



August 21, 2023

Christian Dorsey
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Dorsey,

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce supports Plan Langston Boulevard's broad goal of encouraging smart, sustainable development along the Boulevard. However, the Chamber has concerns with several elements of the Draft Plan. We do not seek a delay in the adoption of the Langston Boulevard Area Plan, as it is the culmination of a process going back to 2013, and we are aware of several development applications along the corridor awaiting the Plan's implementation. However, we urge several revisions to the Plan, including the addition of three Plan Goals, and the concurrent adoption of the Zoning Ordinance and GLUP amendments to ensure optimal outcomes for Langston Boulevard and the Arlington community.

The single most crucial action that the County Board can take when adopting the Langston Boulevard Area Plan is to simultaneously adopt the Zoning Ordinance and GLUP amendments for all sites in the Plan Area to create the Langston Boulevard Planning District, align GLUP designations with the Plan, and enable increased density to achieve the Plan's goals. The draft implementation matrix lists the Zoning Ordinance and GLUP changes as actions to be accomplished "immediately or within 3 years." Waiting too long to finalize these changes will lead to abandoned or delayed projects and discourage developers and businesses from investing in the corridor because they require clarity and certainty to make significant investments. We also ask that the County Board not withhold certain sites in the Plan Area from GLUP amendments, so that certain sites do not have to go through Special GLUP Studies following Plan adoption. For the Plan to have the desired positive impact, we strongly recommend that the County Board adopt the Zoning Ordinance and GLUP changes concurrently with the Final Plan.

The Chamber requests that the County Board support three additional Plan Goals: the retention or expansion of retail and community serving commercial use capacity along the corridor, the provision of parking resources suitable for supporting retail and community serving commercial resources, and the provision of community and cultural resources.

More base density is necessary to make projects financially viable, which will achieve the Plan Goals and will deliver these desired community benefits. The Plan currently proposes a base density Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 1.5, which is what most property owners currently have with existing zoning and through by-right development. The Chamber requests that base density be increased higher than 1.5 FAR to reflect the building heights and forms already recommended in the Plan. A greater base density would provide a framework that would allow for cost-effective investments to create more housing units and achieve the Plan Goals for mixed-use and commercial hubs along Langston Boulevard.

The Chamber asks that in exchange for density above the base recommendations, the County should consider all of the Plan Goals, including the Goals that we proposed in this letter. The Draft Plan does not identify at what rate community benefits will be required for density permitted above base density levels. The Plan should be transparent about the rate to make evaluation of any investment along the corridor feasible and desirable.

The Plan should also include flexibility on maximum building heights to accommodate the feasibility of investment success and Plan Goals along the corridor. We ask for a Plan that intelligently and creatively approaches solutions for height and massing to achieve its Goals. This principle should be articulated throughout Plan exhibits, including how topography and elevation allow for additional height on a site or a portion of a site.

The vibrancy of the corridor will largely depend on a balance of commercial and residential development. The Draft Plan incentives encourage residential development to replace community-serving business assets that the broader Langston Boulevard community depends on. The Draft Plan includes "Economic Vitality" as a Plan Goal, and we encourage the inclusion of more concrete policies for the realization of economic vitality along the corridor.

Retail and community serving commercial uses, as well as community and cultural resources, are disincentivized because they are not identified expressly as Plan Goals in the Draft Plan and are not assigned any value. The Chamber requests Plan language that assigns a value to be used in the bonus density calculations to the creation and retention of both small and large businesses. Assigning value for these uses will incentivize creating and retaining community-serving businesses of all sizes that increase the quality of life for residents along the corridor.

We strongly support the inclusion of a parking plan that will incentivize sufficient, publicly accessible parking in the commercial priority areas. While the activity hubs provide a degree of walkability, Langston Boulevard is neither a Metro Corridor nor a Premium Transit Corridor like Columbia Pike. Incentivizing adequate and publicly accessible parking in the commercial priority mixed-use hubs will actively encourage retail and commercial uses. Chamber members along Langston Boulevard have expressed the importance of surface or publicly accessible parking for their businesses. We request that the County assign a value to publicly accessible parking, through private investment or public partnerships, and articulate this need as a Plan Goal.

Arlington deserves a vibrant Langston Boulevard corridor to attract and retain residents, visitors, and investment. For Langston Boulevard to truly realize its potential as a successful "Green Main Street," it needs a proper balance of commercial and residential uses, and the Plan goals need to be realigned for the reasons provided above. We urge the County to incorporate these revisions into the Plan, and we look forward to continued engagement with the County as we move toward the adoption of the Final Plan.

We thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Bates". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Bates
President & CEO

CC: Vice-Chair Libby Garvey, Members Matt de Ferranti, Takis Karantonis and Tannia Talento, Arlington County Board; County Manager Mark Schwartz; CPHD Director Claude Williamson; Planning Director Anthony Fusarelli; Principal Planner Natasha Alfonso-Ahmed.