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June 16, 2017

Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard  
Suite 300  
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Dear Chairman Fisetto:

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce expresses our support for the sentiments behind the proposed amendments to the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance regarding retail signage. As stated in our May 18, 2017 letter, we appreciated the opportunity for our Government Affairs & Economic Development Committee to work through the proposed amendments in April with County staff, and to provide feedback. However, we are concerned that this feedback is not being reflected in the staff recommendations.

We remain concerned about the direct street access requirement for second floor retail (especially when considering outdoor common stairways) in order to gain additional signage credit as well as the requirement that the plaza/park not be roofed or enclosed.

Our most pressing concern, which other stakeholders have raised as well, remains the requirement that sites include a public-use easement to qualify. This proposed requirement produces a significant additional burden on the property owner to achieve what the County seems to agree is appropriate signage. There are a number of older properties with parks and plazas that do not have public access easements that would benefit from additional signage. With retail, it is in everybody's best interest to allow the most foot traffic tenable. The average Arlingtonian cannot tell the difference between the properties with and without easements.

Rather than requiring that a park or plaza be subject to a public-use easement in order to be eligible for additional signage, the additional allocation should be available in instances when either a building façade is approved for retail in a site plan or shown as an area recommended for retail in the Retail Action Plan.

Both County Staff and the Planning Commission cited the Crystal City Sector Plan as a prime example of the justification for the County's public-use easement requirement to obtain additional signage. However, the Crystal City Plan discusses public-use easements specifically as part of the redevelopment process. It is County policy to require these public-use easements as part of the Site Plan process. As noted in the staff report, this was not consistently applied to older site plans. As a result, these buildings are now B and C class properties where additional signage to facilitate tenant success would be tremendously valuable.



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In addition, these older sites are also some of the best opportunities for redevelopment, allowing the Crystal City Plan to be realized. County practice currently requires developers to purchase back public-use easements prior to redevelopment. This policy coupled with a requirement to add a public-use easement to obtain additional signage would result in additional hurdles to redevelopment. This could hamper the realization of the Crystal City Plan, including the enhanced parks and plazas envisioned in the Plan.

The Chamber remains appreciative that the County recognizes, and is working towards, utilizing additional signage as a tool that could help businesses prosper. The Chamber believes more can be done by fixing these specific concerns. We as a community should be doing everything feasible to help retail thrive as it faces growing challenges and online competition. We respectfully ask that you take this feedback into consideration moving forward to tomorrow's Board Meeting.

Sincerely,



Kate Bates  
President & CEO

CC: Arlington County Board members Libby Garvey, John Vihstadt, Katie Cristol, Christian Dorsey and County Manager Mark Schwartz

