

Columbia Heights Civic Association
P.O. Box 41501
Arlington, Virginia 22204



April 26, 2018

To: Arlington County Board
Arlington Public School Board
Career Center Working Group

Re: Recommendations for the Career Center

Columbia Heights Civic Association files these comments in support of the planning of the Career Center Working Group, in which we are participating. We appreciate the strong support by both the County Board and the APS Board for a bold vision for this site that could incorporate commercial properties south of the existing Career Center campus, with the potential of linking it to Columbia Pike.

The general discussions in the CCWG have been far-ranging, and have included the possibility of a fourth comprehensive high school. However, if the County moves forward to create a new high school at this location we hope that this new school will take advantage of the greatest educational asset at that site, which is the technical instructional opportunities and programs that already exist. Opting for this school would allow students in a high school setting to have easy access to a multitude of programs and career opportunities, both at the Career Center and the Arlington Tech program. In fact, Arlington Tech may grow beyond the 800 seats now anticipated and become the dominant program. As Senator Tim Kaine said recently, this program, which he supported as Governor, represents the educational future for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

We believe that the multitude of programs anticipated on this campus—the Career Center, Arlington Community High School, Arlington Tech as well as the public library—requires us to think about this site as an urban facility with the look and feel of a college campus. There will be a multitude of students and adults using these facilities. To encourage the most creative solutions we urge the County to conduct a juried architectural contest for the site, which will attract the talents of the best architectural firms in the nation. The contestants should be given a description of the programs (and possible growth scenarios), a rough budget, and a timeline for phasing in components. Let's see what the best and brightest of our nation can envision for such a project.

We would also encourage a more reasonable approach to open space at this facility, preferring landscaping that complements the neighborhood and entices students to go outdoors, rather than focusing solely on creating the greatest space for sports fields. A high school at this site should instead focus on the unique characteristics and amenities that could be developed here. That could include indoor sports facilities, or facilities that could be accommodated on the roof of buildings—like a swimming pool, tennis courts, classrooms on urban farming, or terraced green space.

Space fronting Columbia Pike potentially would be ideal for the public library, providing an anchor for the entire community. Retail space could provide an outlet for the students who are perfecting their skills in Career Center programs like food service, car repair and hair care. The Columbia Pike frontage, with density up to six stories, could also support facilities for the performing arts.

And importantly, we encourage Arlington Public Schools to provide leadership in advertising Arlington Tech as the important program that it is, both on its web site, in educational brochures, in outreach to parents and students across the County, on proper signage outside the facility, and to the public. Currently this program is not advertised properly and few in Arlington even know of its existence. That needs to change.

As we plan for the next 50 years, let's make sure that we make this facility a jewel that all of Arlington can be proud of, for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Sarah McKinley

Sarah McKinley
President