

June 17, 2019

COMMENTARY ON SEMINARY ROAD PROPOSALS

By Kathleen Burns, 1036 N. Pelham St., Alexandria. (Longer version of Letter published June 6, 2019 in Gazette Packet)

Solving urban problems requires consensus building, based on shared interests and mutually agreed goals, with lots of public debate. This is the case for paving the tiny strip of Seminary Road that runs from #395 to Quaker Lane. A standing-room-only crowd of very interested Alexandria residents showed up on May 30 to voice their concerns. But something highly unusual happened beforehand.

The attendees thought the meeting scheduled by the Transportation and Environment Services (TES) was to get their input, before a final plan was circulated. Instead, 6-1/2 hours before the session started, the City put online its formal decision, ignoring the favored options by those who live nearby. Such action lacked transparency or honesty, as TES appeared ready to move ahead toward its artificial deadline of having this convoluted plan implemented by September 2019. Most residents fully support the routine paving of all our streets at regular intervals. That is not an issue on Seminary. But those in attendance---emphatically---did NOT support cutting down one of the City's main East/West thoroughfares from 4 lanes down to 2. "Complete Streets" is not a one-size-fits-all remedy for Seminary. Focus on improving traffic flow, not grinding it to a halt.

And any decision should be based strongly on citizen input, not by the limited Parking and Traffic Board, with the majority serving in their first term. No one can ride a bike to work unless there is a shower available when you get there.

One of the most favored options---Option 4, to keep the four lanes---was not even discussed by staff. Why was that? You had hundreds of enthusiastic residents supporting it, versus three TES staffers opposing it. Earlier, several major Alexandria Civic Associations voted in support of a Resolution circulated by the Seminary Hill Association. This represents a HUGE number of local residents who use Seminary Road on a daily basis.

Given that some 20,000 people travel this route each day, it is not safe to emphasize bicycles versus cars. TES chief Yon Lambert noted that cyclists who ride to work in Alexandria represent about 2.5% of the city's estimated 160,000 residents. Bikers should opt for a far safer path to downtown Alexandria via Holmes Run Park, not on Seminary or Van Dorn, which have steep hills and lots of traffic. For the few who do bicycle, wider sidewalks on limited streets might be a shared option with walkers and pushers of strollers.

Another false claim made by some TES statements is that there are so many accidents on Seminary Road, which is not accurate, when compared with other streets. Similarly, there was a flawed methodology for the online survey, which did not require participants to list their addresses. The cardinal rule of such studies is to cite the exact number who are surveyed and whether they are impacted by the questions asked. The slide proclaiming "78%" supported Option 3 was not helpful. We need to know 78% of how many people participated, and did they have any "conflict of interests" in their responses.

There is widespread citizen support for striping the cross walks, installing better signage and implementing the synchronization of the timing of stop lights, so pedestrians can cross safely. There was utter confusion as to why TES considered a sidewalk on Zebriske Street, tied to paving, and which would create a convoluted path of 4 lanes, 2 lanes and back to 4, while eliminating an essential Right-On-Red turn at Quaker Lane for those going East.

TES, in its planning, ignores that this busy stretch of road has both a hospital and fire department, that operate on a 24/7 basis. Two lanes are not realistic. This was all hashed out by residents years ago when dealing with the increased traffic flows from BRAC and the lengthy overpass dumping cars on Seminary Road already.

Stop the growing disease of the "Deaf Ear Syndrome" at City Hall, which is becoming as pervasive as measles. Stop ignoring realistic objections by the citizenry, not just to improvements on Seminary Road, but also to things like the Kerig Estates, the Potomac Yard METRO stations, the development of the waterfront and the West End. The City spends way too much money on legal fees, fighting citizen opposition to some poorly constructed plans. TES needs to work with its citizens, not against them.

June 22, 2019

To the Mayor and members of the Alexandria City Council

Comments on West End Concerns from Kathleen M. Burns, 1036 N. Pelham St. (burnskathy1036@gmail.com)

Yesterday was the first day of summer. That is relevant since no publicity seems to have surfaced on one of the City's most welcome traditions ---the 6 weekly Summer concerts held Thursday evenings in July and August from 7pm to 8:30 pm. For decades, enthusiastic fans of all ages poured into the park's outdoor amphitheater for fun and free entertainment. Then, without warning or any public hearings, those concerts disappeared, with no reason given. I called Parks and Rec and they said one neighbor had complained about the "noise." Really? We aren't talking about blasting music at midnight. For 7 years, there were no concerts. Then, they mysteriously reappeared two years ago, but with mediocre efforts to publicize them. They even skipped the glass-encased announcement stands right next to the amphitheater---a perfect venue to list such concets.

These concerts were a source of widespread entertainment. PLEASE bring them back! Is any money allotted in the current budget to hire musical groups for this summer and to do publicity?

For many years, this park also hosted the annual Memorial Day city-wide Jazz Festival which drew large and appreciative audiences. The West End gets much of the new population surges, but it loses out on funding for cultural and entertainment events like this.

Another area on the West End that is being overlooked is the 2 recycling collectors (there used to be 3) on Whiting Street, where the tiny bins are packed to overflowing on weekends. Could more attention be paid to this, especially for a Sunday pickup of trash? There is little enforcement to the signs that warn against dumping discarded furniture, paint cans, garbage, and other household goods. Could a monitoring camera be installed and the fines boosted so this site does not continue to look like a trash heap attracting flies and bugs during the summer?

The third area I ask the Council to pay closer attention to is the TES proposals to radically alter Seminary Road---one of the City's three main arterial West-East Road---carrying 20,000 motorists a day---into a two-lane road.

On May 30, an overwhelming number of residents protested this totally unwanted action. And six major civic associations in that area filed their complaints on behalf of the thousands of residents who live in this area. The pretense of "Complete Streets" and "safety" are being used as a crow bar to beat back realistic opposition.

No one opposes paving the streets. That should be the main focus. "Complete Streets" is NOT designed for one-size fits all. No one opposes realistic safety improvements like better striped crosswalks and flashing pedestrian lights.

Stop trying to pit motorists versus pedestrians and bicyclists. Yon Lambert of TES is driving the idea that the main need is to make this major street---which has constant traffic for the hospital and the fire department---as the main road for cyclists. No, they should take a much safer route through Holmes Run Park.

The online survey has been skewed so that no respondent lists their address, so many bicyclists to DO NOT reside in Alexandria signed the comments. Similarly, some members of the Parking and Traffic Board have a conflict of interest and should recuse themselves from the June 24 vote. We need people who are neutral, not those committed to another, undisclosed agenda.

I have served on the Parking Board myself---as the first woman appointed. For years, the City has dumbed down the role of the Parking Board as Planning and Zoning usurped more of the regulation of parking for multi-unit buildings and waived realistic regulations. Postpone the June 24 since 2 members will not be able to vote and reschedule it for fall. TES is driving this false sense of: Do It Right Now. No, do it later & get it right.



2

H. Michael Curry
1418 Juliana Place
Alexandria, VA 22304

May 22, 2019

Good Morning Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor and Members of Council:

My name is Michael Curry and I live at 1418 Juliana Place in the Seminary Hill neighborhood. As a past member of the Traffic and Parking Board and Chair of the Board of Zoning Appeals, I thank you for your service to the City of Alexandria.

I am here to voice my support for keeping Seminary Road four lanes. I know from my own service to the city that decisions made here affect the lives of all residents. I know that the Seminary Road repaving project will not come before you until September. However, I ask that during the time between now and September that you not just accept the recommendations of T&ES, BPAC and a few residents, but seek information for all the residents of the City who use Seminary Road daily.

T&ES has promoted safety as the need for changes to Seminary Road. I am glad that T&ES staff recognizes this section of Seminary Road as one of the safest streets in Alexandria. As a retired safety professional, I also know that there are ways to make improvements to address the concerns of the few residents worried about safety on Seminary Road without causing gridlock.

If safety is a real concern, Seminary Hill Association's Alternative 4 addresses those concerns without causing additional backups on Seminary Road.

As a past member of city boards, when making decisions I did so based on what was in the best interest of the majority of residents, not to support a single agenda or impose unwarranted restrictions on the majority of residents.

I am sure that you will listen to the overwhelming outcry from Alexandria residents and not impose hardships on residents by narrowing Seminary Road. Along with the majority of residents and five civic associations, I urge you to keep Seminary Road four lanes by implementing Seminary Hill Association's safe Alternative 4.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

H. Michael Curry