

## **Statement Opposing Comprehensive Plan Amendment 2014-I-B2**

Submitted to: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Submitted by: Holmes Run Valley Citizen's Association

December 1, 2014

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To: Clerk to the Board of Supervisors  
CC: Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova  
Mason District Supervisor Penelope Gross  
School Board Chairman Tamara Derenak Kaufax  
Mason District School Board Member Sandra Evans

Reference: Board of Supervisors Hearing on PA 2014-I-B2 originally scheduled for  
December 2, 2014 at 5:00 PM

This statement opposing plan amendment PA 2014-I-B2 for the SE Quadrant at Bailey's Crossroads is submitted on behalf of the Holmes Run Valley Citizen's Association. The association hereby asks the Board of Supervisors to NOT approve the amendment. Opposition is based on two concerns:

- The proposed school site on the SE Quadrant, Sub-Unit B-2, is not a suitable location for an elementary school, and
- The amendment has not been vetted with stakeholders.

### **Proposed Site Is Not Suitable for a School**

Virginia guidelines for public school facilities (\*) state that the quality of the school environment has a profound effect on the well being of both students and staff. Benefits include better student performance, increased attendance, and opportunities to use the facility as a teaching tool. The guidelines for an elementary school boil down to a safe, reasonably quiet site of sufficient size to accommodate the building, transportation, and outdoor areas, including a certain amount of green space for educational activities, play equipment, and non-structured play.

The attached graphic shows the SE Quadrant site on Columbia Pike with the proposed five-story apartment building on the right and the five-story school as a gray square on the left. At the top of the exhibit, the north face of the school would be set back only 20 feet from the curb along Columbia Pike, which is planned to be widened to six lanes. The school, with outdoor play facilities only on the garage roof, would be separated from the apartment building only by a one-lane fire road. Off-street transportation space for parking and to service bus and automobile traffic for the proposed 950 students plus staff is located behind the school.

The proposed site is not suitable for a school for a number of reasons:

- The location on the curb of a six-lane arterial in a busy commercial district does not qualify as a safe, reasonably quiet site for an elementary school. The Comprehensive Plan advocates locating schools in aesthetically pleasing areas that are conducive to pedestrian traffic; commercial areas are to be avoided.

- There is no useable green space for outdoor activities. Outdoor recreational activities would be confined to the roof of the parking garage.
- The limited off-street transportation space behind the school appears inadequate for handling bus and automobile traffic for 950 students plus staff. Buses would have difficulty maneuvering in the confined space and there is no capacity for car lines on the adjacent streets.
- The windows on the west side of the apartment building would look directly into school windows a few feet away risking the safety and security of children and staff in this era of school violence.
- Finally, in the event of a fire, children and staff would need to evacuate a burning building hemmed in on three sides by streets lined with emergency vehicles and by a parking garage on the fourth. Once outside, the site would provide no space where they would be able to assemble and stand safely clear of the building. Fire safety is a major concern.

On November 10, I submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) asking for a copy of the school layout that the rezoning applicant (Avalon Bay) had submitted. I also asked for copies of documents that FCPS had provided to outside parties, including Fairfax County, commenting on the documents that had been submitted. My purpose has been to better understand the proposed layout and the degree to which FCPS has agreed that the site would be suitable for a school. As of close of business, November 28, I have received nothing from FCPS indicating that they consider the site suitable.

In my opinion, the site is not suitable for a Fairfax County Public School.

### **The Plan Amendment Has Not Been Vetted with Stakeholders**

The staff report on PA 2014-I-B2 was published on the Planning Commission Web site on October-23 and fast-tracked to a hearing on November 5. The plan amendment was not reviewed with community residents prior to its publication nor was it reviewed with the School Board. The degree to which FCPS concurs with the amendment is undetermined.

The only community exposure to the amendment prior to publication was a briefing of the final proposal two days earlier, on October 21, to a small group of residents at a monthly meeting of the Bailey's Crossroads Revitalization Corporation. Supervisor Gross's Land Use Committee was briefed on the amendment on October 28, five days after publication. There was no opportunity for residents to comment on the amendment and for the county to respond to comments and concerns prior to publication.

The full School Board was first told of the proposal to build a school on the SE Quadrant site at a work session on November 10, five days after the Planning Commission had approved the amendment. The School Board, of course, is responsible for selecting sites for public schools.

The staff report states on page 5 that discussions among the county, Avalon Bay, and FCPS identified a “mutually beneficial opportunity” to allow an elementary school to be built in conjunction with a multi-family residential building. The community and the School Board are conspicuously absent from the staff report’s statement that the “opportunity” would be “beneficial.” And after more than two weeks of FOIA correspondence with FCPS, it remains unknown whether they consider the site even suitable for a school much less beneficial. Presumably, there would be benefits for Avalon Bay in building an apartment building and for Landmark Atlantic Holdings LLC in selling their 1960’s era Bailey’s International Center. However, among the School Board, FCPS, and community residents there is no evidence of a perceived benefit for public schools.

The substantial unresolved concerns about the suitability of the school site and its benefits are a consequence of the county's reluctance to vet the proposal with stakeholders.

### **Request for Denial**

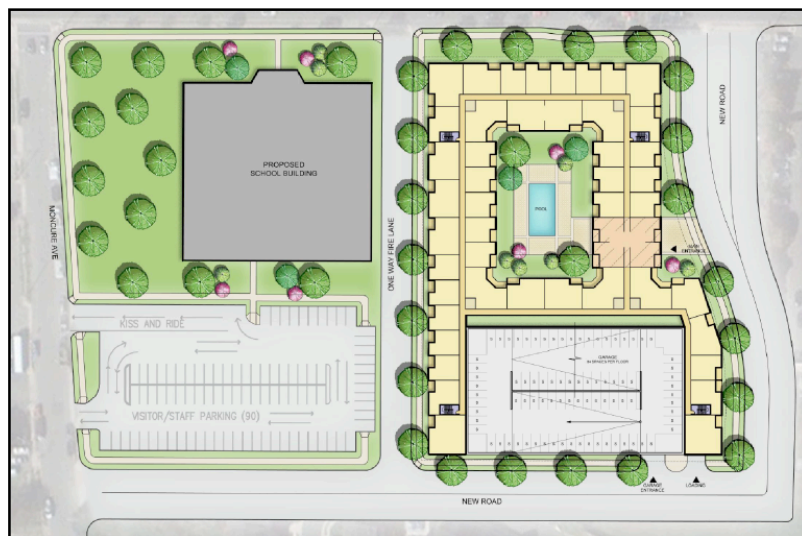
In asking the Board of Supervisors to authorize the proposed plan amendment on July 1, Supervisor Gross described the specific purpose as allowing the development of an elementary school and a multi-family residence on the site. Avalon Bay submitted a rezoning application for the project in August. The proposed amendment language provides only two redevelopment options: one for community-serving retail and office, and a second for residential use and a public elementary school. If the site is not suitable for an elementary school and/or the School Board would not select the site, it would be pointless to approve the plan amendment. The only practical redevelopment option then would be a community-serving-retail/office option no different from options in the existing plan language.

Holmes Run Valley Citizen's Association hereby respectfully requests that the Board of Supervisors NOT approve the plan amendment. The association also asks that the following activities be accomplished prior to further Board consideration of locating a school on the site:

- The full School Board and FCPS confer on the suitability and benefits of the site and determine whether the School Board would select the site for a school.
- In the event that the School Board would select the site, the School Board conduct the necessary public meetings to inform the community regarding the rationale and plan for using the site.
- Following such meetings, residents are allowed a sufficient period of time to review the School Board proposal and resolve concerns with School Board and FCPS officials.

Thank you.

### **Proposed Multi-Level Elementary School and High-Rise Apartment Building (DPZ Briefing on Plan Amendment 2014-I-B2)**



\* Guidelines for School Facilities in Virginia's Public Schools, Virginia Department of Education. June 2010, Revised February 2013.