

35
9-8-20

Gloria Sitton

From: Carolyn Hanjian <c_hanjian@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 08, 2020 5:27 PM
To: Gloria Sitton
Subject: [EXTERNAL]our call today - submission for City Council meeting tonight - Planning & Zoning

Hello Gloria,

I am looking at the City Council docket for the Council meeting tonight, 9/8/20. While I am not active at all in city government matters, someone in our neighborhood put a notification on our car this weekend, referencing this meeting docket and specifically item # 35, which is "21-0143 - Consideration of a Predevelopment Loan of \$250,000 to AHDC for a New Project at 4547, 4555, and 4575 Seminary Road that Combines Affordable Rental Housing, Affordable Homeownership Options, and a Component of Permanent Support Housing for Alexandrians with Development Disabilities".

I would like to express that simply due to the fact that this development plan (to remove 2 single-family houses, and in their place build multi-family housing) would require the City to re-zone this area (which also includes a supposedly unused piece of land in addition to the 2 single-family houses, to be developed), that the City Council should please not grant the Alexandria Housing Development Corporation the loan of \$250,000 from the City to build this project.

My reasoning for this is simple: to my knowledge, from the many times I have walked or driven on Seminary Road from just east of the firehouse, going past the addresses shown above in an easterly direction, there are no multi-family housing units of any kind for miles on Seminary Road (including when Seminary turns into Janney's Lane after it crosses North Quaker Lane). I have lived in the Seminary Hill area for 16 years. My concern is, whether walking or driving, that having multi-family units and townhouses that span the addresses above on Seminary, that it would add to traffic congestion and difficulty with potentially multiple cars trying to get out of these driveways at the same time. This would cause a problem if the cars tried to drive west, toward the I-395 highway entrance, since there is a traffic light just before the firehouse; and, it would cause a problem if the cars tried to pull out and go left (east), because both east-bound and west-bound lanes would have to be clear of traffic to allow this (which they rarely are). Notably, I would feel the same way if the City or the Alexandria Housing Development Corporation wanted to knock down the single-family houses on Seminary and construct, for example, a strip mall or grocery store. This is exactly the reason Seminary road, east of the firehouse, is zoned the way it is, which I assume is for single-family residential houses only. It is not designed to accommodate multiple cars trying to exit potentially multiple driveways from multi-housing units at the same time, as if it were zoned for commercial activity. This would cause a bottleneck, and I believe, would contribute to causing car accidents at this congested area of Seminary Road. People getting in car accidents, particularly during this time of COVID-19, is a very bad result - people will get out of their cars and potentially have close contact or conflict with each other. This is a good way to spread COVID-19 if either party has it, and, endangers police personnel too if they are summoned to the scene of the accident to help mediate a conflict or direct that cars be moved to the side. While COVID-19 may not forever be the life-threatening illness it is now (if a vaccine comes out and everyone gets it), I would think that anything the City can do to minimize the spread of this deadly virus and encourage social distancing would be a good idea (which means, not to allow a project that will contribute to more traffic and potentially car accidents in a congested area).

In my humble opinion, this plan by the Alexandria Housing Development Corp is not well thought out in terms of its impact on traffic and zoning, and, I think the City (to which we pay taxes) should not be in the position to have to give a \$250,000 loan to the Alex Housing Development Corp to effectively bring more traffic to an already very congested area on Seminary road. There is a reason it is zoned as it is, which should not be changed to accommodate a potentially large number of cars on that proposed property trying to get into traffic. Maybe the Housing Development Corp could consider another site that is already zoned for not single-family residential housing, so having multiple cars coming and going in a congested area would already be something many other buildings, shopping centers, etc. in the same area are already doing (thus, a zoning change wouldn't be needed).

I truly appreciate your and the Council's consideration of this item on your docket as you think about its potential negative impact on Seminary Road and the neighborhood.

Thank you!

A concerned City of Alexandria taxpayer, and avid walker (and driver) on Seminary Road

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Alexandria City Council Docket Item #35, September 8, 2020

My wife and I have lived for 31 years in a residential home opposite the focus area of 4547, 4555 and 4575 Seminary Road. We are strongly opposed to a predevelopment loan from the city to the AHDC for the following reasons:

- We are quite dismayed by the lack of prior notice concerning this significant project, which will impact upon all neighbors on Seminary Road. We were only advised of the September 8th council meeting and Docket Item #35 by a concerned citizen, on Saturday, September 4, 2020. This absence of notification is both extremely disappointing and unacceptable.
- Disregarding the current and presumably temporary COVID-19 impact on Seminary Road traffic volume, such a project will exacerbate traffic density, through construction of an estimated 55 housing units, whether individual or a multi-family building. The project would add to an increased traffic volume, on a four-lane artery already heavily used by various types of private, emergency, and commercial vehicles, including buses and frequent 18-wheelers.
- The project would involve removal of two originally residential-zoned properties and numerous large, environmentally friendly trees which encompass the area of interest. Such a large renovation of land would involve numerous pieces of heavy construction equipment, moving in and out of the site, compounding the traffic flow mentioned above. To say it would be disruptive to our neighborhood is an understatement.
- The project will certainly decrease the value of our home and property since our lot will face a complex of buildings instead of neighborhood homes.
- There is an apparent but unexplained predevelopment association/ connection between the AHDC and Sheltered Homes, the latter of which is programming construction of three townhouses.
- The terms of the predevelopment loan from the city are not explained; no details have been provided to the public.
- Beyond the terms, what specific planning requirements/anticipated expenses dictate a loan of \$250,000? It is noted that in 2017, ADHC "Executive Compensation" amounted to \$149,752.

In view of the above, we urge the city council to disapprove a predevelopment loan to the AHD, without further action.

Thank you for considering our comments.

John W. Richards
Kathryn G. Tatko

Thank you, Mayor Wilson, and Members of Council.

I am speaking tonight as President of the Seminary Hill Association, on Docket Item #35, the proposed housing on Seminary Road. I would like to request 5 minutes instead of 3.

This application for predevelopment funding appeared on Council's Docket over a holiday weekend and was never noticed to adjacent neighbors, including the owner of the house immediately next door. I appreciate the fact that Jon Frederick called me last week to give me a heads-up that AHDC was considering a project on Seminary Road, but I was not told it was coming to Council for funding tonight. Once again, residents and civic associations have been left scrambling to prepare a response to this proposal in time for tonight's meeting.

While the applicant states that the project is in the very early conceptual stages, this does not ring true to our residents. Clearly, enough pre-development work has been done to determine that a 40+ unit apartment building and 15 townhomes are appropriate for the site.

As you have heard from others, residents in this area are extremely concerned about the water issues this site presents, not only to the proposed development, but also to all the neighboring properties. Many neighbors that surround this site, especially on Loyola and Stonebridge, have experienced major flooding issues in their own homes, due to the lack of sufficient stormwater capacity in the area. Despite repeated requests, they have been told that the City has no funds to increase the capacity of the storm lines in this area. While we are all aware that new developments must provide their own stormwater infrastructure, at some point that new infrastructure connects to the existing infrastructure, and we know that infrastructure is already inadequate for the existing homes.

Nearby residents observe first-hand what happens on the land owned by the City next to Fire Station 206 when storms come. They

characterize it as waterfalls coming off the precipitous 40-foot drop behind the homes on Seminary Road.

It is interesting to note that decades ago when this area was annexed from Fairfax County, this vacant parcel was designed to be the continuation of Pickett Street from Seminary to Braddock. The road was never built, possibly because city engineers found the terrain too difficult.

This should not be surprising, given the very steep and dangerous drops in the topography on that parcel. Others have considered developing this parcel and have failed.

The Seminary Hill Association would request that Council defer the \$250,000 in predevelopment funding tonight. Instead, we would like to suggest that the City use its own salaried Stormwater Management and Natural Resources Management teams to completely survey this site and offer a professional assessment and detailed report of the stormwater capacity and the suitability of development here, given the terrain and the Lucky Run stream running through the property.

If, after that assessment is completed and Council is satisfied that the project can physically be done, then Council could consider expending city funds to further explore the project in terms of density and the questionable use of the RMF zoning change in a single family residential zone.

To expend a quarter of a million dollars tonight on a project that faces such obvious and serious physical and environmental challenges seems too risky, given that **if** the project doesn't go forward, the city loan is forgiven and the money lost. Let's get some more information before we walk down this expensive path.

Richard Kirk McPike
1325 N. Ivanhoe St
Alexandria, VA 22304
September 7, 2020

Remarks in Support of the Docket Item 35:

Consideration of a Predevelopment Loan of \$250,000 to AHDC for a New Project at 4547, 4555, and 4575 Seminary Road that Combines Affordable Rental Housing, Affordable Homeownership Options, and a Component of Permanent Support Housing for Alexandrians with Development Disabilities

Mister Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor, and Members of Council:

I am writing in support of the proposed affordable housing project on Seminary Road, regarding which the Council is considering a loan to the developer, which is Item 35 on the September 8 agenda. As you may be aware, I am a previous member, and chair, of the Alexandria Economic Opportunities Commission, and a present member of the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee, though I am not writing today in my capacity as a member of the Committee. During my time on the EOC, during which I served alongside Councilman Aguirre, affordable housing was the focus of most of our work.

We all know that the city is struggling to ensure that affordable housing options are available to residents of all economic means, and that the present rate of increase in housing costs is squeezing many middle class and working families out of Alexandria. That is why I am encouraged to see the Council take up three proposals for affordable housing during the September 8 session. As a resident of Seminary Hill, I live on North Ivanhoe Street, very near where the proposed facility on Seminary Road would be located.

I think this is an excellent location for new housing that includes affordable units, for three reasons: first, there are already several apartment complexes in the area, so this construction will not introduce a significant increase in local density beyond that which residents are presently accustomed; second, the building would be on the four-lane stretch of Seminary Road between Interstate 395 and North Howard Street, and thus should not have a particularly

noticeable impact on traffic along Seminary — and I can't think of many places in the city where more housing units could be placed with easier access to the Interstate; and, third, this development project includes both affordable rental and affordable purchasable units, the latter of which are of particular need in the city.

Of course, in approving new units, the Council should be mindful of future impacts such housing will have on city infrastructure and services, particularly future class sizes in our public schools. I am confident the Council will take these new units into account when addressing future funding needs for these services.

Thank you for taking the time to read these remarks, and for your service to the City. I hope you will support Docket Item 35.

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9-8-20

My name is Chris Page and I live at 4560 Seminary Road.

I am not in favor of this proposal, however, I could be persuaded if there were safety measures taken for the additional 150-200 people that will be added to this dangerous intersection across from Hammond Middle School. Folks west of North Howard on Seminary were already snubbed by the City Council with regard to road diet/safety precautions in favor of the higher tax base east of North Howard. This new project, without additional safety measures is a 2nd snub in as many years.