



The Arlington Greens, Spring 2007 Newsletter, v. 1 #1

<http://www.arlingtongreens.org> info@arlingtongreens.org

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Monthly meetings take place the first Wednesday evening of each month at 7:00 PM at Atilla's Restaurant, 2045 Wilson Blvd., across the street from the Courthouse Metro.

Wed., March 7, 7PM, we'll be joined by special guest **Christian Dorsey**, Executive Director of the Bonder & Amanda Johnson Community Development Corp., who will speak about his organization's efforts to build affordable housing and provide social services in the Nauck neighborhood.

Wed., April 4, 7PM

Wed., May 2, 7PM

ABOUT THE ARLINGTON COURTHOUSE GREENS

Arlington/Courthouse Greens were founded in early 2001 and are an affiliated local of the Green Party of Virginia (which is a member of the Green Party of the United States). The local came into being as a result of interest in the Green Party in Arlington following Ralph Nader's presidential bid in 2000. Meetings are run by consensus process and all are welcome to attend. Decisions requiring a vote (where consensus is not present) may be restricted to members. Arlington Greens have been involved in a number of local campaigns including opposition to widening of I-66, actions to stop the loss of affordable housing in the County, lobbying for the Living Wage Ordinance (passed in 2003 by the County Board), opposition to the Death Penalty--to name just a few.

ARLINGTON GREENS TO NOMINATE CANDIDATES FOR 2007 ELECTIONS

The Arlington Green Party will accept nominations for candidate positions for the November 2007 elections at its next monthly meeting, Wednesday, March 7.

On **Tuesday, November 6, 2007**, a General Election will be held in Arlington for the offices of Virginia Senate (30th and 31st Districts), Virginia House of Delegates (45th, 47th, 48th and 49th Districts), Clerk of the Circuit Court, Commonwealth's Attorney, Sheriff, Commissioner of Revenue, Treasurer, County Board (2 seats), and School Board.

ARLINGTON GREEN PARTY CALLS ON COUNTY TO PASS ANTI-WAR RESOLUTION

The Arlington Green Party has launched a petition "calling upon the United States to end its war on and occupation of Iraq and to support our troops by bringing them home safely now." Sign the petition at <http://www.petitiononline.com/iraq2220/petition.html>

If you'd like to help us collect petition signatures, please contact Josh Ruebner at josh4arlington@yahoo.com or 202-423-7666 and we'll send you hard copies of the petition.

Members of the Arlington Green Party last asked the Arlington County Board to pass an anti-war resolution during the January 27 County Board meeting; the efforts were rebuffed by Board Members who refused to address the issue. According to Cities for Progress, 273 localities in the United States have passed resolutions calling for an end to the war in Iraq.

ARLINGTON COURTHOUSE GREENS RUN FIRST CANDIDATE

Last November, Arlington County voters had the opportunity to choose a Green Party candidate for County Board for the first time. Josh Ruebner, a nine-year county resident who has served in leadership positions in United for Peace and Justice and the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, announced his candidacy at the May 20 meeting of the County Board.

Josh addressed many issues, including health care and the environment, but focused on the lack of affordable housing in Arlington County. In the past five years, the county's affordable housing stock declined by 52%. The loss of affordable housing and rising taxes and property values were significant factors in the nearly 20% decline in Arlington's Latino population.

Third-party candidates often have trouble getting access to the media and candidate debates. However, Josh participated in 13 debates, many of which were sponsored by local civic organizations. His campaign received extensive local coverage. Seth Rosen of the Arlington Connection wrote that "Josh Ruebner, a political novice, surprised many in the community by running a strong campaign this past fall as the Green Party candidate for County Board."

On November 7th, Josh won 5% of the vote, including more than 8% in several precincts. He ran strongest in precincts where his volunteers campaigned and were at the polls. Josh's campaign for County Board was a breakthrough for local Greens; it put affordable housing and county spending priorities onto the table. Five members of the Arlington Courthouse Greens are applying to be members of county commissions. The Green Party is becoming a force to be reckoned with in Arlington County.

ARLINGTON GREEN RESPONDS TO COUNTY'S FRESH AIRE INITIATIVE

County Can Do Even More for Environment

Reprinted with permission from the *Arlington Sun Gazette*, January 8, 2007

Editor: Upon being elected County Board chairman for 2007, Paul Ferguson unveiled an ambitious, yet practical, initiative to reduce county government carbon emissions 10 percent by 2012.

The plan, known as Fresh AIRE (Arlington Initiative to Reduce Emissions), seeks to reduce county government emissions by planting trees, purchasing more wind-generated electricity, and installing solar energy in county facilities.

The government also will encourage the public to reduce carbon emissions, by distributing compact fluorescent bulbs and providing free energy audits to 20 households; it also will examine the idea of tax-breaks for owners of hybrid and electric cars.

Fresh AIRE is an initiative filled with common-sense steps to reduce Arlington's "carbon footprint." As the Green Party candidate for County Board this past fall, I advocated for several similar measures, including Arlington's voluntary adherence to Kyoto Protocols emissions-reductions standards and tax incentives for owners of fuel-efficient cars. It is heartening to see the county government moving in this direction.

As laudable as the initiative to reduce governmental emissions is, Arlington needs to take bolder action to reduce overall carbon emissions levels.

Although the county cannot compel its residents to drive energy-friendly cars or build green, it can do a stronger job of incentivizing these behavior patterns.

For example, the county government currently encourages green building practices by granting bonus density to developers who build to LEED-specifications and bumping homeowners to the front of the line for plan reviews when they build through the Green Home Choice Program.

These programs could be enhanced greatly by providing a tax rebate, either for a set number of years or possibly in perpetuity, for green homeowners through a program similar to the homeowner grant program, which provides tax rebates to homeowners of modest means.

To really get a handle on reducing carbon emissions, however, Arlington needs to put some brakes on over-development and the intertwined environmental and transportation problems that it is causing.

Whether or not one agrees that the county's development of the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor constitutes "smart growth," it is indisputable that the vast increase in population along the corridor has driven up total energy consumption, put more cars on the road, and over-burdened the Orange Line to the point of transportation failure.

With County Board member Jay Fissette predicting that Columbia Pike will look like Clarendon within five years, the trend toward over-development in Arlington seems to be spreading.

It is hard to reconcile the County Board's encouragement of over-development with its praiseworthy goal of reducing carbon emissions and energy consumption.

While Arlington remains flat-footed in its efforts to control over-development, other Northern Virginian jurisdictions have raced ahead to confront this problem head on, recognizing its inherent environmental and transportation dangers. Recently, both Prince William and Loudoun counties voted to halt major residential rezoning applications in 2007 and Loudoun took the additional step of capping the density of development in the western half of the county.

To make an even bigger dent in reducing carbon emissions, Arlington should build on its positive Fresh AIRE initiative and look to its neighbors for inspiration to control over-development.

Josh Ruebner, Arlington

Ruebner was the Green Party candidate for County Board in 2006.

ARLINGTON GREEN DISCUSSES I-66 WIDENING

Out, Out, Damned Spot Improvements!

By Audrey Clement

On January 23, VDOT conducted a “public workshop” designed to get feedback from Arlington residents on its proposed I-66 spot improvement project. Since VDOT disallowed public comment after its presentation, some people questioned the purpose of the workshop. Some also questioned the purpose of the spot improvement project itself, the construction of three discontinuous on-ramp extensions comprising 4.1 miles of the 6.5 mile I-66 corridor between Rosslyn and the Beltway.

The answer to both questions lies in NEPA (the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969), which requires state transportation agencies to produce environmental impact statements (EIS) on major highway projects. If a highway project would have no significant environmental impact, the state can obtain a categorical exclusion (CE). If the project is within the scope of a published list of routine improvements, FHWA approval of the CE is not required. Otherwise it is. In situations where it is not clear whether an EIS is required, the state agency has to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) justifying either an EIS or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI). Preparation of either an EIS or an EA requires public input.

VDOT opted to proceed with spot improvements after publication of the Idea-66 report in March, 2005, which recommended constructing an additional westbound lane in the I-66 corridor. VDOT no doubt decided to forgo the widening, at least in the near term, after realizing that an EA would be triggered by the need to obtain either additional right-of-way for the third lane at several chokepoints on the roadway or apply to FHWA for permission to reduce the width of the shoulders—already below FHWA standards—at those points.

If required to produce an EA, VDOT would have to prove that there are no reasonable alternatives to widening. Opponents of widening could easily challenge that argument in court, given that the Idea-66 report itself evaluated a whole array of alternatives—including, expanded HOV, HOT lanes, a third Metrorail track and express bus service—several of which are cheaper and arguably better at reducing long term congestion than widening.

By reducing the scope of the project to “spot improvements”, VDOT not only can avoid triggering an EA, it believes it can get a categorical exclusion to proceed with the work. That’s because 23 CFR 771.117 (d) (1) allows a CE with FHWA approval for: “Modernization of a highway by resurfacing, restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, adding shoulders, or adding auxiliary lanes (e.g., parking, weaving, turning, climbing).”

However, there is an important caveat to the regulations governing CE’s at 23 CFR 771.117 (b) (4), which requires FHWA to direct the state transportation agency to provide justification for a CE in cases where granting it might be inconsistent with “any Federal, State, or local law, requirement or administrative determination relating to the environmental aspects of the action.” In this case spot improvements might conflict with Coleman Decision of 1977, the popular name for the EIS Record of Decision authorizing construction of I-66 some thirty years ago and requiring that it be limited to a four lane highway inside the Beltway.

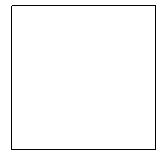
The Coleman Decision was presumptively annulled several years ago when Congressman Frank Wolf got Congress to enact a rider to a transportation appropriation invalidating the decision. But the authority of Congress to override an administrative decision of such scope is open to question and could be challenged in court. If it is, VDOT is certain to argue that even if the Coleman Decision still obtains, spot improvements don’t amount to widening. So it’s operating within the law.

The question then turns on what VDOT plans to do after the spot improvements are in place. VDOT itself bills spot improvements as “interim”, and opponents believe that they will not reduce congestion on I-66. So it seems that both sides agree on one thing, spot improvements are a temporary measure that will have to be replaced with a future permanent solution. In creating traffic conditions that justify the need for permanent widening, VDOT ignores NEPA case law, which characterizes this approach as “segmentation”—compliance with NEPA by proceeding with a highway project in stages.

Because the courts frown on segmentation, the regulations at 23 CFR 771.111 require that states demonstrate that road projects connect logical termini, have independent utility, and do not preempt alternative transportation options. VDOT argues that it has met the latter requirement, because any future option, e.g. express bus lanes or an additional Metrorail track, will simply require re-striping the pavement once the on-ramps have been extended. But if as expected, the extended on-ramps merely move bottlenecks down the road, there is a serious question whether the extension connect logical termini. The only way to get an objective answer to that question is to evaluate the results of the traffic modeling study that VDOT undertook to justify spot improvements. To date VDOT has not published the results of that study.

Audrey Clement is a member of the Arlington Greens and a board member of Arlington Coalition for Sensible Transportation.

Arlington Greens
c/o Kirit Mookerjee
1201 N. Kensington St. #9
Arlington, VA 22205



Yes, I would like to get involved with the Arlington Courthouse Greens. I'm interested in:

- Attending monthly meetings
- Receiving email and newsletter updates
- Organizing events
- Working on Green Party campaigns
- Joining the Green Party of Virginia and making a contribution*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please return to: Arlington Greens, c/o Kirit Mookerjee, 1201 N. Kensington St. #9, Arlington, VA 22205

* **Federal law** requires the Green Party of Virginia to collect the name, address, occupation and employer from donors contributing more than \$200 per year. Please include this information with your check. You must be at least 18 years of age in order to contribute. Contributions to the Green Party of Virginia are not tax deductible.