1, so that the
façade at Eads Street is no higher than 45 feet, to prevent "wall effect"
Facades should be pedestrian friendly, and not "turn their back" on the neighborhood.
There should be pedestrian entrances on Eads Street for all buildings.
There should be pedestrian-friendly landscaping and street lighting, as well as standard
sidewalks and setbacks to invite walkability.

The neighborhood prefers a balance between various uses-- Residential, offices, hotels, with commercial spaces on all first floors. The neighborhood feels that the existing post office should be retained. All new developments should include underground parking sufficient to meet the needs of their residents, tenants and visitors. The community strongly opposes any effort to relax current county standards for required parking and would wish to protect residential parking as development increases.

Crystal City

Extensive redevelopment of Crystal City is in progress, and will continue well into the future.

To the south of Crystal City, between Route 1 and George Washington Parkway, lies the new Potomac Yards development area which extends to the border of Arlington at Four Mile Run. This large area is south of 26th St where high-rise housing and offices are under construction.

To the North of Crystal city, between Route 1 and George Washington Parkway, there is a large area north of 12th Street where a large county park and aquatic center is planned.

Parts of the Aurora Highlands neighborhood overlap with the proposed Crystal City redevelopment area. Specifically, the blocks between Eads Street and Fern Street from 15th Street to 23rd street. These blocks presently have high-rise residential properties that sit across from the single-family residential neighborhood along Fern Street.

Future redevelopment plans for Crystal City raises concerns for residents of Aurora Highlands. Increased density of development will bring increased traffic to our local residential streets. (See Traffic and Transportation section) . Parking issues will need to be addressed. Increased residential and commercial development will require appropriate supporting services.

The community feels that any new construction on blocks bordering the single-family residences needs to be of limited height and density, as a transition to the single-family neighborhood that is adjacent, with no structures higher than existing structures. High-rise structures should be restricted to the portion of Crystal City that is east of Route 1.

We feel that the blocks along the west side of Eads Street south of 23rd street should remain residential. Single family homes only—no townhouses. (Note: R 2-7 duplexes are there too)

The two existing apartments on the west side of Eads Street are zoned RA 8-18 and RA 6-15. There should be no rezoning of these lots to more development-intensive categories.

The East side of Eads Street may remain commercial but should be low rise except for existing structures. Tapering down toward residential areas is of critical importance.

Parking lots and car rental/sales lots and other commercial facilities should be appropriately screened and landscaped.

Blocks between Eads Street and Route 1

Infill no higher than present buildings, especially South of 23rd St
The west side of Eads should stay with present residential zoning

East side of Eads Street- low rise commercial preferred except for existing Holiday Inn.

Aurora Highlands and Crystal City are two communities of very different character.

It is inevitable that on some issues, the perspective of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association will conflict with the Crystal City Business community.

It is inevitable that the long range vision of the Aurora Highlands neighborhood will differ from the vision that will emerge in the report of the Crystal City Task Force.

It is hoped that as time goes by, the AH perspective will be considered and respected. The residents of the community will rely on the County government to function as mediator in cases of dispute.

PENTAGON CENTRE PROPERTY

Pentagon Centre is the last remaining parcel in Pentagon City to be developed. This large parcel, currently the site of the Pentagon Centre shopping area is also known as the "Costco property". It includes several large retailers and restaurants.

At the time of this writing, the developer is working with Arlington County to produce a long-term site plan for this lot, which will include commercial, retail, residential and hotel properties. Because the Pentagon Centre Property lies within the boundaries of Aurora Highlands, the community is a participant in the planning process.

Any new development should ideally have the same community/urban-friendly mix of development that we have at the nearby Pentagon Row development. Development must consider the proximity of low-rise residential buildings (Southampton Condominiums) along 15th Street.

Among the issues for the community will be:

- Continuing present businesses without interruption
- Preservation of adequate parking without adverse impact on local streets
- Possible benefits to the community within or near the site
- Overall impact of the development on local services.
- Minimizing adverse impacts on local residents, particularly those whose residences directly abut the project.

GENERAL

The community stands by several general principles apply to businesses adjacent to or within Aurora Highlands.

- We strongly oppose commercial establishments in the center of our residential neighborhood. Residents would object to expanded development of commercial establishments and would oppose any effort to rezone to more development-intensive categories.
- Zoning should not permit existing residential properties to change to commercial or to a higher residential zoning
- Buildings in the commercial areas should have minimal impact (visual, noise, light, odor) on homes in Aurora Highlands.
- Commercial development should not be permitted to increase neighborhood traffic or parking problems.
- Ensure that the architecture of new buildings harmonizes with existing buildings, with street trees and landscaping added.
- We are seeking restaurants and pubs, dry cleaners and hair salons, ice cream parlors and sandwich shops. More supermarkets will be needed as new residential developments are completed.
- Local businesses are responsible for the appearance of their properties. They should be responsible for keeping the street and sidewalk near their business free of litter, and should place garbage in appropriate containers.
- Parking is limited in this community, and local businesses should ask their patrons to observe the local parking regulations. The County and developers must work with the surrounding neighborhood to plan for adequate parking before development begins, for example with Crystal City revitalization.
- Engage managements of commercial properties to educate their businesses to be sensitive to the surrounding neighborhood and to the effects of cut-through traffic

The Aurora Highlands community will promote and encourage the creating of a dynamic commercial street along 23rd St while working with developers and the County to limit impact on residential neighborhoods. We will encourage businesses along 23rd St to develop and revitalize through the efforts of their local business association, the Crystal City Business Improvement District and the Crystal City Redevelopment Project.