

**Arlandria Action Plan Implementation**  
**Arlandria Developer Forum**  
**May 17, 2010**  
**7PM – 9PM**

**Meeting Summary Synthesis**

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**Assets**

- Arlandria is very vibrant
- Stable working class community; not in decline or blighted
- Stable retail and residential occupancy
- Affordable housing
- Four Mile Run Park
- Birchmere
- City-owned land
- Chirilagua Festival

**Challenges**

- Transportation access and lack of transportation grid
- Poor access and connections to Four Mile Run Park
- Four Mile Run Park is underutilized and not programmed
- Buildings look tired and old
- No transit
- Poor image and lack of branding
- Retail competition nearby
- Lack of economic diversity

**Recommendations**

- Create reasons for people to visit Arlandria; create a sense of place
- Branding
- Capitalize on the success of the Birchmere
- Create opportunities in Arlandria that will encourage Birchmere customers to do other things in Arlandria (restaurants, shopping, live music)
- Consider music as the focus of an arts district
- Improve connections to Four Mile Run Park
- Improve the park and program it
- Improve transportation options
- Consider an east – west connection from Rte 1 to Arlandria via the Jack Taylor site
- Cluster retail
- Fill in gaps in the street wall
- Consider neighborhood revitalization comparables such as: Brookland (DC), Hyattsville (MD), Mt. Rainer (MD)

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Meeting notes are recorded by City staff to provide a written record of principal items of discussion, and comments from the Arlandria Advisory Group, City officials and members of the public. They are not intended to be a verbatim transcription of events at the meeting.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Faroll Hamer, Director of Planning and Zoning, welcomed attendees to the Developer Forum. Gary Oelze welcomed guests on behalf of the Birchmere. He discussed the Birchmere's history in Arlandria, some past challenges with developing in the City, and encouraged City officials and residents to view the Birchmere as an active and vital community asset and partner.

Val Hawkins, President & CEO of the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, introduced the evening's panel and moderator.

Moderator: Steve Moore, President & CEO Washington DC Economic Partnership  
Panelists: Danny Abramson, Abramson Properties; Stewart Bartley, Y-12 Investments; Jair Lynch, Jair Lynch Development Partners; Cameron Pratt, Foulger-Pratt

**Moderator: What did you see today?**

Abramson: Arlandria is very vibrant; looks tired and old but it's affordable; Presidential Greens is a fairly well-maintained residential development that provides housing for 30% - 40% AMI households; there are some problems that include roads and access to Arlandria and Four Mile Run Park and the potential reuse of that open space.

Pratt: The question he asked himself during the day was: "what do people want this place to be?" He asked constituents that question and the response was "better than it is now" but not a concrete answer. Not every place can be Bethesda Row or Old Town so residents and the City should identify the assets in Arlandria. What lacks in Arlandria is transportation. Clarendon has Metro. Shirlington has I-395. What is its highest and best use? Arlandria's assets include: Four Mile Run Park, (currently poor access and underutilized) and the Birchmere. The perspective to making Arlandria better is to ask: "How do you take advantage of the assets?"

Lynch: Neighborhood is stable working class community; neighborhood is not in decline or blighted; neighborhood is similar to Brookland in DC, Hyattsville in MD; Questions to pose are: "Where are we today?" and "Where can we be tomorrow?"; there is no transit so it cannot become a large-scale type of development; weaknesses include: lack of

connection to Route 1, lack of a transportation grid, and poor connections to Four Mile Run Park; opportunities include: stable retail, city-owned land, Chirilagua Festival with high attendance; there is a heartbeat here and we need to tap into that.

Bartley: Developers only build residential in places that they are financially comfortable; Del Ray has great brand and is a good place for residential development; challenges: Arlandria's brand; assets: Birchmere and large open space of Four Mile Run Park.

**Moderator: Density? Is it good or bad? Can it help or not?**

Pratt: Density is curious. Developers may not be able to afford to build dense in Arlandria; rents don't support high-rises; would have to evaluate demand first.

**Moderator: Is the retail that people want supported without density?**

Lynch: Look at surrounding neighborhoods. Would people drive from surrounding areas to the retail in Arlandria? People can reach many retail centers within a ten minute drive. Arlandria needs more growth. Density is just one tool. Placemaking<sup>1</sup> is valuable. Gentrification<sup>2</sup> is a lack of planning & lack of defining where you want to go.

**Moderator: If you plan, do you manage the downside of density?**

Abramson: Cannot fully answer. One developer must develop first and that is the most difficult. Government should take the neighborhood as it is (vibrant, livable) and add the park and city-owned property to a development. Density, height, and design are tricky.

**Moderator: What about the park?**

Pratt: I didn't get to the park today. It is highly inaccessible. Parks are only good when they are accessible, used, and safe.

Lynch: Park is not accessible. It is not programmed. You can have outdoor concerts.

**Moderator: What about the Birchmere?**

Pratt: The Birchmere does a great job. They figured out how to do business and do it well. The City & neighborhood aren't capitalizing on it. The City should take advantage of the traffic and people that it brings to the neighborhood.

Lynch: The Birchmere is an island. I've come for shows and then I leave. The goal is to have people come to the Birchmere and stay in the neighborhood for a longer visit. You must figure out ways to keep Birchmere customers in Arlandria longer.

**Moderator: Comment on festivals and farmers markets in Arlandria.**

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<sup>1</sup> Placemaking is a term used to describe the process of creating spaces such as squares, parks, plazas, streets, and landscapes that will attract people to a place and contribute to its identity; creating a sense of presence.

<sup>2</sup> Gentrification is a term used to describe the buying and renovation of houses and stores in deteriorated urban neighborhoods by upper- or middle-income families or individuals, thus improving property values but often displacing low-income families and small businesses.

Bartley: They create reasons for people to come to the neighborhood. It leads to placemaking and community building. They create a positive identity and generate demand.

**Moderator: Comment on establishing an arts district in Arlandria.**

Pratt: Music is art. If I owned a restaurant across the street from the Birchmere, I'd host live music. The Birchmere is a top music venue. Cluster similar uses and activities. Work with the strength of the Birchmere.

**Moderator: Arlandria is a stable neighborhood, has great business, affordable housing, and it is close-in [to DC-Metropolitan region]. So what's the problem?**

Abramson: Any redevelopment will impact existing residents in Arlandria more so than in other areas because there is a lack of workforce housing in the region.

Bartley: Arlandria has an image issue. There is a lack of economic diversity.

Pratt: Land owners want to maximize investments. Residents are concerned about being forced out. The area can be better than it is. There is the opportunity here to meet the desires of a diverse constituency.

**Moderator: "Maturation of an urban place". Can you explain that concept?**

Lynch: We are bombarded with images that set the bar high for shopping districts (Shirlington, Clarendon). Your goal should be to create a quaint, walkable place (Hyattsville and Mt. Rainer). You can become that. Focus on placemaking, branding, and filling in the gaps (vacant lots and gaps in the Mt. Vernon street wall).

**Open Public Discussion**

Public Comment #1: I'm on the Parks and Recreation Commission. Four Mile Run Park is used but people use it and leave. The proposed plan for the Duron Building re-use aspires to partner with the Birchmere and host events. However, there is a need for the private sector to partner with the community.

Response from Bartley: The restoration of Four Mile Run will not be the catalyst for redevelopment or economic development in Arlandria; albeit Four Mile Run is a tremendous asset.

Public Comment #2 (Mayor William Euille): There have been past problems with coordinating redevelopment and property owners in Arlandria. There is a sensitive human aspect to redevelopment in Arlandria. We have to have a comprehensive and sustainable perspective. People have to come together.

Public Comment #3: I'm on the Board of the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA). I used to be on the City Council. ARHA is building 101 affordable housing units in Arlandria. There are many affordable housing units in this neighborhood because the past flooding issues made the land less expensive. The keys are to define solutions to the transportation problems and have a vision that is a blend and diverse [ethnically and economically].

Lynch: Is the R-O-W above the Jack Taylor dealership available to create an East - West connection from Rte 1 to Arlandria? Creating that vehicular connection can be a game changer as it would provide people with transportation options.

Public Comment #4: I work for Tenants and Workers United. This plan does not include any of the 6,000 - 8,000 Arlandria residents who are people of color. Most of them are not opposed to change. Change is good as long as housing and people aren't displaced.

Public Comment #5: Who was the targeted audience for this event? There are good intentions but the vision has not gelled.

Public Comment #6: If the Birchmere fronted<sup>3</sup> Mt. Vernon Ave, how would that change things?

Response from Lynch: If it does, it must interact with street environment.

Response from Stewart: Fronting Mt. Vernon Ave is not too important but its presence must begin to create spinoff activity.

Public Comment #7: I'm a board member of the Columbia Pike Association (in Arlington County, VA) and the County provided funds for improvements on Columbia Pike. The County decided it wanted to do something and it did. Has the City considered a special tax district? Developers want incentives. The City has the power to make things happen.

Public Comment #8: I'm representing St. Rita's Church. St. Rita's was built in center of block to be part of community but due to surrounding development we are now on the corner of the block. Arlandria keeps getting left behind.

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<sup>3</sup> Fronted is to have the front façade toward; face