



Clarendon Courthouse Civic Association

24 April 2021

Mr. Chairman and members of the County Board,

On behalf of its members, and the residents of the Clarendon and Courthouse neighborhoods, the Clarendon Courthouse Civic Association (CCCA) submits for your consideration the following thoughts regarding the **proposed updates to the Clarendon Sector Plan**.

After hearing from the County and developers, our members discussed the proposed updates and what they mean for our neighborhood. We voted to take the following positions, which we think are in the best interest of our community:

- **Support** a change to the Sector Plan to allow step-back requirements on a given parcel to be met in the aggregate, rather than requiring a uniform 20-foot step-back (as the Wells Fargo site developers are requesting).
- **Support** a change to the Sector Plan to allow the parcel at the corner of Wilson and Washington to be developed as a hotel, rather than office.
- The CCCA continues in general to strongly support the step back requirements. The CCCA **opposes** the proposed elimination (or curtailment) of the step-back provisions on Irving Street or Fairfax Drive, for which the developers have offered no rationale that it improves the built environment, and, indeed, have offered justifications that contradict each other.

By taking these positions, the CCCA accepts that some technical changes to the Clarendon Sector Plan may be appropriate in order to continue to further its vision and principal goals. The Wells Fargo developers are still proposing substantial net setbacks that would meet the goals of maintaining a pedestrian scale at street level, but would add increased architectural quality and interest to the building. Hotel uses were not as carefully enumerated in the 2006 Sector Plan as other uses, and we agree that a hotel use at the proposed location is compatible with and supportive the overall office and use mix the Sector Plan. Thus both of these changes would increase public benefit and improve the Plan.

Conversely, the CCCA did not see any substantial neighborhood benefit in the proposal to eliminate or curtail step-backs along Irving Street or Fairfax Drive. These proposed changes would work against the pedestrian scale that decades of Clarendon Sector Planning has sought to foster. Unlike the developer of the Wells Fargo site, the developers proposing the step-back relief on Irving and Fairfax propose no significant public benefit offsetting the reduction in air, light and increase in urban scale their buildings would impose. In their March 2020 presentations, reviewed by the CCCA, these developers offered mutually-inconsistent justifications based on expected redevelopment or non-

redevelopment of utility buildings across the street. Even if their unsupported (or perhaps now abandoned) expectations for their neighbors' buildings came to pass, step-backs on both sides of a street necessarily contribute to Clarendon's pedestrian scale, and the sheer building walls each developer has proposed would detract from it. While we do not blame these developers from seeking any plausible justification (or no justification) for increasing the value of the land they have contracted to build on, the County should not agree to changes that fail to significantly promote any Sector Plan goal.

We thank you for your attention to these positions during the Clarendon Sector Plan update process. We are happy to discuss these positions further with the County Board, staff, and other relevant parties.

Sincerely,
Clarendon Courthouse Civic Association

Casey Nolan
President

CC: Mark Schwartz, County Manager
Clarendon Courthouse Civic Association membership