

Docket 13

FINAL --- 3 MINUTES FOR SEPT. 17 HEARING Submission of Comments for Public Hearing on Sept. 17, 2022

DOCKET ITEM #13 ---Parking Issues APPEAL  
By Kathleen M. Burns, 1036 N. Pegram, Alexandria, VA 22304  
Burnskathy1036@gmail.com cell: 703-624-2097

I am the chair of the Brookville-Seminary Valley Civic Association (BSVCA) Open Space Committee  
I was duly appointed by a unanimous vote of the BSVCA Board on Nov. 17, 2021.

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

We are here today because 155 local Alexandria residents signed a PETITION to file this APPEAL to the Council to rescind or repeal a decision by the Parking and Traffic Board on July 25, 2022.

This Public Hearing pits 155 tax-paying residents and constituents of our elected Council members against One Very Powerful Agency--the Transportation and Environmental Services (TES). Those odds of 155 to 1 are important in assessing how you individual members of Council will vote.

- As residents on the West End and throughout the City, we hope that the 2019 Council decision on the fate of Seminary Road will NOT become the role model for 5325 Polk. And not the basis for future TES and City policies decisions.

The City had planned a sidewalk for Seminary Road, but officials were stymied when VDOT rejected, the day after the vote, the promise of an earlier grant. In this instance, TES and City officials initially lined up the Road Diet debate on Seminary Road before the Transportation and Parking Board, which voted it down. To counteract that move, TES and City officials teed it up for a Council hearing. In that astounding verdict, the City overruled the valid Petition signed by 13,000 local residents to NOT accept the TES plan. The Council action was not good governance, not good traffic policy, nor good design. Since that Council decision, there have been 5 significant accidents at Quaker and Seminary are under investigation.

Council members are being asked to decide whether you will support the "Will of the People" approach or endorse the TES engineers in their one-sided approach. For guidance in this decision, perhaps Council members need to use the mantra applied to healthcare workers and apply it to engineers and urban planners in these sidewalk and road use decisions: "First do no harm." Or the proposition that "A false premise leads to a false conclusion." [A false premise is an incorrect proposition or assumption that forms the basis of an argument and renders it logically unsound.]

**Today's hearing needs to focus on three relevant issues:**

- **Removal of 9 essential on-site Parking Spots on the one-block stretch on Polk Avenue.** But the removal of those parking spots goes well beyond that one street. Our competition for any available parking already has residents from the 92 KMS townhouses (without driveways between houses) now having to walk several blocks...if and when they find parking on Polk or on Palmer Place or anywhere else.

The TES plan ignores the significant differences in availability between daytime and the nighttime parking needs.

Unfortunately, TES also avoids any mention of the removal of easily accessible parking for the daily Park visitors who drive here to park on Polk and then climb the path to the top of 5325 Polk Open Space Park. Without reasonable parking access, they won't be able to do that. We would never minimize parking access to other nearby parks like Holmes Run and Fort Ward.

- **A lack of overall neutral, fact-based documentation on how TES reached its various conclusions,** without TES citing any reputable methodology provided by outside, neutral experts. The Outcome was predicted in November 2021 by TES.

The TES information relied primarily on staff-driven comments, and only when some community residents questioned the numbers presented in a widely distributed news article, [see ATTACHMENT: July 27, 2022, from AlxNOW media) did TES attempt to provide limited additional data from outside sources. But TES chose to limit the scope of the study by National Data Surveying and Services, and thus compromised the ability to create a more complete report. The company provides only the factual information. They do not write the report or provide recommendations.

- **TES has failed to offering any reasonable alternatives to only a sidewalk**, which will require annual snow shoveling and maintenance, and provides a one-sided assessment of options. As former US Representative Barney Frank has said: "You are entitled to your opinions, but not your own facts."

Go beyond the fallback stance of the "right-of-way" (which is not carved in stone) and look at possibilities that don't remove 9 parking spots and that have no current or future potential to harm the structure of the Park.

TES has offered no cost-benefit analysis on how they came up with the \$100,000 sidewalk price tag, to justify this project. TES waived a mandatory Environmental Impact Statement, which is usually standard for government land use projects, especially on a fragile site. TES ignored geological and scientific data (provided by outside, neutral experts) on the site, which has a 49% slope, on marine clay, with underground water sources, with a large sign proclaiming this is a WATERSHED PROTECTION ZONE, and a Nature Center.

In spite of repeated requests to TES staff and our elected political officials, there has been an adamant refusal to consider a reasonable, viable, safe, cost-conscious alternative---which has gotten no traction, even though it is the preferred option by residents who would be impacted by the sidewalk.

As a taxpayer, a constituent of our elected Council, and as a parent, who values safety for children and adults, I remain alarmed that the official Decisions Makers are not evaluating the Pros and Cons of not only the sidewalk, but of the Alternative-----of a \$5000 Crosswalk from one side of Polk to the other, with appropriate signage, including a Curve in the road sign; reduced School Zone speed limits to 15 mph (as are found for other Alexandria schools); bright signs with walking boys and girls.

What the school officials, parents, concerned residents and taxpayers are all looking for is A SAFE PEDESTRIAN CROSSING ON POLK AVENUE---and that option should not be limited to only the impervious sidewalk.

- **Take another broader look at School Input in this sidewalk decision. And start at the Top.**

We have a dynamic, knowledgeable and informed **new Interim School Superintendent Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt** and she should have some input in the TES Sidewalk versus the 5325 Polk Open Space Park, which happens to be near Polk School. She is probably a more realistic appraiser of overall School Policy for all neighborhood sidewalks than the PTA or principals who are not experts in engineering, construction or sidewalks.

I spoke with her on Sept. 15 at the dedication of the Winkler Preserve

She was not aware about school and neighborhood controversy of the TES sidewalk versus the Open Space Park near Polk School and she said she would like to refer the issue to her chief of operations, for advice and input. Sidewalks are NOT just a **decision for individual schools ---with varying circumstances---but a school-wide Policy issue.**

Dr. Kay-Wyatt said **she would like her Operations officer to look into the SIDEWALK versus the Polk school dispute** and provide some advice and input for the school-wide system policy.

Thank you to Council members for your time and interest on Docket Item13

I would like to include the following items as ATTACHMENTS to the end of my Statement:

1. "Traffic and Parking Board unanimously approves Polk Avenue sidewalk despite neighbor objections" by Vernon Miles, July 27, 2022
2. "Don't Pave the Park," Alexandria TIMES, April 21, 2022
3. "My View: Time to Shift Priorities," Alexandria TIMES, July 14, 2022
4. Alexandria Press Release by then-City Manager Rashad Young on Dec. 5, 2012, to announce "Consideration of Request to Authorize the Acquisition of the Property at 5325 Polk for use as Open Space.

To: Mayor Wilson and Members of the City Council

Date: Saturday, September 17, 2022

Place: City Council Chambers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor City Hall

From: Shirley Downs

1007 North Vail Street

Alexandria, VA 22304

Phone:703-845-7958, Land Line no Text

Email:Shirley-Downs@Comcast.net

Re: Opposition to the decision of the Parking Board to eliminate the 9 Parking Places at Polk Park, Docket Item #13

I am asking you to overturn the actions of the Parking Commission to take away the 9 parking spaces on Polk and replace them with a sidewalk and possibly delay voting on this project subject to further data and analysis related to the Audit of the number of Children Attending Polk and concerns about Environmental Issues. In previous emails I outlined issues related to both.

Today I am concentrating on the need to preserve the parking spaces which are needed to deal with the Parking Paralysis residents of KMS which include Van Dorn, Vail, Terrill, Richenbacher and Pelham as well as the single family residences on Pelham, Polk, Palmer Place and the single family homes below Polk down to Richenbacher experience.

A Night Time Parking Survey is needed not just for the Pelham Polk area and the single-family homes below Polk which I have been told T&ES collected in a One-Night Survey. We also need *ALL OF THE STREETS RELATED TO THE KMS TOWNHOUSES TO BE INCLUDED IN SUCH A PARKING SURVEY AT NIGHT*. This is where the parking is the scarcest. As I understand it the ***KMS Townhouses including Van Dorn, Vail, Terrill, and Richenbacher were excluded*** from the one Night Parking Survey that was conducted.

This was brought up when residents on the BSVCA Zoom call indicated that the majority of KMS residents had not received letters from TE&S asking for their opinion re the proposed sidewalk. Because parking is so constrained and competitive people from KMS routinely have to park all the way over on Pelham and Polk. Parking is a nightmare because it is so constrained and competitive. Advocates both for and opposed to the sidewalk said they prioritized the Night Time Parking because of this. That is why 155 people signed our Parking Petition.

In addition to not receiving letters advising KMS residents of the proposed project that would greatly impact them when the PTA Meeting was held relating to this project only members of the PTA were invited to the meeting. Residents right next door to the Polk School, who would be most impacted by this decision were not invited to attend and so local residents knew nothing about this proposal. These neighbors were excluded. Is that fair?

Neighbors and staff at Polk School have indicated that people do not walk up Pelham and on to Polk to get to school because Pelham is too steep, they go along Richenbacher to Pegram and then go up and turn left onto Polk to get to Polk school. Two children live on Pelham, and two on Polk walk to school along Polk that way, so we need data on Parkside.

To make an intelligent policy decision, reliable, updated, independent data is necessary because the ability to walk to school has been cited as the primary reason for this proposed sidewalk. This data, previously collected for the VDOT application which T&ES used for its presentation on this project, is from 2014, making it seriously out of date. We need to know how many children and adults are actually using this area now.

Use the Metropolitan Council of Governments Safe Streets to School audits grant, or use electronic counters aimed at the Gate to Parkside on the area where you plan to put the sidewalk to count the children and adults using the sidewalk and do the same on the Richenbacher /Pegram intersection to count where children and adults are walking there.

Contact the Polk school for updated data on the number of children at Polk school, and how many children arrive at school via bus, car, or walking. Use an electronic counter on the sidewalk to count the children and adults who are coming thru the gate at Parkside and how many others are using this space to walk. Do the same at the intersection of Richenbacher /Pegram to count how many children are using that route to school.

As indicated in testimony on July 25, 2022, and previous emails other intersections such as Richenbacher /Pegram and Richenbacher/Sanger and Van Dorn should be the focus of your attention rather than the area identified for this sidewalk *because, they have been identified by residents as being unsafe and in need of remediation to make it safer for children and other pedestrians to get to school and around the neighborhood.*

If you do not have up-to-date data *perhaps it would be better for City Council to postpone the vote until Audit information on the number of school children and adults using the area in front of Polk Park to walk to school is available.*

This would also allow consideration of whether any of the suggestions related to dealing with pushing the sidewalk further into the Park, such as a low wall with weep holes, or narrowing the sidewalk and perhaps narrowing Polk Street to force the traffic to slow down could be considered, or the use of permeable pavers to reduce the flow of water over the sidewalk and into the street and the houses below could be more fully considered. Permeable pavers allow more water to go into the ground this reducing the chance of ice forming on the sidewalk which is a liability. None of these and other suggestions were actually analyzed as possibilities. Rather the response was we do not have money in the budget for any of these things. *Would it be worthwhile to delay a final decision in order to consider such suggestions? Maybe there is a solution which could eliminate or diminish the number of parking spaces sacrificed if there is more time for analysis of such options.*

The City has a Policy for prioritizing Neighborhood Sidewalks and where they should be built. It is attached below. It states that criteria for selection of projects include:

The Speed and Volume of Traffic going by,

The Cost and Feasibility of the project,

The level of Neighborhood Support – Note 155 people expressed opposition to this project because it would take away 9 needed parking spaces in the neighborhood.

The policy also notes that problems related to:

Large Trees, and

Excessive slopes

can increase the cost of a project and for that reason may negate building the sidewalk.

If these apply it would seem to be that city policy related to the building of the sidewalk **might suggest that it not be constructed**, such options need to be studied, to see if there is any way to accommodate different views, look at budgetary costs and weigh the options. That may also take time.

***It appears that the proposed sidewalk at Polk may fail the City's policy regarding where to prioritize the building of sidewalks if it is; not used that much, if the neighborhood is opposed to the project; if the construction of the sidewalk would create problems that were expensive to remediate; if other locations where there was more foot traffic and investments would be of greater benefit to a larger number of children and pedestrians attending Polk School.***

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/transportation-planning/neighborhood-sidewalk-program>

To: Mayor Wilson and City Council Members

Date: Saturday September 17, 2022

From: Shirley Downs

1007 North Vail Street

Alexandria, VA 22304

Phone: 703-845-7958

Email: [Shirley-Downs@Comcast.net](mailto:Shirley-Downs@Comcast.net)

Re: Docket Item 13, Opposition to Parking Commission Vote on Parking at Polk Park

I am opposed to the Decision of the Parking Commission to remove 9 Parking Spaces and replace them with a Sidewalk that benefits a smaller number of children and adults than an investment in other streets children use to go to Polk School. The need to complete the Audit of school children going to Polk and review Environmental Issues suggests that it might be good to delay a final vote until data and cost estimates are available to try to reach an agreement which will not take away needed parking and still protect the Park.

KMS residents parking is so constrained and difficult we regularly spend 20 to 25 minutes looking for parking. KMS and other local residents in the single family houses have acute parking problems on our streets and competition between KMS, Willow Run, and Parkside is fierce. All of us need the parking.

T&ES indicated in their printed graphics related to this project that the audit related to Polk School students needed to be updated because the data was 7 years out of date. But in spite of the fact that they have a grant to compile data relating to Safe Streets to School audits they said they were not going to update this data.

Residents and Staff at Polk School have stated that most children and parents do not go up Pelham and Polk to get to Polk School because it is too steep. They go via Richenbacher /Pegram and then turn left onto Polk. The intersection of Richenbacher/Pegram is far more important than up where they want to put in the sidewalk in front of Polk Park.

Richenbacher/Pegram is where Polk School Staff and local parents and residents see 95% of the kids walking to get to Polk School.

Put a counter at the place where the proposed sidewalk is to be and aim it at the gate from Parkside to Polk where children and adults come through. This would provide an accurate data record of how many people are using this area to walk to Polk School. Do the same at the intersection of Pegram/Richenbacher.

Some sidewalks might be expensive to install and run counter to the priorities in our Alexandria Neighborhood Sidewalk policy indicating where they should be built. One priority is, " A high level of Neighborhood Support," but 155 Petition Signers said that night time parking was more important than this piece of sidewalk. They indicated this parking was a quality of life issue. Parking is the third rail of politics. Sometimes people care more about parking than they do about other issues because it benefits them more.

