County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

June 18, 2009

Irma Clifton
President, Lorton Heritage Society
8912 Ox Rd
Lorton, VA 22079

Dear Irma and LHS members:

The purpose of this memo is to provide a response to the two motions passed by the Lorton Heritage Society at the May 11, 2009 meeting regarding the Revised Master Plan for the Laurel Hill Adaptive Reuse Area. Responses to the other questions and comments raised at the meeting are posted online as part of the meeting summary.

Motion 1: Moved that the Lorton Heritage Society withhold endorsement at this time of the Alexander Company's latest draft of the Laurel Hill Adaptive Reuse Master Plan, at least until the following pressing issues of importance to the Society's founding purpose are more fully clarified and resolved to its satisfaction, or via submission of a new and presumably much improved plan that would prove to be more responsive to LHS' interests:

1. *Preserving/respecting the Ballpark's ballgrounds to include accommodation of a 90 foot baseball field/multiple-use recreational area.*
2. *Removal of the inappropriate vehicular "horseshoe-design" roadway proposed for the Penitentiary's Quadrangle-Green, and,*
3. *Review/revision of both the overall placement and architectural design concept of the proposed 181 Single Family- Attached/Townhouse style of residential units with special emphasis given to compatibility of the design concept with its historic surroundings and to those units on and adjacent to the Ballpark ballgrounds/multiple-use recreational area.*

Motion 2: Moved that Fairfax County, in consultation with the Alexander Company, revise the latest of the firm's Laurel Hill Adaptive Reuse Master Plans per one of the two alternative site configurations presented by Mr. David Brooks (see attachment), wherein a baseball field (with dimensions of 325-foot/at right field foul-line, 360-foot/deep-centerfield and 325-foot/at left field foul-line) is sustained within the existing Ballpark by using one of two presented illustrated overall plans - one with an increase of 3 Single Family-Attached/Townhouse style residential units, and the other with a decrease and possible relocation of 10 Single Family-Attached/Townhouse style residential units, respectively, and; identify satisfactory upgrades to sustain the utility of the Ballpark's ballgrounds/multiple-use recreational facility.

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Motion 1, item 1, and Motion 2: Ballfield Area

The discontinued use of a 90' baseball field at the Reformatory is recognized as a concern in the community. The grandstands, bleachers, and dugouts create a true ballpark atmosphere. The Master Plan proposal to use this area as a community green and general recreation area is based on a variety of factors that the consultant and staff believe reflect sound planning principles.

Background information – The National Register period of significance is 1910 – 1961. The ball field area is a relatively late addition to the Reformatory complex. Aerial maps show the area as highly disturbed during the construction of the Penitentiary, ending in the early 1940's. A 1953 aerial shows the area as a large grassy open space with no ball diamonds or other field markings. It also appears that the grandstands are not constructed at this date; a road appears to access the field where the stands will eventually be built. An April 1960 aerial shows 5 ball diamonds located on the ball field area. A June 1962 engineer's plot of the Reformatory and Penitentiary shows the grandstands and labels the area "General Recreation Area." Later aerials show a volleyball court, a football field, and possibly a track in this recreation area. Archival records also indicate the use of the area for picnics, concerts, and field days for the prisoners and, on some occasions, their families. It is not until the recent adoption of the field by a local baseball team that the field has been used solely for baseball.

The proposed use of this area as a general recreation area is, in our opinion, an honest representation of the historic uses of the site. With a community green – grass with no dirt infields – a variety of events and activities can be programmed for the surrounding neighborhoods including concerts, picnics, and recreational activities.

Community considerations – The 80-acre adaptive reuse area is surrounded by nearly 2,000 acres of parkland containing, or programmed for, golf, playgrounds, a fishing pond, disc golf, an equestrian center, a baseball complex, and a Sportsplex for soccer and field sports. The proposed community green presents an opportunity to create a unique asset for the community: an urban park to serve adjacent and neighborhood residents, programmed for community events, and located in the historic setting of the former prison buildings. The reuse of the historic buildings will draw specific users: residents, shoppers, business owners and their customers. The proposed community green presents an opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the historic site.

Economic considerations – The proposed plan for including a 90' ballfield, relocating the mixed use pad, and adding townhomes is not considered economically feasible. Moving the mixed use pad directly into the neighborhood would be, depending on the use, intrusive on the residents. The success of mixed use commercial and retail uses away from Silverbrook Road will depend on visibility from the new access road and general accessibility to the site. Siting this pad at the entrance into the site from the access road is important, as is proximity to the commercial (Penitentiary cell block) buildings within the wall. This will help with parking and foot traffic from the commercial buildings.

In addition, townhomes surrounding a community green and general recreation area are better positioned to attract buyers than those surrounding a baseball field. The revised Master Plan reconfigured the townhomes – based on comments from the ARB and others – to create a more livable and vibrant arrangement. The proposed location of the 90' baseball field puts the townhomes back into a rowed-array.

Reducing the number of townhomes to accommodate the ballfield puts a financial strain on the economics of the project. Townhomes generate necessary income to pay for the high cost of new infrastructure and adaptive reuse of historic structures.

Planning and Preservation considerations - The revised Master Plan attempts to strike a balance between historic preservation and adaptive reuse of the historic structures, and financial viability to minimize the impact to the County taxpayers. It is important to note that of the approximately 54 contributing buildings in the Adaptive Reuse Area (including the towers); only nine are proposed for demolition. Three of these nine (located near the Power Plant) can be demolished without further study, per the Memorandum of Agreement. Taking these three into account, the removal of six out of 54 buildings represents preservation and adaptive reuse of approximately 89% of the historic buildings on-site. The use of the ballfield area for new development represents a compromise to utilize the limited existing open space on the property to help to preserve a significant number of the historic buildings on the site.

From a planning perspective, a civic green can incorporate landscaping, playground equipment, and/or shelters otherwise excluded by a dedicated baseball use. Additionally, a 90' (senior high school and adult league) baseball field requires extensive safety elements – primarily chain-link fencing – to keep foul balls from going into the grandstands and bleachers, adjacent open areas, and the residential areas. The required fencing would impact the visual character of the site and restrict movement around the ballfield.

The South County Hawks maintain and use the field through an Adopt-A-Field agreement with the Fairfax County Park Authority. The Fairfax County Park Authority has an interim use agreement with the Board of Supervisors to use this field on an interim basis. The County is sensitive to the potential loss of use of the field, and is actively pursuing alternate options in the area to provide for continuous baseball use by this team and others. It is envisioned that the details of any sort of agreement would be finalized with the developer of the site.

Motion 1, item 2: Penitentiary Quad

The Draft Master Plan presented in the fall of 2008 proposed parking in the Penitentiary Quad area. This parking was removed for the Revised Master Plan, and a U-shaped vehicular travelway is now shown in this area. Further review of this travelway will occur with VDHR and

the ARB as part of the development review process. This travelway is shown to depict potential handicap parking and drop-off access to improve the function of the proposed office use in the historic Penitentiary buildings.

Options may exist for providing this drive in a tasteful and sensitive manner using pavers or partial grass drives. The concern expressed by LHS will be brought to the attention of the review agencies as part of the site planning discussions.

Motion 1, item 3: Architectural Design Details
Adaptive reuse and new construction design and architectural styles within the Adaptive Reuse Site are not part of the Master Planning process. The ARB-adopted Draft Standards and Guidelines are an important document for understanding the context of proposed development on the site. The Lorton Heritage Society was provided these draft Guidelines for review, and may recall that the Guidelines include information about visual impacts, doors and windows, open spaces, new construction and building rehabilitation.

The Draft Standards and Guidelines were used in this large-scale planning effort and will be further referenced as site plans are developed and discussed with the appropriate review agencies. Architectural details will be reviewed and guided by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the National Park Service, and Architectural Review Board. All three bodies have guidelines and standards for new construction and adaptive reuse rehabilitation.

In general, new construction will be differentiated from the historic buildings and will be compatible in terms of massing, size, scale, and architectural features. We envision the use of high-quality materials and creative design to ensure a premiere development. Furthermore, new buildings will be constructed in a way that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment will remain intact.

Sincerely,

Leanna H O'Donnell

Leanna Hush O'Donnell
Planner III

cc:
Supervisor Gerry Hyland, Mount Vernon District
Laurel Hill Project Advisory Committee
Brad Elmer, The Alexander Company
Chris Caperton, Laurel Hill Project Coordinator