

April 27, 2015

City of Alexandria  
Department of Planning and Zoning  
301 King Street, Room 2100  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Subdivision 2014-0014  
809 and 811 Vassar Road  
Applicants Stephen and Mary Hales

Dear Members of the Planning Board:

We are writing to respectfully express our disagreement with the proposed subdivision of 809 and 811 Vassar Road. We are residents of the Clover neighborhood, many of us owners of properties adjacent to Mr. and Mrs. Hales' two lots. Since we learned of the proposal two weeks ago, some of us have spent hours meeting together, walking the lots with Mr. Hales, and pondering what this decision might mean to our neighborhood.

Zoning Ordinance #4652, Section 11-1710B states, "No lot shall be re-subdivided in a manner as to detract from the value of adjacent property." In this letter we hope to show that subdividing the lots will not only detract from the value of the properties adjacent to those of the Hales, but will also negatively impact the historic, aesthetic, environmental, and financial value of the properties in Clover.

The Clover neighborhood is over 60 years old. President Gerald Ford and his wife were the original owners of 514 Crown View Drive (a property adjacent to the Hales' home), which was built in 1955. The Ford connection is a point of pride in the neighborhood; 514 Crown View has a historic plaque, and surrounding houses still have old-fashioned alarm lights over their garage doors which the Secret Service installed during the transition period when Ford was President but had not yet moved into the White House. Homes in Clover have been owned by generals, admirals, authors, and other noted figures. The neighborhood is stable; to our knowledge, no subdivision has ever taken place since it was originally laid out in the 1950s. Indeed, this neighborhood would be a good candidate for Historic designation by the City of Alexandria.

The five lots at the top of Vassar Road – 401 Cloverway Drive (which faces Vassar), and 809, 811, 812, and 814 Vassar – are some of the largest and most beautiful in all of Clover. They are located together at the highest topographic point in the neighborhood. They average 0.4 acres each and are laid out with spacious homes. They have the highest property values. One could say that the top of Vassar Road is the "crown jewel" of Clover. The Hales' plan would reduce the size of two of

those big, beautiful lots to the neighborhood "average." The large homes on both lots would be strangely proportioned in their suddenly-smaller, reshaped yards. That would be a sad comedown for this admired part of the neighborhood.

No homeowner wants to be robbed of open area views and sunlight. The site of the proposed new lot has been defined by large, open landscaped areas for these 60 years, and all of us had every reason to believe it would stay that way, because the neighborhood was clearly subdivided and no parcels have ever been re-subdivided. This is part of what we paid for to live in our particular homes. Homeowners on Crown View Drive who live downhill from the lots in question planned their back yard landscaping, as well as their patios and back windows, around this open space. Now we are told that the space may be re-subdivided and a home of at least two stories will likely be built upon it. It is reasonable to surmise that property values will be negatively affected by the loss of beautiful views and sunlight. Some of us will have to put in trees and other costly landscaping features to hide the "new" view of the back of a two-story home. There will be a loss of privacy as well as a feeling of being squeezed in. It is unfair to those of us who have lived here peacefully for years to suddenly have to deal with this inconvenience and these losses.

We have significant concerns related to the management of water runoff from any future structure built on the new lot. The proposed new lot is about ten feet higher than the adjacent lots on Crown View Drive. Runoff from the higher lots on Vassar Road has already created many issues with Crown View Drive property owners over the years, resulting in wet backyards, flooded basements, and foundation repairs. This is a natural result of the impervious clay soil of the neighborhood coupled with the sloping nature of the lots. The existing open space between 809 and 811 Vassar has provided a natural means of absorbing a significant amount of water. Any new structure on the proposed lot will take much of this absorptive ground away. The water coming off the roof of a future structure has to go somewhere. Unfortunately, that somewhere will be the backyards and foundations and retaining walls of several property owners on Crown View Drive. This will create a constant water management problem for these owners. The price of the consequences will fall to homeowners on Crown View Drive in the way of increased maintenance costs, landscape impacts, and decreased property values. In addition, we are concerned about the potential impacts any new construction might have on the 12" storm water line on the northeast side of new lot 625.

While Clover is a beautiful community with an interesting history, its future is clearly fragile. The houses and many of the trees are 60 years old. Many owners – some of whom are original to the neighborhood – are growing older and will either "age in place" (which will require some remodeling of their homes) or have to move out of the neighborhood altogether, making way for younger families. Homes will need renovation and repair. Older trees will need to be monitored and eventually replaced with new trees. Infrastructure will wear out and need to be updated, or new infrastructure will need to be installed to keep up with technological demands.

If changes are made thoughtfully, with a deep appreciation of the neighborhood's original beautiful, tasteful design, Clover can continue to thrive for generations to come. However, disruptive actions like re-subdividing lots and building homes where none have existed before can set a precedent that will tip the balance and set neighbor against neighbor. Just because a property owner "can" do something does not mean it is in the best interest of the neighborhood as a whole.

We respectfully request that you vote to NOT APPROVE the re-subdivision of 809 and 811 Vassar Road and keep the neighborhood in its present state. Thank you for your consideration.

Adri M. Helen Lloyd

514 CROWN VIEW DRIVE  
ALEXANDRIA VA 22314

Tim Lloyd TIM LLOYD

514 CROWN VIEW DRIVE

David Rust DAVID RUST

Rebecca Rust Rebecca Rust

103 751-1620  
506 Crown View Drive

Deana Rhodeside Deana Rhodeside 414 Crown View Drive

Deana Rhodeside

415 Crown View Drive

Formah (Zorana LLC)

500 Crown View Dr.

Lauren Robert  
+ JANE SUNDUS

807 Clovercrest Dr.

C. Wayne Summers

407 Crown View Dr.

Marie Summers

407 Crown View Dr.

Deborah G. Nagle Deborah Nagle  
Donald J. Brady D J Brady

408 Crown View Dr.

Douglas Craig

407 Cloverway Dr.

C/ReBell

407 Cloverway Dr.

Adele J. Pitt

316 Crown View

Gail + W.J. Warlick

313 Crown View Drive

Adele and John Augustine

315 Crown View Drive

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Orlando Glenn Spittler

314 Crown View Dr.

Melinda Mount

312 Crown View Dr.

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May 4, 2015

City of Alexandria  
Department of Planning and Zoning  
301 King Street, Room 2100  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Subdivision 2014-0014  
811 and 809 Vassar Road

Dear Planning Commission Members and City Staff,

This letter is in response to the letter dated April 27, 2015 sent to you by some concerned neighbors of the Clover/College Park neighborhood. We respect their right to raise concerns about the proposed subdivision, but want to address some of the points that are made in the letter.

The prevailing argument contained in the letter is that the proposed subdivision will have a negative impact on surrounding properties, by “detracting from the value of adjacent property.” They use the possibility of a future structure as well as characteristics of that structure (height, depth, etc.) to underpin their argument. We believe that the case Seymour vs. City of Alexandria clearly demonstrates that any characteristics of a future structure on the lot cannot be considered in the subdivision request.\*\* The court ruled that “the City could not consider the anticipated improvements on Seymour's proposed lots when considering Seymour's resubdivision application.” In that case, the City itself conceded that, “[t]he division of land into lots is a purely legal construct that, by itself, can have no effect on the value of anything.”

Even if the Seymour case is ignored and a future structure is considered, saying there will be a negative impact does not make it true. In fact, it could easily be argued that the subdivision will increase property values. A new home on the lot will likely sell for 1.2 to \$1.4 million (as evidenced by the recent sales of 315 Vassar for \$1.225 Million and 1110 Trinity for \$1.395 Million), and would be another improvement, in a long line of teardowns and renovations that have enhanced the quality of housing stock in Clover/College Park. These additions to the neighborhood are “raising all the boats” by increasing property values across the board. This can be observed by looking at increased property tax assessments by all residents of Clover/College Park. These are objective facts that support approval of the subdivision.

The neighbors' letter mentions the lack of subdivisions in Clover/College Park. This is untrue. In 2011, the City Staff and Planning Commission approved the subdivision of 400 Princeton Blvd (which becomes Vassar Rd as it turns the corner), which created 402 Princeton Blvd. 402 Princeton Blvd is exactly 8 lots away from 811 Vassar Rd. That subdivision has not caused property values to decline. In fact, values in the entire neighborhood have increased since 2011.

Another neighbor concern is the change in lot sizes as a result of the subdivision. The properties at 811 and 809 are indeed larger than most of the lots in the neighborhood. The proposed lot for 627 will be

14,382 Square Feet, or exactly one third of an acre – still much larger than nearly all other lots in the neighborhood. Lot 626 and 625 will be 9453 SF and 9891 SF respectively, both of which are larger than every other lot on that side of the street, with the exception of the last one, which is a corner lot. The City Staff Report addresses the issue of lot size and describes in detail why these lots fit in with the character of the neighborhood.

Storm water runoff is also mentioned as a concern. The City Staff Report clearly states that any future development would have to include a storm water management plan to handle water flow from the property. We are committed to meeting our responsibilities in this area, at the appropriate time. That time has not arrived, as we have no immediate plans to build on the property.

As property owners, we are seeking no relief from the City. We are not asking for variances of any kind or for special exceptions to rules and regulations. The facts are clear: R-8 zoning, by definition, requires a minimum lot size of 8000 Sq. Ft. We meet this threshold. The zoning also requires a minimum frontage of 40 feet, 65 feet at the building line, and 8 foot setbacks off the property line. We meet these thresholds. Finally, City Staff has determined that the lots are in character with the neighborhood.

The future of Clover/College Park is bright. It is vibrant. Change is all around and it is fantastic. Improvements are being made to properties all over, enhancing neighborhood aesthetics and increasing property values. I hope that you will confirm the City Staff's recommendation and approve the proposed subdivision.

Sincerely,



Stephen and Mary Hales  
811 Vassar Road  
Alexandria, VA 22314

\*\*Notes from Seymour vs. City of Alexandria

Pursuant to section 9.24 of the City Charter, sections 11-1701 and 11-1710(B) of the Ordinance involve the division of land and do not concern building and zoning specifications. The trial court properly distinguished zoning and subdivision regulations based on the power authorized under the City's Charter. Fogarty, the Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning, correctly advised the Planning Commission that "the term 'lot' in Subsection 11-1710(B) [sic] refers to really the use of the land, and not so much the design of the structures that are built on the property." Accordingly, we hold that Judge Kemler correctly ruled that **the City could not consider the anticipated improvements on Seymour's proposed lots when considering Seymour's resubdivision application.** See also Board of Supervisors v. Countryside Inv. Co., 258 Va. 497, 504-05, 522 S.E.2d 610, 613-14 (1999) (holding that the local government could not deny a subdivision based on zoning considerations).

Section 11-1710(B) prohibits the approval of a subdivision that will "detract from the value of adjacent property." **The City conceded in an interrogatory answer that "[t]he division of land into lots is a purely legal construct that, by itself, can have no effect on the value of anything."** Therefore, the Planning Commission erred in denying Seymour's resubdivision application on the basis that, as the City explained in answering an interrogatory, "the Commission was not satisfied that the lots, as improved, would be compatible with the . value of the adjacent lots."

April 27, 2015

*From  
Elliott*

City of Alexandria  
Department of Planning and Zoning  
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Alexandria, VA 22314

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those big, beautiful lots to the neighborhood “average.” The large homes on both lots would be strangely proportioned in their suddenly-smaller, reshaped yards. That would be a sad comedown for this admired part of the neighborhood.

No homeowner wants to be robbed of open area views and sunlight. The site of the proposed new lot has been defined by large, open landscaped areas for these 60 years, and all of us had every reason to believe it would stay that way, because the neighborhood was clearly subdivided and no parcels have ever been re-subdivided. This is part of what we paid for to live in our particular homes. Homeowners on Crown View Drive who live downhill from the lots in question planned their back yard landscaping, as well as their patios and back windows, around this open space. Now we are told that the space may be re-subdivided and a home of at least two stories will likely be built upon it. It is reasonable to surmise that property values will be negatively affected by the loss of beautiful views and sunlight. Some of us will have to put in trees and other costly landscaping features to hide the “new” view of the back of a two-story home. There will be a loss of privacy as well as a feeling of being squeezed in. It is unfair to those of us who have lived here peacefully for years to suddenly have to deal with this inconvenience and these losses.

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Citra Dawson  
505 Crown View Dr.

Deborah Dawson  
505 Crown View Dr

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