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Transmitted electronically

Arlington County Board

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Re: 601 S. Carlin Springs Rd Site Planning

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Glencarlyn and Forest Glen Civic Associations, adjacent to the 601 S. Carlin Springs Rd property, were surprised by the Board's announcement and VHC Health's plan to acquire a substantial portion of the site. We are disappointed that no effort was made for meaningful engagement with us prior to the finalization of the letter of intent (LOI). Up to now, the County had provided timely notice of activities on the site, including the ongoing demolition. We look forward to a more transparent process in the weeks and months ahead.

Collaborative engagement should begin immediately among VHC Health, the County and our communities, well before a site plan is submitted for review. Effective engagement will result in both a better plan and a smoother path forward during the review process.

The fact that the site is contiguous with Long Branch Nature Center and Glencarlyn Park creates opportunities, as well as concerns. It is well documented that exposure to nature is beneficial for mental health and general wellbeing. The proposed facility provides the opportunity for patients and staff to enjoy the natural environment.

Careful and thoughtful planning in development of the facility provides opportunities for environmental enhancement, which will benefit the park, the environment, and Arlington as a whole. The proposed facility must not cause adverse impacts on the park and surrounding environment.

Regarding the overall site environment, there are areas of concern we hope to discuss in the very near future. These include, but are not limited to:

- Protection of the watershed, including the Moses Ball Spring, the small stream informally called Salamander Run, and the Willow Pond vernal pool

- Preservation of the stands of mature trees on the east end of that site that may be outside of the resource protection area (RPA) and scenic easements.

The opportunity this project provides to enhance the Long Branch Nature Center operations is paramount. The nature center is a wonderful facility; however, it has deficiencies. The building is quite old and not ADA compliant. There is little space for exhibits, classes, and wildlife rehabilitation. Vehicle access is difficult, school busses are not able to visit, and parking is limited. The possibilities for collaboration and colocation of new nature center facilities abound, particularly in light of the County's retention of part of the property. We look forward to this discussion.

In addition to the environmental issues, we have and will continue to have many questions. Some initial questions are:

- Why a 500-vehicle parking garage? This seems excessive.
- What considerations are being given to potential impacts of the underground garage on site groundwater?
- What is the proposed building height and footprint? How many stories? Does further expansion include additional stories? Is it necessary to have structure as close to the 6th Street S houses and RPA as the LOI map implies?
- What is the site security plan? How will safety be assured for all parties, including patients, staff, community residents, school communities and park users?
- What will be done to mitigate general hydrological impacts including stormwater runoff and disruption to flows in the stream?
- How will you address noise, lighting and other intrusive environmental factors?

Additional topics we look forward to exploring include:

- Possible preservation of the "sledding hill" on the southeast side of the site.
- Biophilic design
- Use of native plants in landscaping and gardens to create wildlife habitat
- High-end energy, net-zero, LEED design provisions
- Creative uses of rooftop spaces that consider opportunities such as green roof, wildlife habitat, solar energy, and viewing decks
- Bird-safe windows and Dark Sky lighting

We all recognize the need for mental health services, and the added value of locating a facility on this site. With collaboration, this project will have far-reaching benefits. We look forward to hearing from you soon and beginning our work together.

Sincerely,

Julie Lee, President
President, Glencarlyn Civic Association

Brian Glosh
President, Forest Glen Civic Association

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