

*Alcova Heights  
Neighborhood Conservation Plan*

March 28, 1999

*Prepared Under the Auspices of the  
Alcova Heights Citizens Association*

**ALCOVA HEIGHTS  
NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The original Alcova Heights Neighborhood Conservation Plan was prepared in 1968. That plan proposed numerous community projects that residents felt would enhance the quality of life in Alcova Heights. These included the addition of sidewalks, curbing, streetlights and improvements to the park. Most of the recommended activities in the original plan have been undertaken and completed.

In 1994, the Alcova Heights Citizens Association (AHCA) resolved to update the plan. A Conservation Committee was formed to work on the plan, and a survey was developed and circulated throughout the community to gather information on neighborhood characteristics and areas of concern.

Even as the conservation plan was being rewritten, additional projects were being undertaken by the AHCA. These projects included park improvements, street lighting, the replacement of a retaining wall on Randolph Street, a much needed sidewalk on the north side of Columbia Pike between Quincy and Randolph, and the installation of traffic circles in a number of intersections in the neighborhood. These projects were recommended as a result of the high priority given to the park and traffic calming in the survey, as well as numerous discussions at AHCA meetings. Most of these projects have been approved by the county and have been completed or are in progress. An additional group of projects including neighborhood identification signs, picnic gazebos for the park and the completion of permanent traffic circles was approved by the County Board during the summer of 1998.

As a mature neighborhood that has undergone continuous improvement under the original conservation plan, Alcova Heights does not have a need for a lot of capital projects. Although some new projects are being considered, the revised plan focuses primarily on the safety threat posed by cut-through traffic and speeding vehicles, as well as ensuring that future development within Alcova Heights be of the same character and density as the existing homes.

The Conservation Committee also recommends that this plan be revised every ten years. By maintaining an up to date plan, the residents of the neighborhood will have a more effective tool to guide them as they address issues and problems that arise.

A summary of each plan section follows.

### **Neighborhood Goals**

Alcova Heights residents are concerned about preserving and enhancing the quality of life in their neighborhood. Responses to the Neighborhood Conservation questionnaire suggest that their most important goals are to:

- Preserve the character of the neighborhood as a core of single-family homes bordered by commercial and institutional development;

- Preserve the open, un-crowded nature of the neighborhood by discouraging infill and pipestem development;
- Protect the core area of the neighborhood from cut-through traffic and speeding while maintaining convenient access to and across major arterial streets and to adjacent retail centers;
- Promote pedestrian safety by completing the neighborhood’s sidewalks, curbs and gutters; improving the maintenance of the sidewalks now in place; and improving street lighting where it is inadequate;
- Work with residents and businesses to improve the appearance of the neighborhood;
- Improve the appearance of the streetscape at specific locations with additional landscaping or street improvements;
- Promote broader recognition of the Alcova Heights community by erecting “Alcova Heights” signs at the primary entrances to the neighborhood;
- Improve the appearance of the entire neighborhood by encouraging residents and owners to improve their homes; and
- Maintain and improve the condition of Alcova Heights Park, recognizing the heavy use it gets from citizens from the neighborhood and the wider community.

## **History**

The history of Alcova Heights as it developed after the Civil War is presented in the plan. The area originally known as Spring Hill Farm was first plotted during the 1920’s. The neighborhood’s oldest home is a local historic district, and remains a graceful reminder of the charm of Alcova Heights.

## **Neighborhood Characteristics**

This section contains information on who we are, what our houses are like, where we work, how we commute, and other notes of interest on the community as a whole. This section also describes the commercial areas that surround the neighborhood, and the institutional neighbors including schools, churches and community facilities that are a part of the community.

## **Land Use and Zoning**

This section contains the reasoning, recommendations and methods for keeping the residential character of Alcova Heights intact. The recommendations in this section are intended to establish a baseline for any new development in the area. By abiding by these recommendations, we believe the strong community feeling that exists in Alcova Heights can be maintained for the youngest to the oldest residents. These recommendations will also serve to enhance the character of open space and improve the environment of Arlington County as a whole. In addition this section outlines residents’ concerns with

commercial development at the edges of the neighborhood, and suggests ways in which the residents can work with business and the County to improve the attractiveness of the commercial border.

### **Infrastructure and Capital Improvement**

This section contains recommendations for capital improvements that should be considered in the future. These include the addition of sidewalks on those blocks where none exist, continued upgrading of curbs and gutters, and additional lighting where necessary. This section also describes areas of the neighborhood where substantial drainage problems continue to exist. We propose that the county and AHCA work together to determine if any of these drainage problems are worthy of County attention as an NC project.

### **Traffic Management**

Contains a description of traffic patterns and problems in and around Alcova Heights. Like many Arlington neighborhoods, Alcova Heights is subject to cut through traffic and speeding. Despite the coming addition of traffic circles, neighborhood streets will still suffer from heavy traffic and speeding. These streets need additional traffic controls, as soon as possible.

### **Parks and Recreation**

Alcova Heights Park forms the western border of the neighborhood and is an asset to the neighborhood. This section describes the park and suggests improvements that can be made to it. Although 1998 has seen a number of improvements to the park, this section calls for the creation of a master plan to guide future improvements and outlines additional improvements that should be made to enhance the park, increase its usability, and provide the safest possible environment for the citizens who use it. The small park at the foot of South Oakland Street is also discussed. This tiny park deserves a second look and improvements to make it a more integral part of the community.

### **Project Recommendations**

The plan references 15 projects, some of which have been approved and funded by the County Board, but have not been completed, and some that are in the early stages of development and will not be submitted for NCAC approval until some time in the future. All the projects listed are considered important to the continual improvement of the Alcova Heights neighborhood and the surrounding area.

- 1) Examine persistent drainage problems that occur naturally, and from recent home building . Develop proposals with County staff to improve drainage in the areas of South Monroe, and 7th and 8th Streets.
  
- 2) As requested by residents through the County's petition process, install curb, gutter and/or sidewalk where missing in Alcova Heights.

- 3) As requested by residents through the County's petition process, install additional street lighting on streets and public walkways.
- 4) Study measures which would improve the flow of traffic at the Glebe Road/Columbia Pike intersection and make Alcovia Heights less attractive as a cut through.
- 5) Study the George Mason Drive/ Columbia Pike intersection for possible light sequence change. Possibly add left turn arrow for traffic traveling west on Columbia Pike and turning south on George Mason Drive.
- 6) Complete permanent traffic circles approved by AHCA.. Remove temporary circles that were rejected by AHCA vote.
- 7) Establish 4-way Stop at the intersection of Quincy Street and South 8th Street.
- 8) Add 4-way Stop or other traffic controls at the intersection of South 9th Street and Quincy Street.
- 9) Erect signs on George Mason Drive and South 8th Street advising motorists that they are approaching a playground area.
- 10) Complete bike path through Arlington Hall\* adding access to Glebe Road.
- 11) Complete work on ball field drainage improvements.
- 12) Prepare Master Plan for Alcovia Heights Park.
- 13) Increase size and location of trash receptacles within the park.
- 14) Work with Arlington Hall and appropriate federal agencies to correct the erosion problems at the south end of Arlington Hall as it abuts the creek. Establish additional wetlands area.
- 15) Complete southernmost entrance on George Mason Drive into the Arlington Hall parking lot by installing curb and gutter, sidewalk and landscaping.
- 16) Prepare Master Plan for Oakland Street/South 9th Street Park.

\* Arlington Hall refers to the Foreign Affairs Training Center and the National Guard facility.

## INTRODUCTION

Alcova Heights is a quiet neighborhood bordered on the east by Glebe Road, on the west by George Mason Drive and the State Department Arlington Hall, on the south by Columbia Pike, and on the north by Arlington Boulevard. Alcova Heights consists primarily of older single-family detached homes with a sprinkling of recent in-fill homes. The neighborhood also includes a mix of duplexes, townhouses and apartment buildings. Commercial development borders the neighborhood along Columbia Pike and at the corner of Glebe Road and Arlington Boulevard. According to the 1990 Census, the population of the neighborhood is 1649 in 708 households.

Alcova Heights is one of the original participating neighborhoods in the Arlington County Neighborhood Conservation Program. The Alcova Heights Neighborhood Conservation Plan dates to 1967, and has never been updated. However a number of issues not addressed in the Plan have arisen recently which could change the character of the neighborhood.

Recent increases in land values throughout Arlington County have resulted in pressure to redevelop many established neighborhoods such as ours. Alcova Heights' large lots, modest older homes, and convenient location make it a potential target for higher density development. This is opposed by our residents. Increases in traffic speed and volume on our residential streets poses another major threat to the character of Alcova Heights and to the residents' quiet and safety. Our proposals for traffic management are intended to protect the residential character of our neighborhood and to design streets that are attractive and safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, and children, as well as convenient for motor vehicles. Traffic management is of great concern to Alcova Heights residents.

Alcova Heights residents have undertaken this plan to preserve the neighborhood's character and stability and to facilitate long-range improvements. We initiated this revision because we believe that positive change can be achieved by developing and carrying out a comprehensive, well-thought-out, neighborhood-supported plan.

In 1994, the Alcova Heights Citizens Association committed to updating its outdated Neighborhood Conservation Plan. Members of the Alcova Heights Citizens Association Conservation Committee met with County staff, conducted both a neighborhood survey and a physical survey, and began drafting an updated Neighborhood Conservation Plan. Completion of the effort was delayed for several years, but resumed in 1997, and led to this final product.

Through a survey of all the home owners involved and opinions voiced at meetings of the Alcova Heights Citizens Association, it is evident we have chosen to preserve our community as it is, rather than developing it more densely. We believe that the community and our homes are worth saving. We have dedicated ourselves to this effort, and seek the support of the Arlington County Board on the program outlined in this report.

## HISTORY

Alcova Heights was given its name by real estate developer J. Cloyd Byars. “Alcova” stands for Alexandria County, Virginia. In 1921, Byars bought 142 acres from the Columbia Land Company and sold the lots for five cents a square foot. Byars laid out many streets, naming them Azalea Street (Quincy Street), Marconi Avenue (8<sup>th</sup> Street), Deepwood Avenue (9<sup>th</sup> Street), Springhill Street (Lincoln Street), Virginia Street (Monroe Street), and Linden Avenue (Oakland Street).

Byars’ home, which he also called Alcova, is the oldest in this community. It was built before the Civil War as a tenant farmhouse on the estate of William Young, who had bought the property in 1850. During the Civil War, Alcova, also known as “Spring Hill Farm” and “Columbia Place”, was occupied by Union soldiers and many buildings were destroyed. For “military purposes” all the fences were taken down, the animals confiscated and the main house burned. In 1878, the Young family received \$3,198 in compensation for these losses. The Alcova house has undergone many changes over the years, and is now a County landmark.

By the time that Mr. Byars began developing the neighborhood, the population of the whole County was rapidly increasing and Alcova Heights became a popular spot to live. The trolley line was less than a mile from “Hunter’s Crossroads”, the intersection of Columbia Pike and Glebe Road. Telephone service had reached the community, and after 1928 water and sewer services were available.

Alcova Heights in 1921 was regarded as a very accessible community. It was bordered by two surfaced highways, Columbia Pike and Glebe Road. Trolley service to Washington, Rosslyn, and Alexandria was available less than a mile down Columbia Pike, at the intersection with what is now Walter Reed Drive.

Transportation was further improved when Bob May and his wife started a bus service - consisting of one bus and one driver, Mr. May - operating between their home in Barcroft and Washington. It was known as the Columbia Pike Bus Line, and the first Barcroft-to-Washington trip was made June 21, 1921. In 1924 service from Washington to Alexandria was added and the line became the AB&W Rapid Transit Company.

The nearest elementary school in the early 1920s was Columbia, located on Columbia Pike at Walter Reed Drive. For “higher education,” students traveled to Washington, until the opening of Thomas Jefferson Junior High School and Washington-Lee Senior High School in 1925.

Arlington Hall, now the site of the State Department Arlington Hall, was built in the 1920s as a select school for girls, Swidells Junior College. It went bankrupt in 1930, but managed to keep going until the Army took over the rural campus in the 1940s. The first headquarters of the Defense Intelligence Agency was in this installation. Many of the homes of Alcova Heights are built on the former grounds of this old institution.

Most of the single family homes in Alcova Heights were built between 1921 and 1950. There are least two Sears houses among them. Over the past 50 years, a number of

additional single family homes have been added through infill development. The Dundree Knolls townhouse condominium along Columbia Pike was constructed in the mid-1980's.

On January 21, 1966, the Alcovia Heights Citizens Association was organized. Until this time, Alcovia Heights had been included in the territory of the Columbia Pike Citizens Association. There were 80 Charter members and Dr. Mosely served as the first President.

Throughout its history, Alcovia Heights has been a popular place to live, because of its relatively inexpensive homes, large lots, easy access and recreational amenities such as Alcovia Heights Park. These same factors are at work today ensuring that it remains so.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

### Demographics<sup>1</sup>

The population of Alcova Heights, according to the 1990 census, is 1649 people living in 708 households. The population distribution is:

Age	Share of Population
under 5	10%
5-17	10%
18-24	6%
25-34	19%
35-54	34%
55-64	11%
above 64	7%

Census data and survey information allow us to identify other key features of the Alcova Heights population:

- **Incomes:** The mean household income in 1989 was approximately \$61,292. Although specific information for Alcova Heights is unavailable, it appears that about 5% of the population has an income below the poverty level.
- **Education:** About twenty three percent of school age children attend private school. Eighty five per cent of the adult population has completed high school and almost 50% have an undergraduate degree. Another 21% have professional or graduate degrees.
- **Employment:** Fifty per cent of the adult population report working in a professional or managerial capacity. Forty one per cent of those working outside the home work in the private sector. Public sector jobs account for 31% of employment, 16% of the residents are retired and 4% work in the home.
- **Over 70% of the residents have been here since 1990, and 30% have lived in the neighborhood for 20 years or more.**

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<sup>1</sup>The following information was derived from the 1990 census, supplemented by a survey conducted by the Alcova Heights Citizens Association in 1996.

- Transportation: All but 37 households own cars. Over fifty per cent of the population drives alone to work. Seventeen per cent of the residents car pool and sixteen per cent use public transportation.
- Just over six per cent of the work force walks to work or labors at home, and two percent use other means. The average commute for Alcova Heights residents by any mode is 22 minutes.

## **Housing**

Alcova Heights is largely made up of single family, owner occupied homes. There were 708 housing units in Alcova Heights as of the 1990 census. A number of homes have been built since the census was taken. Four of them are on large lots that were split to accommodate construction and two replaced houses that were demolished. Seven new homes are under construction in the area off South Fifth behind the fire station. One more new home is planned on a subdivided lot in the 800 block of South Monroe.

The median construction date for homes in the area is 1954. However 131 of the homes were built prior to 1939. Around 34% of the homes, or 243 units, were built between 1940 and 1960. Construction slowed between 1960 and 1985, when only 141 units were constructed. In the years between 1985 and 1988 another 141 units were built, matching the construction of the previous 25 years. The townhouse development bordering Columbia Pike, Dundree Knolls, accounts for 91 of these new units.

There are 371 single family and 44 semi-detached homes in the neighborhood. The neighborhood's only large apartment buildings are four-story condominium buildings located on South Fifth Street. Home ownership rates in Alcova Heights remain high, with only 152 or 22% units rented.

Alcova Heights houses tend to be small by 1990 standards and most (73%) have two or three bedrooms. According to the 1990 census only 72 homes have four or more bedrooms. The median household occupancy rate is 1.8 for owner-occupied homes and 2.21 for rental units. Neither the federal census nor the neighborhood survey determined the number of dogs, cats, hamsters, or crickets per household.

Natural gas supplies heat to 65% of homes, electricity is used in 21%, and the remaining homes use fuel oil, or bottled gas for heat.

The median monthly cost of home ownership in Alcova Heights is \$1183, based on information provided by residences with mortgages as reported in the 1990 census. Most renters spent less than 30% of their income on housing, and the median rent was \$974.

During the late 1980's, real estate values in Alcova Heights rose rapidly. This was followed by a slight decrease in pricing in the early nineties. Arlington County assessments reflect a slight decrease in valuation for many Alcova Heights homes in the past two to three years. However, low interest rates coupled with increased demand are keeping real estate values steady, and according to local agents, a market increase is expected over the next few years.

Because so much of Alcovia Heights is owner occupied, the homes and properties are generally well maintained. Home owners will continue to improve and maintain the property, if they can be assured the neighborhood will retain its single family residential status.

## **Commercial Development**

Alcovia Heights is edged by commercial or institutional development on all four of its borders. Approximately 30 retail establishments border the neighborhood, as do numerous businesses that reside in small office buildings on Glebe and Columbia Pike.

- To the north the area is bounded by Route 50 and three institutional properties. These are a Masons Lodge, the National Foreign Service Training Institute and the Headquarters for the Army National Guard. Many area residents use the parking and green areas around these installations for exercise and dog walking.
- Glebe Road borders the east side of the neighborhood and has a mix of commercial, residential and institutional uses. Businesses are clustered at the northern and southern section of Glebe as it runs along Alcovia Heights. Residences alternate with two churches and the local fire station between those areas.
- George Mason borders the western edge of the neighborhood with a mix of residential, park land and small businesses, as well as the main entrance to the National Guard Headquarters and a parking entrance to the Foreign Service facility.
- Columbia Pike, on the south side of the neighborhood, has the most commercial development. Fast food restaurants, banks, plumbers, grocers, pizza parlors and consignment shops line Columbia Pike. These businesses provide convenient services and in some cases unwanted traffic and litter. Graffiti and dumped solid waste appear to be most prevalent along Columbia Pike, when compared to the other border streets. Parking areas behind a few of the commercial buildings suffer from illegal dumping and some vandalism.
- The Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization (CPRO) is made up of businesses and residents along Columbia Pike. CPRO has a mission to improve and assist businesses in the area and beautify the Columbia Pike corridor from South Courthouse to South George Mason Drive. CPRO provides a link to County offices and other business organizations in Arlington, and clearly welcomes citizen input.

In December of 1997, CPRO contacted the Arlington County code enforcement office to request more inspections of some properties along Columbia Pike in the area between George Mason Drive and Glebe Road. This effort has resulted in some improvement in the appearance of these properties.

CPRO has also initiated a program called “Eyes on the Pike”, and encourages neighbors to provide comments, both good and bad, on the state of the Columbia Pike area. In addition CPRO conducts monthly walks along the Pike to provide informal inspection of improvements and changes in the area.

### **Community Facilities**

Three schools serve the Alcova Heights area; Barcroft Elementary School, Thomas Jefferson Middle School, and Wakefield High School. In addition, children in the neighborhood attend St. Thomas More School, the Arlington alternative schools, and other educational institutions. Younger children may receive child care at the Presbyterian and United Methodist Churches, as well as from a number of home child-care providers.

Although there is no library within the neighborhood, we are a short walk from the public library on Walter Reed Drive in the Career Center facility.

Alcova Heights is well-endowed with religious institutions, with a United Methodist church, a Presbyterian church, a Seventh-Day Adventist church, a Baptist church and a Salvation Army facility, as well as Asian and Hispanic congregations which share their buildings. The churches provide important assets to the community, including worship services, social activities, and youth programs. Many of these churches make their facilities available for community use and provide other kinds of community support. Their grounds also provide valuable green space.

# LAND USE AND ZONING

## **Existing Land Use and Zoning**

The map on the opposite page shows existing zoning and use of land in Alcova Heights. As it indicates, the land use pattern in Alcova Heights is predominately single-family detached homes on relatively large lots.

Some of these homes are situated on 32,000 square feet of land; the smallest lots are 5,000 square feet. This affords privacy and green space. As described above, strips of commercial, townhouse, and apartment development border the neighborhood. Alcova Heights also is home to five active churches; Baptists, Presbyterian, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, and Salvation Army. All of these churches provide off-street parking which prevents congestion on neighborhood streets at peak activity times.

All residential areas in our neighborhood's core are zoned "R-6" (one-family dwelling) or "R-5" (restricted two-family residential development). The commercial properties on Columbia Pike from Glebe Road to Oakland Street are zoned either "C-O" (Office Building) or "C-2" (Commercial). The 510,000 square feet of park land which runs along South George Mason Drive forming the western boundary of Alcova Heights is zoned "S-3A". South of the park, the parcel on Columbia Pike from George Mason Drive to S. Randolph Street is zoned "C-1," permitting local commercial development. The final zoning category in the neighborhood is for Alcova, the estate for which our neighborhood was named; it is designated as a Historic District ("H-D").

Arlington County's General Land Use Plan, the framework for the County's zoning and land use decisions, classifies the residential portion of Alcova Heights as "Low Residential" (1 to 10 units per acre). The existing zoning throughout the neighborhood is generally consistent with the General Land Use Plan, with exception of three two-family units which were built on "R-5" property. These units are all located on one plot of ground at South 7<sup>th</sup> Street and Glebe Road.

## **Residential Concerns**

Although the majority of the development and construction in Alcova Heights occurred before the adoption of the first General Land Use Plan in 1961, most residents seem to accept the current division of the neighborhood into its existing zoning categories. They believe that the current zoning and land use designations are appropriate and should remain, discouraging higher density development within residential areas.

However, a complex set of interrelated issues have surfaced in our neighborhood survey. Alcova Heights citizens have voiced concern about a number of different development strategies which increase neighborhood density, many of which we have already seen. The neighborhood's large lots, relative ease of consolidating property, and convenient location make us a target for a variety of new developments which residents consider out of character with the surroundings. Among the developments generating concern are

subdivided lots, infill developments, the creation of “pipestem” lots, higher density single-family homes or townhouses, and excessively large homes built on small lots.

Neighborhood concern about these possible new development patterns stems from a number of issues. Residents enjoy living in an area of modest single-family homes, with a large amount of green space. The prevailing pattern of homes which face directly onto the street encourages people to know their neighbors and to be aware of what is happening on the sidewalks and streets.

The new housing being built threatens these amenities in a number of ways. A number of new houses are much too large for their lots and out of keeping with the neighborhood character. While developers argue that this will increase adjacent property values, residents prefer that new houses be designed and sited with sensitivity toward the scale of the surrounding neighborhood, and in such a way as to maximize green space and the conservation of existing trees. Neither townhouses nor pipestem houses are in keeping with the neighborhood pattern, facing onto private drives or parking lots rather than onto the street. Some new prefabricated houses have been placed sideways on the neighborhood’s narrow lots, creating an unattractive street front for the rest of the block.

Moreover, old homes in the neighborhood are retaining their value much better than new construction, especially when that new construction takes the form of low-value townhouses or is on non-standard lots. Because they do not retain their value, the atypical houses are often rented rather than owner-occupied, and thus are subject to poor maintenance.

We recognize that the economics of home development in Arlington does not permit construction of the small new homes which would be most in keeping with the current balance of the neighborhood. We are also aware that much of the new construction and conversion of vacant lots is by-right development, and therefore could not be prevented even if the county wished to do so. However, we would like to see the existing patterns retained insofar as permitted by county laws and regulations.

*Policy Recommendations (1):*

*New housing built in the neighborhood should be limited to detached single-family homes. Variances should not be issued to permit higher density construction, nor should it facilitate the consolidation of individually owned residential lots for block sale to developers.*

*Policy Recommendations (2):*

*Wherever zoning variances are required for subdivisions, infill housing should not be permitted over the objections of the neighbors.*

*Policy Recommendations (3):*

*Variances should not be granted to permit lot subdivision, infill housing, pipestem lots, or other increases in residential density.*

#### *Policy Recommendations (4):*

*Variances should not be granted which would permit new houses to be built on undersized or otherwise non-conforming lots, or which would allow the construction of new houses larger than would otherwise be allowed. Any new construction should be subject to existing setbacks, height limitations and other regulations to ensure that new homes are in character with those in the neighborhood.*

### **Commercial Concerns**

Alcova Heights' commercial areas would be a greater asset to the community if they were more attractive. As they are, they often do not reflect well on the neighborhood or on the Columbia Pike revitalization efforts.

#### *Policy Recommendation (5):*

*We suggest that all neighborhood commercial establishments, working with the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization, invest in upgrading their outdoor facilities, in order to make the area more attractive both for their customers and for their neighbors.*

Trash is a particular problem stemming from commercial establishments in the area. Piles of trash have accumulated around dumpsters behind some establishments, particularly at Oakland Street and Columbia Pike. In addition, drive-through fast food customers sometimes discard their trash out their car windows, leaving it on the lawns, streets, and sidewalks of our neighborhood.

#### *Policy Recommendation (6):*

*Fast food restaurants should take responsibility for the trash they generate. We suggest a number of steps to address this problem. These might include steps to educate their customers about the fact that others live in the neighborhood (e.g. through signs at the drive-through, notices handed out with the food, printing reminders on napkins and bags, etc.), handing out auto-convenient plastic trash bags with the orders and reminding customers to use them to store trash in their car, and similar tactics.*

Noise pollution is also a problem with some of our commercial establishments. Fast food restaurants employ outdoor speakers to serve drive-through customers. At times the confirmation of orders can be heard as far as two blocks away.

#### *Policy Recommendation (7):*

*Drive-through restaurants should eliminate the noise pollution problem to their neighbors' satisfaction. This might be done by simply turning down the volume; however if that hampers the functioning of the drive-through, they might construct sound-block screens which keep noise from traveling into adjacent areas. During*

*1998 the County will review regulations governing drive through businesses, we suggest that noise abatement standards be adopted as a part of the reformulation of these regulations.*

Fast food restaurants can also create odor problems, as the smell of their kitchens permeates the neighborhoods around them. These odors are not noxious however they do pose a nuisance and should be reduced wherever possible.

*Policy Recommendation (8):*

*That the County Health Department develop guidelines for restaurants that vent kitchen exhaust to the outside. Every effort should be made to decrease the odor level from these establishments on a voluntary basis prior to action by the County.*

In some instances, commercial establishments are accessed not from Columbia Pike but from the side streets within the neighborhood. This is the case on Monroe Street. This brings additional traffic into the neighborhood and threatens the residential character of the neighborhood.

*Policy Recommendation(9):*

*Commercial development should be limited to the major thoroughfares on the edges of the neighborhood. Existing zoning regulations should be enforced, and no rezoning should be granted to permit additional commercial activity on the side streets.*

Customers from the car dealership on Monroe Street and on Columbia Pike test drive vehicles in Alcova Heights and other adjacent neighborhoods, often at unsafe speeds. While the dealership in question is not in Alcova Heights, it is nevertheless having unwanted impacts on the quality of the neighborhood.

*Policy Recommendation (10):*

*Work with CPRO and the County to convince automobile dealerships and sales people to discourage their customers from using residential neighborhoods as vehicle test sites, and recommend areas where potential customers can safely drive at the faster speeds necessary for testing a new car.*

Graffiti is a problem on Columbia Pike and in other commercial areas. In addition to being unsightly, the graffiti is typically left by gang members, who may gain a foothold in the neighborhood if their marks are allowed to stay. We are pleased with the County's prompt response to graffiti reports, as a front-line strategy to prevent gang activity.

*Policy Recommendation (11):*

*Residents and business-owners who see graffiti should immediately report it to the responsible County office. The County should continue its program of immediate graffiti eradication on county property. The County should pursue the authority to develop standards for the removal of graffiti from commercial and other private property.*

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

This plan will not impose any improvements on residents who do not want them, but will support those who wish to petition the County for their installation under existing County procedures.

### Alleys

Alleys are either paved or otherwise maintained; or “let go”; depending on block resident consensus, and the need of the Dept. of Public Works and utilities workers to reach utilities. While only a few alleys are considered ‘thru’ alleys, and are designated for maintenance by the Public Works Department, many are maintained by the residents, and are used for garage access.

The alley segment between 6th and 7th streets from Monroe to Quincy is maintained for vehicle access for parking/garage access for the houses on that block. By contrast, another “thru” alley that runs from Lincoln to Monroe—and between 8th and 9th Streets has reverted to a grassy state, both alleys appear on the Department of Public Works map of maintained alleys. As maintenance of these designated alleys continues, we want to reinforce the idea that Alcova Heights’ remaining alleys lend character and a sense of history to our neighborhood; they are also used by dog and baby walkers as a low traffic, and safe area to walk.

#### *Policy Recommendation (12):*

*Any proposed changes to these alleys by the county should be presented to the Alcova Heights Citizens Association for careful consideration prior to action. Advance notice of maintenance activities by the County should be provided to residents whose property borders the alleys.*

### Drainage

Drainage is sound in most residential areas. However, there are significant drainage problems on a few blocks, particularly where the construction of infill housing has been accomplished by raising new houses up so that water flows down onto surrounding properties. This has been a particular problem on the block surrounded by 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, Oakland and Quincy Street and on the block surrounded by 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, Lincoln and Monroe Streets. Drainage is also a problem on the ball field in Alcova Heights Park. (see the discussion in the chapter on parks and recreation areas)

#### *Project Recommendation (1):*

*AHCA Should open discussion with the County concerning those areas that continue to have drainage problems. After an assessment of causes and possible solutions to these problems, AHCA should work with the County to formulate proposals for drainage improvement projects as appropriate.*

*Policy Recommendation (13):*

*The County should enforce regulations regarding storm water drainage when the construction of new homes is undertaken to ensure that surrounding properties are not adversely impacted.*

**Sidewalks, Curbs and Gutters**

Alcova Heights recognizes the aid to pedestrian safety offered by sidewalks and supports the efforts of any homeowner to have sidewalks, curbs, and gutters installed. Most of the neighborhood received curb and gutter and sidewalks as the result of previous NCAC projects. However, there are several areas in the neighborhood where sidewalks still do not exist and may be desired by the residents.

Two blocks on 8th street and one block on 7th have been highlighted for further study.

*Project Recommendation (2):*

*The County should install curb, gutter and/or sidewalk where missing at the request of property owners through the County's petition process.*

**Street Lighting**

Adequate, attractive street lighting is important to overall safety and the residential character of our neighborhood. Adequate street lighting is also an important factor in pedestrian safety as well as a proven deterrent to burglary and vandalism. Street lighting in Alcova Heights is generally good, but is considered by some to be inadequate in a few places: notably, Monroe between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets; 9<sup>th</sup> Street between Lincoln and Monroe; and at 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Quincy. Additional streetlighting can be requested by residents at any time and does not need to go through the NCAC process. Residents are encouraged to discuss lighting need on a localized basis, and approach the county as the need arises.

*Project Recommendation (3):*

*The County should install additional street lighting on streets and public walkways at the request of residents through the County's street light petition process.*

**Street Signs**

A review of street signs in Alcova Heights indicated that most signs provide adequate information.

**Neighborhood Signs**

The Alcova Heights Citizens Association has approved installation of signs that identify neighborhood boundaries. The purpose is twofold: to identify our attractive

neighborhood, and to encourage pride among the residents. The number, design, and placement of the signs should be determined through an open and cooperative process between Alcova Heights Civic Association and County representatives.

### **Street Surfaces**

The appearance of our neighborhood is certainly linked to the quality of its street surfaces, which of course dominate one's view of the streetscape. Few if any potholes have been identified, but regrading and use of slurry-seal topwash (in place of asphalt re-paving) was mentioned at the first Alcova Heights Citizens Association meeting of 1997. The slurry-seal creates a rougher and less attractive surface, and may not be most economic in the long term, as it appears to wear faster than asphalt.

### **Utility Lines**

All utility lines (electric, telephone, and cable) should be buried in connection with new construction. As Columbia Pike is redeveloped, this plan supports all utility lines being buried. Removing the utility lines and poles would contribute more to improving the appearance of our streetscape than any other improvement; however, we understand that this is very expensive.

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Alcova Heights is a community of quiet residential streets aligned in a grid pattern. However, major arteries surround Alcova Heights on all four sides, and they have a substantial impact on the neighborhood. The primary goal of the traffic management plan is to keep traffic on the major arteries and away from residential streets. A secondary goal is to slow the speed at which traffic travels through the neighborhood. The neighborhood is committed to working with the County Department of Public Works to achieve these goals with a traffic management plan for Alcova Heights.

The results of the neighborhood survey indicated that traffic is a major concern for neighborhood residents. Forty nine percent of survey respondents indicated that through-traffic was a problem on the street where they lived, and almost fifty nine percent believed that through-traffic was a problem somewhere in the neighborhood. In addition, eighty one percent of the respondents listed streets where they believed that vehicles speed. The most frequently cited roads with speeding problems are 7<sup>th</sup> Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Quincy Street and Monroe Street.

### **Glebe Road and Columbia Pike**

Much of the cut-through traffic in Alcova Heights results from deficiencies at the intersection of Glebe Road and Columbia Pike. Motorists traveling northbound on Glebe Road cannot turn left to go westbound on Columbia Pike. Consequently, many proceed through the intersection to 9<sup>th</sup> Street, where they turn into Alcova Heights as they make their way back to Columbia Pike. Motorists traveling eastbound on Columbia Pike and wishing to go northbound on Glebe Road are also prohibited from turning left. Many will turn off of Columbia Pike onto Quincy Street or Monroe Street and make their way over to Glebe Road via 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The other problem associated with the Glebe Road/Columbia Pike intersection is the heavy congestion and traffic that backs up on both roads. Motorists traveling south on Glebe Road during the evening rush hour often encounter significant delays at the traffic light. Those wishing to go west on Columbia Pike will bypass the intersection by cutting through Alcova Heights. Monroe Street carries the bulk of this traffic.

#### *Project Recommendation (4):*

*The planned installation of left turn lanes at Glebe Road and Columbia Pike should do much to alleviate the cut through traffic. However, the County should closely monitor traffic volumes to determine if other measures may be required. Other measures need to be considered which would improve the flow of traffic at the Glebe Road/Columbia Pike intersection and make Alcova Heights less attractive as a cut through.*

## **Columbia Pike and George Mason Drive**

The intersection of Columbia Pike and George Mason Drive also contributes to cut through traffic. Drivers southbound on George Mason will often encounter delays if attempting to turn left onto eastbound Columbia Pike. They frequently cut through Alcova Heights in an attempt to avoid any delays. Motorists traveling westbound on Columbia Pike do not have a left turn arrow and must wait for a break in the eastbound traffic flow. Failure to successfully gauge the rate of speed of oncoming traffic can be disastrous to motorists attempting to negotiate this turn.

### *Project Recommendation (5):*

*The County should take measures to improve the safety of the intersection of George Mason Drive and Columbia Pike. The installation of a left turn signal for westbound Columbia Pike traffic should be seriously considered as part of this effort.*

## **Speeding**

Alcova Heights residents are particularly concerned with speeding traffic. Most attribute this problem to cut-through traffic, and it is most noticeable on 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Alcova Heights would like to see better traffic flow on the major arteries, making them more attractive to motorists, and thus keeping the traffic on the roads which are equipped to handle it.

### *Project Recommendation (6):*

*The five permanent traffic circles (7<sup>th</sup> Street at Monroe Street and at Oakland Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Street at Monroe Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street at Lincoln Street and at Oakland Street) which have been approved for installation should measurably reduce speeding within Alcova Heights. However, additional measures may need to be considered in the future if speeding remains a problem. The use of four-way stop signs or other techniques should also be kept in consideration if the traffic circles do not prove to be successful.*

## **Parking**

Parking in Alcova Heights is generally not considered to be a problem. However, employees of Arlington Hall park near the intersection of Quincy Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Street to avoid paying for parking on the federal facility. While this has a minimal impact on the community it can inconvenience the adjoining homeowners.

### *Policy Recommendation (14):*

*The County should work with the management of Arlington Hall to encourage workers to park within the facility where parking is ample and fees are low. If the problem should ever worsen, parking restrictions in this area may need to be considered.*

### **Intersection of Quincy Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street**

This intersection is especially dangerous. There are stop signs controlling 8<sup>th</sup> Street traffic. However, drivers frequently do not come to a complete stop and proceed through the intersection where they collide with vehicles on Quincy Street. The problem is exacerbated by poor line of sight along Quincy Street. Vehicles northbound on Quincy Street are often not visible to motorists on 8<sup>th</sup> Street until the vehicles are in the intersection. Even if an 8<sup>th</sup> Street motorist comes to a complete stop, they may not see an approaching vehicle until they have proceeded into the intersection.

*Project Recommendation(7):*

*The County should install 4-way stop signs at the intersection of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Quincy Street to force motorists to come to a complete stop prior to proceeding through the intersection.*

### **Intersection of Quincy Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Street**

There have been numerous accidents at this intersection within the last few years, several have resulted in injury. Motorists attempting to move through the intersection from 9<sup>th</sup> street encounter poor visibility, as well as motorists speeding along Quincy Street.

*Project Recommendation (8):*

*The County should take steps to improve safety at this intersection. The use of four-way stop signs and traffic circles should be considered, along with the improvement of visibility.*

## **PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS**

We are fortunate to have three parks/recreation areas in Alcovia Heights; Alcovia Heights Park, the Arlington Hall Recreation Area (Arlington Hall), and South Oakland Street. According to the neighborhood survey, residents value and use these parks, recognizing their benefit as a refuge from our urban environment and as an important wildlife habitat for native and migratory animals. Our central location combined with picnic areas, ball courts and fields provides a haven for all Arlingtonians. However, some residents have voiced safety concerns regarding individuals who loiter in our parks. This plan recognizes that our public areas must be maintained to provide a safe environment. Neglect of facilities creates safety hazards and gives the impression that we are a neighborhood that does not care. This is a condition that the citizens of Alcovia Heights will not tolerate.

### **Access to Parks**

Access to all park areas can be improved. To reach Alcovia Heights Park, most neighborhood residents must negotiate the intersection of Quincy Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street. This crossing is hazardous for young children and senior citizens. Vehicles traveling this section of 8<sup>th</sup> Street from either direction are often exceeding the speed limit.

#### *Project Recommendation(9):*

*The County should post “playground ahead” signs on South George Mason Drive and on South 8<sup>th</sup> Street.*

Access to the Arlington Hall Recreation Area is possible through pedestrian entrances at South Quincy Street (north of S. 6th St.), Route 50, and S. George Mason Drive. There is no entrance to the facility, however, from the East. Residents living between Route 50 and S. 3rd St., therefore, have no direct access to the Arlington Hall Recreation Area or to Alcovia Heights Park.

In the recent past, the County proposed to extend the existing bike trail through Arlington Hall facility along the property line with S. 6th St residences, with an exit onto S.5th St. This proposal was opposed by Alcovia Heights residents, because it adversely affected the privacy, security and use of adjacent residential properties. In addition it was not the preferred route for cyclists or pedestrians. While the association recognizes a need to provide greater access to this area, we would continue to oppose construction of a bike trail on or near residential properties. We believe running the bike trail in a different location would allay residents' concerns, and prove to be a more practical and safe route for pedestrians and cyclists.

*Project Recommendation (10):*

*The County should work with Arlington Hall to provide a pedestrian and cyclist entrance on S. Oakland St. between S. 1st Rd and S. 3rd St. A new bike trail should be constructed to connect the new entrance with the existing trail and should follow the existing vehicular roadway. Such a trail should not be situated adjacent to, or close to residential properties.*

*Until such time as the bike trail is constructed, the County should consider measures to enhance the safety and use of the existing bicycle routes, such as more clearly marked signs at the entrance on S.6th St. and S. QuincySt., or demarcating bicycle lanes on S. Quincy and/or S. 6th Sts.*

### **Alcova Heights Park**

The citizens in this neighborhood are fortunate in having approximately 510,000 square feet of usable land in Alcova Heights Park. Mature stands of native trees and meandering Doctors Branch create a rural atmosphere in an otherwise urban setting. The south side of the park offers baseball, basketball, picnic areas, a comfort station, and a playground. Unfortunately, maintenance and upgrading of this portion of the park has not kept pace with its popularity. Heavy public usage has created erosion problems along the Randolph Street hillside. The erosion has augmented the severe drainage problems in the baseball field, which is used by Arlington's youngest T-ball players. The slippery conditions in the field often present a safety hazard to the children who play here.

*Project Recommendation (11 ):*

*This project has been started but requires additional attention. The County should correct the drainage problem at the Alcova Heights Park ball field.*

Citizens young and old enjoy the Alcova Heights Park playground. Not only is it used by all on the weekends, but also during the week it is also used by public and private school children ranging in age from toddlers to early teens. All the playground equipment is used to its fullest. However, some it may not meet new safety guidelines.

*Project Recommendation(12):*

*A master plan should be prepared for the park by the County in conjunction with the residents of Alcova Heights. This plan would be used to guide all future improvements. This effort should examine playground equipment in light of the most recent safety standards. It should also take into consideration the heavy usage of the park and the demands that this usage places on the infrastructure. In addition the plan should examine the frequency of park maintenance and trash collection services, vector control, and stream clean up.*

*Any improvements should follow these principles:*

- 1. All improvements to the site should be consistent with its use as a community park.*
- 2. Existing mature trees should be preserved and appropriate landscaping should be added.*
- 3. No lighted ball fields of any kind should be permitted.*

*Policy Recommendation (15):*

*The County should regularly inspect the playground and all playground equipment to make sure that they meet current safety standards, and are structurally sound. Equipment should not be added to or removed from the park without consulting the residents of Alcova Heights.*

Regular trash and special pickup services are consistent with services in the County; however, our neighborhood survey indicates that residents living near Doctors Branch are having problems with rats. This is a serious health hazard and requires action.

*Project Recommendation (13):*

*The County should install additional trash receptacles behind the fence that borders Randolph Street and at the newly created entrances to Alcova Heights Park along Eighth Street.*

Loitering and the use of alcohol in the park continue to be concerns. Both of these jeopardize the health and safety of the citizens of Alcova Heights.

*Policy Recommendation (16):*

*The County should vigorously enforce all of the park regulations. Use of the newly created bicycle patrols and community policing should be increased in the park area.*

## **Arlington Hall**

The Arlington Hall site has recently been redeveloped by the Federal Government. Our neighborhood enthusiastically supports the commitment of federal and local officials to devote portions of the Federal land on the east side of South George Mason Drive to expand and improve Alcova Heights Park. While improvements have been made to this site, several serious safety problems still remain. The boundary between the Arlington Hall property and Alcova Heights Park is hazardous. A steep drop-off exists between these two properties which has become a magnet for trash and debris. Erosion along the hillside continues to remove plants and soil, threatening several mature trees. In addition

the drive area providing access to the parking lot at Arlington Hall lacks gutters, curbing and the sidewalk that would continue to George Mason Drive. This area is also eroding.

*Project Recommendation (14):*

*The County and the Federal Government should remove debris from the gully between Arlington Hall and Alcova Heights Park. The erosion problem could be stabilized by creating a wetlands area in that part of Doctors Branch similar to the one that exists in the Arlington Hall park.*

*Project Recommendation (15):*

*The County should work with Arlington Hall to complete the southernmost entrance on George Mason Drive into the Arlington Hall parking lot. Curb and gutter, and sidewalk need to be installed to link the parking lot with George Mason Drive. Additional landscaping is also required to bring the appearance of this entrance up to the same level as the other entrances.*

## **Oakland Street Park**

This park is located at the foot of Oakland Street where it meets South Ninth Street. The park has the potential to be a haven for residents of the neighborhood. However, the layout limits visibility which raises safety questions. The landscaping has not been well maintained. There are also problem with graffiti and litter.

*Project Recommendation (16):*

*A master plan should be developed which would include a redesign of the layout in order to make the park more attractive, safer and accessible to the neighborhood.*

## **Appendix A - Policy Recommendations**

### *Policy Recommendations (1):*

*New housing built in the neighborhood should be limited to detached single-family homes. Variances should not be issued to permit higher density construction, nor should it facilitate the consolidation of individually owned residential lots for block sale to developers.*

### *Policy Recommendations (2):*

*Wherever zoning variances are required for subdivisions, infill housing should not be permitted over the objections of the neighbors.*

### *Policy Recommendations (3):*

*Variances should not be granted to permit lot subdivision, infill housing, pipestem lots, or other increases in residential density.*

### *Policy Recommendations (4):*

*Variances should not be granted which would permit new houses to be built on undersized or otherwise non-conforming lots, or which would allow the construction of new houses larger than would otherwise be allowed. Any new construction should be subject to existing setbacks, height limitations and other regulations to ensure that new homes are in character with those in the neighborhood.*

### *Policy Recommendation (5):*

*We suggest that all neighborhood commercial establishments, working with the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization, invest in upgrading their outdoor facilities, in order to make the area more attractive both for their customers and for their neighbors.*

### *Policy Recommendation (6):*

*Fast food restaurants should take responsibility for the trash they generate. We suggest a number of steps to address this problem. These might include steps to educate their customers about the fact that others live in the neighborhood (e.g. through signs at the drive-through, notices handed out with the food, printing reminders on napkins and bags, etc.), handing out auto-convenient plastic trash bags with the orders and reminding customers to use them to store trash in their car, and similar tactics.*

### *Policy Recommendation (7):*

*Drive-through restaurants should eliminate the noise pollution problem to their neighbors' satisfaction. This might be done by simply turning down the volume; however if that hampers the functioning of the drive-through, they might construct sound-block screens which keep noise from traveling into adjacent areas. During 1998 the County*

*will review regulations governing drive through businesses, we suggest that noise abatement standards be adopted as a part of the reformulation of these regulations.*

***Policy Recommendation (8):***

*That the County Health Department develop guidelines for restaurants that vent kitchen exhaust to the outside. Every effort should be made to decrease the odor level from these establishments on a voluntary basis prior to action by the County.*

***Policy Recommendation(9):***

*Commercial development should be limited to the major thoroughfares on the edges of the neighborhood. Existing zoning regulations should be enforced, and no rezoning should be granted to permit additional commercial activity on the side streets.*

***Policy Recommendation (10):***

*Work with CPRO and the County to convince automobile dealerships and sales people to discourage their customers from using residential neighborhoods as vehicle test sites, and recommend areas where potential customers can safely drive at the faster speeds necessary for testing a new car.*

***Policy Recommendation (11):***

*Residents and business-owners who see graffiti should immediately report it to the responsible County office. The County should continue its program of immediate graffiti eradication on county property. The County should pursue the authority to develop standards for the removal of graffiti from commercial and other private property.*

***Policy Recommendation (12):***

*Any proposed changes to these alleys by the county should be presented to the Alcova Heights Citizens Association for careful consideration prior to action. Advance notice of maintenance activities by the County should be provided to residents whose property borders the alleys.*

***Policy Recommendation (13):***

*The County should enforce regulations regarding storm water drainage when the construction of new homes is undertaken to ensure that surrounding properties are not adversely impacted.*

***Policy Recommendation (14):***

*The County should work with the management of Arlington Hall to encourage workers to park within the facility where parking is ample and fees are low. If the problem should ever worsen, parking restrictions in this area may need to be*

***Policy Recommendation (15):***

*The County should regularly inspect the playground and all playground equipment to make sure that they meet current safety standards, and are structurally sound.*

*Equipment should not be added to or removed from the park without consulting the residents of Alcova Heights.*

***Policy Recommendation (16):***

*The County should vigorously enforce all of the park regulations. Use of the newly created bicycle patrols and community policing should be increased in the park area.*