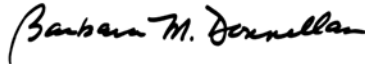


Memorandum

To: Arlington County Board

Date: June 21, 2011

From: Barbara M. Donnellan, County Manager 

Subject: Letter from Mr. Charles Walter, Arlington Ridge Civic Association, regarding the Arlington Ridge Road Improvement Project

In response to the concerns expressed by the Arlington Ridge Civic Association and some other residents, County staff has conducted a complete review of the additional questions and concerns raised regarding the redesign of Arlington Ridge Road/S. 23rd Road/S. Meade Street pedestrian safety improvement project. Attached are the staff responses to the issues raised in the letter dated May 27, 2011 by the Arlington Ridge Civic Association.

Throughout this process, staff has made every effort to balance the input from the neighborhood with the safety and operational issues identified during the investigation. Staff attempted to be flexible in the application of standards to the extent possible while keeping with the policy principles adopted by the County Board.

Input was carefully considered in evaluating and developing the proposed project plan. Based on input from the neighborhood, several adjustments were made to the project design to address concerns: reduced the bus pull out area to 25 feet from the previous 40 feet; added a right/through lane for eastbound 23rd Street S; added a buffer strip to the west side of Arlington Ridge Road; and removed the northbound bicycle lane on Arlington Ridge Road from Oakcrest Road to 23rd Street S which became a sharrow.

Upon a thorough review, I have concluded that this project is ready and will move forward with construction scheduled for later this summer.

Next Steps:

Staff will ensure that the residents fronting the project, as well as the Arlington Ridge Civic Association (ARCA), receive the final plan and notification of the implementation timeline. ARCA may post the information on their website and staff will ask them to deliver flyers door-to-door as before.

Timeframe:

Construction of the project will commence during the week of August 8th. Once construction begins, the duration of work is expected to take approximately four weeks. The start time of the project is critical since there will be less disruption to school children walking to school during this time.

Overview:

This project is fully in keeping with the principles of the Streets, Transit, Pedestrian, and Bicycle Elements of the Master Transportation Plan as adopted by the County Board, and embodies the Complete Streets philosophy that the County is implementing through all its street projects. The elements of this plan have been incorporated into safety improvement projects elsewhere in the County on a variety of streets and have shown to be effective in lowering vehicle speeds and improving safety for all street users, including vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.

Arlington Ridge Road and 23rd Street South are both transit routes and walking routes for Oakridge Elementary School and Gunston Middle School. This intersection is the nucleus of the Aurora Highlands and Arlington Ridge neighborhoods walking routes to each school.

As the County proceeds to implement the Master Transportation Plan elements throughout the County, intersection realignments have proven to be one of the most effective measures to address pedestrian safety and slowing traffic.

The plan in its entirety is comprehensive and addresses the County's goals and objectives as well as addresses the Civic Association's concerns raised during the Arterial Transportation Management Study in 2004 and again at the Walking Town Meeting in April 2007.

Attachment

Attachment to Memorandum to County Board regarding the letter from Mr. Charles Walter, Arlington Ridge Civic Association, regarding the Arlington Ridge Road Improvement Project

Current Status/Findings:

The following are staff's response to the questions/concerns raised by the Arlington Ridge Civic Association (ARCA) in a letter dated May 27, 2011, to the County Board regarding the project plan.

1. **ARCA Concern: Narrowing the west side of 23rd Street S at Ridge Road to two lanes via recently added bumps-outs will create congestion.** All other legs of the intersection have three lanes, with a dedicated left turn lane, and most neighbors want the same here. Currently, if an eastbound car is waiting to turn left onto Ridge, there is usually room on the right to go through or turn right. When this right space is blocked, and someone waits to turn left, the net result is that only one car that gets through the light. If nubs are added to constrict the street, and the north side sidewalk is pushed out, it would create a bottleneck. Many asked for left turn lanes.

Staff Response: As a follow-up, staff conducted field studies on several occasions to evaluate the traffic flow during peak hours. Based on the findings and feedback received, the decision was made to incorporate two full lanes at the intersection and to eliminate the bump-out on the southwest corner. The narrowing of the west side of 23rd Street South at Arlington Ridge Road with two bump outs has been adjusted by staff. Although the traffic volumes are not significant enough to warrant a change, staff is understanding of the neighborhood concerns and is incorporating this change into the design. However, this change will adjust parking hours on the south side of 23rd Street South from "No Parking 7am-9am Weekdays to "No Parking 7am-4pm Weekdays." This decision is based on field observations and will ensure proper operation of the intersection.

2. **ARCA Concern: Closure of the slip lane to South Meade Street from Arlington Ridge is viewed as an unneeded and potentially dangerous change for motorists, with little or no gain for pedestrians, on a corner with challenging grades and geometry.** Concerns are that the steep grade of what would be the only entry to South Meade Street from Arlington Ridge Road would be hazardous in inclement weather, and that slowing for the proposed narrowed and squared turn could result in collisions given the patterns of traffic on Arlington Ridge Road. Similarly, low cost fixes have been

suggested. Eliminating this slip lane was not requested as an ARCA priority.

Staff Response: The elimination of the slip lane is a major component of the project plan since it addresses both lowering vehicle speeds and improving safety for all street users. The existing slip lane allows vehicles to exit Arlington Ridge and enter South Meade Street at a higher rate of speed. Requiring vehicles to slow to a safe maneuvering speed at the proposed singular entry site improves the safety for vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians and is consistent with the majority of cross street intersections along Arlington Ridge Road. The necessary reduction in speed for turning vehicles under the proposed plan is also supported by the current speed limit on Arlington Ridge, the lowering of which was heavily supported by ARCA. The combination of reducing the speed of turning vehicles and the number of pedestrian crossings results in an increase in safety for pedestrians. The most logical and safe place for a pedestrian to cross is at an intersection. At the intersection under study, pedestrians have been observed crossing diagonally using the current island or attempting to cross Arlington Ridge Road at South Meade Street. To correct this behavior, the intersection has been realigned. This engineering practice has been successfully applied in construction projects throughout the County, such as at North George Mason Drive and North Frederick Street, South Joyce Street and 15th Street South, and several planned locations on Walter Reed Drive.

3. **ARCA Concern:** **Elimination of the bus pull-out at the NE corner of Arlington Ridge Road was criticized as unneeded, and could make it difficult for larger vehicles westbound on 23rd Street S to make a right turn on Arlington Ridge Road.** Additionally, a bus stopped in the roadway right after the light could cause blocked traffic if commuters get stuck in the intersection behind it. Some residents also see value in the pull-over for dropping people off or stopping to seek directions. Regardless, ARCA would like to see the "No Parking" requirements immediately posted and enforced for this pullover.

Staff Response: The elimination of the bus pull-out area is consistent with County's vision in providing a safer environment for transit riders and creates a stop compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Since the Metro Route 10E stops at this location eight times per weekday with an average of only two boardings, the delay in traffic will be negligible. Due to low level of passenger activity, the bus pad has been reduced to 25 feet and not the 40 feet proposed,

thus adding more green space and enhancing the neighborhood streetscape. Since the project is scheduled for construction soon, it would be impractical to install the "No Parking" signs at this time; however, the County's Transportation & Engineering Bureau, the Arlington County Police Department, and the Arlington Ridge Civic Association have agreed that if the project is delayed to unforeseen circumstances the signs will be installed as soon as possible.

4. **ARCA Concern:** Questions remain about the proposed changes made to the sidewalk in front of the 2300 S. Arlington Ridge Road. There is a question as to whether it can be made 2 feet wider than the County's plan though this would seem to be a simple question of geometry that could be resolved easily. Also, we had only asked this one corner be addressed as a priority, as prior staff had noted how costly it is to move utilities. We are now told the light signal pole will not be moved due to expense.

Staff Response: In order to fulfill the need for bus and bicycle facilities and to maintain a safe travel lane alignment along Arlington Ridge Road, a four foot buffer strip cannot be accommodated. The requested additional two feet is needed for the width of the roadway in order to provide enough width for the bus turning movement and the bicycle sharrow lane. At the start of the project, a bicycle lane was proposed all the way up the east side of Arlington Ridge Road to the intersection of 23rd Street. The bicycle lane became a sharrow lane between South Oakcrest Road and 23rd Street S in order to provide the two foot buffer strip after discussions with the neighborhood. This compromise achieves the goals of the project by accommodating pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and vehicular traffic. Utility poles currently located within in the sidewalk are planned to be moved into the new utility strip to create a four foot unobstructed sidewalk. However, the traffic signal pole will not be moved due to the expense of the relocation. A four foot unobstructed sidewalk will be provided around the signal pole.

5. **ARCA Concern:** Making permanent the experimental rubber curbing changes to the complex southeast corner where both 23rd Street S and Oakcrest Road both meet at Arlington Ridge Road seemed to be acceptable to most residents, and was anticipated by ARCA when installed. **There was concern over placement of the supplementary signal head, and need for signage and pavement markings to better enforce keeping cars at the stop line south of Oakcrest, keeping Oakcrest access clear.**

Staff Response: The placement of the supplemental advisory traffic signal head has been reviewed by Transportation and Engineering Bureau on several occasions and the placement of the head on the northeast corner of Arlington Ridge Road and Oakcrest Road is necessary due to the retaining wall and easement constraints on the southeast corner. All necessary signage and markings will be installed to assist with keeping cars at the stop line south of Oakcrest to provide clear access to this area.

6. **ARCA Concern: That the Oakridge Elementary School traffic that would be affected by the proposed redesign.**

Staff Response: Based on staff's review of the traffic counts, field observation of the streets and school frontage at a.m. and p.m. peaks periods as well as interviews with Arlington County Public Schools transportation staff, the project will have no adverse impact on school traffic and in fact may reduce traffic by providing an enhanced walking routes to the school.