

LESSONS FROM PARKING REIMAGINED

I served for approximately a year and one half on the Fairfax County Parking Reimagined Working Group, whose members were appointed by district supervisors. As a result of my experience, I believe that many in Fairfax County government seem oblivious to residents' concerns and give the impression that residents need to be "dealt with" as opposed to being represented and protected. Of course, Fairfax County needs to continue to evolve and grow; however, Fairfax County government needs to do this by working *with* residents.

Fairfax County residents should think about what they want from their government and elected officials. We need leaders who want to represent residents and will instruct County staff to respect their needs. In this election year, please pay close attention to the candidates running and vote for the ones who will value your needs and opinions, versus those who believe in streamlining county processes to eliminate residents' voices.

The Parking Reimagined amendment to the Zoning Ordinance was passed unanimously by the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, September 26th. Both the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors had made some changes to the proposed amendment, which thankfully resulted in fewer parking reductions in multifamily dwellings, and the Director of Land Development Services having less authority to make administrative adjustments to parking requirements, than what was originally proposed.

Also, two follow-on motions to the proposal were approved which instructed County staff to monitor data related to the adopted changes in parking requirements to assess their effect and to establish a readily accessible link to a webpage, which would permit the public to sign up for an electronic listserv and to be notified when a request is made for a parking adjustment.

The parking amendment is more resident friendly because of these changes and we all owe a debt of gratitude to all the residents and resident organizations who spent a *significant* amount of time analyzing the amendment, informing their members, and communicating with County staff, Planning Commissioners and Supervisors, concerning the amendment.

However, as one of the members of the Parking Reimagined County work group, I am concerned about the significant amount of time and resident feedback that was needed to get County staff, Planning Commissioners and Supervisors to consider how the parking amendment would affect residents in Fairfax County.

The details of the Parking Reimagined initiative have been resolved by the Board of Supervisors, but many unanswered questions remain in regards to what exactly is the responsibility of Fairfax County government to its residents. In moving forward, is Fairfax County government going to be more receptive to resident feedback or are residents going to have to organize and work strenuously to have their concerns heard? Are community meetings given by County staff going to be an exchange of ideas or remain a "marketing spiel" for how the County wants to proceed? Are residents going to have to analyze future zoning amendments with a fine-tooth comb to ensure that they are reasonable for residents? These are some of the bigger questions that arose from my experience with Parking Reimagined and questions which I think all residents should be concerned about, especially as we head to the polls to elect our leaders.