

Minutes of Parkfairfax Transportation and Land Use Committee of 14 January 2021

The Parkfairfax Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC) convened its first monthly meeting of 2021 on 14 January via Zoom teleconference. It is hoped that the TLUC will be able to resume in-person meetings at some point, but for now the “virtual” format must continue, unfortunately.

Topics discussed included:

1. Online safety. TLUC members have been receiving emails from scammers masquerading as Board members. These often involve gift-card schemes or other illegal solicitation and identity theft. While the email has the spoofed name of a known individual, the actual email address from which it was sent may be that of the scammer. And even if the sender’s actual email address has been spoofed, the “reply-to” address is a giveaway that the mail is not legitimate. A word to the wise is sufficient.

2. Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations (AFCA). The TLUC Chair is the Parkfairfax principal delegate to the AFCA where three “hot topics” are currently being addressed:

a. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Some cities are experimenting with allowing single family homeowners to build a standalone dwelling unit on their property to accommodate returning college students, their in-laws, affordable housing or even short term (e.g. Airbnb) income-generating lodging. Alexandria is developing an ADU policy and grappling with issues related to zoning, parking, traffic, etc. The AFCA is working to slow down the process and expand community input before City Council approves an ADU policy.

b. Collocated school / housing. This is another hot button issue, as the City is looking at building housing units atop public school properties such as George Mason and the future rebuilt Minnie Howard. The occupants of the housing would not necessarily be related to the school itself. While the goal is to expand affordable housing in the City, the proposal raises issues similar to those of ADUs. The AFCA will convene a special meeting on 20 January to chart a course of action.

c. Landmark Mall redevelopment – Inova Hospital relocation. Plans are for Inova to build a new large hospital facility at the west end of the former Landmark Mall using, in part, proceeds from sale of the current Seminary Road (N. Howard St.) property which will be rezoned for residential development. Issues as to the appropriate zoning designation are being discussed with AFCA participation. The new hospital is expected to be operational in 2027-2028 and redevelopment of the Seminary Road property could not start prior to that date.

3. I-395 and Shirlington Circle lighting. As previously reported, the Chair contacted the VDOT Commissioner last month regarding the dozens of roadway and sign light outages from the Pentagon to Shirlington, including the rotary itself. With a little “nudge,” many lights have already been restored, and work continues until all are operational. After years of neglect,

major sections of underground cable has to be replaced in order to power lighting adjacent to the Army-Navy Country Club and elsewhere. The I-395 Express Lanes Project, and legal and jurisdictional disputes resulting therefrom, have hampered progress. Now that the Project is complete, and with high level VDOT support, the lighting will finally be restored.

4. The Chair also planted the seed with VDOT (pun intended) about the tall grass every spring that reduces critical visibility at the Quaker Lane and Shirlington Road merge points into the circle. VDOT will be receiving a gentle “reminder” when it’s time to mow.

5. Alexandria Transit Company (ATC) Board meeting. The Chair attended the ATC (DASH) Board meeting (virtually) on 13 January. With transit grants from the Cares Act, Metro and DASH are hoping to maintain a reasonable level of service through 2021. DASH is expected to resume fare collection by March, assuming Plexiglas driver barrier installations proceed on schedule. All DASH routes are operating at normal service levels EXCEPT for the AT3 and AT4. While scores of Parkfairfax residents crammed in the Party Room in 2019 to support maintaining our Pentagon commuter services, these two routes now report the LOWEST ridership in the entire DASH network! As such they operate once every 60 minutes instead of once every 20 minutes. Realtors often brag about Parkfairfax homes being steps away from a bus stop, and residents revel in having a robust transit network here. But the reality is that if Parkfairfax residents don’t ride our DASH and Metrobus routes, they will vanish. Notwithstanding the pandemic, other communities are supporting transit, albeit at reduced level, with Parkfairfax being the exception. Those empty buses plying our streets aren’t conducting “Operator Training.” The lonely drivers are scouring the neighborhood hoping to find a passenger or two to say “hi” to.

6. TLUC members again discussed aircraft noise. There is an FAA study inviting feedback, however it is believed that most of the noise and vibration observed in Parkfairfax and Fairlington is being caused by military helicopters deviating from the I-395 flight path as opposed to commercial aviation.

The next TLUC meeting will again be “virtual” and will be February 11th at 7PM.

Looking forward to “seeing” all of you then.

Best regards,

Bob Gronenberg
TLUC Chair