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Docket 23-0803

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Good morning, City Staff, Councilors and Mayor,

I appreciate the opportunity to speak this morning regarding the development of 899 & 999 North Henry. I realize that I am a little late to the party since this is presented today for your approval. I know that I will not create a wave of impact but am happy to be a drop in the bucket.

I have read the Staff Report and reviewed the Presentation submitted for you today. I have a small list of notes and comments.

First let me offer some context for my observations so you are better able to understand the filter I applied.

I am a recent transplant to Alexandria having moved just under two years ago. My daughter lives here and is a fan of the small town feel with big city choices. I completely see why she fell in love with the area. The access to so much by walking and an incredible transportation infrastructure has reduced my need to drive to maybe once per month. Very cool. Having lived nearly all my life in Oregon driving everywhere is the norm. Anything south of Portland did not have efficient public transportation.

With that said, I live in the Meridian not far from the proposed development and between my location and the subject site another multi story building is being erected. Parking will be needed for that structure as part of their development in the same area. Currently if you do not pay for parking in your building and get a coveted permit, by 4:30 pm there is no street parking available. Any plan for additional residences without all of the parking needs met by a parking garage is untenable. Additional pressure on the streets for parking (both Montgomery and Madison will lose spots) is unsafe pushing residents possibly further and further from their homes to park. I did not see any notes in the write up regarding parking enforcement experience in the 3-block radius to the site noting issues and vehicle density already packing the streets.

Additionally regarding safety, since my move here there have been 5 firearm incidents within about 2-3 blocks of the Belle Pre including simply shooting at the businesses. I am unclear in the plan where public safety stands with having the child care center and the playground on an exterior walls facing a very busy streets. Perhaps the walls are reinforced and not glass as the pictures appear to be.

Also, it is unclear in the report if the childcare is for the exclusive use of all the residents, the affordable housing residents or if the public will be able to also utilize the facility. Is there a prioritization for the residents, especially those in affordable housing? The school age children per the report is potentially 288. In reviewing the Hopkins House website there is actually a reference to all age services. Will those be fully integrated into the new location ensuring that pre-teens and teens have services as well?

Just as a note, nearly every resident of the area I have encountered has been pleasant if not friendly. The few times I have encountered less than friendly comments while walking have been teens or pre-teens. Additionally, those homes that have doors on the street level in the area have teens congregating because most of the public access areas have "No Loitering" signs. Having access to places to hang out or engage in activities needs to be a part of this plan. Chas Houston Rec Center has multiple classes up to age 14 and classes for adults beginning at age 18. I was unable to find classes/activities for ages 15-17.

While walking in the neighborhood between the current high rise apartments it can be chilly and a wind tunnel effect. The sun is limited and while outside is a breath of fresh air from my apartment it is not until you walk by the more open space of the current buildings with grass, backyard space and trees that you can fully soak in the sun. How is the public loss of open space being addressed?

In my day the version of "affordable housing" we had was a 3 bedroom 800 sq foot trailer up on blocks. That was home for my mom and us 5 kids. My mother worked 3 jobs and my two older brothers spent their teens tempting trouble. We had worked in the fields for school money since I was 10 and the bus to the fields did not come to our new place. We were on public assistance for food and school lunches. I watched my 2 younger brothers after school and on weekends. There was little room for much of anything in the trailer. I was considered trailer trash and bullied at school. The saving grace for my two younger brothers was our trailer in the park was up against a small field. They had made friends in the park and they would all run around in the field playing games all day and into the night.

When walking by the houses of the families now, the buildings need help but the kids can be heard outside laughing, running and playing. There are clothes hanging in the wind to dry and people visiting. The plan calls for some open space with several units having terraces. How many of the affordable housing units will have terraces? Will the open space provide places for the potential 288 children? Hopkins House will have exclusive use of the playground during "operating hours". For those not enrolled, where are they supposed to go during summer or days out of school? Of the 66 units in the current development there is no mention of square footage currently available and how it translates to the new units. (Side note: Why is only one 4-bedroom unit included in the new development?)

Affordable housing needs to be framed as affordable living. The inclusion of the Alive! Services is a great feature, but the size may be too small if it is to serve the full neighborhood with the services listed. The space for the other retail functions should be revisited given the neighborhood. The SUP request for a proposed athletic club is not detailed enough within the report and should have a needs study. There are currently at least 6 studios within 3 blocks plus the facilities at most of the apartment complexes. The restaurant is suggested along Madison where multiple restaurants with outdoor dining exist. The Belle Pre has parking in the garage for retail use creating traffic problem with ingress and egress when coupled with resident parking. The proposed situation is the same proposal on the same street. One of the restaurants has authorized seating in the street which will not be sustainable if the new restaurant is allowed. Rarely are the restaurants at capacity and there are numerous others in the area. There does not appear to be a needs study in the document for this either. How else can this space be used to benefit the residents in the area? Job training site, Art space, ?? The Platform building just down the block has retail space that has not been utilized for over a year. Unused space could present a negative feel to the neighborhood.

Finally, the critical need for sustainability is of interest to all residents of Alexandria. The city engaged in a nearly two year process to update the Climate Action Plan to enable a forward thinking approach to new development and reductions in pollutants. The South building, identified to be wholly owned by the applicant has a provision built in to the request that will allow them to not meet standards in effect in 2019 if they make a good faith effort. Plainly put that is unacceptable. Through the work of the task force the plan was suggest for major revisions in the area of new building development. By the time this project is completed the new requirements for the improvement of sustainability will continue to evolve. The applicant stated that the use of conventional financing for the South building limits accessibility to funds for those types of enhancements. Given international industry evolution in sustainability it is suspect to build in a clause that allows the developer to possibly bypass this critical component and worse that the city condones it.

Compacting more people into higher space has a cost. Creatively addressing needs such as installing carport shelters with solar panels, more efficient heating and air units, community gardens, play structures, visually appealing exteriors and interior upgrades, will allow some of the housing complexes to shine as refreshed ways to pursue affordable, healthy living.

