

FAQ -- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Affordable Housing in the Metro Corridor The "Views At Clarendon" Project

Q: Who will gain from approval of the project?

A: Affordable housing has been a top priority of Arlington County. The county has lost thousands of affordable residential units because of the sharp rise in land values, including almost all of the affordable apartments near the Metro stations. To counteract this trend, the Views project offers 70 committed affordable apartments located only 1/2 block from the Clarendon Metro station at the heart of Clarendon's "Urban Village." The Views project offers residential apartments (not condos):

- 70 committed affordable apartments
- 46 market rate apartments
- a mix of efficiencies, 1-BR, and 2-BR apartments, and six 3-BR apartments
- 54 apartments offered to families under 60% of Area Median Income
- 6 additional apartments offered to families under 50% of Area Median Income
- 6 of the apartments will be 100% accessible to those with disabilities
- 5 apartments are available to assist the county's supportive housing program

Q: Who else would gain from approval of the project?

A: The project would allow the current owner of the property, the First Baptist Church of Clarendon, to remain on the location that it has occupied for more than 90 years. The church supports a variety of successful community service programs, including Arlington's largest private child care center which has been sponsored by the church for 38 years in the same location. The project would permit the church to maintain this and other social ministries to the community, including the county's largest clothing center, support for teen mission projects in DC, and meeting space for Arlington's Department of Human Services and various community groups.

Q: What are the other major features of the project?

- A:
- Mixed-use Class A apartment building, not a "luxury" project like others in Clarendon.
 - Retention of existing 3-story Educational Building as buffer to Lyon Village community.
 - Heights lower than other recent projects in Clarendon adjacent to Lyon Village residences.
 - Retention of public meeting space.
 - Retention of space for 180-child day care center.
 - Retention of 5-congregation church with a smaller footprint.

Q: Will the proposed building cast a shadow over neighboring single family homes?

A: The engineering study demonstrates that the shadows will not touch the property of any single-family residence during most of the year. The longest shadows in the winter will not touch the property of any single-family residence in the morning and would affect only one house after 3:30 pm on December 21 (the Winter solstice).

Q: Who is sponsoring this project?

VIEWS AT CLARENDON CORPORATION

A: The First Baptist Church of Clarendon currently owns the property where it has been located for more than 90 years, now only 1/2 block from the Clarendon Metro station. Rather than sell to a private developer, the church agreed that a non-profit dedicated to building and maintaining affordable housing should purchase the development rights to the site. With the help of the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH), the Views at Clarendon Corporation was formed to own the apartment units and administer the affordable housing program. APAH is a consultant to the project and offers many years of experience in developing and managing affordable housing projects.

Q: What about the separation of church and state?

A: Views will own and manage the eight levels of residential apartments and three levels of underground parking. The church will retain two floors to be used for new meeting space at ground level. Views has already submitted a request for the vertical subdivision of the title to the property in order to ensure the physical and financial separation of the church from the apartment space. Views will hire a property management company to lease and manage the apartments.

Q: Was the project changed after consulting the neighboring civic associations?

A: Yes. The County Manager held four Roundtable mediation sessions with the neighborhood civic associations. As a result, the Views project was changed to include the following improvements:

- Reduction in height (eliminating one of the floors of the church).
- Increase in affordable apartments (increase from 48 to 70 dedicated units).
- Tapering of the building away from the Lyon Village residential community.
- Addition of 6 disabled-access apartments and 5 supportive housing units.
- Traffic calming and landscaping improvements.
- Improvements to streetscapes, sidewalks and crosswalks.

Q: Why is this happening so quickly?

A: It is not happening quickly. The project was proposed in 2004. It was initially approved by the County Board after many public hearings, meetings, presentations and mediation sessions with the neighboring civic associations. To date, the site plan proposal has been heard and debated at --

- 4 public hearings before the Site Plan Review Committee
- 3 public hearings before the Historic Affairs and Landmark Review Board
- 4 public hearings before the Planning Commission
- 3 public hearings before the Housing Commission
- 4 public Roundtable mediation sessions conducted by the County Manager
- more than a dozen presentations to the nearby neighborhood civic associations
- 3 negotiation sessions with the Lyon Village and Hartford Condo Associations
- 3 public hearings of the County Board

Q: I thought that this project was already approved? What happened?

A: The project was set back by a Virginia Supreme Court ruling that the County Board had misinterpreted its own ordinance to permit rezoning of the church's site to "CR."

Q: Is the proposed building higher than its neighboring buildings?

VIEWS AT CLARENDON CORPORATION

A: The neighboring buildings are the DHS office building to the East (75 feet), the Hartford office building to the South (125 feet) and Hudson condo building one block to the West (125 feet). The site plan limits its height of new building to 96.5 feet, only 21 feet higher than the *by-right* option.

Q: How about providing a buffer to the residential community?

A: The site plan for the new building includes two floors of tapering toward the neighborhood and retains the existing 32-foot educational building to the North. That 3-story building was constructed in 1962 and provides a buffer to the residential neighborhood across 13th Street. It has housed Arlington's largest private child care center for the past 38 years.

Q: Will the proposed zoning ordinance change affect me?

A: The County Board has proposed to amend its ordinance to allow CR zoning "for use in the vicinity of the metrorail stations on property designated 'medium density mixed-use' on the General Land Use Plan." This will affect only the church site and about three blocks in Virginia Square between Wilson Boulevard and Fairfax Drive. No other Arlington properties are affected.

Q: Will there be anything to stop the County Board from re-zoning other residential property?

A: The proposed change in the ordinance does not increase the county board's authority beyond what is stated in the proposed language, as quoted above. In addition, it preserves the existing overall height limitation, which states: "Under no circumstances shall the height of any building exceed one hundred twenty-five (125) feet and under no circumstances shall a penthouse height extend more than fifteen (15) feet above the one hundred twenty-five-foot height limit." This is the same language that applied to the Hudson Building (125 feet), an all-Luxury apartment building built at Hudson and 13th Streets, which required a zoning change that was supported by the Lyon Village Civic Association.

Q: Why can't the building be built lower or have a greater percentage of affordable apartments?

A: There is a tradeoff between height and cost. A lower building would lose economies of scale and result in a greater per-unit cost of construction. Increasing the committed affordable units would reduce the number of market-rate apartments needed to cover the lost rents from the affordable units.

Q: Who has studied the economics of the building to prove that this is the best height?

A: The county hired a consulting firm to study the project financing. Various building heights were analyzed (from 5 floors to 12 floors). The consultants also studied varying levels of affordability (from 45% to 100%). In all, 13 different combinations of building size and affordability were studied. The consultants found that the site plan proposed by Views was the best option. The results of these studies were presented to and discussed at the Roundtable mediations

Q: What is the county subsidy?

A: Arlington County does not have a public housing authority, unlike other neighboring jurisdictions. Instead, the county makes loans to those who are willing to build or renovate "committed affordable housing" units. The only "subsidy" is a loan at 3.5% that fills the gap between the construction costs and the federal and state funding and private loans that can be obtained at market rates. The AHIF fund makes loans and uses the repayment of loans to replenish the county's funds available for future loans on new projects. The proposed loan to Views will be granted on terms that are even better than other affordable housing projects that have recently been sponsored by

VIEWS AT CLARENDON CORPORATION

the county. Rather than the usual period of 30 years, the Views project will maintain its affordable housing for a minimum of 45 years, or up to 60 years if the county assists in future renovations.

Q: Isn't this the most expensive plan supported by Arlington's Affordable Housing Investment Fund?

A: No. While it is above the current average, there have been more expensive projects. For example, the county staff estimates that the Buckingham preservation project will likely cost even more per unit than the Views project, and that will cover only renovation at Buckingham. By contrast, the Views project offers new construction at a lower per-unit cost to the county.

Q: Is this a good deal for the county's Affordable Housing Investment Fund?

A: On February 15, the county housing staff presented their updated financial analysis to the Housing Commission and stated: "**Staff concludes that the project presents a rare opportunity to secure affordable housing this close to Metro at substantially below market costs.**" The project was, once again, approved by the Housing Commission.

Q: Will the Views project compete with the Buckingham project for county or state financing?

A: The county has been seeking new affordable housing projects as well as preservation. In the 2005 competition, the Views project received funding from the non-profit pool. The Buckingham project will compete in the Northern Virginia pool, not the non-profit pool. The county has set aside sufficient funding to provide supportive loans for both projects.

Q: Is there an effort to cover a funding "gap" that it appears the county will have to fill?

A: Opponents of the project have quoted from an e-mail that speaks of a funding gap that would be caused by lowering the building height. It is plainly noted in the subject line of the email that the financial gap occurs in the option with seven floors of apartments -- "103 units (7 residential floors)." As the e-mail states, this posed a problem with "the County appearing to subsidize Church costs." For that reason, the 7-floor option was rejected by Views and by the county's economic consultant.

Q: How can we be sure that Views won't discriminate? Will the church control the rental units?

A: The church is selling its development rights to a non-profit, the Views at Clarendon Corporation. By law, its sole corporate purpose is to promote affordable housing. Also, like other apartments in Arlington, the Views project will be obligated to comply with the federal and state laws and county ordinances that guarantees equal access to housing.

Q: Will the steeple be preserved? If so, who will pay for the preservation?

A: Yes, steeple will be preserved. The church did not require the retention of the existing steeple, because it would add some cost to the project. However, as a result of citizen input through the public meeting process, it was clear that the preferred architectural option was to preserve the steeple that has provided Clarendon with its most distinctive landmark for the past 57 years. The church will be paying for the preservation of the steeple.

Q: What else is the church paying for?

A: The church is obligated to pay for the costs of construction for its two floors. It also will pay a pro-rata share of the pre-construction costs, other soft costs and hard costs of shared facilities, such as

VIEWS AT CLARENDON CORPORATION

the elevators. The church portion of the building will have its own heating and air conditioning systems and will have separately-metered utilities.

Q: Who set the value of the church's land rights and considered other development options?

A: The County Manager convened a panel of real estate developers to provide advice regarding land values and development options for the site. The county also hired a professional real estate appraiser to conduct a survey and analyze the land valuation issues. The land value was then established by the County Manager.

Q: What will happen to the Child Development Center and other church-sponsored programs?

A: The church founded the Child Development Center 38 years ago. The CDC is the largest private full-time day care in Arlington, and is proud of its financial stability. However, it still relies on the availability of space in the 3-story Educational Building on 13th Street across from Lyon Village. The CDC will continue its mission as long as there is a demand for high quality private day care.

Q: Who will be following the money?

A: The county staff has examined the financial plans and the project will be the subject of regular audits. In addition, the project's financial accounting will be subject to federal tax audits and scrutiny by the major financial institutions involved in arranging for private financing. These audits ensure financial stability and guarantee separation of the affordable housing and church finances.

Q: Has the church been given any money to pursue this project or defend against a lawsuit?

A: The church has not received any money from Arlington County. The project development has been financed with non-public funds.

Q: What would happen if the project is disapproved? What are the "By Right" options?

A: While the church is financially stable at present, it will not likely be able to raise the funds required to renovate the existing meeting space, so the existing use of the site will likely change. The C-3 zoning allows the construction of a 75-foot office building *by right*. This means that (unlike the current proposal) any new building would require only a construction permit -- no site plan would be required and there would be no community input. Such a *by right* building can also be constructed without regard to the community's General Land Use Plan or the Sector Plan. The owner (either the church or new owner) would have the right to determine all aspects of the design, construction and uses of a new building. The economics of the location would likely dictate the construction of a plain, rectangular-sided building with no tapering toward the Lyon Village neighborhood.

Q: Who would lose if the project is disapproved?

A: The entire community of Arlington County will lose its first and maybe last opportunity to dedicate a substantial number of new affordable housing units next to a Metro station. It eventually may lose a landmark church that now houses five active congregations and provides space for the county's largest private day care center (180 children), the county's largest clothing center, an accredited seminary for part-time students, and the largest public meeting space in Clarendon.