**Arlington Ridge Civic Association (ARCA)**

**Minutes of the Membership Meeting, May 19, 2016**

*Recorded by Don Schlichtmann*

President Arthur Fox called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm. He immediately introduced VP Lisa Gammon to present the slate of nominees for Board positions to be elected at the July Membership meeting. Lisa indicated that most incumbents were willing to remain in their positions but that there were three new nominees, as follows: Charlie Hughes to fill a vacant VP position, and Sandi Amendola and Michael Pickford to fill the vacant Transportation positions. There were no additional nominees from the floor.

Arthur then introduced County Manager Mark Schwartz to speak of his priorities and perspectives and to address questions from the audience. Mr. Schwartz noted his three top priorities as follows:

1. Economic Development. He noted that the commercial vacancy rate is now near 20%, and he indicated that companies (and the Federal Government) are using less space even if growing.
2. ‘Open Government’. He cited the opening of a data portal which allows citizens to manipulate County data online and an improved permitting process that has been implemented. He noted a new smart-phone app (“My Arlington”) which will show approved permits and crime data.
3. A strategic planning process with the County Board. He cited a need to ‘envision’ what the Board and citizens want Arlington to look like in 20-30 years.

He also discussed ‘day-to-day’ management issues such as the budget and the CIP (capital improvement plan). He noted that the County had approved a 0.5% tax rate reduction, though increased property values would result in an average $150 annual tax increase per household. He indicated that increased revenue would be used to increase police and fire personnel and add street lighting projects. He said that there was “planning” money in the CIP for a new community center and elementary school, though no money for actual construction as yet.

Mr. Schwartz then took questions and comments from the audience, which were addressed as follows:

* A thorough “re-do” of the Aurora Hills Community Center/Library/potential new elementary school is several years away, though the ‘rehab’ of the Aurora Hills Community Center which has been approved will move ahead as scheduled.
* The ‘tax loss’ from an increased commercial vacancy rate results from lack of an income stream and sales tax revenue, even though building owners continue to pay some property tax.
* Long-term commercial development authorizations (e.g., 1900 Crystal Drive) that ultimately are not brought to fruition nonetheless add value to developer’s portfolios.
* The Board approved development of the $64M Aquatics Center at Long Bridge Park in April, though the issue will surface again at the Board’s CIP hearing in June.
* The need to protect the ‘fragile’ 22202 residential neighborhood is understood; comprehensive traffic data will be posted in late June, and Mr. Schwartz seeks engagement in a strategic planning discussion with the neighborhood regarding infrastructure & development.
* Complaints about lack of County responsiveness to citizen concerns (car/pedestrian interaction; permit violations; etc.) can now be brought to a ‘Citizen Ombudsman’, Robert Sharpe.
* Mr. Schwartz will look into printing of crime reports by ‘time of day’, as occurs in other jurisdictions.
* Private sponsorship is being sought for development of a ‘therapy pool’, which was deleted from the Aquatics Center project.
* More concern was expressed by the audience to slow approval of development in 22202 until the impact of existing and approved development on transportation infrastructure is understood. Mr. Schwartz noted that METRO is in critical condition.
* Members noted that the “Bonus Density” policy adhered to by the County is questionable given that it may result in excessive density overloading infrastructure. Also, “bonus density for ‘affordable housing’ and energy efficiency” provides an unnecessary incentive.
* “Density equals tax revenue” is a questionable maxim given that it increases demand for and cost of additional services that may more than offset additional revenue; Mr. Schwartz noted that every 1% change in commercial vacancy means approx. a $4-5 million annual change in County revenue.
* APS and the County both have ‘placeholder’ funding in their 2019/20 CIP for siting study of a new 22202 elementary school; question is whether this timeline is adequate.
* Concern expressed regarding traffic congestion at S. 23rd St. and Eads was referred to Mr. Schwartz’ deputy.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:32 pm.