



NATIONAL LANDING

PENTAGON CITY

CRYSTAL CITY

POTOMAC YARD

January 14, 2022

Mr. Mark Schwartz
Arlington County Manager
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 302
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Mr. Schwartz,

The National Landing Business Improvement District's (BID) 23rd Street Committee would like to express its agreement with the sentiments and recommendations outlined in the Crystal City Citizens Review Council (CCCRC) Report to the County Board dated November 15th, 2021. Specifically, the Committee concurs with the desire for County leadership to guide a conversation about a new vision for 23rd Street within the context of the Crystal City Sector Plan.

Recent economic development wins and renewed development interest throughout National Landing have created both risks to and opportunities for achievement of the Sector Plan's goal to "preserve or protect" 23rd Street's Restaurant Row. Though ongoing development review and planning processes offer opportunities for community conversation about this goal, the Sector Plan offers no clarity on the tools, tactics or overall vision for 23rd Street that would yield success.

Informed by a robust conversation amongst membership during the November 3rd CCCRC meeting, the Report makes a compelling case of the need to identify concrete means of meeting the Sector Plan's goal to "preserve or protect" 23rd Street's Restaurant Row. As the report states, the conversation illustrates "*...an abundance of enthusiasm and potential ideas for revitalization that could be pursued through a review and study led by the (Arlington County) Community, Planning, Housing, and Development (CPHD) in collaboration with the area stakeholders.*"

Though the CCCRC report stops short of specific asks, a number of ideas were touched upon that would be important topics of discussion in any future community conversation. These ideas include the provision of additional retail parking as well as minimum parking requirement flexibility to support small businesses, enhanced walkability and multimodal access, the extension of the 23rd Street retail corridor several blocks west of South Fern Street, and the provision of additional height to properties between South Eads and Fern Streets.

As representatives of the 23rd Street business community, we encourage Arlington County to lead a planning effort to develop a shared community vision and action plan for this important corridor in light of current market conditions and strong community consensus. Such an effort will provide a clearer path towards achievement of Sector Plan goals and ensure that National Landing's most authentic downtown destination continues to grow, prosper, and serve the community. The National Landing BID and the 23rd Street Committee stand ready to assist in this effort.

Sincerely,

23rd Street Committee Co-Chairs, National Landing BID
Freddie Lutz, Owner, Freddie's Beach Bar and Federicos Ristorania Italiano
Mary Voutsas, Pappas Trust

Enclosure: CCCRC Report to the County Board – November 15th, 2021

Cc: Anthony Fusarelli, Jr., Planning Director, Arlington County
Matt Mattauszek, Master Planner, CPHD

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REPORT TO THE ARLINGTON COUNTY BOARD

FROM THE MEETING OF THE CRYSTAL CITY CITIZEN REVIEW COUNCIL ON NOVEMBER 3, 2021

The topic for the meeting of the CCCRC on November 3, 2021, was a review of how to achieve an optimization of 'Restaurant Row' (in S. 23rd Street between Eads and Fern), as a special asset for the County and the community, in keeping with the spirit of the Sector Plan.

The discussions confirmed that there is a strong interest among all the stakeholder groups in undertaking a review of what actions would be feasible and desirable. The feeling is that for too long there have only been exchanges of ideas and informal discussion, but these have not led to a formal review and planning effort by the County. The stakeholders hereby want to signal their intentions, and obtain your general support, when they now are ready to engage in a discussion with Planning Director Mr. Fusarelli and his staff about placing a review and subsequent planning effort on the work program.

As background, during the 2005-2010 process for developing the Crystal Sector Plan, the southern boundary west of our Rte. 1. was drawn in a logical place along 22nd Street, immediately south of the high-rise buildings in Crystal Houses. However, at a later stage, the County specifically insisted on moving the boundary to a vague line between the buildings on southern side of 23rd Street, and the buildings on 24th Street. The argument was that the County specifically wanted to ensure that the character of Restaurant Row be 'protected' and 'preserved'. Thus, not in the sense of preserving building structures for the sake of it be retained, but that the Restaurant and its unique features and character remain a special asset.

This would seem to assume a special attention and support on the part of the County, as it would be unrealistic to place the entire burden on land-owners and tenants for the combination of preservation and revitalization of both buildings and surroundings, which would be necessary to keep Restaurant Row as an attraction for decades to come. The burden, despite County support in the form of 'TOSA', has been particularly hard during a period when the usual stream of hotel guests and office workers has dwindled.

Therefore, the need for support, and more specifically an effort in the form of holistic and longer-term planning can no longer be postponed. There is a risk that the owners could no longer afford to maintain the basic elements of what makes Restaurant Row special. This risk is exacerbated by the large amount of growth occurring throughout the National Landing downtown area, with the potential for 23rd Street to be left behind and thus unable to share in the benefits of new development.

In the CCCA discussions, representatives of the three Civic Associations were unified in their support. They noted that current and emerging development in Crystal City and Pentagon City will of course bring restaurants and other retail, but that it is the contrast offered by Restaurant Row that makes its continued ability to thrive important. They compared with how nearby Mount Vernon Avenue in DelRay creates a setting that puts its mark on a neighborhood well beyond the individual restaurants and stores. While residents tend to worry about 'destinations' in their neighborhoods that draw traffic, this is not seen as an issue with Restaurant Row, provided that better solutions are found for scarcity of parking.

As you know, major developers and land owners are represented on the CCCRC. While these entities obviously are engaged in introducing their own retail businesses as vital components in their development endeavors, they expressed strong support for a special focus on the revitalization of Restaurant Row, within its traditional concept, and as a contrast to the kind of retail that normally becomes part of brand new development. Rather than as a competition, they see it as providing synergy and as a key attraction for businesses, residents and visitors to the area.

Thinking ahead, several CCCRC members even suggested that, rather than permanently confining Restaurant Row to the one block of 23rd Street, there would seem to be scope for looking at adjacent parcels as potential additions in the form of outdoor eating areas or open space. But interest was also expressed in the exploration of an expansion of Restaurant Row westward along 23rd Street. However, the intention at this point is not to bring the Board into a speculation about detailed ideas. It is more a matter of demonstrating the existence of an abundance of enthusiasm and potential ideas for revitalization that could be pursued through a review and study led by the CPHD in collaboration with the area stakeholders. In particular, the National Landing BID, in line with its strategic planning, is well placed to play a major, coordinating role in such an endeavor.

Respectfully,

Christer Ahl
(Departing) Chair of the CCCRC

November 15, 2021