

Nov. 17, 2011

TO: Mayor William Euille and members of the Alexandria City Council  
City Hall, 301 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314, and  
Chairman John Komoroske and members of the Alexandria Planning Commission

CC: Faroll Hamer, director, Alexandria Planning and Zoning Department  
Rich Baier, Transportation and Environmental Services  
John Noelle, arborist, City of Alexandria  
Laura Durham, Alexandria Open Space Coordinator

RE: DSP#2011-0016 for 5325 Polk Ave.

Dear Mayor Euille and members of the Alexandria City Council and Chairman Komoroske and members of the Planning Commission,

The membership of Alexandria's Night Blooming Garden Club has directed me to convey our club's interest and concerns regarding the latest proposed development plans for 5325 Polk Ave. When our members saw the 156 mature trees at this site banded with pink ribbons for possible removal, it prompted a request to send this letter. We are also members of the National Capital Area Garden Clubs.

This site is an acknowledged problem area for building more structures than the one existing house. The zoning goes back to 1961, when horses were on the property at Pegram and Polk, and were ridden down the paths of the West End of Alexandria and Fairfax County. In past years, developers ruled out developing this site because of the clay soils along with logistical and environmental concerns.

City officials need to weigh the value of these trees that would be removed and their impact on air quality and the prevention of erosion, as well as the visual impact. Trees help to control storm water runoff, save on home energy usage, increase a home's property value and reduce the carbon in the atmosphere.

One mature red oak can deal with over 8,000 gallons of storm water runoff annually. Runoff is very detrimental to the urban landscape since it washes chemicals and trash into streams, wetlands and oceans. That same lone oak can conserve almost 300 kilowatt hours of electricity used for heating and cooling.

In preparing any Cost/Benefit Analysis for this project, we encourage City officials to use the national Tree Benefit Calculator ([www.thecareoftrees.com](http://www.thecareoftrees.com)), a website provided by the Tree Care Industry Association.

Besides the environmental and aesthetic value of trees, they also have a fiscal benefit. A single mature northern red oak, with a diameter of 45 inches, can provide a total of \$368 annually, according to the Tree Care Industry Association.

Too often, a forested area such as 5325 Polk is clear-cut, eliminating the trees that help to root the marine clay soil. When the project is completed, the trees are "replaced" by pencil-thin saplings, which lack the water supply and maintenance needed to help them thrive and survive.

We would offer some recommendations for consideration by the Planning Commission and the City Council as they debate the merits of adding 42 apartment units to this site:

Based on the split-zoning, with both single-family and multi-family designations on a diagonal in this rectangular parcel, it would seem the site should have a maximum of three single-family homes built on a cul-de-sac, to save trees and to cut down on the access and entry traffic.

---Driveways and walkways on this site should all be constructed as a permeable surface to collect the rain water and to slow down the runoff in the marine clay soil, given the steep incline which rises up to more than 40%. This would also give the trees the time necessary to clean and to absorb the water generated by the homes.

--If the consensus is not for residential usage for this site, we would strongly support its use for Open Space. The City must replace the 6 acres taken by the Army for the BRAC Building. The site would provide a home for song birds and small animals while the tree canopy could sweeten the air and filter the carbon dioxide. It would also be suitable for a natural center for ecology studies by the two nearby schools, with no need for major structures. Simply provide some benches and bird houses for bird watching.

---The land might also qualify as a conservation easement, which would generate a tax benefit for the owner. With the recession, the value of the land has diminished. It is also surprising to note that the City is still placing an assessed valuation of \$50,000 on a house which has been abandoned for more than 10 years and has had to be boarded up repeatedly, with concerns raised by the police and fire departments as well as Code Enforcement.

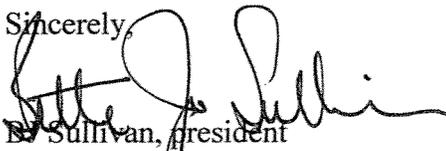
---The City purchased the neighboring parcel of land next to the Seminary Fire Station for Open Space. This site at 5325 Polk would have the benefit of a beautiful view as well as tranquility, since the sounds of the traffic do not waft up to the top of this hillside.

---We would urge that the City officials and staff go back and re-read Alexandria's Urban Forest Report as part of the basic research needed to decide on a beneficial outcome for this site.

In testament to my own personal concerns about this site and those of our Club, I spent 20 years on the Alexandria Beautification Commission and served four years as its chair.

Our Club stands ready to assist you in any way that we can, to help ensure the ongoing beauty, safety and ability of the site of 5325 Polk.

Sincerely,



Peter J. Sullivan, president

Alexandria Night-Blooming Garden Club

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