



Commonwealth Avenue

A Collaboration
between the Communities along Commonwealth Avenue and
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Commonwealth Avenue

Love Me, Love Me Not

Final Studio Report
Sponsored by the Del Ray Citizens Association

A Collaboration
between the Communities along Commonwealth Avenue and
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Washington Alexandria Architecture Center

2006

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*Poised in the middle of the boulevard
is a sculpture of a small girl holding daisies
reciting a childhood rhyme.*

*She poses a question for the future of
Commonwealth Avenue:
"Love Me, Love Me Not."*



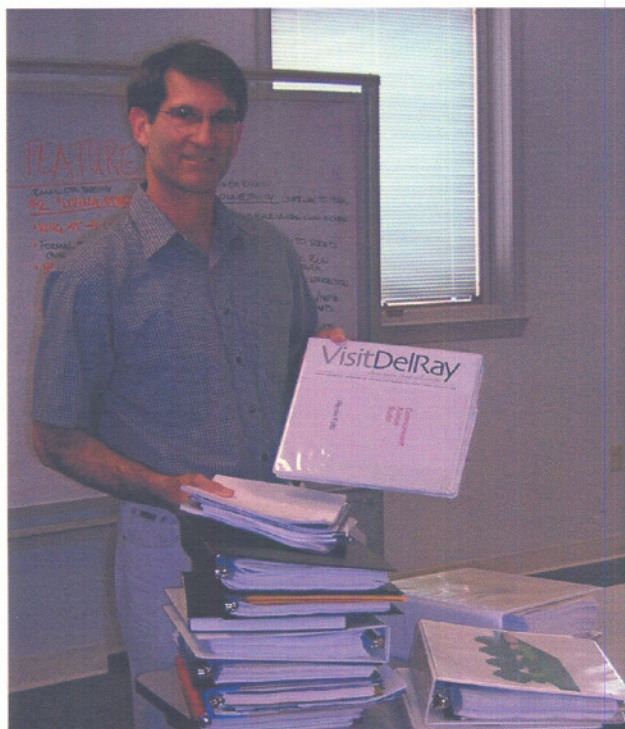
Joe Schilling, 2006

Preface 1

How can one propose new ideas for an avenue so beloved by its residents for its visual character, history, and eclectic community? One resident observed that "Commonwealth is already such a great place, it is hard to conceptualize improvements." The Alexandria neighborhoods that surround Commonwealth Avenue are undergoing constant change brought on by adjacent development, redevelopment, environmental restoration, and the influx of new residents. The time seems ripe for reflecting on Commonwealth's past with a view to its future. At the request of the Del Ray Citizens Association and with their financial support, graduate students and faculty from Virginia Tech spent the spring of 2006 visualizing what Commonwealth Avenue could become.

Virginia Tech hopes that city leaders and community residents may learn something they may not already know about the Avenue and its neighborhoods. The book is a digestible summary (though digital scans of all the student work are archived in the Landscape Architecture Department at Virginia Tech). It introduces the participants and the process of the 2006 urban design studio along with a tour that identifies the avenue's existing conditions. These conditions influence the studio's many recommendations and design concepts. These presentations evoke pronounced themes within which members of the community can see Commonwealth's full potential. These themes give the community ways to think about their Avenue today, what it could be, and what they want it to become.

The following portfolio of student designs, plans, and community feedback officially completes the list of tasks set forth by the association—it closes the first chapter on the recasting of Commonwealth Avenue. The report illustrates what Commonwealth Avenue could become through the eyes of the graduate students and identifies the needs they did not have time to address. It also represents a progress report for city leaders, planners, and architects who have target dates and master plans that already shape and influence the Avenue. The community and the city must now work together to forge consensus on the next chapter of change for Commonwealth.



2 Introduction

In December of 2005, the Del Ray Citizens Association in Alexandria, Virginia approached Virginia Tech about plans and designs for creating a new kind of landscape for Commonwealth Avenue that is part street and part park. The association voiced concerns about Commonwealth Avenue's (hereinafter Commonwealth or the Avenue) declining infrastructure and its accessibility for walkers and cyclists while many members believed its tree lined medians could serve as a catalyst to enhance its green assets. Commonwealth is also a fragmented street as it traverses through three diverse neighborhoods—Arlandria, Del Ray, and Rosemont—each with its own identity and cultural character. In fact, several more communities and neighborhoods are collectively referred to as Arlandria. Any successful design would need to consider the entire length of the Avenue; otherwise piecemeal plans would only contribute to the separation that Commonwealth's existing features facilitate.

By the time spring semester started in January 2006, the university had put in place a multi-disciplinary studio environment for students in Landscape Architecture and Urban Affairs and Planning named *Commonwealth Avenue: Street as Park*. Four classes and 24 students (and four professors) became involved with the Commonwealth Avenue Project: Community Involvement, Land Analysis, the Landscape Architecture Design Studio, and the Urban Planning Studio. This Studio Report presents the results from four student design and planning teams along with neighborhood input facilitated by community involvement students.

The goal of the community and student collaboration was to establish a green vision for Commonwealth Avenue. One student observed that the Avenue should be more of a home for people who are walking and biking than for cars. The benefit of dividing into four teams was not to propose a single solution, but to raise ideas for the community and city officials to consider. Each design team was asked to create a master plan for the Avenue and develop a portion in greater detail. The teams inventoried and integrated the conditions of the Avenue in a way that drove their design concepts.

Some students made a series of small-scale changes, others proposed grander changes such as closing one entire side of the Avenue and creating a "living street" where pedestrians have highest priority and drivers are guests (www.autorijschoolgriffioen.nl). Community feedback ranged from, "It's such a crazy idea, it just might work," to, "It's such a crazy idea, it'll never work." In another example, students designed two very different ideas for the intersection with Mount Vernon Avenue. In one, a semi-circular town green is created where Mount Vernon Avenue is allowed to run through the space and Commonwealth Avenue is sent around. Another very different idea incorporates a market plaza in the same space. Other concepts include "day-lighting" Hooff's Run, a term and methodology described further in the Design section. The desire to link communities was a common theme for students and influenced their work the most.



Renee Foltz, 2006

"Commonwealth Avenue is a desirable address because of its tree lined median and attractive streetscape. With few opportunities for open space development, we need to look to our streets as places for beautification and linkage."

City of Alexandria, 2002

The report presents the studio results in the following sections:

- The *Introduction* sets the stage for the studio. Here the reader meets the community client, the school, and the students and gains a better understanding about the process that guided the semester along with the initial list of residents' goals.
- The *Site* describes the local and regional context of Commonwealth Avenue along with the physical conditions that contribute to the fragmented nature of the avenue. The interesting story of Commonwealth Avenue would not be complete without its history, which also factors strongly in the design approaches.
- The *Designs* section presents a brief summary of the plans from the four teams and provides context for the next section (Themes). In *Designs*, each team's contribution sets forth a master plan or vision for the Avenue and elaborates on a specific design detail. It is important to remember that these studio plans are preliminary designs for the community to build upon.
- In *Themes*, the report explores the common threads in the designs and the different details the students chose to focus upon. Through these sections, the readers can see how the teams' responses to existing conditions on Commonwealth Avenue can produce different design outcomes.

- The final section, *Conclusions and Next Steps*, offers ideas and suggestions for the community and city officials to consider—how can Alexandria adapt these designs to form a more cohesive open space/transportation plan for Commonwealth. Our hope is the Virginia Tech studio provides a strong framework for transforming Commonwealth Avenue into a place that answers the needs of all residents and responds to the future while honoring its important past.

In this collaboration between Virginia Tech and the communities along Commonwealth Avenue, it was important to craft a framework that could respond to the communities' needs, balance the academic and educational goals of the programs, and be accomplished in one semester. The Del Ray Citizens Association commissioned the larger study after initially approaching the Planning and Landscape Architecture Departments in December 2005. Several residents and organizations from Commonwealth Avenue participated in feedback sessions by asking questions and sharing information about their community not immediately visible or documented in existing plans. They are included in Appendix A. The students, especially, are very grateful for their openness and involvement in their studies.

Three major participants are called out in the following paragraphs: the Del Ray Citizens Association, the Department of Landscape Architecture and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.

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Participants

Del Ray Citizens Association

The Del Ray Citizens Association (DRCA) was formed in 1954 as a non-profit organization for residents and business owners who live or own a business or property in the area described as Del Ray. The association keeps members informed of many aspects of Alexandria city life, including land use, public safety, parks and recreation and many other issues which impact quality of life. Jim Snyder, a citizen of Del Ray for 30 years, is the DRCA representative for the project. He is also an adjunct faculty member in the Urban Affairs and Planning Department at Virginia Tech.

<http://www.delraycitizen.org/>

Department of Landscape Architecture

The Landscape Architecture (LAR) program at the Washington Alexandria Architecture Center is accredited by the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board and enables students to develop the capabilities required to enter private or public practice. The Department of Landscape Architecture is part of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies which offers degree programs in Architecture, Building Construction, Industrial Design, Landscape Architecture, Public Policy, Urban Affairs and Urban and Regional Planning. Professor Paul Kelsch of Landscape Architecture led the Advanced Landscape Architecture Design Studio.

<http://www.lar.arch.vt.edu/departments/mission/mission.htm>



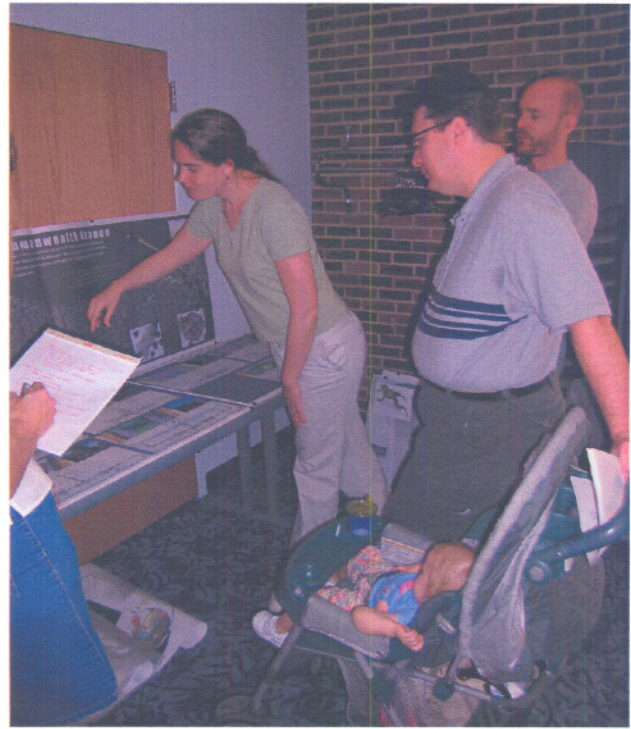
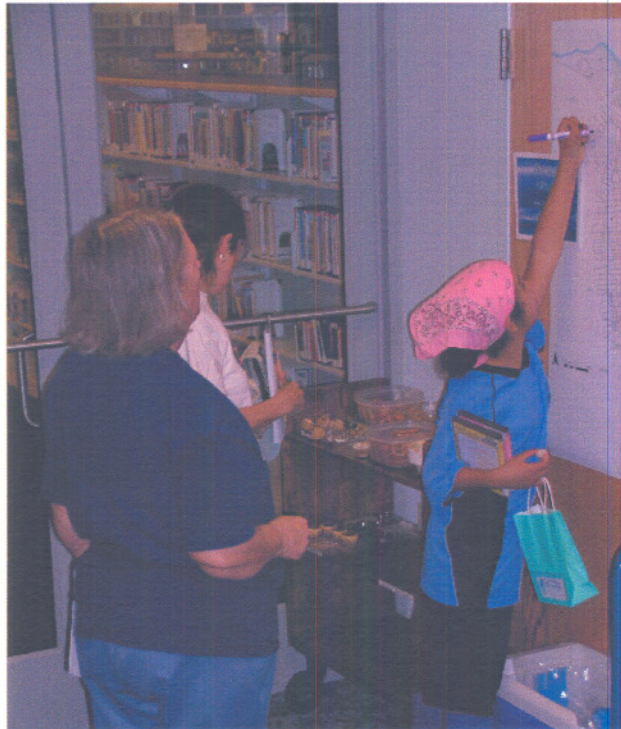
Department of Urban Affairs and Planning

The Urban Affairs and Planning (UAP) program is accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board, composed jointly of the American Planning Association and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. The program is located in the heart of metropolitan Washington DC which enhances specialization in land use and physical planning, transportation and land use planning, community and economic development, international planning, environmental and natural resources planning, and urban form and urban design policy. Professor Joe Schilling led the Urban Design Studio.

<http://www.nvc.vt.edu/uap/index.asp>.

Community Involvement

In the spring of 2006, members of the Community Involvement class facilitated public meetings at which citizens were given the opportunity to learn about the Commonwealth Avenue Studio. Meetings with the Del Ray Citizens Association, the Hume Springs Civic Association, and members of the Arlandria neighborhood gave residents an opportunity to comment and provide feedback about ideas from the studio, provide their own suggestions and share concerns. Notes from these sessions are included in Appendix A. In addition to the meetings, the Community Involvement class created a survey in both English and Spanish to collect information from as many residents as possible. Throughout the semester, concepts and designs evolved as students learned more about the needs and desires of the various communities on the Avenue. At the end of the semester, the Community Involvement class organized an Open House at the Duncan Library on Commonwealth Avenue which was well attended by the community. Professor Joe Schilling and Kathryn McCarty led the Community Involvement course.



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The Process

Ideally, the process of inviting and facilitating community input is structured well in advance and precedes the design phase of a project. The university designed a process to make that happen within the short timeframe of one semester by coordinating resident input with the studio work by students. Each studio team made simultaneous, yet independent observations, inventories, and analysis of conditions along the Avenue. Several students spoke with city staff, developers, property owners, school officials, and other residents as part of their investigations about the Avenue.

Students independently studied area plans and made “on-the-street” observations about Commonwealth Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods. Soon, Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture students were combined in a joint studio environment to develop design alternatives along with summary planning reports for each proposal. For the remainder of the semester the studios formed into four teams of two Landscape Architecture and two Urban Planning students, to develop master plans and design ideas in response to community needs and concerns.

Community Involvement students met with Commonwealth Avenue residents when possible during the semester to determine what citizens envisioned for their street. They held three focus group meetings with members of the Del Ray Citizens Association and the Civic Associations of Hume Springs and Warrick Village (the notes from which can be found in Appendix A). Students experimented with a variety of methods to reach out to residents: e-mail, posters, newspaper articles and a website, finding that

each method had a certain “reach” but not one could do the whole job by itself. They learned quickly that it is challenging to arrange meetings with community members who have hectic work, school and family schedules while planning and architecture teams are clamoring to know what residents want. Public meetings in March and April 2006 culminated in the final Open House at Duncan Library on May 6, 2006. The communities of Rosemont, Del Ray, and Arlandria responded generously to these public events.

Two community involvement students designed a brief survey in English and Spanish (at right) to solicit inputs for “A New Vision for Commonwealth Avenue.” The survey was given to residents at the focus group meetings and also posted on the UAP web site. There were not enough responses to the survey to draw significant conclusions, but the comments are consistent with those made in person at the various focus group meetings and at the May Open House at the end of the project. For example, while the demographics of the neighborhoods vary, there is little difference between how respondents got around Commonwealth and what they perceive are the important elements in creating a pedestrian oriented boulevard. Among the many inputs for the Avenue, the residents stated that they would like to see Commonwealth Avenue reshaped as a linear park to connect neighborhoods and to offer amenities to visitors and residents. Amenities should include: safe bike and pedestrian areas, added green space, traffic calming, increased signage, continuous sidewalks on both sides of the street, additional gathering spaces, preservation of the natural features and displays illuminating the area’s history.

A NEW VISION FOR COMMONWEALTH AVENUE - SURVEY -

The City of Alexandria has designated Commonwealth Avenue as a priority project in the City's Open Space Plan. Graduate students from Virginia Tech's Alexandria campus are working with residents to formulate a vision for how Commonwealth Avenue should be redesigned. The work conducted by the students will culminate in a written report that will be submitted to the community during the Summer of 2006. As part of the design process, we would like to include feedback from you regarding how you currently use the space and what features you feel would best enhance Commonwealth Avenue.

For more information regarding the process and to access the final report please visit:

<http://www.nvc.vt.edu/nap>

Click on *Student Products* and then *Commonwealth Avenue*.

1. How often during the past two weeks have you driven, walked, or biked to the destinations listed below? Please only list destinations along or near Commonwealth

Destination	Drive	Walk	Bike
Example	4		3
restaurant			
Metro			
bus stop			
church			
recreation / community center			
park			
school			
retail shopping			
Four Mile Run			
food shopping			
outdoor recreation			
dog park			
playground			
library			

2. How important is each feature in enhancing Commonwealth Avenue?

1 10
not important very important

Example..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

lighting..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
seating..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
public art..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
trash cans..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
shade..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
gathering space..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
recreation..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
parks..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
sidewalks..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
bike lanes..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
plants and trees..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. List particular things about Commonwealth Avenue that you would like to be redesigned.

Would you like to be notified of future events regarding the redesign of Commonwealth Avenue? If so, please fill out the section below:

Name _____

Address _____

E-mail address _____

Phone number _____

If you would like to return your survey by mail:

1021 Prince Street
Attn: Benjamin Wiles
Room 105
Alexandria VA 22314

If you have any questions regarding this project please feel free to contact Joe Shilling at jms33@vt.edu

OPTIONAL SECTION:

In order to make sure that we are collecting information from a wide range of residents we would like to know a little more about you. Your answers will never be used for any other purpose, and will never be sold or rented.

1. I live in _____.

____ Arlandria _____ Mount Jefferson
____ Auburn Village _____ North Ridge
____ Del Ray _____ Rosemont
____ Hume Springs _____ Warwick Village
____ Lynhaven Other _____

2. I have lived in the neighborhood selected above for _____ years.

3. I currently _____ my home.

____ own
____ rent

4. Age: _____

5. Race: (select as many that apply)

____ American Indian
____ Asian
____ Black or African American
____ Hispanic or Latino
____ White

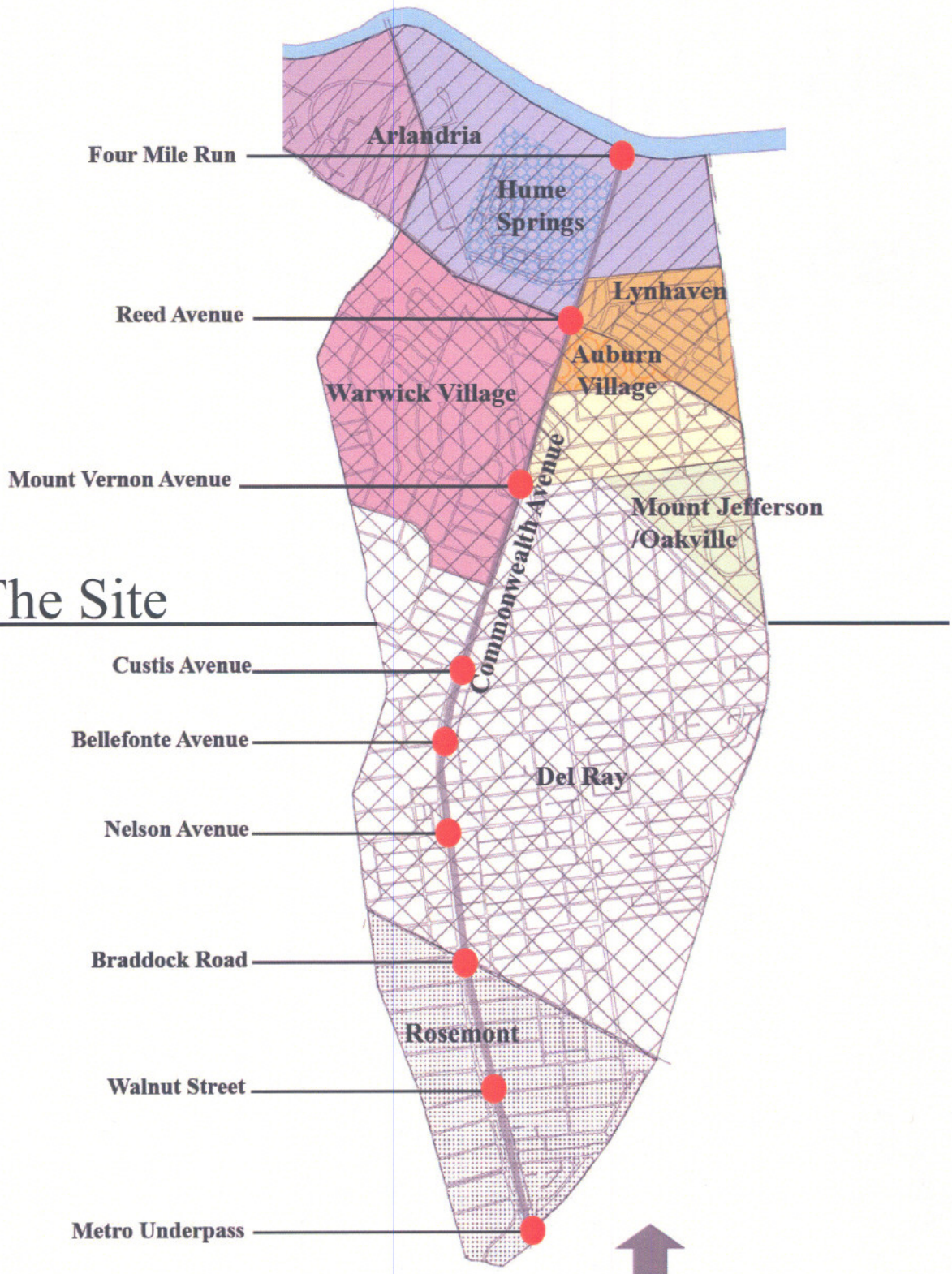
6. Sex:

____ Female _____ Male

7. Marital Status:

____ single
____ married
____ single with children
____ married with children

8 The Site





A Tour of the Avenue 9

Overview

Commonwealth Avenue is a 2-½ mile street that traverses three primary neighborhoods in eastern Alexandria, Virginia. It extends from the King Street Metro Station, a major transit hub for the City of Alexandria, passes under the CSX railroad tracks and enters the oldest residential area, Rosemont. Commonwealth forms the spine of several largely residential neighborhoods as shown in the image at left derived from the Potomac West Small Area Plan, and determines the naming of cross-streets as “East Glebe” or “West Custis.” Beginning at the south end, the neighborhoods include: Rosemont, Del Ray, Warwick Village, Mount Jefferson, Oakville, Auburn Village, Lynhaven, Hume Springs, St. Elmo, and Arlandria. The Avenue ends in a cul-de-sac approximately 200 feet south of Four Mile Run, a tributary of the Potomac River that separates the City of Alexandria from Arlington County. According to the City of Alexandria, all of these neighborhoods comprise the Potomac West planning area. This introductory “Tour of the Avenue” redraws the street as nine segments based on shared characteristics such as street width; residential, commercial and institutional land uses, or the presence of a median.

Metro Underpass to Walnut Street

Entering Commonwealth Avenue from Old Town, a visitor sees a grand, 40-foot wide, grassy median, dotted with trees of different sizes and species. Townhouses and detached homes flank the Avenue, each with its own front yard or garden. Two mini-gardens maintained by the Rosemont Garden Club mark the intersection with Rosemont Avenue, the site of the original trolley stop. There are benches to sit here and enjoy the gardens and the view, though there is no visual indication of its early 20th century historical significance as a trolley stop. Hooff’s Run Park leads off to the right, running half a block behind the townhouses on the east side. It is a narrow, linear park with a basketball court and a sizeable playground, but mostly it serves as an alternate route to Commonwealth Avenue for walking, jogging or bicycling. A major strength of this street section is its proximity to the King Street Metro, which has several important consequences. This is the street section with the highest home values, and it is also a focus of pedestrian and vehicular traffic heading to Old Town and the Metro. Speed bumps to slow the traffic are prevalent, and the east sidewalk is wider than the west, perhaps to carry larger numbers of people walking to the Metro and Old Town since the sidewalk on the west side ends before it reaches the underpass. The street is wide enough here to have ample room for parking and bike lanes along both sides, except near the underpass. However, the wide travel lanes of the street prevent people from using the median for much other than political signs before elections.



A Tour of the Avenue

Walnut Street to Braddock Road

At Walnut Street, the Avenue narrows and the tree-filled median ends giving the street a very different character. It feels more like a neighborhood street. Even though it is wide enough to carry the heavier flows of traffic heading into or out of Old Town, it is too narrow to have separate bike lanes, as well. In addition to residences, this section includes three churches: the Baptist Temple Church, the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, and Redeemed Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ (just off the Avenue). The Rosemont Park Market at Walnut Street is the only commercial establishment in this part of the Avenue. Adjacent to the market, Hooff's Run Park rejoins the Avenue at a small park with two benches facing a tennis court. At Chapman there is also a small, unfenced dog park and a public parking lot accommodating 24-cars, that serves as the terminus of Hooff's Run Park. There is another unfenced dog park at Braddock Road. These are the only places where dogs are allowed to be off-leash. As the Avenue approaches Braddock Road, the bike lane is sacrificed for a center turning lane for cars.

Braddock Road to Nelson Avenue

Braddock Road marks the beginning of Del Ray. A tiny portion of Glendale Avenue was closed to create a small flower-filled mini-pocket park on the northwest corner of the intersection, but utility poles and wiring detract from it. Due to a small hill, the street is especially narrow here. There is no median along this stretch, and parking, bike paths and sidewalks are all intermittent. Pedestrians and cyclists have to cross the street to continue along the avenue or confront traffic. This discontinuity in the sidewalks and bike paths is the greatest weakness of this stretch. However, students observed many pedestrians walking this section, so people seem to persevere despite the lack of continuity of the sidewalks. A variety of residential dwelling units are the dominant features, from detached single-family residences to large apartment complexes, as well as Grace Brethren Church.



Nelson Avenue to Bellefonte Avenue

This segment of Commonwealth Avenue is quite distinct from the previous ones as it is home to a small commercial district and several large apartment complexes. The Monroe Avenue intersection is a focal point of the Avenue in Del Ray with its commercial complex comprised of Monroe's American Trattoria, Colonial Market, Salon & Spa, Cleaners and Tae Kwon Do facility. Behind this block of stores is Mason Avenue Mini Park, which is a small family park with playground equipment and several benches. Across Monroe Avenue is another small dog park. Just north of the commercial center on the east side of the Avenue is a highly visible power station, and consequently a dominant visual feature at the Monroe Avenue intersection is the crisscrossing of utility lines. Though the sidewalk is quite wide in front of the shops it is congested with power poles, signs, newspaper boxes, etc. A sign designates it also as a bicycle lane, though it would be difficult and dangerous to ride on the sidewalk.

Bellefonte Avenue to Custis Avenue

At Bellefonte Avenue, the wide median returns with a prominent line of large oak trees growing down the center—the “avenue of the giants,” as one student labeled them. These trees and the wide median establish a strong image for the Avenue that in some ways sets the quintessential character of the street. Due to the width of the street, bike paths and sidewalks are continuous again, and there is parking on both sides of the street. This section also continues the variety of housing types, mostly single-family residences and duplexes, and as in earlier sections, their front yards and gardens contribute to the character of the Avenue. Many of the houses do not actually face Commonwealth; they face the side streets instead. A subtle feature of this section is that the highest point of Commonwealth Avenue occurs near Custis Avenue. Prior to this point storm water flows toward Hooff's Run and Old Town; beyond here, it flows toward Four Mile Run.



12 A Tour of the Avenue

Custis Avenue to Mount Vernon Avenue

At Custis Avenue, Commonwealth narrows again, so the median is thinner than in the previous section, but the strong central line of oak trees remains in the narrower median as do the bike paths, sidewalks and parking. The streets on either side of the Avenue do not always intersect directly across from one another. This leaves larger gaps in the median to accommodate traffic turning into or from either of the alternating side streets. The residential character changes on the east side due to a collection of civic buildings and park space as Commonwealth nears Mount Vernon Avenue. The James M. Duncan Public Library, Mount Vernon Community School and Recreation Center, a baseball field, a tennis court, and a mini-pool for children make an important collection of civic structures and spaces. This combination of civic buildings and park space make this one of the most important and well-used places along the Avenue. There is also a small vacant lot on the corner of Del Ray Avenue that holds potential for a new neighborhood park space and has been nominated by the DRCA as a city pocket park.

Mount Vernon Avenue Intersection

The intersection with Mt. Vernon is the busiest intersection along the street, which makes it a challenge to cross due to the high volume of traffic, multiple turning lanes, and limited sidewalks. Mount Vernon Avenue separates Del Ray from the various neighborhoods north of the intersection. There is a small park on the south corner of the intersection with a large evergreen (decorated at Christmas time) surrounded by deciduous trees. There are no benches or other opportunities to use the park, although there is a small parking lot adjacent to it accommodating eight cars. Suntrust Bank, ASAP Printing & Mailing, and Anthony's Auto Center occupy the east corner; Georgio's Piatsa Carry Out occupies the north corner; and Warwick Village rises on the hill above the intersection to the west. Because of the need for additional turning lanes, bike paths again disappear, and one can only cross Mount Vernon and continue along Commonwealth Avenue on the east side of the intersection, because there is no cross walk on the west side.



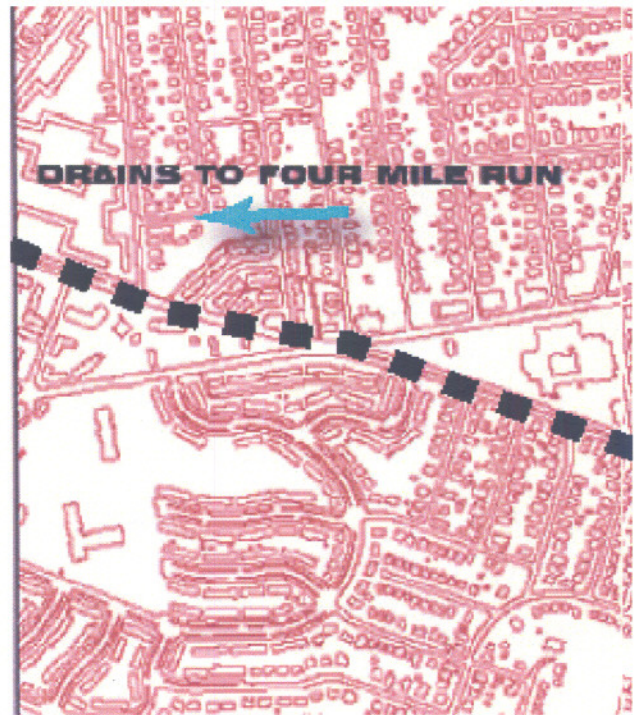
Mount Vernon Avenue to Reed Avenue

After crossing Mount Vernon Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue descends a hill. The busy intersection and the change of elevation make this section seem quite disconnected from the previous sections. Furthermore, bike paths and sidewalks are discontinuous again due to topography and the need for additional turning lanes for the Mt. Vernon Avenue intersection. A narrow median reappears, but the trees are small crape myrtles and do not have the same towering presence that the oaks have in the previous sections. This segment of the Avenue is the most socially diverse and has the greatest mix of commercial, residential and institutional uses. There are attached single-family residences, modest sized apartment complexes, and condominium complexes on both sides of the street. The Del Ray Commercial Center on the west side hosts a dry cleaner, Pay Day Loans, and a martial arts facility. To the east is the Arlandria Health Center.

Reed Avenue to Four Mile Run

After Reed Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue narrows to just two lanes with no extra width for parking or bike lanes, and there is only a sidewalk along the west side. Further along is the Freedom Way Missionary Baptist Church, converted from a retail shopping storefront. The eastern side is dominated by the backs of businesses and apartments that front along Route 1. This segment of Commonwealth Avenue is largely influenced by utilities and infrastructure. Power lines dominate much of the vista, and storm water drainage problems are evident. Cora Kelly School and Recreation Center and their adjacent ballfields fill the entire western side of the Avenue all the way to Four Mile Run. Cora Kelly School also has an extra parking lot on the east side. The land is lower here and susceptible to flooding from Four Mile Run, especially the ball fields and park at the end. At the end of the Avenue a cul-de-sac opens onto Four Mile Run, a recreation area which hosts a pedestrian trail parallel to the waterway. A stone marker with a bronze plaque identifies the trail but there is no parking for visitors.

Several topics demand closer investigation than the guided tour provided: hydrology, flora and fauna, traffic and traffic calming, pedestrian and bicycle transportation, cultural history, the neighborhoods, natural history, and the planning context. These physical conditions and other considerations may begin outside of what is thought as the physical boundary of the neighborhoods but still have an effect on Commonwealth Avenue and its residents. They also include conditions that are not isolated to a specific segment but may span its 2-½ mile length.



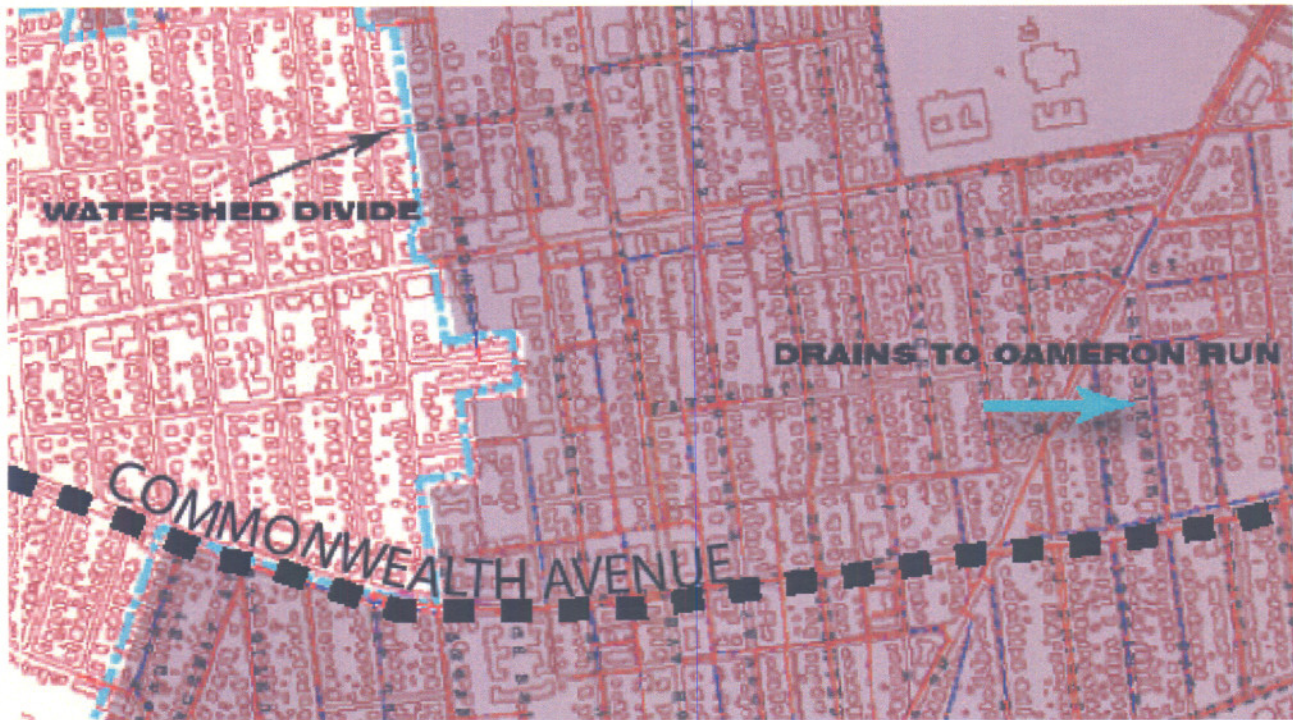
14

Hydrology



Commonwealth Avenue: Love Me, Love Me Not

Commonwealth Avenue runs along the base of a ridge that rises to the west (Russell Road runs higher up the ridge.) This ridge occurs near the edge of Virginia's Piedmont Plateau, where it drops off to the more level Coastal Plain. This topographical position influences the hydrology of the Avenue as shown above: water falling on the ridge naturally flows downhill to the Avenue below and then drains in two directions to the Potomac River and eventually the Chesapeake Bay. The highest point of the Avenue is near Custis Avenue, which divides water flowing north to Four Mile Run from water flowing south to Cameron Run. An interesting curb and gutter arrangement shown at left shows how the street and sidewalks have been changed to collect and channel the runoff.

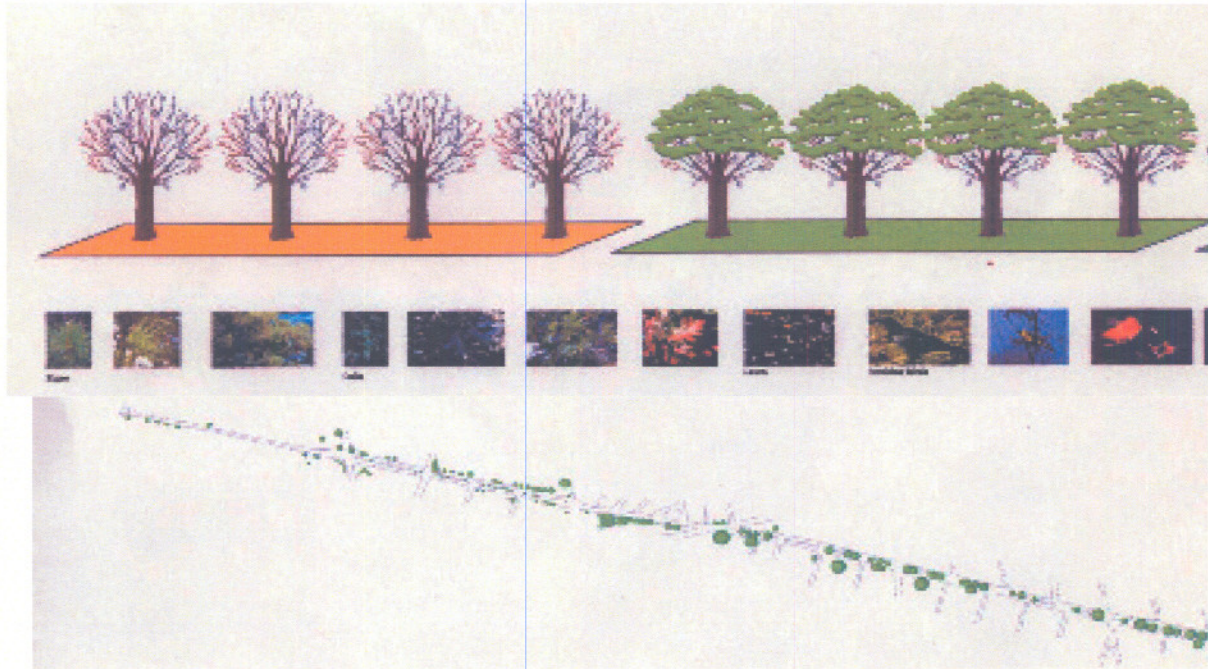


Four Mile Run was filled in over time and straightened at the end of the Avenue. The frequently saturated fields at Cora Kelly School give evidence of the wetlands that were there at one time. Storm sewer stencils like the one at right are common along the portion of the Avenue in the Four Mile Run watershed. Like other neighborhoods in the metropolitan area, the percentage of impervious surface has increased steadily over the years and added to the amount of storm sewer runoff that enters the storm water system. The stencils reinforce community awareness about the effects of sediment and pollutants from rooftops, streets and driveways on water quality and habitat in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.



Also in the area's hydrological past, Hooff's Run began from a source on the western ridge and flowed south over much the same land the Avenue covers today. Although most of the stream is buried in a culvert and hidden from view, it can still be heard through the drain inlets along Hooff's Run Park. For one block between Maple and Linden Streets, as seen in the image to the right, it is open to the air above. However, the concrete walls and base prevent it from being a natural stream in any way. Eventually, Hooff's Run emerges just past Duke Street and runs through the Alexandria African American Heritage Memorial Park to Cameron Run.





16 Flora and Fauna

Like many other aspects of the Avenue, vegetation varies along its length in intermittent groupings, a diversity of trees and a range of maturity, and some spots of color mostly in private yards. At Cora Kelly School and Four Mile Run, the area is open and sunny with grasses, an indication that there has been more land disturbance here (few mature trees). Closer to the Mount Vernon intersection and further south, the Avenue becomes more urban with more mature street trees. The magnificent trees marching down the center of the median make a memorable impression and help characterize the street to visitors. Where there is less room in the center median for large shade trees such as oaks and maples, cherry trees and crape myrtles seem to indicate a desire to continue the linear planting scheme. The City of Alexandria offers a detailed inventory of the street trees. The trees are in remarkably good condition despite the various conditions in which they are growing, ranging from wide center medians to tight sidewalks, where they are cut off from water and air and are boxed in by utilities.

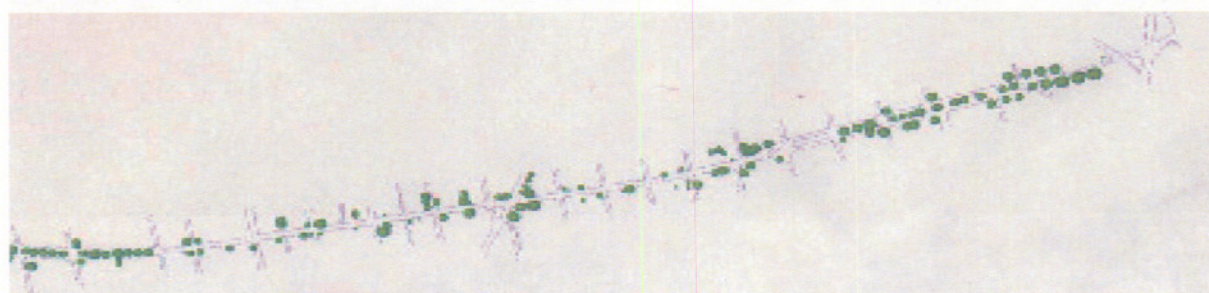
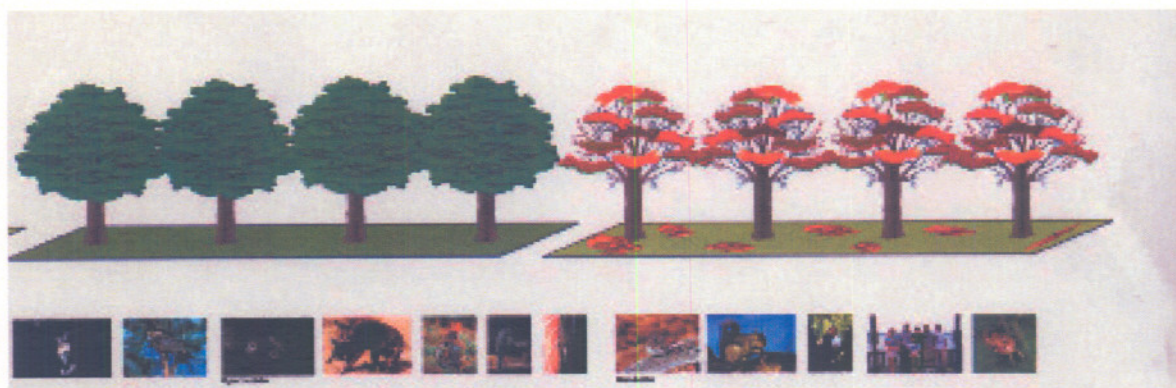
Neighborhood plantings in existing pocket parks and private yards indicate a local interest in gardening, and planters in commercial areas brighten up the sidewalks in spring and summer. Turf areas in general are heavily used. Some medians double as jogging paths and dog exercise areas and the thin grass and compacted soils indicate the stress they are under. Narrow medians between asphalt traffic lanes, tend to bake in the sun and the grass and trees there seem to suffer from lack of water.

The variation in vegetation impacts the habitat for animals as well, especially birds and small mammals. The proximity to wetlands at Four Mile Run increases the likelihood of encountering species that thrive in such habitats, whereas the mature trees in Del Ray and Rosemont would support more upland species.

Family pets are also part of the ecological environment of the Avenue, although they are not often thought of in those terms. Cats prey on small mammals and birds; dogs chase squirrels and other animals. Their waste can accumulate if owners are not diligent about cleaning up after them and influences nutrients in the soil, particularly when dogs repeatedly mark the same locations. Still, Commonwealth Avenue is a dog-friendly street. People walk and play with their dogs at designated and impromptu exercise areas, even though designated dog parks are small and do not give the dogs much room to run. And dogs often bring people together. Dog walkers are among the most regular users of parks and sidewalks.

"Family pets are part of the ecological environment of the Avenue, although they are not often thought of in those terms."





The Site



Traffic and Traffic Calming

Much of Commonwealth Avenue is a beautiful driving experience, however, its tree-lined, residential character and speed limit of 25 miles per hour belie the fact that it carries quite a bit of traffic. Although it is primarily a residential street, when viewed from a larger, regional perspective, it has significant links to other transportation routes. At the southern end at King Street, it connects to the second-busiest rail transit system in the United States and to several inter- and intra-city bus routes. Alexandria's Union Station serves Amtrak and Virginia Railway Express commuter rail passengers. Another Metro station at Braddock Road lies six blocks east of the Avenue. Lastly, the Avenue is only ten driving minutes from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. When access to transportation services and plans for future development are taken into consideration, it is likely the Avenue will see an increase in volume for of all types of traffic and in the number of visitors.

[Source: Potomac West Small Area Plan, 37-38, and Baker, Linda. 2004. "Why Don't We Do it in the Road?" Salon.com.

http://dir.salon.com/story/tech/feature/2004/05/20/traffic_design/index.html].

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) estimates 6,200 vehicles travel on the Avenue in an average day (2004) and classifies it as a primary collector, a highway classification that typically has 80-foot right-of-way widths and serves through-traffic at medium speeds. These sizable street widths on Commonwealth Avenue easily accommodate emergency vehicles but also create a tension between cars using the Avenue as a through street and pedestrians, bicyclists and local drivers who use it as a neighborhood street. Several factors contribute to this conflict of uses. Nine cross-streets connect Commonwealth with Jefferson Davis Highway (US 1), a major national highway, and both Mount Vernon Avenue and Glebe Road lead to Interstate-395, the major north-south expressway in Northern Virginia and into Washington, D.C.

Street Segment	Northbound Parking	Southbound Parking
King to Sunset	None	None
Sunset to Spring	Yes	Yes
Spring to Braddock	No	Yes
Braddock to Luray	No	No
Luray to Alexandria	Yes	Yes
Alexandria to Nelson	No	Yes
Nelson to Forrest	Yes	Yes
Forrest to Ansell	No	Yes
Ansell to Ashby	No	No
Ashby to Leadbeater	Yes	Yes
Leadbeater to Glebe	Yes	No
Glebe to Reed	Yes	Yes

Source: Field research conducted by Jessica Juriga.

Table 1. Street-side parking exists on several segments of Commonwealth Avenue.



Six intersections have traffic signals: King Street, Braddock Road, Monroe, Mount Ida and Mount Vernon Avenues, and East Glebe Road. Bellefonte, Del Ray and Reed Avenues have four-way stop signs, while other intersections with the Avenue have none. Rather than connecting to another major roadway, the Avenue ends as a cul-de-sac about 200 feet from Four Mile Run, which helps to limit traffic volume.

Traffic-calming measures in the form of speed tables are in place at Cedar and Linden Streets, between Maple and Walnut Streets, at Oak Street, Masonic View Avenue, and at Spring Street to discourage through traffic. The City's draft transportation plan acknowledges that traffic patterns are changing, especially with new development in the area such as Potomac Yards. The DASH Bus was rerouted along a portion of Commonwealth Avenue in the fall of 2006 as part of the Potomac Yards development.



Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation

While there is a lot of commuter traffic on the Avenue, it is also heavily used by people on foot and bicyclists. Streets, sidewalks and medians are a favorite place for joggers who must be particularly careful at intersections to avoid getting hit by cars merging onto the Avenue from side streets. In addition, power-walkers, dog-walkers, parents and strollers, church-goers, shoppers and park-goers regularly criss-cross the Avenue and side streets. Commonwealth is a busy place on a beautiful day!

The width of the Avenue, including medians and sidewalks, varies approximately from 40.5 feet at Alexandria Avenue to 101 feet at Linden Street. Sidewalks along Commonwealth Avenue vary between three and five feet in width. Sometimes they end abruptly as at Braddock Road and Luray Avenue. The result is that pedestrians are forced to walk in the street or change sides. Table 2 lists the presence or absence of sidewalks on Commonwealth Avenue. Yard improvements, fences and residential structures sometimes abut the sidewalk, sometimes directly on the street right-of-way, which has implications for future changes. There are very few places for people to sit; benches occur only in a few garden areas and small parks along the Avenue.

Commonwealth Avenue is a major bicycle route in the region. It is the only continuous north-south bike route in this part of the City of Alexandria. An eastbound bicycle route lies on Braddock Road, and a short paved trail connects the northern cul-de-sac of Commonwealth Avenue with Jefferson Davis Highway and across Four Mile Run to regional trails. The entire length of Commonwealth Avenue is signed as a Bike Route, but it is discontinuous. Several segments of the Avenue contain a painted bike lane, though a painted line is all that separates bicycles from vehicular traffic and from parked cars. In the narrow segments of the Avenue, bicycles are forced to share travel lanes with other vehicles.

There is considerable on-street parking on the Avenue. The exact location of existing on-street parking is shown in Table 1. Sometimes on-street parking serves to give a sense of protection to pedestrians as a buffer between sidewalk and automobile travel lane. At other times, they pose a danger to bicycles when passenger doors open unexpectedly into bike lanes.

Street Segment	Northbound Sidewalk	Southbound Sidewalk
King to Cameron	Yes	Yes
Cameron to Sunset	Yes	No
Sunset to Glendale	Yes	Yes
Glendale to Luray	No	Yes
Luray to 1/2 block north	Yes	Yes
1/2 block north of Luray to Nelson	No	Yes
Nelson to Mount Vernon	Yes	Yes
Mount Vernon to Manning	Yes	No
Manning to Reed	Yes	Yes
Reed to North End	No	Yes

Source: Field research by Jessica Juriga

Table 2. An inventory of sidewalks shows few missing pieces but those may be the places where they are needed the most.





Remnants of History

A few remnants remain of the rich history of Commonwealth Avenue. A number of historic resources have been identified and are located nearby. Many are associated with the Avenue's historic role as a trolley line. Surviving place names such as Oakville, Mount Auburn, Warwick and Hume Springs refer to the area's early settlement pattern of farms and great houses, mostly along the ridge skirted by Russell Road. Although there is history prior to the trolley line, it is the topographical "echo" of the Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Electric Railway that still drives the structure of the Avenue today.

Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Electric Railway and the Town of Potomac

The Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Electric Railway (WAMV) opened in the fall of 1892. It included a line west of the existing Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac (RF&P) main line railroad that served as a western boundary of the urbanized section of Alexandria. This line provided streetcar service south to Mount Vernon and in 1896 extended north across the Long Bridge to the District of Columbia. Streetcars ran on S. Eads Street in Arlington and Commonwealth Avenue in Alexandria. The St. Elmo station (above right) allowed transfers with the Washington and Old Dominion (W&OD) Railroad. In 1894, Ohio-based developers platted out the Del Ray and St. Elmo sections of the new Town of Potomac. While commercial activity centered along Mount Vernon Avenue, the WAMV streetcar line ran along the western edge of the residential sections on what is now Commonwealth

Avenue. The WAMV provided a second rail option for commuters into Washington, DC. The existing W&OD Railroad had provided commuter rail service into the capital since the mid-19th Century. By 1906, bolstered by increasing numbers of schoolchildren traveling to District of Columbia schools, the WAMV served over 1.7 million passengers on 92 daily trains. In 1913, the WAMV merged with the Washington, Arlington & Falls Church railway to form the Washington-Virginia Railway. The trolley company went into receivership in 1923 when buses became the dominant form of local public transportation. In 1927, the two railways were separated and sold at auction. The last trolleys of the line ran on January 18, 1932. Later that year the tracks were removed and some of the right-of-way was used for the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

(<http://oha.ci.alexandria.va.us/archaeology/decades/ar-decades-1900.html>)

Potomac Yard

In 1906, the RF&P opened a massive switching and classification facility east of the Jefferson Davis Highway (US Route 1) named Potomac Yard. This 340 acre rail yard was the largest such facility on the east coast and a major employer; many workers at the yard moved into the Town of Potomac, which was incorporated in 1908. The town resisted incorporation into the City of Alexandria for years, but succumbed to the offer of improved services and relented in 1930. Potomac Yard closed in 1993 and is slated for massive residential and commercial redevelopment; a large regional shopping center now occupies a portion of the site.

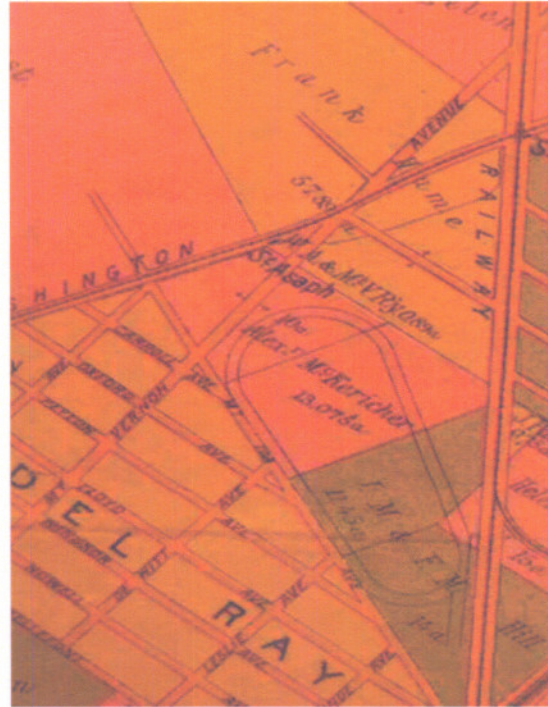
The trolley line opened the area to development, with Rosemont as the oldest community.

Rosemont

The Rosemont neighborhood was laid out around the WAMV Railroad which traveled the length of Commonwealth Avenue where the center medians are. Home construction began in 1908 and Rosemont “became a popular suburban community with Washington, DC-bound commuters.” Sizeable houses were built on large lots with gas, electric, water, and sewer service. Rosemont was annexed by the City of Alexandria in 1915. An oblong traffic circle marks what remains of the Rosemont Trolley Stop and depot at the intersection of Commonwealth and Rosemont Avenue.

Del Ray

Del Ray and St. Elmo were laid out on a grid pattern in 1894 by developer Charles Wood. By 1900, approximately 130 people lived in Del Ray and 55 in St. Elmo. The tracts were incorporated into the Town of Potomac in 1908 and continued to grow in population. Del Ray also became a streetcar suburb of Washington and Alexandria.



Neighborhoods 23

Warwick Village

Warwick Village, on the west side of Commonwealth Avenue between West Uhler Avenue and West Glebe Road was constructed in the 1950s as a planned unit development rental project, and converted to home ownership in the 1970s.

Mt. Jefferson and St. Elmo

Mount Jefferson and its southern neighbor, St. Elmo, runs east of Mount Vernon and Commonwealth Avenues and west of Jefferson Davis Highway. Mount Jefferson borders Commonwealth between Mount Vernon Avenue and Ashby Street. The small, single-family homes date from between the 1900s and 1930s.

Lynhaven

Lynhaven refers to the neighborhood north of Ashby Street. It includes the Lynhaven Gardens Apartments, built around 1949, and Auburn Gardens Condominiums, built around 1939.

Arlandria and Hume Springs

North of West Glebe Road on Commonwealth Avenue’s east side is the Arlandria section of the City. Arlandria features a large, young, predominately foreign-born population and consists of mostly attached housing with retail concentrated along Mount Vernon Avenue. Arlandria was constructed largely in the 1950s

and 1960s. Much of the area lies in the floodplain of Four Mile Run, and experienced devastating consequences during major flood events in the early 1970s. Hume Springs is a townhouse community constructed in the 1940s. It is located north of West Glebe Road and west of Commonwealth Avenue, nestled into Four Mile Run Park.

1960-2000: An Area in Transition

Property values in Potomac West reached a relative peak around 1960 at the same time that the population maxed out at 24,726. Property values declined within the Town of Potomac to an extent that the City used its first Community Development Block Grant to revitalize infrastructure and housing and support economic development. Northern Virginia’s first Enterprise Zone was created in 1994 to further these goals. By the 1990s, most of the Potomac West area was in transition. White, non-Hispanic residents became a minority in the area. Increases in diversity are attributed to a growth in the Hispanic population; Arlandria is home to nearly 1 in 4 Hispanics in Alexandria, while the Hispanic population in Del Ray, Warwick Village, and Mt. Jefferson increased by 34.6% between 1990 and 2000. Income levels, educational attainment, and housing costs in the Potomac West area have been increasing since 1990. The Potomac West Small Area Plan notes, “generally speaking, the area has become attractive to urban professionals, with higher educational levels, more income and fewer children.”

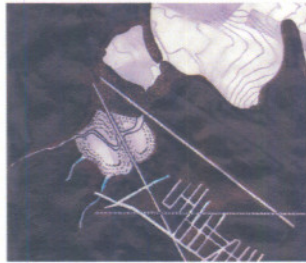
Natural History

Along with transportation, two natural water features in the local area have influenced development along Commonwealth Avenue, and have in turn been affected by this growth. Even though land use has reshaped Hooff's Run and Four Mile Run, their presence continues to be felt by the communities in this report.

Hooff's Run

Near Custis Avenue, a subtle rise in elevation directs the flow of water north or south. While the northern part of the study area drains to Four Mile Run, the southern segment used to include Hooff's Run, which flowed through the study area as shown in the map at right. Today, the water that once traveled in Hooff's Run now flows south in underground pipes. This stormwater drains to Cameron Run, which also drains to the Potomac River.





Four Mile Run

At the northern end of the Avenue, Four Mile Run flows between the City of Alexandria and Arlington County. The stream originally had a wide mouth emptying into the Potomac River, but as the area developed it was gradually filled in, as shown in the drawings to the right. The stream was historically prone to flash flooding and as a result, the Army Corps of Engineers built the concrete Four Mile Run Channel in 1977. The low-lying filled land at the north end of the Avenue is still frequently wet. Today, both Alexandria and Arlington are planning to reconfigure Four Mile Run to be a more natural flood control channel with recreational opportunities.



Four Mile Run Today

New ideas for Commonwealth can only be realized through the city planning processes. The communities surrounding Commonwealth have been the subject of recent master plans and small area planning efforts. Planning provides a forum for community engagement and a framework for accommodating change. One of the constant themes found in these plans is preservation of the character and special personalities found in the neighborhoods of Del Ray, Rosemont, and Arlandria. Commonwealth Avenue transects the city's Potomac West Planning Area, but curiously, does not have its own plan. The land uses and activities along the Avenue are governed by a patchwork of transportation, open space, and commercial revitalization plans and projects. After a brief planning inventory, students integrated aspects from these and other city plans into each of the four team designs.



Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan

Exciting plans are underway to restore a 2.3 mile section of Four Mile Run (http://www.novaregion.org/pdf/4milerun/restoration/012406_MasterPlan.pdf). The product of an extensive joint planning process in Arlington and Alexandria, the plan calls for stream and bank restoration, habitat improvements, and an extensive network of pedestrian bridges, promenades, open space, sports facilities and public art along the stream corridor. Commonwealth's terminus at the banks of Four Mile Run makes it the ideal place to serve as a gateway and connect the Avenue with its ecological roots.

City of Alexandria Open Space Plan

The city's 2004 open space plan sets forth a green vision for the entire city by preserving existing green space and designating places for future open space and parks. The open space plan specifically recommends transforming Commonwealth into a greenway that connects open space, with safe pedestrian experiences.

“Through the sensitive and sustainable integration of natural areas with active urban nodes, the Four Mile Run corridor will be a place along which the communities of Arlington County and the City of Alexandria can gather, recreate and celebrate a shared waterfront legacy.”

*Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan (draft)
January 2006*



A Long-Term Vision and Action Plan for the Arlandria Neighborhood

The Department of Planning & Zoning
City of Alexandria
May 8, 2003

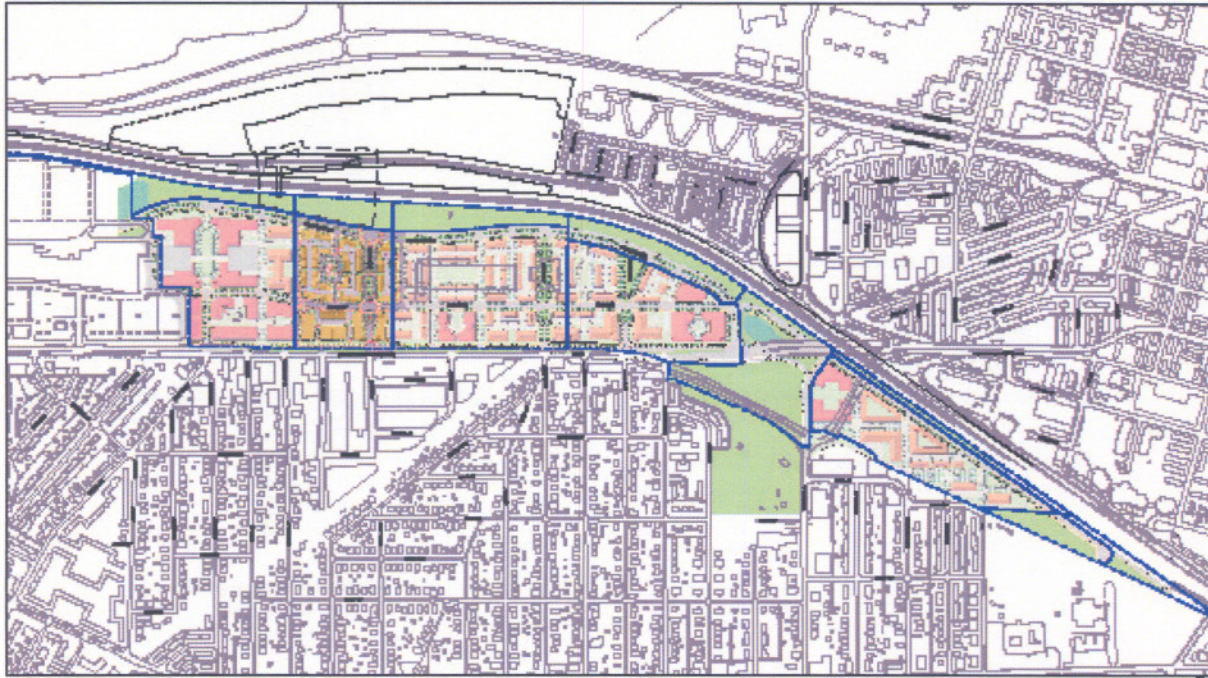
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Neighborhood Small Area Plans

Alexandria planners have been working with residents and business owners to design a series of small scale plans (Potomac West, Arlandria, Northridge/Rosemont, and Mount Vernon Business District) to guide future development surrounding Commonwealth Avenue. Each plan reflects the unique character and culture of each neighborhood with guidance for specific blocks or parcels.

Mount Vernon Business Area Plan

The Mount Vernon Business Area Plan protects the main street feel of Mount Vernon in Del Ray. The plan sets building heights to three stories and establishes design criteria to ensure compatibility with the adjacent residential buildings; it suggests places for underground and shared parking to minimize traffic congestion, identifies areas for public space, and recommends opportunities for affordable housing. The city continues to study how to extend the plan to Arlandria's commercial areas.

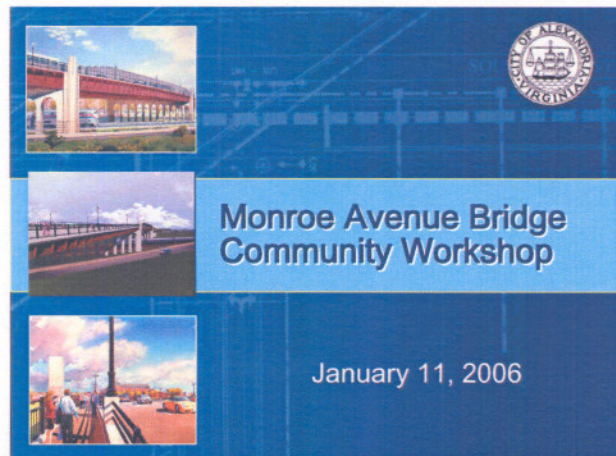


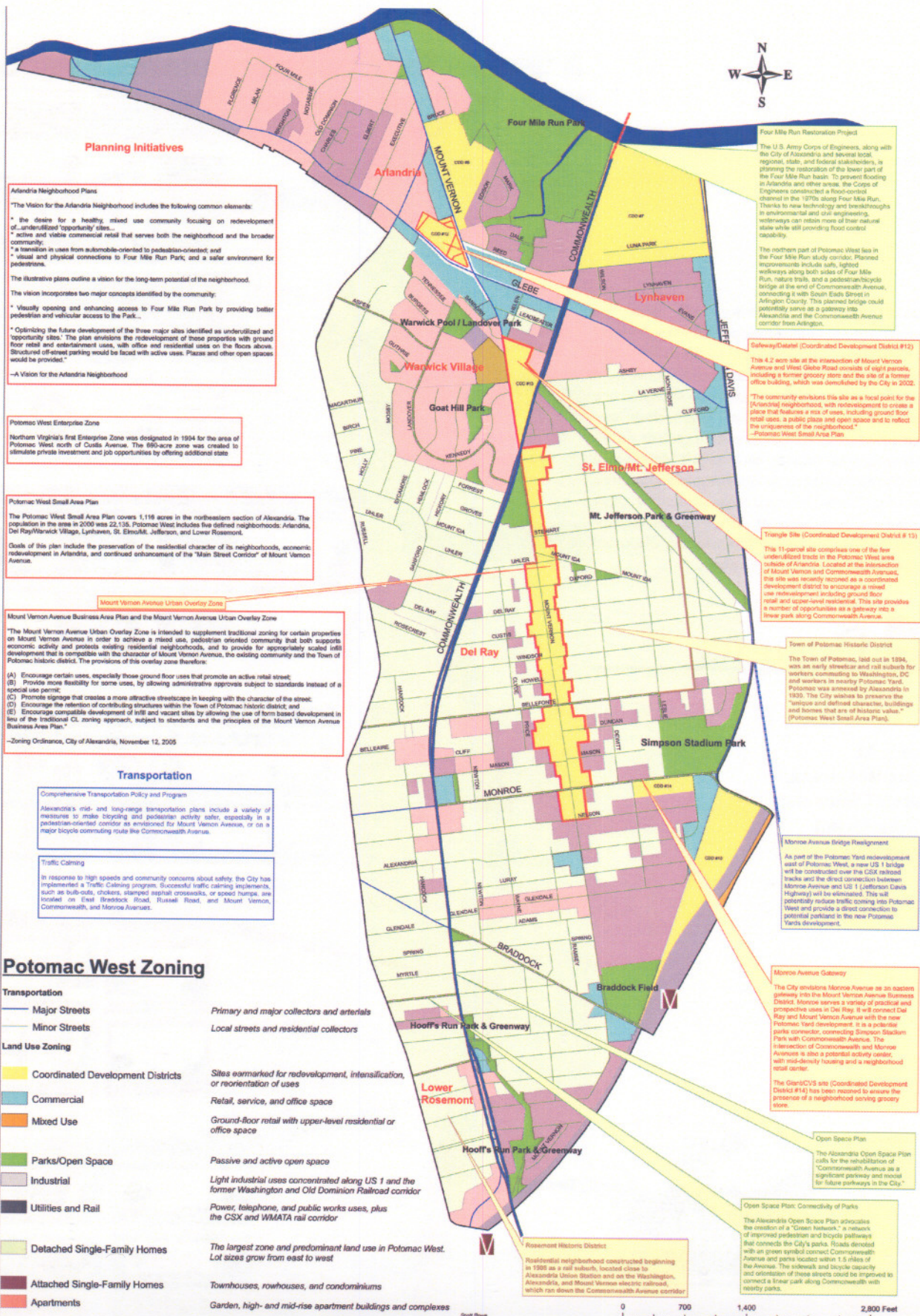
Potomac West Small Area Plan

The Potomac West Small Area Plan employs two zoning tools to implement innovative development: 1) Community Development Districts (CDD); and 2) Neighborhood Residential (NR) Zoning District. CDDs facilitate mixed use development projects that could have significant impact. They typically use a special permit process that can increase density and impose special operational conditions by coordinating areas. The NR zoning district is a critical component in the Arlandria Small Area Plan. NR districts permit ground floor retail and no setbacks to encourage pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development with ground floor retail. Together CDDs and NR zoning could facilitate the revitalization of several commercial strips along Commonwealth.

Current Area Investments

Among the many plans summarized at right, two important public investments will influence Commonwealth Avenue and its surrounding neighborhoods: 1) Monroe Avenue Bridge; and 2) Potomac Yard Office Development. Reconfiguring the Route 1 bridge at Monroe Avenue will have a huge impact on traffic patterns and could create opportunities for adjacent open space or new development. At the northern end of Route 1 the city, developer, and residents are planning for a new park over Four Mile Run as part of the new office towers in Potomac Yards.





[illegible]

Integrated Entrances to Four Mile Run Park
 Considering the communities along Commonwealth Avenue includes establishing a stronger connection to Four Mile Run Park. This master plan identifies three areas that are critical entry points to the park. The primary entrance is located at the intersection of Commonwealth and Reed. Entry visitors are welcomed into a plaza that serves as the threshold to the park. This design transforms the current access into a gate corridor, anchored by the plaza at Reed and a pedestrian bridge at Four Mile Run. The two secondary entrances are more intimate spaces identified by privately landscaped sites the larger park from the

Communissagittil Cimmigat. A Place within is Place is a unique feature in the world for connecting the communities along Communissagittil. Service is a bridge that involves the interaction of Communissagittil and its visitors. This bridge invites staffs to create a special space and for everything just as well as special events. Reaching from up and down the Communissagittil, staffs have been building beautiful bridges.

The primary goal of the program is to encourage communities nationwide to use signage, campaigns, posters, and other visual aids to encourage motorists to drive responsibly. Signage is placed at intersections, along highways, and in residential areas. The program also encourages communities to use other visual aids, such as posters, to encourage motorists to drive responsibly. The program is a voluntary effort, and communities are encouraged to participate at their own discretion. The program is a voluntary effort, and communities are encouraged to participate at their own discretion.

water gate

water level

water control system

control unit

sensor

water gate

water level

water control system

control unit

sensor

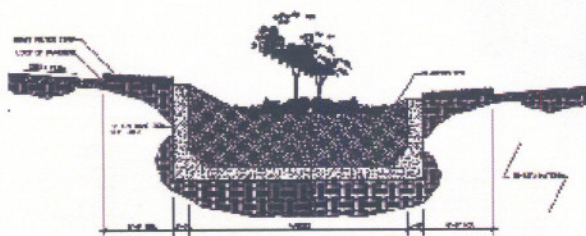
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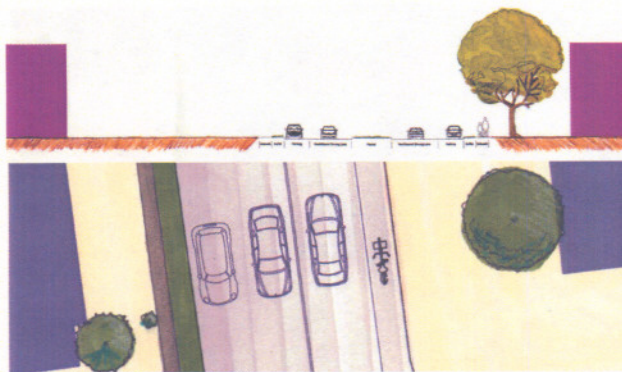
Existing Section

Existing Plan

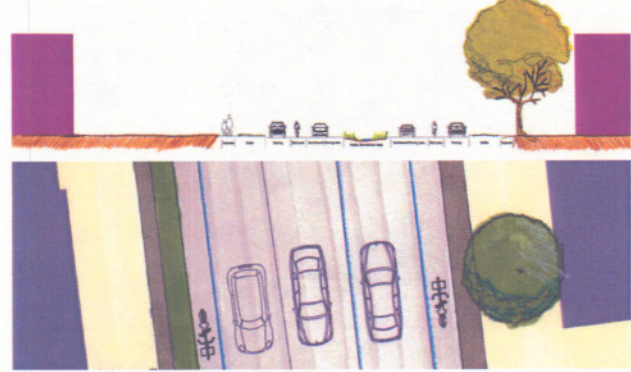
Proposed Section

Proposed Plan





Before Plan and Section of Glebe Road



New Plan and Section at Glebe Road



Before Plan and Section of Fulton Street



New Plan and Section at Fulton Street

Master Plan A: Connecting Communities 31

Connectivity through Multimodal Transportation

The intent of this master plan is to create a feeling of continuity for all types of users—pedestrians, bicyclists and automobiles—throughout the entire Commonwealth Avenue corridor. The plan dedicates continuous bike lanes, with the current gaps eliminated, signed and painted along the entire corridor. A map of the Alexandria bicycle network would be displayed at the foot of the planned pedestrian/bicycle bridge over Four Mile Run, along with water and an air pump. Signs would also direct cyclists to nearby bicycle shops.

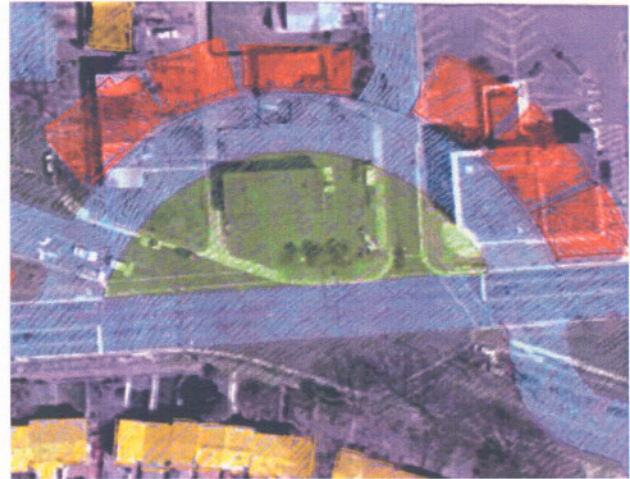
In this plan, well-lit, well-maintained pedestrian paths occur on both sides along the entire length of the Avenue, separated from Avenue traffic where possible with a buffer of grasses or native trees. Historical or cultural interpretive signs appear at regular intervals. Connectivity is achieved by narrowing driving lanes, offering street easements to create space for sidewalks and in rare instances, eliminating parking. The result is a single unified corridor, a backbone for safe, comfortable travel for all members of the community. Horticultural and arboreal improvements further the intent to give the Avenue a feeling of continuity. The plan preserves existing trees and plantings along the Avenue. Medians and park spaces adjacent to the street are enhanced by native plants with year-round interest.

Stormwater Management/Bioretention Facilities

Another subtle form of connection occurs through the expression of stormwater management features. Several bioretention infiltration basins are proposed along the Avenue, and a pair of stormwater channels links these together into a consistent stormwater management strategy. Infiltration basins are recommended in the following places to clean stormwater and allow it to infiltrate into the soil:

- East side of Commonwealth Avenue at Hooff's Run Park
- Intersection of Sunset Drive and Commonwealth Avenue
- Northeast corner of Commonwealth Avenue and Oak Street
- Northwest and Southeast corners of Commonwealth Avenue and Braddock Road
- East side of Commonwealth Avenue between Uhler and Mount Ida Avenues
- East side of Commonwealth Avenue south of Fulton Street
- Medians between Ashby Street and Reed Avenue

The basins are filled with plants selected for their ability to remove pollutants, facilitate infiltration of water into the soil, and withstand heavy runoff events or severe drying between storms. The basins are linked by channel drains located along the street between the parking and bike lanes and along the sides of center medians. These runnels will be dry much of the time, but after rainstorms will be small rivulets of flowing water, creating a special water connection along the length of the Avenue.



A Town Green

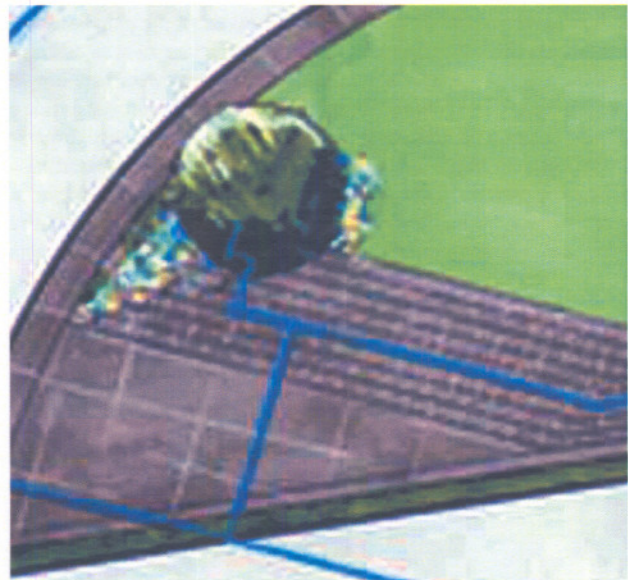
The intersection of Commonwealth and Mount Vernon Avenues lacks a direct path for pedestrians to cross the many lanes of traffic. Long-term pedestrian improvements involve redesigning the intersection to create a semi-circular "town green" that serves as a focus for community gatherings and new economic development. The green would make crossing Mount Vernon Avenue easier and more appealing, thereby linking together the northern and southern parts of Commonwealth Avenues. It would increase pedestrian traffic not only along Commonwealth Avenue, but also in commercial areas along the adjacent Mount Vernon Avenue. Short-term pedestrian improvements in favor of pedestrian safety can be made quickly, and at low cost: traffic signals can be changed to give priority to pedestrians and redirect crosswalks in order to provide a more direct route for crossing Mount Vernon Avenue.

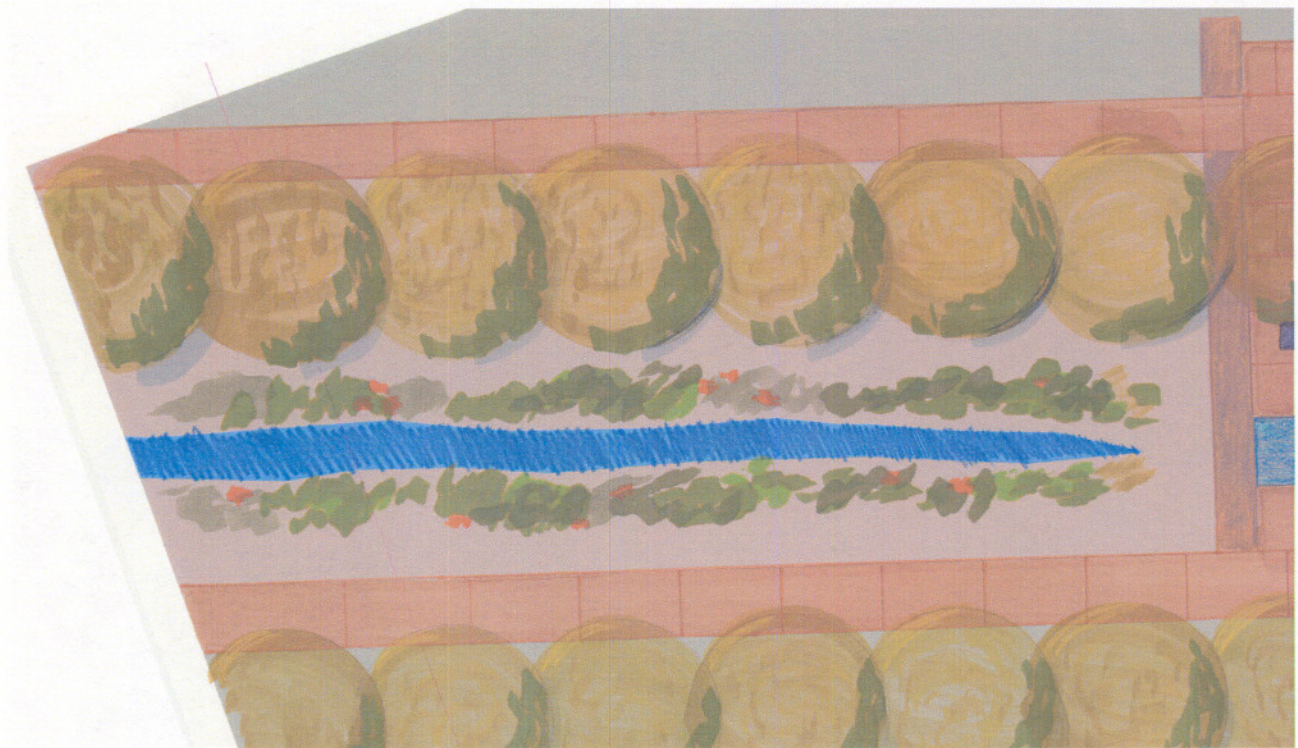
The series of images above help show the decisions surrounding a transformation from the current configuration of the intersection shown in the Google Earth map above, to the Town Green in the top right plan. The redesign of the intersection would redirect Commonwealth Avenue for a short distance, and close off the direct intersection of Hume Avenue with Mount Vernon Avenue. The design of this intersection allows for an open space that would be an ideal place for a public square, or town green. A plaza/walkway gives pedestrians a safe place to wait for crossing. When combined with terraced steps that negotiate the grade change, the whole becomes a space for public performances and gatherings on the green.



The storm water channels described in the master plan are represented as narrow blue lines in the plan above. As these runnels cross the intersection, one course follows the original alignment of Commonwealth Avenue and the other traces the new arc around the Town Green. In this way, the flow of water respects the old and the new conditions, and honors a part of the history of the street.

The acquired space north of the semi-circle would offer opportunity for pedestrian and residential-oriented commerce. The proposed design includes a parking area on one side of the buildings, but away from the Town Green, further underlining the importance of the new pedestrian space.

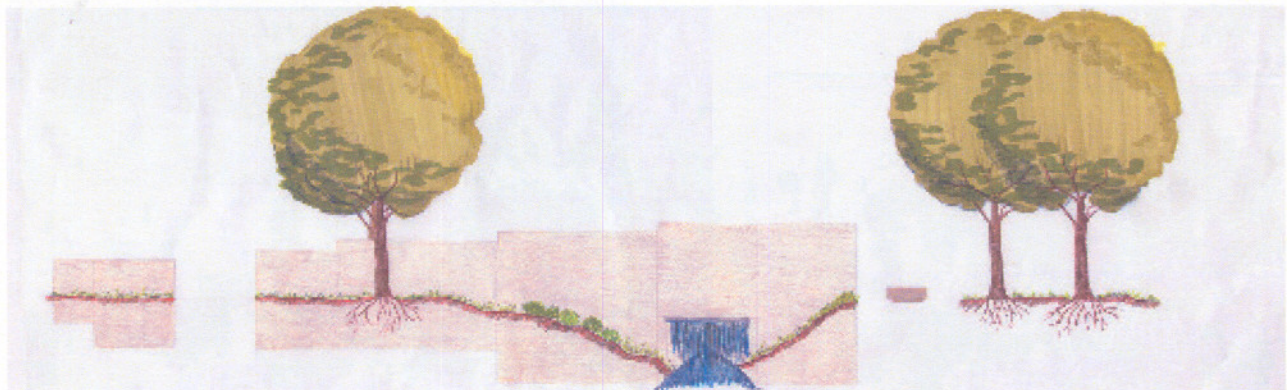


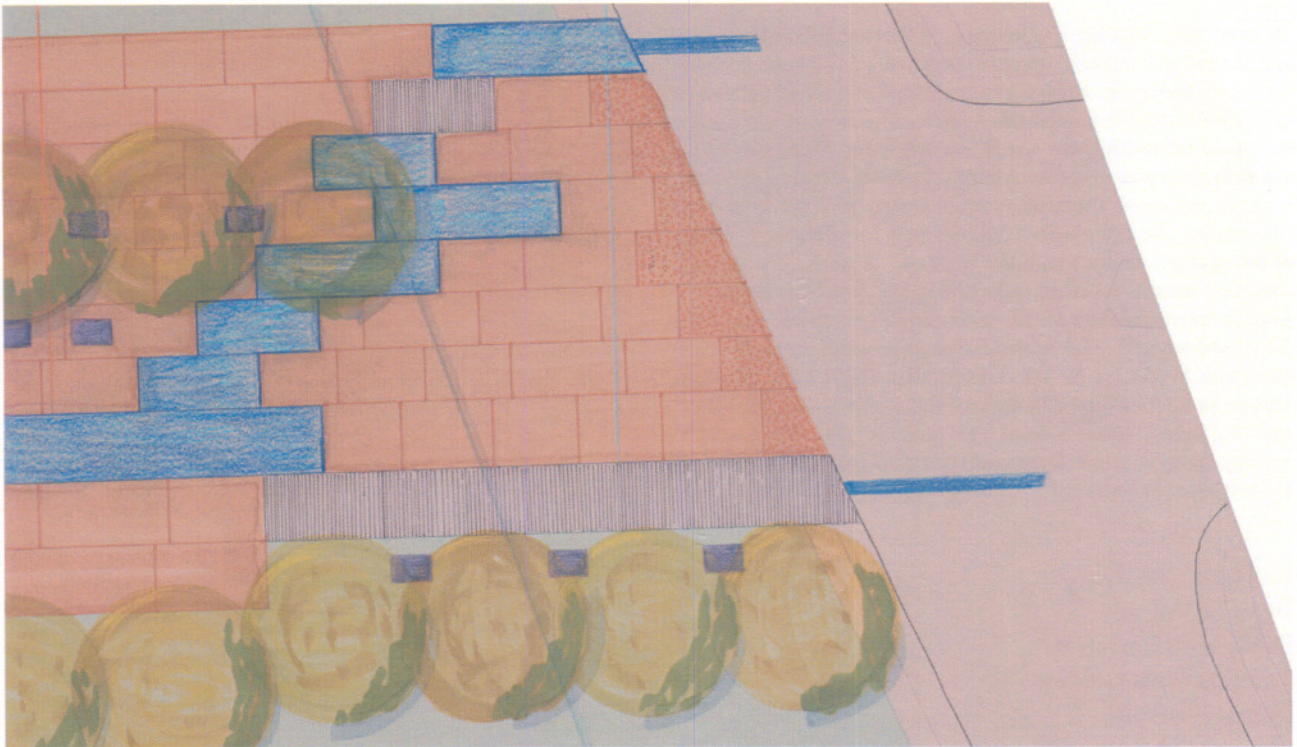


A Promenade to Four Mile Run

At the North End of Commonwealth Avenue, the plan converts Commonwealth Avenue north of Reed Avenue to a pedestrian and bicycle promenade, closing the street to traffic and creating a pedestrian avenue. Direct access to the Cora Kelly School parking lot and to Luna Park Drive service road can be maintained directly from Reed Avenue. Vehicles can park along Commonwealth to access the athletic fields of Four Mile Run park, however, they can also access these fields via the park's main parking lots. Beginning with the entrance plaza, the tree-lined promenade connects

Commonwealth and Reed Avenues to Four Mile Run Park, acting as a gateway to this larger park system. The stormwater channels that were in the form of runnels in the Town Green plan feed the center median leading to Four Mile Run as shown at right. The stormwater wall in the entrance plaza greets visitors, inviting them into Four Mile Run Park. As shown in the image below and in the plan above, the design visibly and physically links storm water runoff from Commonwealth Avenue's neighbors north of Custis to Four Mile Run, reinforcing the environmental message.





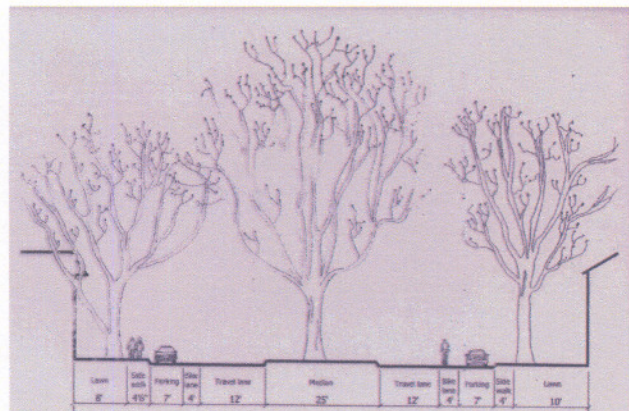
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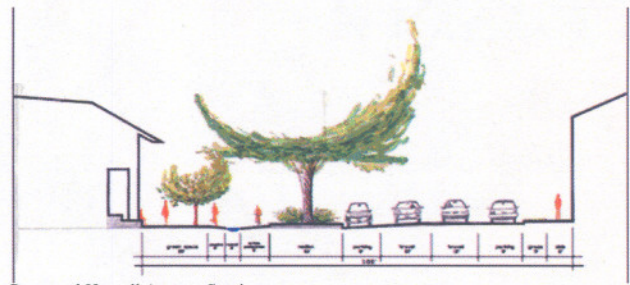
Designs

Team B's vision for Commonwealth Avenue brings the urban and natural environment together to create an educational *Urban Ecology Experience*. Natural and environmental elements meet an urban fabric on Commonwealth Avenue. The Avenue is the home to critical infrastructure – roads, electric substations, sidewalks, and is in close proximity to a Metrorail station. Natural elements, such as tree-lined medians, pocket parks, and the Four-Mile Run stream corridor remind the Avenue's residents and visitors of the near proximity of natural systems. Schools, pre-schools, churches, recreation center, and a library also line Commonwealth Avenue drawing residents and visitors of all ages to travel through the neighborhoods. All of these elements create an ideal urban classroom to educate the area's population about urban ecology. This proposal transforms the entire Avenue into a boulevard street and "daylights" Hooff's Run. The proposal includes an urban ecology learning center and reconfigures a major intersection into an inviting market place.

Team B:
Dena Billingsley
Daria Hutchinson
Julie Duncan-Oakley
Bridget Stesney



Existing Howell Avenue Section



Proposed Howell Avenue Section

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Master Plan B: Urban Ecology

The Boulevard Street

Taking advantage of what the community already loves about Commonwealth Avenue, this scheme applies the concept of the *boulevard street*—a broad tree-lined street—to connect the design elements of their Master Plan. The team observed that the communities on the Avenue are disconnected from each other because amenities such as safe biking, pedestrian access and traffic calming do not stretch along the entire street. As an example, the two adjacent travel lanes in each direction in the north section of Commonwealth, are a sharp contrast to the extra-wide street and tree-lined medians on the southern half of the Avenue. Bicycle lanes are disconnected at the south end, and there are large gaps in the commercial and retail services. Del Ray is served by many businesses on Mount Vernon Avenue, but residents in Rosemont and Arlandria are often more than one-quarter mile walk to daily services, such as a post office or grocery store. Thus vehicular transportation is necessary to run small errands.

By placing vehicular traffic on one side of Commonwealth, a redesigned boulevard street can designate new lanes of travel for bicycles, pedestrians and automobiles. The "existing" and "proposed" cross sections for the Howell intersection in the image above right is an example of the refound open space in the boulevard concept. With more open space, plantings, and clearly designated lanes of travel, the boulevard creates a more livable street for the residents along with increased safety for pedestrian, cyclists, and motorists.

Commonwealth Avenue: Love Me, Love Me Not

New Community Development Districts

This plan encourages new or revitalized Community Development Districts at three intersections: Reed, Mount Vernon and Monroe Avenues, and is shown for Reed in the image at the far right. These are pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use developments with ground floor retail. They provide valuable commercial services for neighborhoods along the Avenue and create vibrant street life. Design guidelines maintain the character of the existing neighborhoods and complement surrounding uses, such as Cora Kelly School, or other existing structures. Proposed uses include development and neighborhood amenities such as a drug store, an arts and crafts store, a place to rent bicycles and kayaks, a grocery store, and a chamber of commerce—each located according to the local conditions and needs of the surrounding communities.

An Urban Ecology Learning Center at Four Mile Run Park

An Urban Ecology Learning Center at Four Mile Run is proposed to promote ecological learning. An Urban Ecology Center is a place for adults and children to learn about ecology, hydrology, urban wildlife and other environmental topics in a "hands on" environment. The Center could focus on Four Mile Run, but certain places along the Avenue, designed as outdoor urban classrooms, could emphasize ecological relationships in the neighborhoods all along the Avenue. The Center could also link with the proposed improvements to Four Mile run as part of the City of Alexandria and Arlington County's extensive restoration and bridge projects.



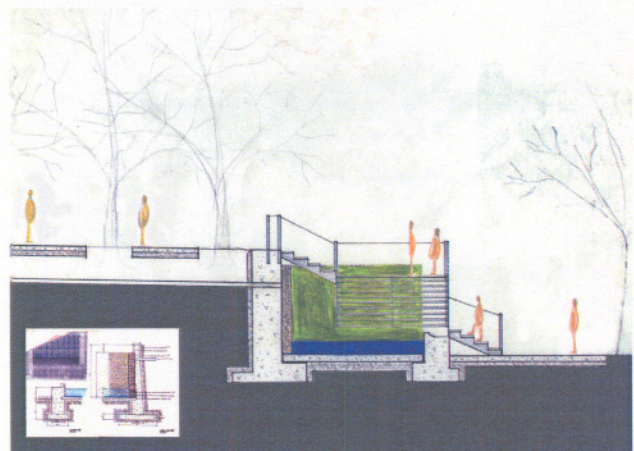
A Market Plaza

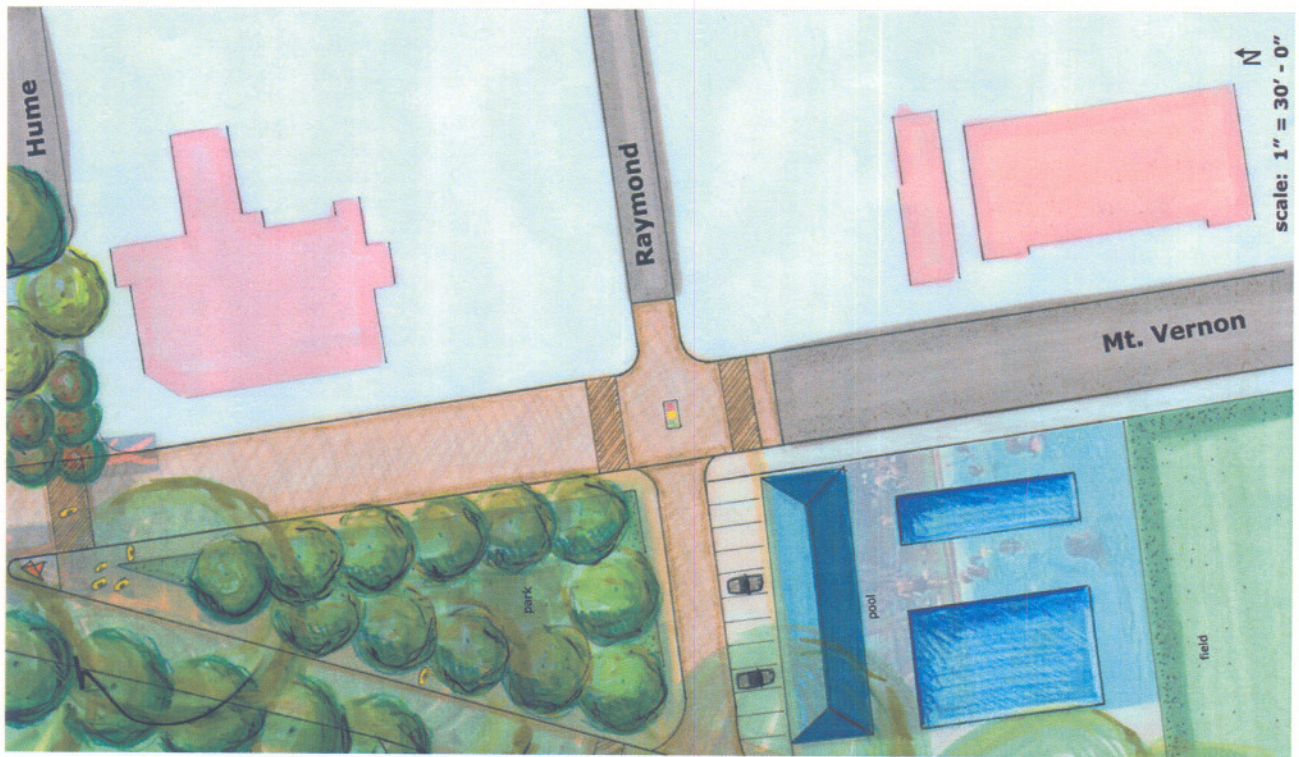
The current layout of the Commonwealth and Mount Vernon Avenues intersection bisects Commonwealth Avenue making it a challenge for travelers. Existing topography and traffic patterns makes the intersection unsafe and confusing for pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic. This plan narrows and redirects traffic lanes to clarify traffic flow and to make crossing easier. Each side of the intersection is designed as a visual focal point so that people naturally want to cross the intersection.

Since dogs are frequent park users and form the basis for much human social interaction, a dog park is planned on the south side of the intersection with a new pool and pool house. The existing artisans center is moved to the east side of the intersection surrounded by green space and connected to a parking area by a pocket park. A terraced plaza is located on the north side of the intersection with a water wall and moss garden. The plaza is designed to convert easily for community events such as markets, art festivals, and concerts. Two mixed-use developments provide amenities to the greater community and bring life to the plaza.

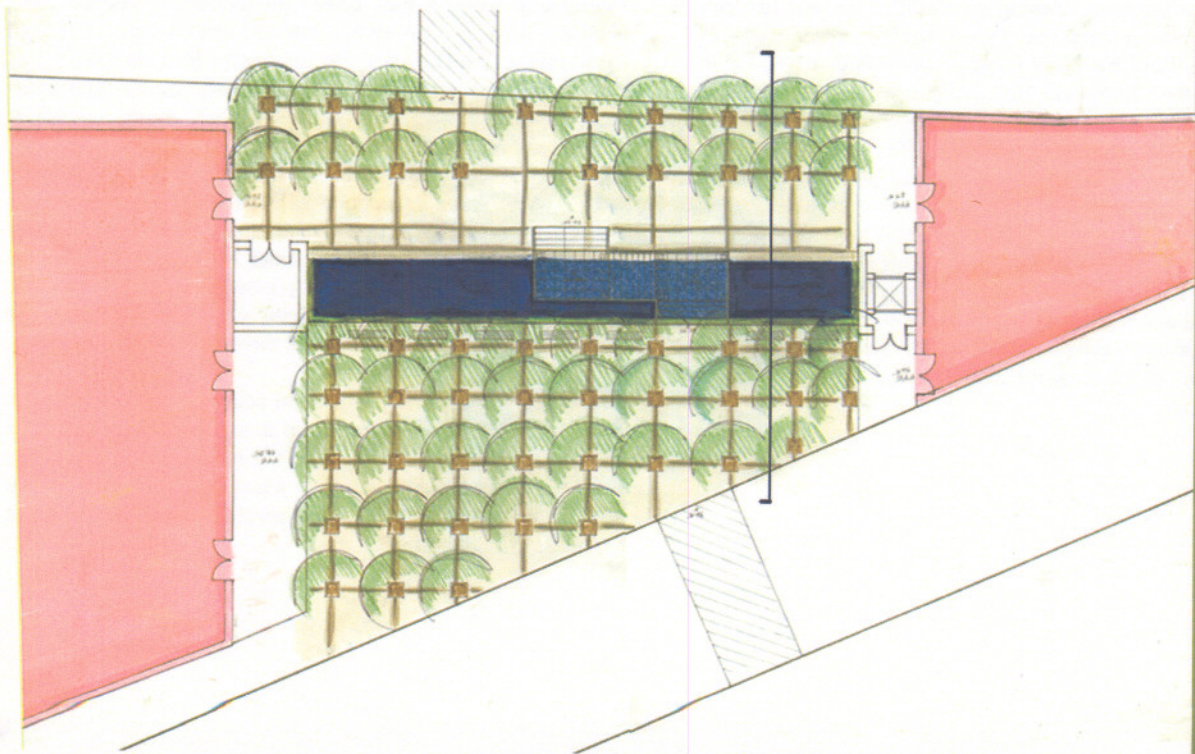
In this challenging place where the built and natural environments meet, the plan transforms one of the busiest intersections along the corridor into a beautiful focal point. By increasing open space without changing the existing topography of the intersection, the concept may be less costly than redirecting the heavily traveled Mount Vernon Avenue. The market plaza connects communities divided by Mount Vernon Avenue and improves safety for all modes of transportation.

Commonwealth Avenue: Love Me, Love Me Not

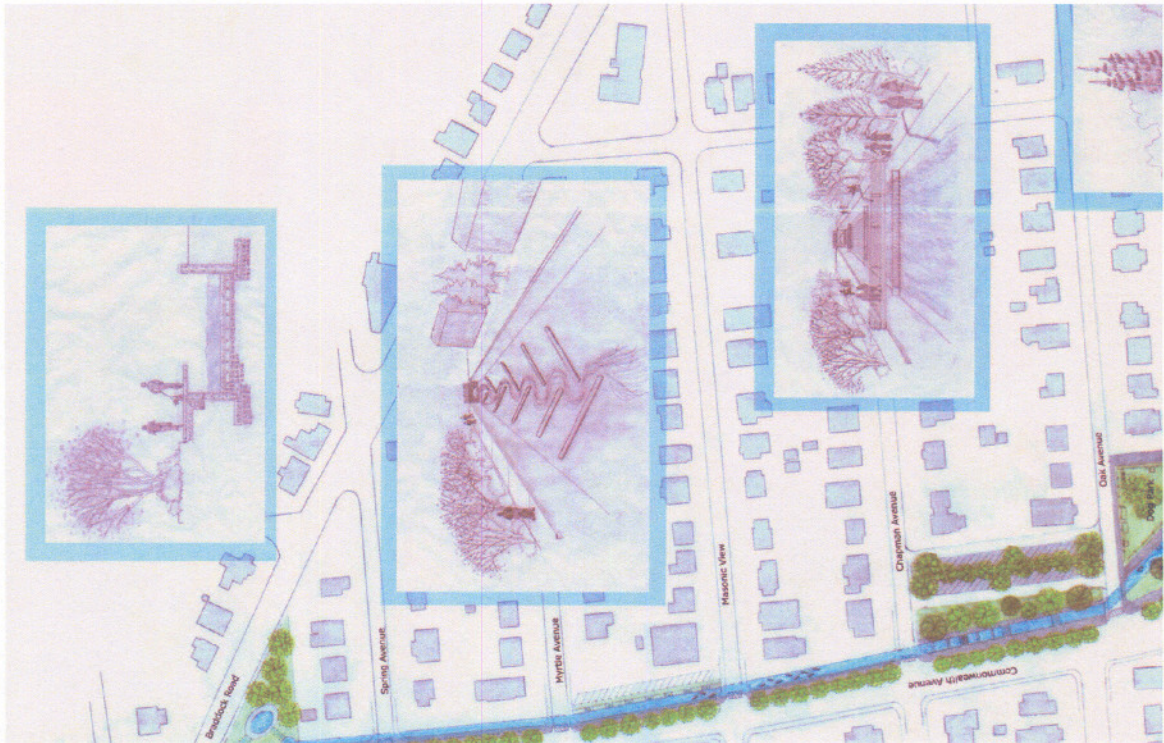




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market plaza: plan and section

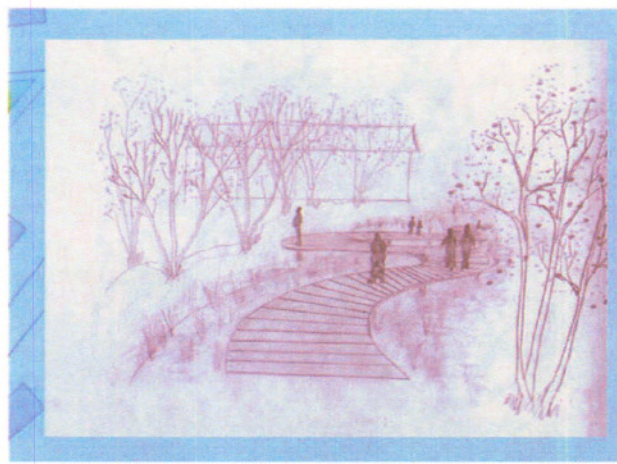
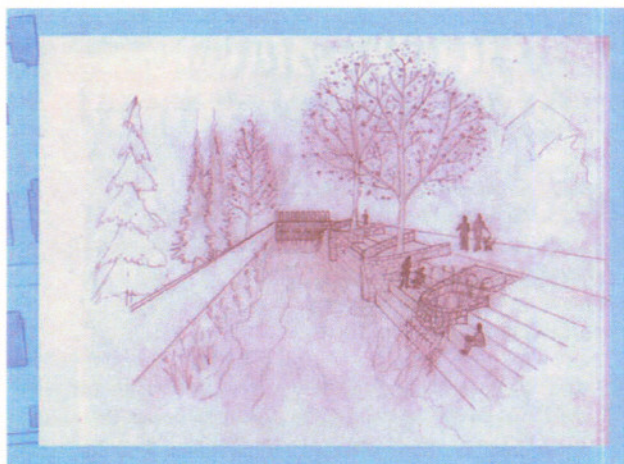


Daylighting Hoeff's Run

This plan proposes opening up Hoeff's Run and restoring it to a more natural condition. This is not only better ecologically for the run itself, but helps improve the ecology of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. It also makes a more interesting natural environment for children and their parents to learn about ecology through more direct contact with nature. The stream is first "daylighted" (opened up) at the intersection with Braddock Road and continues to the Metro underpass. In the beginning there is limited room for a stream, so it is designed as a narrow channel that gradually widens into a more meandering condition nearer the Metro. There are gathering spots along the stream, a dog park, playground and basketball courts, and there is also an extensive path network with benches and lighting. Signs tell the history of Hoeff's Run and discuss the importance of small streams to the environment.

Daylighting Hoeff's Run brings an immediate aesthetic and quality of life improvement to Commonwealth Avenue. Although the terrain is relatively flat, the original path of the trolley line cut through the middle of this watershed. Under- and overpasses associated with the daylighted stream, seating and arbors capture microclimatic changes from a resurfaced waterway. Riparian plantings stabilize banks and perform the same storm water "containment" functions as hard infrastructure such as culverts and pipes. The adjacent plants and grasses act as a natural pollution filter to cleanse storm water before it flows into the stream and on into the Potomac. A nearby dog park allows dogs to run free, but keeps them away from the water. This concept would reduce the amount of animal waste directly entering the stream.

The stream needs to be designed to address three concerns: It must be able to handle storm surges so that it doesn't flood; it needs to be safe for children who will be attracted to it; and it must not create stagnant pools of water where mosquitoes can breed. All of these can be addressed with careful design, but the issues cannot be ignored in the process.

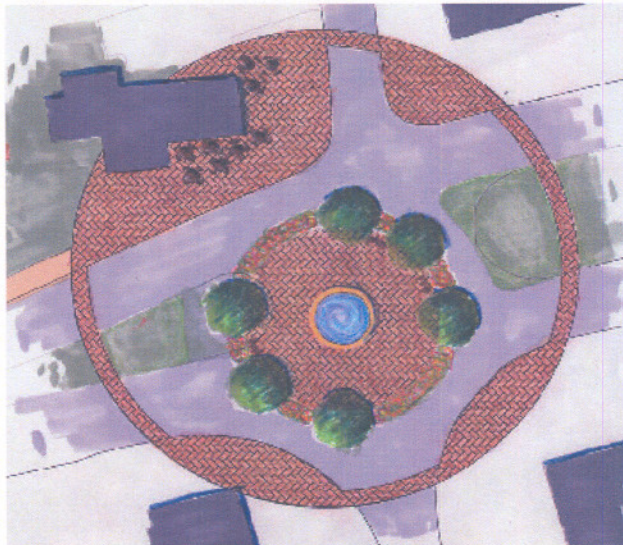




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Master Plan C: Linking Commonwealth

Team C:
Jean Horner
Jessica Juriga
Kurt Kaiser
Irene Mills



Commonwealth Avenue: Love Me, Love Me Not

The goal of this new vision for Commonwealth Avenue is to create a "great street" that links neighborhoods and places of activity through gateways and gathering spaces. Team C defines a *great street*, as:

- a place for people to walk with leisure
- a place where people feel physically comfortable
- a roadway that is defined by consistent materials, plantings, and other features
- a place that is visually engaging
- a place that is well maintained.

Based on many community comments, it is clear that people value the grand trees along the Avenue. However, soil compaction under the larger, mature trees is one indicator that they may be "over-loved" by use.

While linking open spaces emphasizes the linear quality of the Avenue, the design looks beyond the street front to create open spaces there as well, thereby adding "thickness" to Commonwealth Avenue. Wider sidewalks and parallel bike paths are reclaimed from parking lanes to offload some of the existing traffic from the large medians. The Master Plan connects new open spaces to existing spaces along the corridor by improving access for all modes of travel and creates a pedestrian environment that is consistent with the residential, historic, and tree-lined character of the street.

Commonwealth Avenue

potential street with improved open space linkages, and linkages. Our design does not seek to create a new street and adds to existing street features and



Gateways

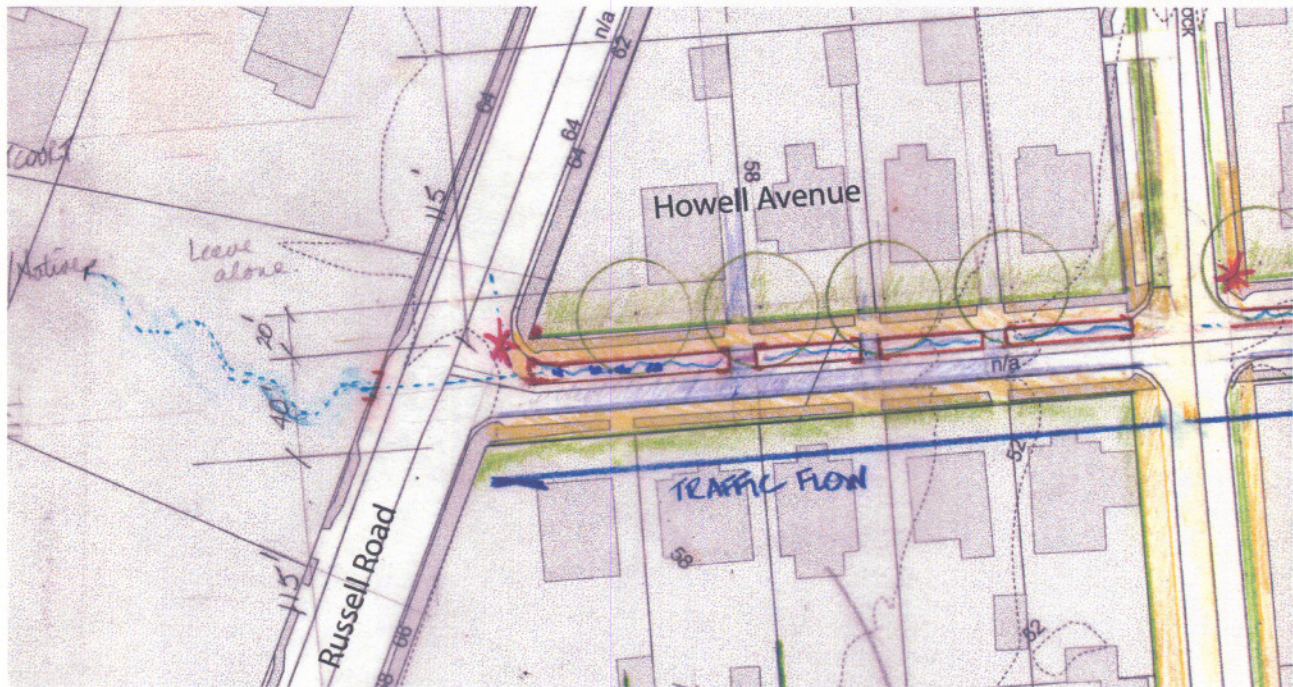
The Metro Underpass acts as a gateway between Commonwealth Avenue and Old Town Alexandria, as well as to local and regional transportation services. If structurally feasible, this proposal widens the Metro Bridge to add bike lanes and wider sidewalks as safer passage for pedestrians and bicyclists. A mural on the bridge abutment, painted by local artists, can provide an inviting "map" of the Avenue's tourist spots, and depict community events such as *Art on Avenue*, or provide directions to Four Mile Run.

A series of small gateways then appear at key points all along the main avenue. Presently dominated by asphalt and lane tapers, the intersection of Commonwealth and Walnut Street is redesigned at right to create a landscaped gateway between Rosemont and Del Ray. A roundabout and center fountain calms traffic through the neighborhood and signals that this is a place of interest. The circle may instead host a historic marker, monument or other ornamentation to signal the site's historical gateway as an old trolley stop/depot, planted and maintained by the community. A change in road width at the Walnut Street intersection also suggests that something interesting is happening beyond the limits of the street. Park-side food service and outdoor seating during matches on the tennis courts behind the Rosemont Park Market could strengthen the connection between market, visitors, and on-site park. If the tennis courts are not heavily utilized, the space could be integrated with a daylighted Hooff's Run.

To facilitate pedestrian travel along Commonwealth at Braddock Road, a retaining wall at the road edge resolves the grade difference between street and embankment on the east side. A slightly raised pedestrian path separates people safely from cars in this narrow segment. By using parking lanes and reducing the length of the existing right-turn lane onto Braddock Road from two blocks to one, the plan adds protected space between pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

"Generally wide, [great residential] streets are invariably tree-lined, they often have graceful curves, they are shaded and cool in the summer, and they are quiet."

Alan Jacobs (1995)

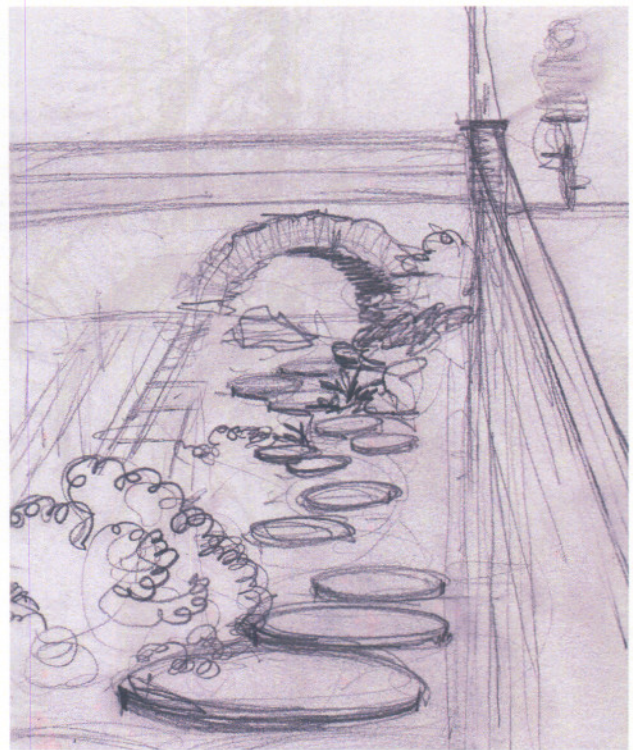


A New Channel for Hooff's Run

The headwaters of streams are the easiest places to affect ecological change in a watershed because there is less volume of water, and it flows with less power. Unfortunately the upper reaches of streams are also the easiest to bury in concrete culverts where they serve little ecological purpose and are quickly forgotten. Out of sight; out of mind. This proposal reintroduces the upper reaches of Hooff's Run along some of the streets of Del Ray to return it to an ecologically functioning stream and to make it a place of delight for children and adults—and even frogs.

By turning Howell/Windsor and Monroe/Mason Avenues into street couplets (alternating pairs of one way streets), these streets can be narrowed to make a new channel for the stream near its original course. The new stream would be a natural aquatic garden along the street, slowing down and filtering stormwater, letting it seep into the ground naturally. The natural play of water becomes visible in the landscape in a way that passersby can enjoy while walking along neighborhood side streets. Therefore this design gives residents and visitors the opportunity to see water at work in the landscape and to interact with it.

In this case, it is not possible to resurface the stream to its original course through the neighborhoods west of Commonwealth Avenue because it would disrupt private backyards. The new Hooff's Run is "collected" just west of Russell Road, and then it would flow east along Howell Avenue to Commonwealth, where it turns south, running through Mason Avenue Mini Park. From there it would flow along Commonwealth Avenue until it reaches Hooff's Run Park and eventually to Cameron Run. The stream is framed in a low wall of brick, 13 feet wide and variable lengths to accommodate streets and driveways. Short walls on the street side keep auto traffic safely separate from the "stream" and give pedestrians a place sit and enjoy the stream. Sections of the existing concrete pipe would be recycled and cut into different lengths to be used as vertical planters in the streambed, slowing water and making places for local gardeners to plant water gardens.

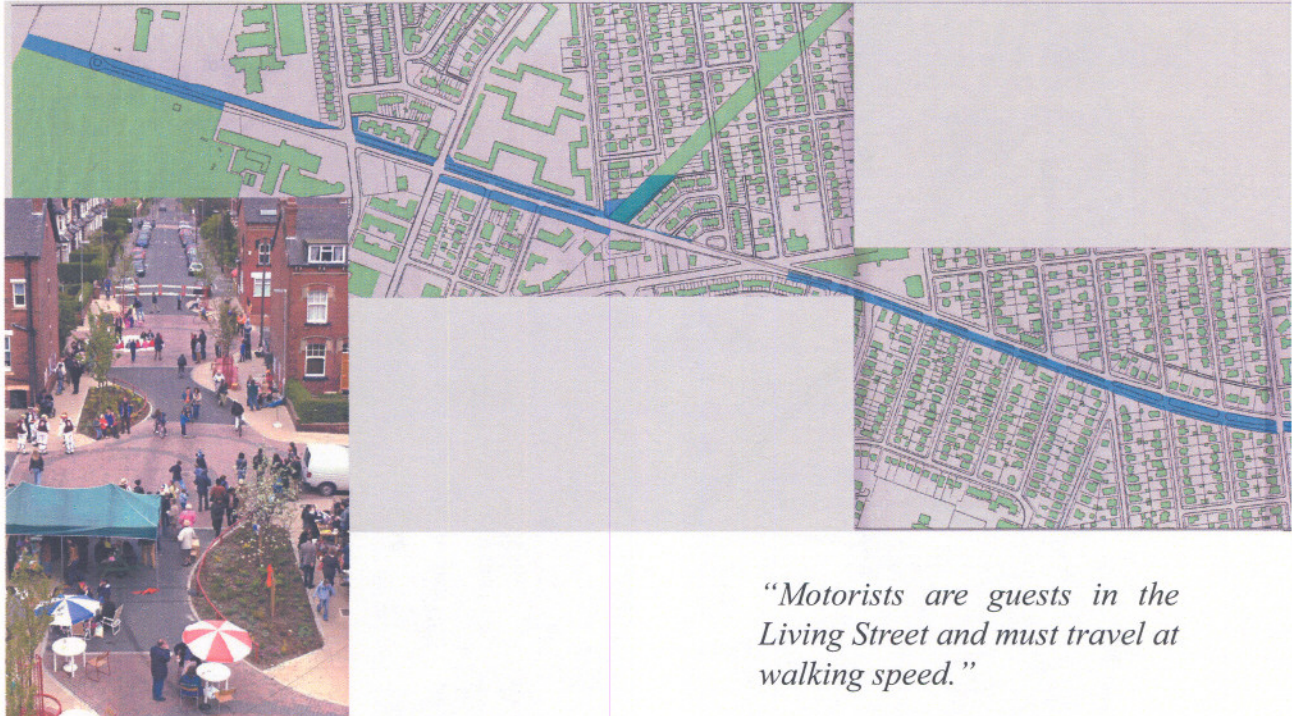


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At Mason Avenue Mini Park the recycled pipe segments are filled with concrete to serve as giant stepping stones for children to hop from circle to circle. Storm water from the adjacent parking lots would be filtered before it empties into the stream. Mason Avenue Mini Park is enhanced in this plan with a bike trail on the east side and improved access from the multi-family buildings along the Monroe Avenue block.



Designs



Methley Community Action Group (2002)

"Motorists are guests in the Living Street and must travel at walking speed."

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Master Plan D: The Living Street

Team D:

Bart Bickel

Mary Ellis

Renee Foltz

Josh Owens

Team D's Master Plan applies a Dutch concept of a "living Street" to Commonwealth Avenue. Living Streets typically are urban, pedestrian streets formed by placing trees, planters, parking areas, and other obstacles in the street to slow vehicles down. Motorists are guests and must travel at walking speeds. As seen in the image above, a Living Street is more like a grand sidewalk than a street, where residents can navigate their cars between trees and people to get to their homes.

This master plan applies this Dutch concept to the whole of Commonwealth Avenue, moving all two-way traffic to one side of the Avenue and turning the other half into a park-like Living Street. The Living Street is on different sides of the Avenue, depending on the adjacent uses along the Avenue as indicated by the blue swath in the master plan above. Street crossings would be eliminated or significantly narrowed to eliminate most of the traffic on the Living Street except the local residents who would have to drive at walking speed. This would transform the former street space and the existing boulevard medians into a continue swath of park-like landscape to be used for recreation and other park activities. This is presented in more detail on the next pages.

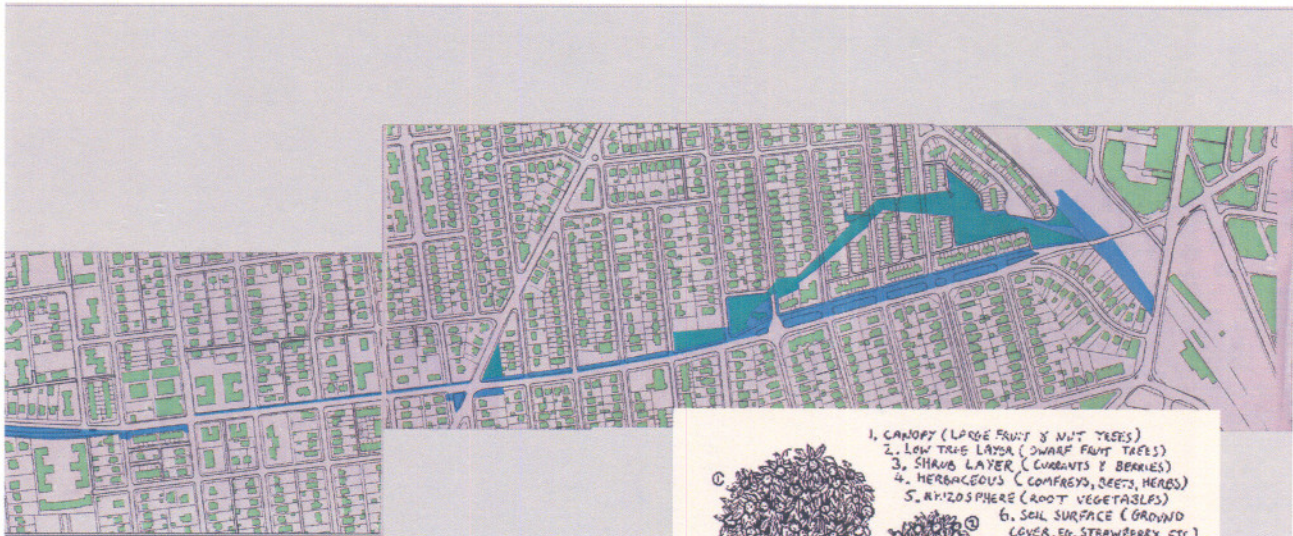
Commonwealth Avenue: Love Me, Love Me Not

Green Spaces

A series of green spaces with articulated planting schemes located along Commonwealth Avenue root the Living Street into place. The design team identified several locations suitable for such interventions as pocket parks, community ornamental gardens, clusters of allotments for gardening, dog parks and street trees, as well as for recreational uses as needed. These locations include:

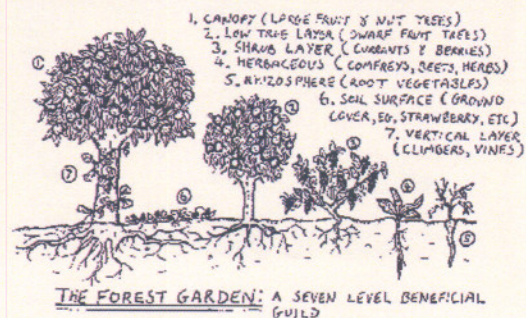
- the dog park and bus stop located east of Commonwealth on Braddock Road
- the open spaces surrounding the intersection of Commonwealth and Glebe Road
- right of way space adjacent to the Mount Vernon Community Center
- right of way space at Cora Kelly School, located just north of Reed Avenue
- along the Four mile Run corridor

The plan also proposes daylighting Hooff's Run and installing interpretive signs that present the historical significance of the trolley line. Plantings, street furniture, signs and street trees define key crossings and intersections along Commonwealth Avenue.



"In an edible forest garden, the tree layer contains fruit and nut trees, the shrub layer soft fruit and nut bushes, and the ground layer perennial vegetables and herbs."

Whitfield, 2002



Urban Forest Gardens

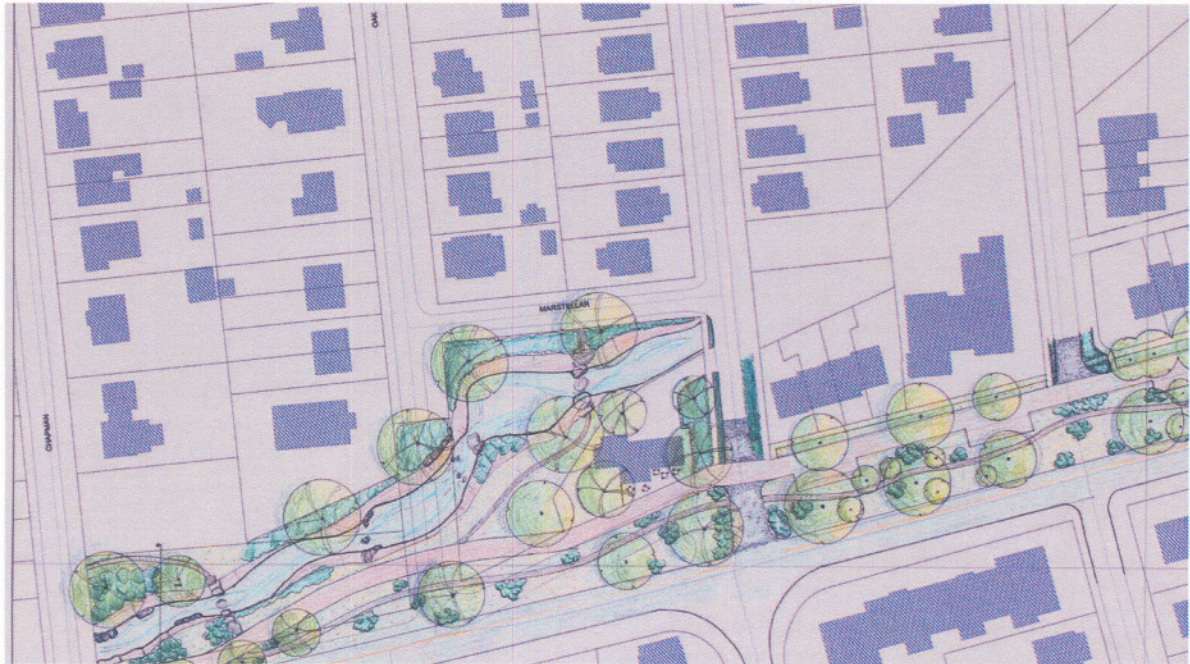
The team proposes an edible forest garden modeled on natural woodlands. Like natural woodlands a forest garden has three layers of vegetation—trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants—as represented in Robert Hart’s drawing above right. “In an edible forest garden, the tree layer contains fruit and nut trees, the shrub layer soft fruit and nut bushes, and the ground layer perennial vegetables and herbs” (Whitfield, 2002). Having a forest garden on Commonwealth Avenue would:

- provide a habitat for birds, small animals, and beneficial insects
- give residents access to fresh fruit, vegetables, and nuts at their door steps
- offer exceptionally beautiful diversity
- reduce the need for maintenance because trees and shrubs mimic a natural, self-regulating system and generally consists of removing produce and pruning back plants
- offer educational opportunities, especially for children.

At the Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, California students “learn how to grow, harvest, and prepare nutritious seasonal produce” (The Edible School Yard). They list “Twenty Good Reasons to Have an Edible School Yard,” including opportunities for community involvement, opportunities to teach life skills, broaden curriculum, trying new things, and best of all, a sense of pride and ownership that discourages vandalism.

Resources for The Living Street and Urban Forest Gardens

- Beatley, Timothy. (2004). *Green Urbanism*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- Hart, Robert. (199-). “Seven Storeys of Abundance; a Visit to Robert Hart’s Forest Garden.” Retrieved March 8, 2007 from <http://www.spiralseed.co.uk/forestgarden/page2.html>.
- Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School. (2006) “The Edible Schoolyard.” <http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/howto.html>.
- Methley Community Action Group. (2002) Retrieved on March 8, 2007 from <http://www.methleys.org.uk/homezones/launch.html>.

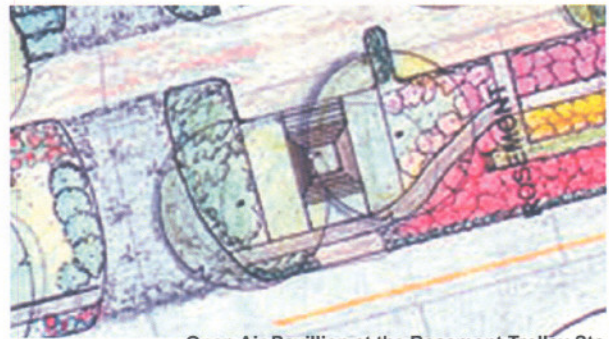
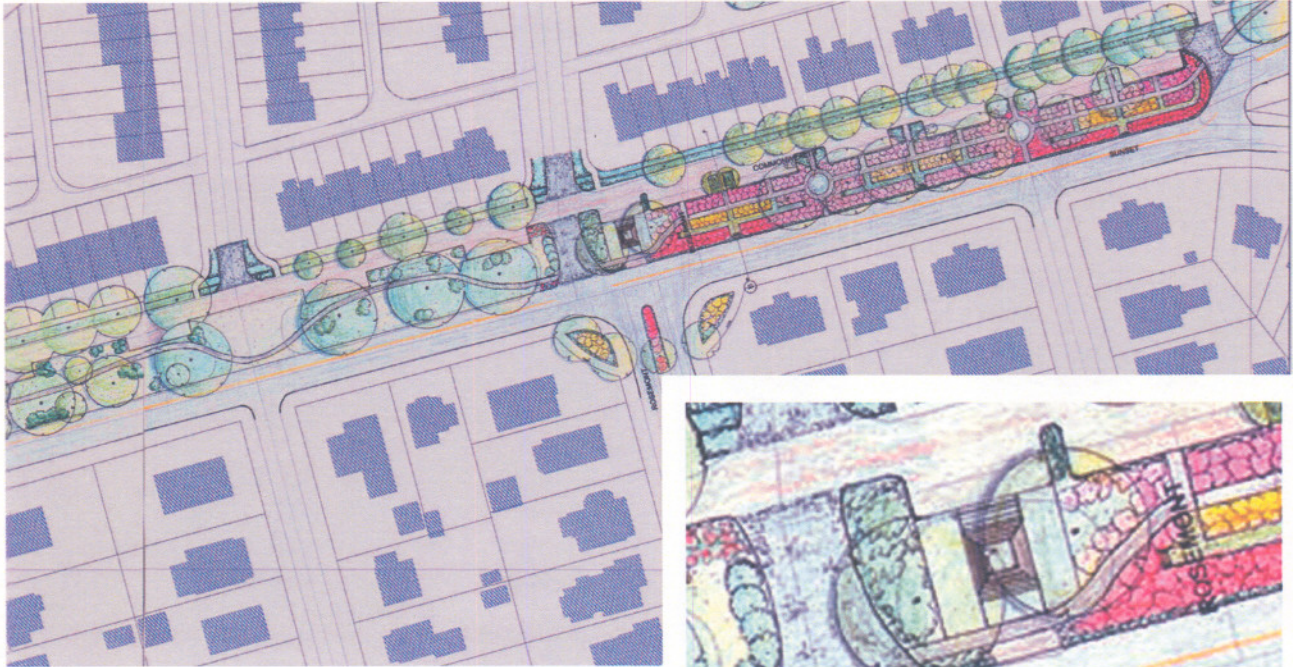


The Rose Garden

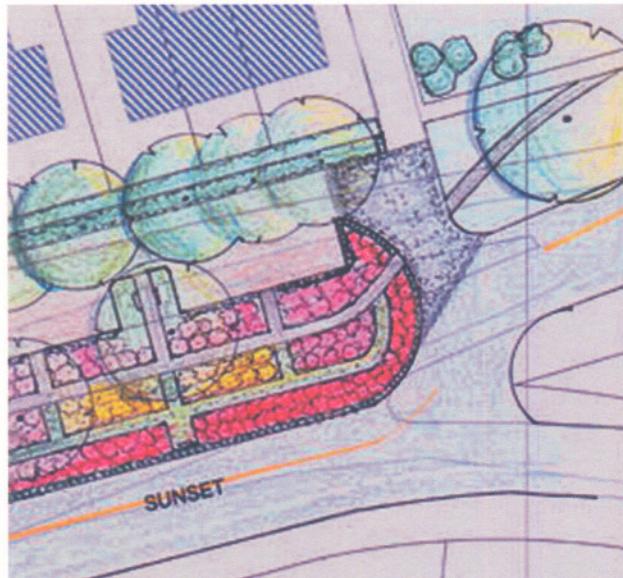
By exploring the Living Street more fully in the assigned Rosemont section, the Rose Garden design demonstrates how local physical and cultural characteristics can be pulled into the design for the entire length of the Avenue. In this section, two of the streets that cross Commonwealth Avenue are closed off, in part to limit access so only residents are more inclined to drive there, and also to maximize the continuous length of open space. The crossing at Oak Street is removed to allow the daylighted stream to flow. Although not rendered in the plan above, the intention is for the daylighted stream to flow as it does in the Team B's Daylighted Hooff's Run. In this design, "daylighting" a stream means bringing the buried or culverted stream into view again. Through the planning process and community involvement meetings, residents can determine to what extent the stream is "restored" or "replicated." Daylighting Hooff's Run through the Rosemont neighborhood reintroduces a buried but significant natural feature to the cultural landscape.

Two streets remain open to cross Commonwealth Avenue, but the crossings are paved in cobblestone to signal a pedestrian environment. The end closest to the King Street Metro, the Living Street is designed as a public Rose Garden. The name Rosemont is not derived from rose gardens, but roses were chosen to play up the name and the established character of the community. There is also a very active garden club here. In the image at right, at the entrance to Commonwealth Avenue, northbound through-traffic curves to the left so only local vehicles may turn off to access the Living Street which runs between the Rose Garden and their homes. In the formal public park visitors can stroll and enjoy the color and fragrance of the roses.

"The Living Street begins to respond to Hooff's Run, becoming more naturalistic in style, and setting a different tone for the rest of the Avenue."



Open Air Pavillion at the Rosemont Trolley Sto



At the site of the old Rosemont trolley stop, all that remains to echo its history is a remnant of the circle and a small garden. At that spot, the team proposes an open air pavillion, enlarged in the inset above. The roofline of the pavillion mimics the shape of the original trolley station and reminds visitors of the origins of the Avenue. Whereas the portion of the Living Street from the Rose Garden to the pavillion has a sense of formality, the tone changes as one passes beyond the pavillion. The Living Street begins to respond to Hooft's Run, becoming more naturalistic in style, and setting a different tone for the rest of the Avenue. This is done by meandering bicycle and pedestrian paths to save the existing trees. The paths are made with permeable paving allowing water to infiltrate into the soil for the sake of the trees and as a better stormwater management practice. Concrete sidewalks near the homes were originally proposed, but the paving material was changed to a fancier material, lessening the "street" feel of the space and further emphasizing the "pedestrian" quality of the Living Street.

The team envisions outdoor seating at places such as the Rosemont Market and in the park. Ironically, the number of parking spaces increased along the Living Street by converting existing parallel parking to pull-in spaces for residents and visitors.

Rosemont

The Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Electric Railway opened in 1892 between Alexandria and Mount Vernon and in 1896 it was extended to Washington across what is now the 14th Street Bridge. The streetcars ran on S. Eads Street in Arlington and Commonwealth Avenue.

Railway stops along Commonwealth Avenue included Rosemont, Braddock, North Braddock, Lloyds, Del Ray, Mount Ida, Saint Asaph, and Saint Elmo.

The streetcar system in Washington, DC never fully integrated into the systems in Maryland or Northern Virginia.



You are here on Commonwealth Avenue



Washington, DC area Streetcar Map

Braddock

In Washington, streetcars turned outlying areas into new neighborhoods. Real estate developers often built streetcar lines to promote new suburban communities. Their success in selling the suburbs to middle-class workers changed neighborhood life and the rhythms of the city.

Trolley lines created the modern suburb and the commuter and enabled people to live farther from their jobs in the commercial center of the city. Other electric rail ran to Bluemont and Leesburg on the Washington and Old Dominion Railway.

The trolley also connected local residents to the Washington's largest public market. There, shoppers could find produce and meat from regional farms, fruits and vegetables from across the country, as well as a few products from overseas.



You are here on Commonwealth Avenue



Center Market at 7th and Pennsylvania in Washington, DC



Passengers boarding a streetcar in the central city

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Wayfinding Through History

While not located immediately adjacent to or along Commonwealth Avenue, nearby historic sites do help bound the Living Street and may be used as part of a way-finding system of interpretive signs. Retelling Commonwealth's past as a street car line through signs at the locations of the old trolley stops helps to connect the street physically in a linear way, and temporally through history.

The team's design for a series of signs is based on a consistent format that makes it easy to visualize how they can be seen on Commonwealth Avenue.

Recognizing the potential for major change along and around Commonwealth Avenue, it is important that the design help visitors to be able to navigate through neighborhoods to their destinations. Consistency in the design of interpretive signs that also blend with the natural surroundings will have a unifying "look and feel" for Commonwealth Avenue which also aids in way-finding. The signs also help bring together the residents of Commonwealth Avenue through a common history. One can imagine a conversation: "I live a short walk from the old St Elmo Trolley Stop. Where do you live?"

Neighborhoods along Commonwealth can also have the same design for a sign, only the names would be different. This will help identify each neighborhood while creating continuity along Commonwealth.

Del Ray



Waiting for streetcars in Washington, DC



You are here on Commonwealth Avenue

Public transit was a battlefield in race relations, especially in southern cities where "Jim Crow" laws restricted African Americans' access to public transportation.

In 1901, Alexandria passed an ordinance requiring streetcars to have separate compartments for white and black passengers. The penalty for a person who refused to occupy the place assigned was a misdemeanor and a fine from \$5 to \$25.

In 1906, the Virginia state legislature passed a statute requiring separate but equal compartments for white and colored passengers. It stated that, "in cold weather they shall reasonably heat the several compartments." Passengers who failed to comply faced misdemeanor charges and fines from \$5 to \$25. Companies that failed to enact law were guilty of a misdemeanor and could be fined between \$50 to \$250 for each offense.

North Braddock



Car #22 used on the Washington, Alexandria & Mt. Vernon Railroad



You are here on Commonwealth Avenue

This site was formerly Potomac, Virginia, an extinct, independent town formerly located in Arlington County. A planned community, its proximity to Washington D.C. by commuter rail made it a popular place for employees of the U.S. government to live. At one time a third of the residents walked to work at the nearby Potomac Yards a major railroad switching facility.

Roughly bounded by Commonwealth Avenue, East Bellefonte Avenue, Route 1, and Ashby Avenue, the area was developed beginning in 1894 as the communities of Del Ray, St. Elmo, Mt. Ida, and Hume, following a grid plan independent of that of Old Town Alexandria. Potomac was incorporated as a town in 1908. In 1928, the town had 2,355 residents. The Town of Potomac was annexed by the independent city of Alexandria in 1930.

As of 2005, the United States Postal Service still recognizes "Potomac, VA" as an acceptable alternate address for ZIP code 22301, although "Alexandria, VA" is preferred.

Lloyds

Streetcars were heavily used, and passengers often found them crowded and uncomfortable. By 1906 the railway had transported 1,743,734 passengers along their route with 92 daily trains.



Actual interior of a streetcar used along Commonwealth Avenue



You are here on Commonwealth Avenue



Artistic rendition from 1912 of interior of streetcar.

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Mount Ida



Buses and streetcars sharing the roads near the Capitol in 1947.



You are here on Commonwealth Avenue

In 1913, the Washington, Alexandria & Mount Vernon Railway merged with the Washington, Arlington & Falls Church Railway to form the Washington-Virginia Railway.

The trolley company went into receivership in 1923 when buses became the dominant form of local public transportation. Many commuters considered buses a modern, comfortable, even luxurious replacement for rickety, uncomfortable trolleys. Buses made business sense for transit companies; they were more flexible and cheaper to run than streetcars.

In 1927, the two railways were separated and sold at auction. The last trolleys of the line ran on January 18, 1932. Later that year the tracks were removed when some of the right-of-way was used for the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

The car became the commuter option of choice for those who could afford it, and more people could do so. In Washington, D.C., the last streetcar ran in 1962.

Saint Elmo



Map of current Washington & Old Dominion Trail.



You are here on Commonwealth Avenue

The St. Elmo station in the Del Ray neighborhood allowed transfers with the Washington and Old Dominion Railway. This railway extended from Alexandria on the Potomac River to Bluemont at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Loudoun County.

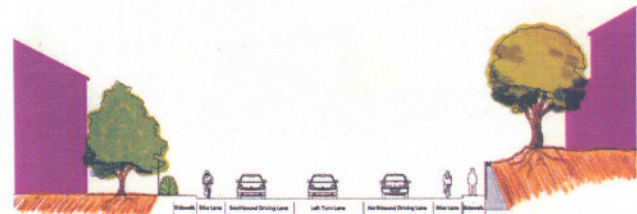
Operations ceased in 1968. Most of the former roadbed is now the Washington & Old Dominion Railway Trail.

One way to view the contributions of the studio is by looking at the common ideas that have been developed, even though the designs are very different. Recurring themes include ideas such as: Connectivity, Ecology, History and Sense of Place. An interesting way to look at the student offerings is by using the project to raise and discuss certain *themes*. The themes become a useful tool for the community as a basis for discussions, instead of getting bogged down into details right away.

In this section, the design elements from student work are referenced as subsets of the larger themes. The designs are discussed in terms of how they are influenced by the existing conditions on or near the avenue. The purpose is not to say, “I like this one better than that one,” but to shed light on the issue the design is trying to address. Many of the themes surface in each design. It would be redundant or exhaustive to articulate them all. One or two designs are used to illustrate each of the themes.



Glendale Avenue Before



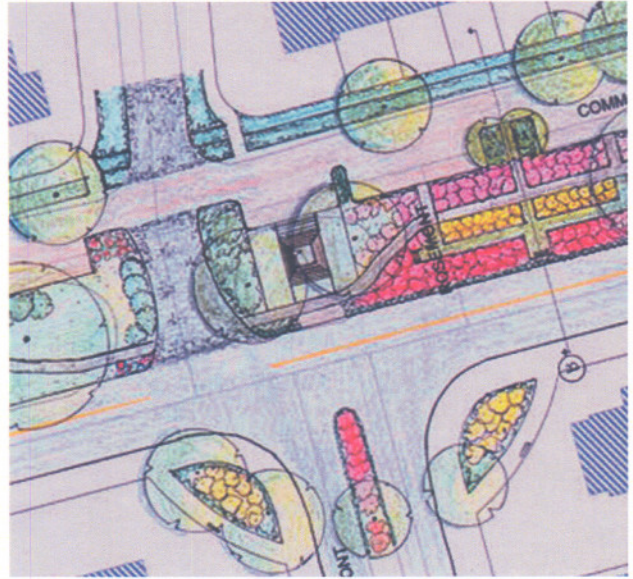
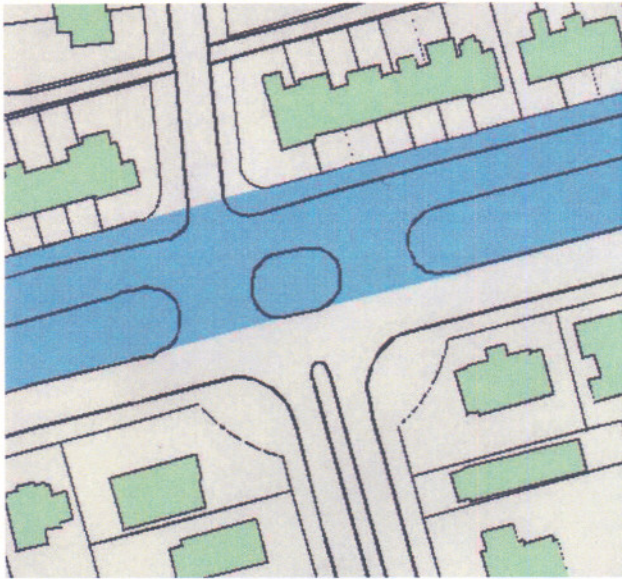
Glendale Avenue After with sidewalk and two bikes lanes.

Themes

One of the most easily identified current “problems” of Commonwealth Avenue is the lack of continuity of the sidewalks and bicycle lanes. Both end abruptly in places and force pedestrians and cyclists to cross the street or ride and walk in the roadway. The issue of connectivity is more than just accommodating consistent flow of pedestrians and bicycles, however. It is also a matter of making a delightful setting so that the act of walking or biking feels like it is special and the equal of the cars. At its broadest level, it is also a matter of making the Avenue seem like an entire linear park, not just a collection of separate communities.

Currently, Commonwealth Avenue is continuous for automobiles only. Both the bicycle lanes and sidewalks disappear and reappear at several locations along the road. Not only is the Avenue continuous for vehicles, but the traffic lanes are generally wide, so that traffic is able to easily travel at greater than the posted 25 miles per hour. This speed of the cars and the discontinuity of the sidewalks and bicycle lanes make it unsafe and uncomfortable for pedestrians and bicyclists, and give a sense that the cars are most important.

The student projects attempt to strike a different balance between the different modes of travel. A primary emphasis of Team A’s Master Plan is to ensure continuous five-foot wide bike lanes and minimum four-foot wide sidewalks along both sides of the street. This is achieved by narrowing driving lanes, offering environmental or open space easements to property owners along the street to create space for sidewalks, and in a few rare instances, eliminating parking. The result is a single unified corridor that serves as the backbone to the Commonwealth community and provides safe, comfortable travel for all of its members.

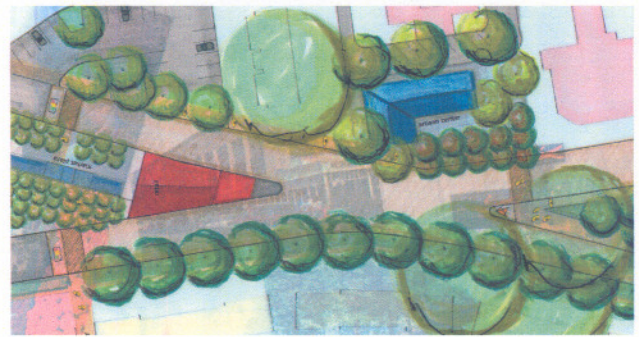
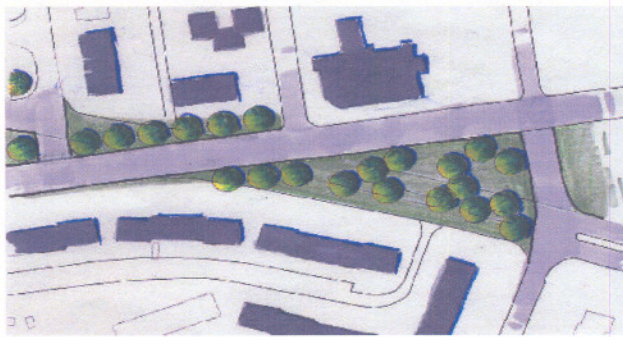


Connectivity 53

A bolder solution is the proposal by Team D for developing a "Living Street" along the entire length of the Avenue. A Living Street allows pedestrians, bicyclists and very slowly moving cars to share the same paved surface. It is best thought of as a broad sidewalk, on which people walk or ride bikes, but that can also move slowly to access residences. To be successful drivers must feel that they are driving on a sidewalk (and therefore drive at very slow speeds), rather than for pedestrians to feel that they are walking in the street. In each of these two proposals, the balance is shifted between cars, pedestrians and bicycles. In the first case, the shift is subtle; in the second it is dramatic.



Themes



54 Connectivity

Intersection of Commonwealth and Mt. Vernon Avenues

Perhaps the single greatest obstacle to a sense of connectivity is the intersection of Mount Vernon Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue. Three proposals offer ways of redesigning the intersection so that both sides of Commonwealth Avenue feel connected to one another. These three schemes differ in the magnitude of change they propose and because the implementation of one scheme precludes implementing the others. They illustrate the need for community discussion of these issues. Team C's plan above proposes the least change: the two halves of Commonwealth Avenue each turn to intersect Mount Vernon Avenue at a right angle. This clarifies traffic flow making it easier for pedestrians to cross the street. Mount Vernon Avenue, which carries more traffic load, becomes the primary through way.

Team B's plan above keeps the flow of traffic in its current configuration but proposes narrowing and rerouting turning lanes, so that the actual crossings are narrower and easier to negotiate. The plan develops each of the corners as a special place, so they act as a series of stepping stones leading pedestrians through the intersection. One of these stepping stones is developed as a Market Plaza bringing people together through a shared shopping experience.

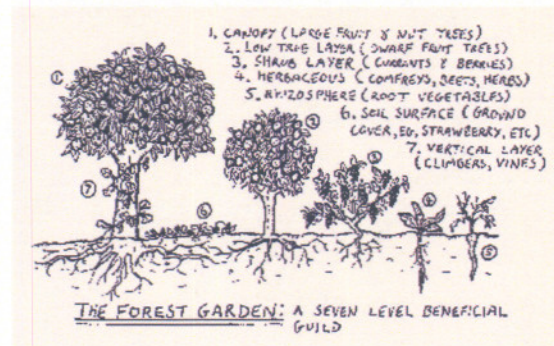


"Perhaps the single greatest obstacle to a sense of connectivity is the intersection of Mount Vernon Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue."

More boldly, Team A proposes making a semi-circular Town Green as a symbolic center for the communities and a focus for special outdoor events. The scheme above would involve acquiring some adjacent properties and re-routing traffic to make a safer intersection as well as a place for gathering. By making the Town Green, it draws people from the two halves of Commonwealth Avenue together so the intersection is a destination in itself, and not just an obstacle to cross. As with Team C's proposal, the Town Green clarifies the flow of traffic, making it safer for pedestrians to negotiate the crossing. In addition, by making a place that is also a destination it has the potential to bring the two halves of the Avenue together socially for community wide events.

Beyond merely accommodating continuous movement, walking along the Avenue should be an enjoyable experience. Various schemes propose a common palette of materials, lighting, plantings, and places to sit, play, garden and walk dogs, so that the landscape feels more park-like rather than just walking along the street. Where there is available land, small neighborhood parks, playgrounds, gardens, and dog-parks can provide a variety of reasons to walk and to stop and use the landscape.

The overarching goal of connectivity is to make the Avenue feel like a continuous landscape. However, it is important to note that the different communities along Commonwealth Avenue have distinct identities. These are not mutually exclusive goals, but the actual balance between connectivity and community identity needs to be discussed as part of an ongoing process of transforming the Avenue into a linear park.

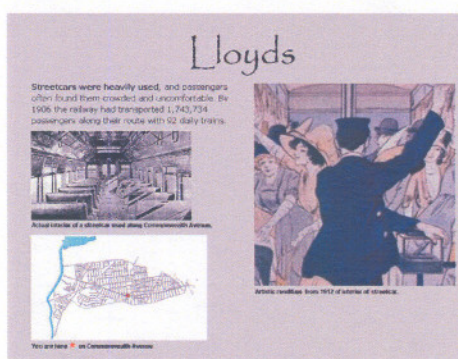
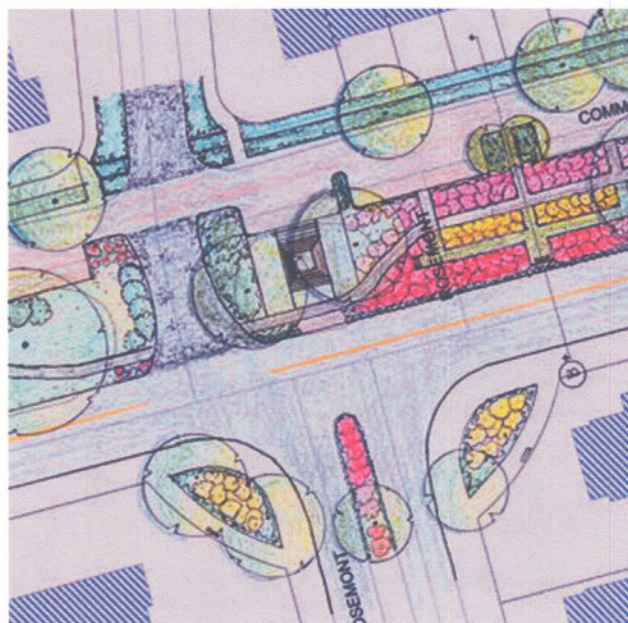


In Del Ray, Team C proposed opening up the upper reaches of Hooff's Run as it flows down from Russell Road and behind the commercial complex at Monroe Avenue. Small grassy swales along the streets would be attractive additions along the streets. The segments of pipes that currently carry the stream underground would be recycled as planters in the swales to make beautiful aquatic gardens and to slow the water down, so that it reduces risk of downstream flooding. In all of these cases, it is important that the streams and stormwater channels be designed so that they are safe for children to play along and so that they do not create standing water that would breed mosquitoes.

Adding vegetation along the length of the Avenue can improve its ecology in many ways. Perhaps the most encompassing way is that more trees will help reduce the build up of excess carbon dioxide that apparently is causing global warming. Growing more trees is one painless way of combating the problem. The kinds of trees and shrubs to plant influence the ecology of the street. Team A proposes planting only native plants as an arboretum along the length of the Avenue. Perhaps more important than the geographic origins of the plants is that they be adequately adapted to the local conditions of the Avenue, so that they do not need irrigation once established, that they provide good wildlife habitat, and that they convey a sense of the broader region.

Team D proposes a different strategy. Their Urban Forest Gardens include an emphasis on plants that provide food: fruit trees and berry bushes, for example, so that the landscape is producing food and is not 'merely' ornamental.

Team B places much emphasis on educational components, creating 'nature spots' at significant points along the Avenue, such as the watershed divide at Custis Avenue where water flows in one direction to Hooff's Run and the other direction to Four Mile Run. At Four Mile Run itself, they propose an Urban Ecology learning center tied to Cora Kelly School and the planned restoration of the Run.



One of the most challenging things to incorporate into any plan is reference to the history of a community—without it being a Disney-like veneer. Part of this decision is a matter of trying to give meaningful form to historical information, and part of the challenge is deciding which stories to tell and how to tell them. There are many examples of controversies over historical interpretation and the specific stories that historical exhibits tell. Community input would be important in deciding which stories to tell and how to present them.

One obvious story of Commonwealth Avenue is the original trolley line that led to the development of the area. Two proposals by Team D illustrate the kinds of interpretation that are possible. One proposal is for a pavilion at the location of the Rosemont trolley stop. Like most of the communities along the trolley, Rosemont developed when the trolley was constructed, and the intersection of two boulevards, Rosemont Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue, marks the location of the former station. Currently there is an oblong traffic circle at this location with a small garden cared for by the Rosemont Garden Club. As part of its Living Street proposal, Team D calls for an open-air pavilion at this location that mimics the roofline and shape of the original station (above). It would serve as a picnic shelter and a place to host special events as well as being a reminder of the origins of the Avenue.

All along the Avenue, their proposal includes interpretive panels that mark the locations of all the former stations and collectively tell a story of the trolley line. These panels would each tell a distinct portion of the history, and if someone were to walk or ride to each of them, they would collectively tell a larger history. The proposed topics include:

- the streetcar's impact on suburban development
- daily commuting to the workplace
- the streetcar's impact on market economies
- the history of Jim Crow and the streetcar
- the downfall of the streetcar due to the automobile
- the historic town of Potomac, Virginia
- connections to other railway lines in the area

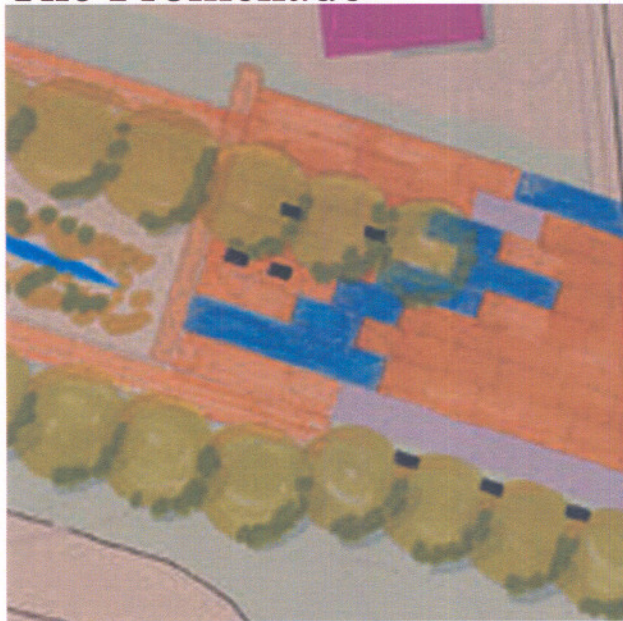


Other histories of the Avenue are still viable in the present—or could be. Hooft's Run was once a visible stream in the communities of Del Ray and Rosemont. Today it is buried in culverts except for one small stretch between Maple and Linden Streets in Rosemont. While the exact location and configuration of the stream can not be recreated because of the streets and homes that lie adjacent to it, restoring it to a more natural form where possible, as Teams B and C propose at right, is a reminder of the area's natural history, too.

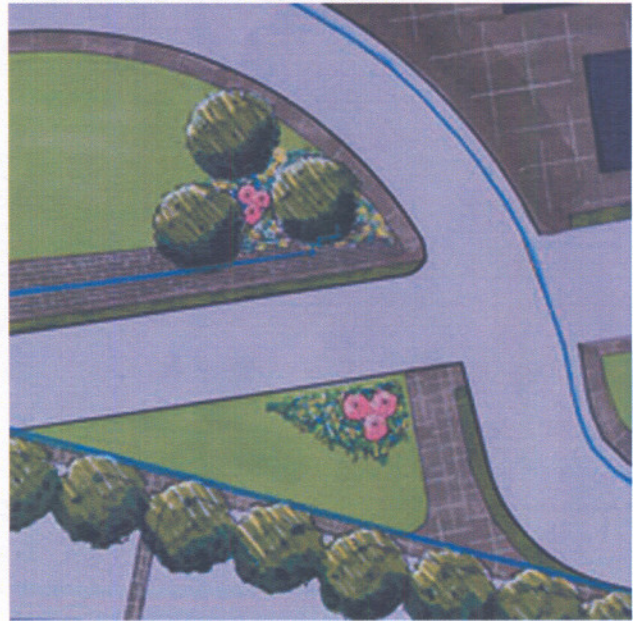
The same is true with Four Mile Run above. At one time, the land that is now the ball fields adjacent to Cora Kelly School, was water—part of Four Mile Run. This is why they flood so often. Although Team A did not call for returning them to a watery condition, it is possible to widen the stream there, creating a broader floodplain as both a means of reducing flooding and creating another reminder of the area's natural history.



The Promenade



The Town Green



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Sense of Place

The previous issues about Connectivity, Ecology and History all have the potential to contribute to the *Sense of Place* of Commonwealth Avenue—the feeling that the Avenue has a distinct identity and that people would like to be there. Although the Avenue already has many positive characteristics, the various plans presented here, propose changes that would create a stronger identity for the Avenue. They illustrate the range of ways that the Avenue can become more special.

For lack of a better term, the charge to the students was to make the Avenue a ‘linear park’. The term “park” evokes certain expectations of what it should look like (and expectations of city management). However the problem is really more complex and more interesting than making a conventional park, and the ideas raised in the proposal draw upon various types of landscapes in their attempts to make Commonwealth Avenue a more special place—or a series of special places. By using different types of landscapes, rather than just making a conventional park, these projects illustrate a range of possibilities. All of these proposals illustrate the potential for creating distinct places along the Avenue: a Promenade, the Market Square, the Town Green, Daylighting Hooff’s Run, the Living Street, a Rose Garden, gateways and many others at a smaller scale.

The Promenade from Reed Avenue to Four Mile Run becomes as special as the “avenue of the giants” (the line of large oak trees in Del Ray), and as a Promenade it would be restricted to pedestrians and cyclists. The intersection with Mount Vernon Avenue is

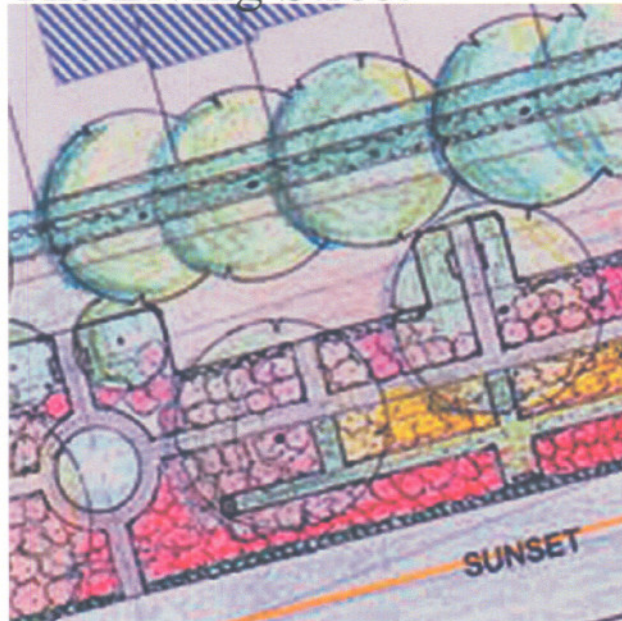
imagined in the proposals as a semi-circular Town Green or a Market Plaza. Both address the difficulty of crossing the busy intersection. But in doing so, they become quite different places for gathering with other people, each creating a stronger identity for this important intersection along both streets.

At the other end of Commonwealth, in Rosemont, the Living Street is developed at the entrance as a grand Public Rose Garden, which would attract strollers to see the roses when they are in bloom. The roses create a special identity for this end of the Avenue. Roses give way to a less formal landscape as the Living Street meanders past the picnic pavilion. Parallel to this same stretch, opening up Hooff’s Run and restoring it to a more natural condition creates the most park-like environment with its naturalistic scenery, and opportunities for picnicking and recreation. The Daylighted Hooff’s Run then becomes the landscape for a series of special places as it transforms from one stream segment in the series of vignettes for that plan. The series of ecological places—from Urban Ecology Center to smaller nature spots—are special because people can learn about and experience the wide variety of “nature”—from urban to wetland—in their local environment. In the middle of the Avenue, near the commercial center at Monroe Avenue, an inventive series of small channels from the upper reaches of Hooff’s Run make for special sidewalks along the side streets and places, and are ripe places for local gardeners. At Mason Avenue Mini Park, they become a special place for families, where children can play and—with their parents—look for frogs, or splash in the shallow water.

The Market Square



The Living Street



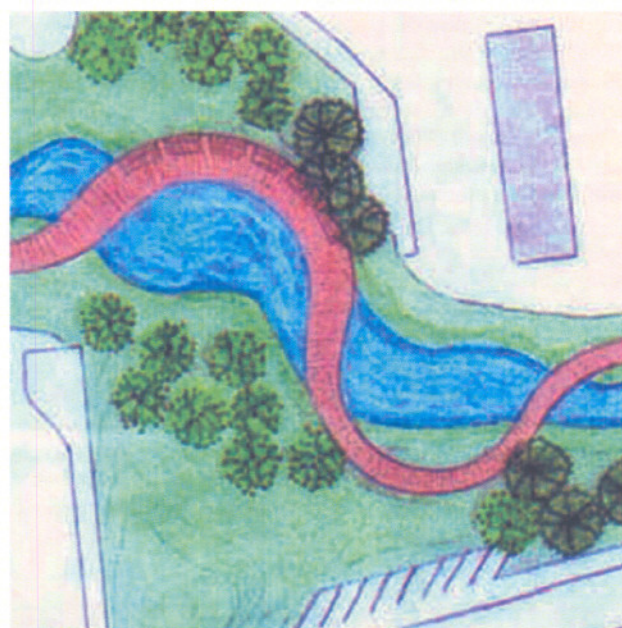
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In addition to ecological spots, Gateways create a series of special places while marking progression along the Avenue. Each gateway has its own identity and unique character, and can also be a gathering place. Collectively, gateways connect a series of places on the Avenue.

Each team also proposes small places along the Avenue wherever there is available land. There are opportunities for pocket parks, playgrounds, community gardens, dog parks, etc. These in and of themselves will not likely create a strong identity for the Avenue, but they are important to give people places to gather, interact with each other, and simply get out and enjoy the landscape. The people who enliven the designed spaces make them special. Care was taken to listen to and imagine what residents may enjoy in the context of their neighborhoods and as part of the larger landscape, not just the streams, but as part of the larger bike trail system and transportation networks, and nearby commercial districts.

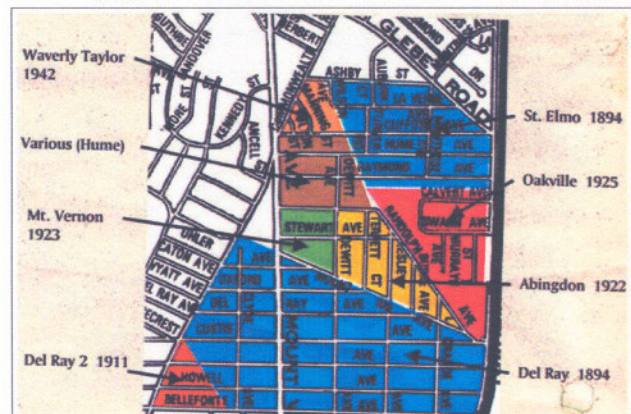
The various plans also raise the issue of establishing or reinforcing the character of the Avenue as a whole. The Living Street proposal to close half the Avenue to through traffic (and putting two-way traffic on the other half) so that it can become a wider, more usable public space is the boldest strategy for the Avenue. But each team proposes changes that would create a common identity along the entire Avenue. Team A's stormwater channels would create small **watery runnels** after storms all along Avenue beside continuous sidewalks and bike paths, so that pedestrians and bicyclists could enjoy the aftermath of a storm as they proceed along the street.

The decision to have continuous pedestrian or bicycle routes, while important for establishing connectivity, also helps foster a sense of place and community along Commonwealth Avenue by promoting social interaction and engagement with others.



Daylighted Hooff's Run

Themes



Conclusions and Next Steps

We have now seen a variety of student designs and master plans based on the conditions of Commonwealth Avenue in the spring of 2006. These are visions of what could be. These design offerings are influenced by the students' interests and their observations of physical conditions that fragment the Avenue. More important are the recurring *Themes* in the proposals—Connectivity, Ecology, History, and Sense of Place—that can serve as a framework to guide future community conversations. Residents need not choose one design over another, but use the four Themes and the student ideas to articulate and develop their own vision for the Avenue.

The city and the residents must now fully engage in a robust and meaningful planning process. The Commonwealth studio provides city officials, staff, civic leaders, and residents with a slate of creative ideas for greening the Avenue and enhancing the livability of the diverse neighborhoods that surround Commonwealth. Based on the inventory of existing conditions, we offer a few suggestions on how city and community leaders may proceed from here. As the community and city sort through these next steps, the faculty and students from Virginia Tech's Alexandria Center remain deeply interested in lending a hand with the next phase of this exciting journey.

Create Collaborative Community Activities for Improving the Avenue

Citizen and civic associations, with guidance from city staff, could pursue a few short term actions to sustain the momentum for improving Commonwealth Avenue. First and foremost the Del Ray Citizens Association should widely share this report with city officials, the relevant open space and parks committees, developers/property owners, and the neighborhood associations that comprise Arlandria and Rosemont. Second, these different neighborhood associations could coordinate a summer 2007 walking assessment and survey of existing conditions along Commonwealth. By walking the Avenue with a uniform list of items and topics, the residents, like the studio students, will uncover the Avenue's assets and liabilities. In addition to safety considerations, these citizen groups could identify overall priorities for the Avenue that would help in future planning. At the physical street level, these associations could work on critical gaps in the sidewalk and bike path systems, identify opportunities for pocket parks, and improve the crossing at the Mount Vernon intersection. Perhaps representatives from each neighborhood association could form a joint Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Committee to encourage collaboration among their respective organizations and provide cohesive community support for a more formal open space/green corridor plan for the Avenue.



Launch Demonstration Pilot Projects

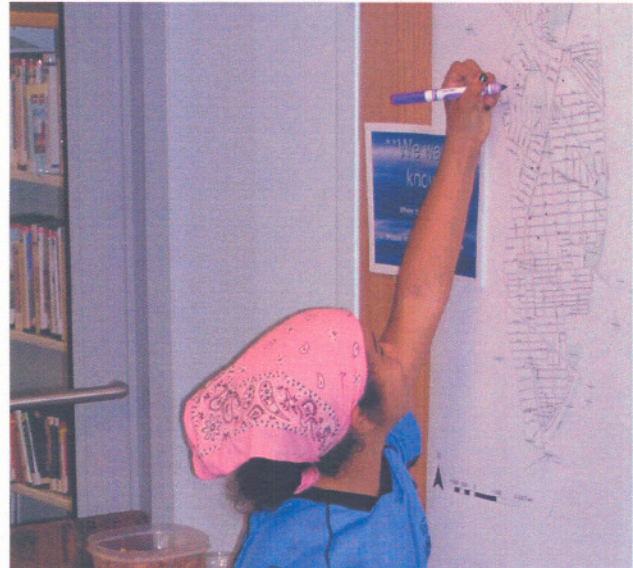
No doubt civic and city officials are already entertaining existing development proposals along Commonwealth Avenue. These projects should be reviewed in light of the studio designs and plans. For example, at the May 2006 Open House a consultant mentioned a proposed commercial/residential development near the intersection of Commonwealth and Mount Vernon that could benefit from the student designs. We understand the City Council approved this project in early 2007 and it will include developer-financed improvements around the site's perimeter. Now seems like a good time to explore appropriate designs for the area north to Reed Avenue in conjunction with the surrounding neighborhoods of Lynnhaven, Auburn Village and Arlandria.

Perhaps the city, working closely with the neighborhood associations, could coordinate a series of demonstration pilot projects that might test a few of the studio designs in certain targeted areas along the Avenue. It seems there are several immediate opportunities to consider:

- Expand the Arlington County/City of Alexandria joint Four Mile Run Master Plan and Bridge Project to include the design and development of a green promenade from Reed Avenue to the water (see Studio Team A's promenade design). Federal and state funds have already been designated for stream restoration, infrastructure (the bridge) and other improvements. Federal and

city officials should consider extending these enhancements to Reed Avenue. Such a gesture would also engage the residents of Arlandria to equally participate and gain the immediate benefits from such green infrastructure along Commonwealth Avenue.

- Create more detailed designs and master plans for the Commonwealth Avenue blocks between Monroe Avenue and Mount Vernon Avenue (Del Ray) with a particular focus on tree inventories, new and replacement tree plantings, new landscapes, possible pocket park designs, coordinated pedestrian scale street furniture, and traffic calming/pedestrian safety strategies.
- Experiment with the concept of the living street, perhaps through a series of design charrettes in Rosemont and Del Ray, as the wide, tree-lined medians present the ideal environment to test the design ideas of Studio Team D.
- Incorporate some of the student ideas relative to Way Finding through History (Studio Team D) as part of the Del Ray Citizens Association's celebration of the centennial of the Town of Potomac (1908 -2008).
- Improve pedestrian sidewalks and bicycle access between Monroe Avenue and Braddock Road – this area is heavily used by pedestrians but has no sidewalks in several locations. Several of the wide travel lanes could be redesigned to create safer areas for pedestrians and cyclists.

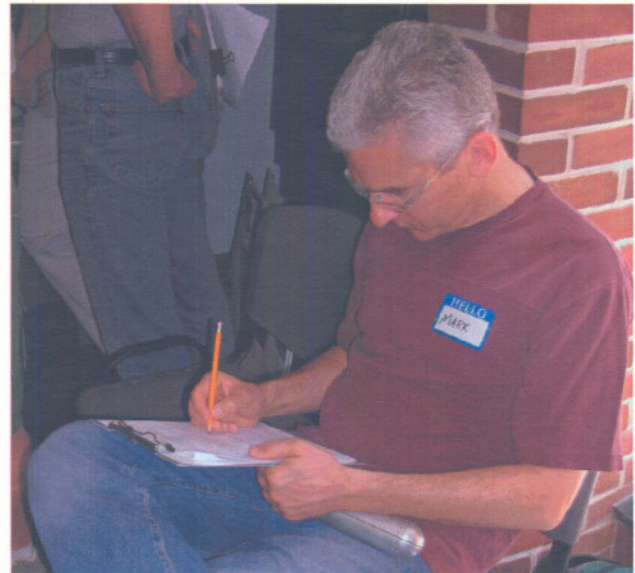


Commonwealth Corridor Open Space and Neighborhood Transportation Plan

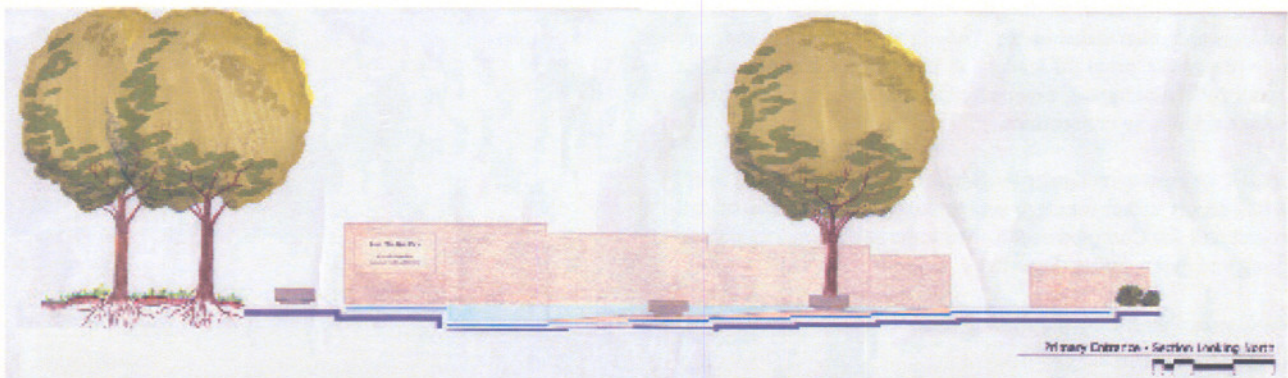
Eventually the city should formally adopt a special open space and transportation plan for the Commonwealth Corridor. The Potomac West planning area contains several planning initiatives, but no special plan or zone protects or enhances the livability of Commonwealth Avenue. A formal plan is necessary to ensure a cohesive vision for the Commonwealth corridor. City officials and residents would then have the opportunity to translate these demonstration projects and community activities into a cohesive open space/transportation plan that links the entire Avenue while respecting the community identities and the desires of Rosemont, Del Ray, Arlandria and its diverse neighborhoods. Within the next year city officials should officially designate the appropriate department to oversee the design and implementation of a Commonwealth Corridor Plan. Perhaps the plan might find a good home within the city's open space master plan and transportation planning programs. The City is working right now to adopt several important Master Plans including an Urban Forestry Plan, a Transportation Plan including Pedestrian and Bicycle elements. Commonwealth Avenue would be an excellent place to demonstrate how these elements can be integrated into a unique pedestrian friendly environment.

Commonwealth Green Visioning Process

As part of the Commonwealth Corridor planning process, city officials should engage the residents in forging a green vision for Commonwealth Avenue. While the studio held focus groups, convened an open house, and conducted a resident survey, more extensive civic engagement is necessary. The city should convene neighborhood workshops or charrettes that identify physical features and opportunities to leverage Commonwealth's green assets. Perhaps the city could form a special corridor planning advisory group with representation from Del Ray, Rosemont and the many communities of Arlandria.



The faculty and students from Virginia Tech's Alexandria Center would be very interested in working with the neighborhood associations and the city on these ideas and other demonstration pilot projects.





Acknowledgements

The success of the Commonwealth Studio rests with the commitment and collective energy of a handful of students, faculty, and neighborhood residents. We thank Jim Snyder who served as the catalyst for the project and the members of the Del Ray Citizens Association for their financial sponsorship and participation. Landscape Architecture Graduate Assistant Irene Mills did the lion's share of the work on this report and served as the defacto project manager with assistance from students Sam Bennett and Josh Owens. All of the graduate students from Landscape Architecture, Planning, and Community Involvement spent countless hours, well beyond the requirements of their course work, dedicated to doing good work for Commonwealth and its residents.

We also doff our hats to Professors Kelsch, Schilling, and McCarty for their stewardship in guiding the students and working with the residents and other stakeholders. They in turn would like to thank their respective program leaders at Virginia Tech's Alexandria Center for their support, especially Dr. Chris Nelson for making the initial Del Ray connections.

Finally, we want to recognize the flower child that adorns the cover of this report as her message sets the tone for the future of this project and for Commonwealth. We hope she returns again this spring and every spring thereafter.

The Commonwealth Studio Project Team

Commonwealth Avenue: Love Me, Love Me Not

Community:

Jim Snyder
Resident and Representative, Del Ray Citizens Association
Adjunct Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning, Virginia Tech

University:

Paul Kelsch, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture, Virginia Tech

Kathryn S. McCarty
Adjunct Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning, Virginia Tech

Joe Schilling
Associate Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning, Virginia Tech

Students:

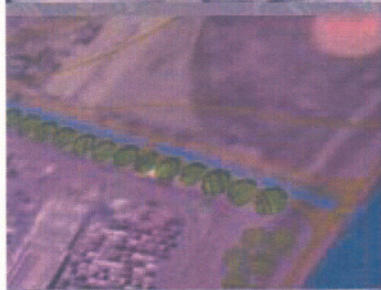
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Keli Garman
Kristen Gedeon
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Bridget Stesney
Ben Wiles

Course Participants:

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Urban Planning
Landscape Architecture
Landscape Architecture
Urban Planning
Landscape Architecture
Urban Planning
Community Involvement
Community Involvement
Community Involvement
Community Involvement
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Landscape Architecture
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Urban Planning
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Appendix A: Community Involvement

A NEW VISION FOR



COMMONWEALTH AVENUE

Virginia Tech graduate students in Planning and Landscape Architecture have dedicated a studio to creating a vision for transforming Commonwealth Avenue into a pedestrian oriented boulevard park. Join students for an open house Saturday May 6th to provide your input on their designs. Feedback will be used to compile a final written report that will help to guide future development of Commonwealth Avenue.

DATE:
SATURDAY MAY 6

TIME:
OPEN HOUSE 10 AM to 2 PM

LOCATION:
JAMES M. DUNCAN LIBRARY
2501 COMMONWEALTH AVE.



A1: Del Ray Meeting

Commonwealth Avenue Visioning Session
March 1, 2006
7-9pm, Mount Vernon Recreation Center

Facilitation Team Goals and Game Plan

- Group Introductions/Icebreaker- Ask people to share their favorite story related to Commonwealth Ave, or their favorite way to use Commonwealth Avenue
- Start with big picture. Use popcorn technique to get people to brainstorm big picture ideas for the park.
Emphasize that we want them to be as imaginative as possible, temporarily ignore cost and other limitations, etc. Ask people to spend a few minutes and write down three ideas for how they would like to transform the space. Go around and have each person to answer in turn.
- Create a list of Pros and Cons of Commonwealth Avenue as it exists today
- Create a list of Pros and Cons of developing Commonwealth Avenue as a linear park

AGENDA

COMMONWEALTH AVE VISIONING SESSION MARCH 1, 2006

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 20 minutes | Overview of the Project
Meeting Purpose, Framework, Desired Outcomes, Format & Follow-Up |
| 60 minutes | Commonwealth Visioning Session |
| 10 minutes | Summary/Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How the information will be used by students• Opportunities for further comment• Question and Answer Session |

Notes by Betsy Rose—14 Del Ray Community Members in attendance

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1st Brainstorming Exercise: Visions for Commonwealth Avenue

- Sidewalk access
 - Both sides of street
 - No telephone poles/safety concerns
- Median Park areas
 - Gather/rest
- Brick sidewalks
- Signage/Direction to points of interest
 - List both walking time and distance
- Water fountains/features
- Increase size of green space
 - Lengthen medians
 - Reduce width of streets
- Alignment of cross streets
- Shade canopy
 - Absorb heat
 - Greenery
- Shortening cross walks
- Winding/meandering street
 - Slow traffic
- Theme park
- Gathering space for community
- Democratic use of space between modes of transportation
 - Bikes/cars/pedestrians
 - Integrate park with
 - Gracious experience
- Variation in light/dark & sun/shade

- Shared space
- Blending of uses:
 - House/sidewalk/auto/median
- Close for special events
- Zone as park land so there are no political signs
- Illustrate history
- Linear park
- High quality pedestrian experience
- Consistent lighting
- Wider sidewalks
- High quality material
- Reveal history
- Interpretive photographs
- Have an experience
- Connect to civic spaces and other parks
- Attract people from outside the community
- Plaza at intersection of Mt. Vernon & Commonwealth
- Art show
- Sites for public art installations
- Low maintenance
 - No English gardens = high maintenance
 - Make colorful
 - Self-contained ecosystem
 - "Plant it and let it go"
- Grand Boulevard
 - Mix of hard and soft-scaping
 - "Sense of Paris Street"
 - "This is the place to be"
- Better accommodations for cyclists
- Low maintenance
 - Drought resistant plants
 - Xeroscaping
- No buses or trucks
 - No room to accommodate bus stops
- Bike accommodations
 - Bike lanes from beginning to end
- Regulate/restrict locations of political signs
 - Do not look like a junkyard
- Color/Texture
 - Use of 4 season plants
 - Use of different materials to distinguish uses (bike lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.)
- Tree canopy
 - Higher on building side of street
 - Like Elm trees used to be
 - "Park-like" atmosphere
- Concern about safety of children playing in median
- Natural Features
 - i.e. rocks to sit on
- Exercise stations along the way
- Incremental changes rather than transformational
- Shared space that is pedestrian-oriented and cars are permitted
- Change mind set from automobile to walk-ability from city council down (buy-in)
- Art
 - Artists can display work
 - Rotating Exhibits
 - Open air studio space
- Year-round plantings
- "Art-on-the-road" festival (chalk art contest)
- Use disease resistant Elms
 - PR Value

- Markers at the beginning and end of the street
 - “Gateways”
 - Define the space
- Better connections to surrounding neighborhoods
- Lighting on/under King Street Bridge
 - Wall murals on sides of bridge
- Pedestrian/bike bridge to connect to 4 Mile Run
- Special nodes – emphasize to alert automobiles to slow down
 - Public places
 - Intersections
- Reinforce Connections through design with visual elements
- Medians:
 - Use different colored pavers/materials to signal changes and stand out
- Elevated Intersections
- Sidewalks:
 - Accommodate kids learning to ride bikes
- Xeroscaping
- How is storm water being dealt with?
- Can it be treated on site?
- Succession of Trees
 - Long term plan
- Maintenance
 - Split between departments, possibly get community involved
 - Need to have a shared vision between departments
- Poor street lighting now
- Increase quality and effort (of elements used and maintenance/upkeep)
- Green Boulevard version of King Street
- Lighting
- Identify gateways
- Common vocabulary amount plant material, hard-scaping, lighting, etc. along entire length of street; but signal changes from one neighborhood to the next to draw out uniqueness of each place.
- Bio retention area/Rain gardens
 - Possible federal funds/grants for environmental improvements?
- “Trolley Line Greenway”

2nd Brainstorming Exercise: Pros & Cons of Existing Conditions

□ Pros:

- Shading
 - Mature trees
- Wide median space near Maple & Linden
- Garden club maintains gardens in Rosemont area
- Little grade change—the Long view
- Bike lanes make travel easier (comparatively, better than most streets)
- Fort Williams Parkway

□ Cons:

- Curbing is falling apart
 - Lack of maintenance
 - Poor appearance
- Parking on the street
 - Car doors hitting bicyclists
- Sidewalks too narrow/poor condition
 - No sidewalks at Braddock & Commonwealth
- Insufficient lighting
- Median gets no respect because it is disconnected
- Some trees unhealthy (not enough space for roots/compacted/etc)
- Sight lines are poor

3rd Brainstorming Exercise: Pros & Cons of Implementing Changes

- ❖ Pros:
 - People coming to visit
 - More pedestrian-oriented
 - Improved environmental treatment
 - Storm water management
 - Connection to 4 Mile Run
 - Increase usage by pedestrians
 - More walking
 - Low cost way to get a large area designated as an open space
 - Unites all these communities
 - Good stewards of area
 - Residential improvement area
 - Increased community involvement
 - Compliment to business corridor on Mount Vernon
 - "Backyard" Corridor on Commonwealth
- ❖ Cons:
 - Where do people park who come to visit from outside the neighborhood?
 - Pressure to become a thruway & handle more cars
 - The attraction of homeless people
 - The attraction of rats
 - Increased safety concerns

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4th Brainstorming Exercise: What defines each community?

Rosemont:

Victorian Houses
Old Train Station – "The Stop"
Elms

Del Ray:

Arts & Crafts Houses
Oaks

Arlandria: ???

General note: the old train stops gave character to all of the neighborhoods.



A2: Hume Springs Meeting

VISIONING PROJECT FOR COMMONWEALTH AVENUE

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT CLASS
HUME SPRINGS CIVIC ASSOCIATION MEETING MINUTES**

SARAH HAMBERG

MARCH 21, 2006 7:00 PM

PARTICIPANTS:

Ben Wiles

Jonathan Logan

Recorder: Sara Hamberg

President of Club: Charles Balog

11 Club Members

MEETING OBJECTIVES: Meet with Hume Springs Civic Association to:

1. Give background information on the Visioning Project for Commonwealth Avenue;
2. Extend the invitation for their participation in the public processes scheduled for April 5th and May 6th (location to be decided), organized by the facilitation team to get feedback on design ideas;
3. Distribute and collect surveys concerning the project.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM DISCUSSION

Hume Springs' residents seem to be more concerned about **crime, safety, and cleanliness** than with purely aesthetical improvements to their neighborhood. Basis for this conclusion stems from discussion during the meeting, not from feedback we gathered directly.

Examples include concern about:

- Broken wooden slats on fences;
- Disorderly groups congregating in the streets/loitering;
- Drug dealing;
- Double-parking;
- Trash/trash can theft;
- Proliferation of pawn shops and fast check-cashing companies.

Other relevant information includes:

- The desire for better-looking sidewalks, not brick, was mentioned (though members did point out that Alexandria's capital improvements are on hold, which I have not verified);
- Need for improvement of public services, expected as a result of the recent increase in property tax;
- Belief that Del Ray and other high-income areas receive more benefits from the city and have more of a say about where funding goes;
 - It was pointed out that the Hume Springs portion of the Open Space Plan improvements is one of the last phases planned by the City.
- Hume Springs Civic Association web site: <http://humesprings.org/>

Important Dates:

Arlandria Sector Plan meeting: TONIGHT (Wednesday, March 22, 2006): This meeting has not been confirmed, but presumably it is being held by the city.

April 10th: City Council candidates will be hosted by the Del Ray Civic Association to answer pre-arranged questions.

Other

civic leagues have been invited to attend.



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APPENDIX: OUTLINE OF MEETING PRESENTATION

Introduction (Ben)

- Team Members
- Classes Involved
 - LA's
 - Planners
 - Community Involvement

Project Background

- City Open Space Plan Priority Project
 - Maximizing open space connections throughout the City through pedestrian- friendly streets, trails and enhanced streetscape corridors.
 - Placing a high priority on protecting and enhancing the City's stream valleys and other natural resource areas. This includes the creation of "less engineered" stream banks and using parks as buffers along river and stream banks to the greatest extent possible.
- Del Ray Approached VT
- Faculty advised to include all the neighborhoods
- Students from the classes working on a preliminary plan for enhancing Commonwealth.
 - Two advantages –
 - This approach allows for flexibility in addressing different needs of the Commonwealth neighborhoods
 - Student work does not cost \$\$
 - The role of the community involvement class is to actively engage the community for their input and be an intermediary between the studios and the community.

What's been done so far (Ben)

- Studio students gathered background information
 - existing infrastructure
 - history
 - demographics
- Del Ray Community meeting
 - Gather local input and knowledge that only residents can provide

Next steps (Jonathan)

- Upcoming Meetings
 - April 5 – Cora Kelly – gather information from the Arlandria Communities
 - May 6 – Time and place to be determined – present student plans
- Survey to be distributed via email and at the April 5 meeting

End product (Ben)

- Summer 06
- Plan created that has community backing presented to city

Invite to April 5 meeting and May 6 open house because this presents an opportunity to further engage in the studio process.

City Open space plan highlights (distribute copy if necessary)

In the spring of 2001 the City convened several sessions with residents of Alexandria to address the city's short and longer term open space needs. The process that was established for developing the Open Space Plan combined assessing current open space conditions with the vision of residents for the establishment of an Open Space Steering Committee.

The assessment of existing open space areas, as well as the definition of potential open space opportunities, was carried out in several ways. The process began with the analysis of the City's existing open space data regarding parks, other open space areas, environmentally sensitive areas, streets and roads, and public and private vacant land parcels.

The outreach by the city included: interviews with various organizations and individuals with interest in open space issues in Alexandria; three Open Space Planning District meetings, and a citywide Open Space Summit.

Several overarching principles were outlined and include among others: Achieving a continuous public open space corridor along the Potomac River in Alexandria.

A3: Arlandria/Warwick Village Meeting

**VISIONING PROJECT FOR COMMONWEALTH AVENUE
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
MEETING MINUTES FOR ARLANDRIA MEETING
CORA KELLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

SARA HAMBERG

APRIL 5, 2006

PARTICIPANTS:

Facilitation Team:

Ben Wiles
Betsy Rose
Brandy Schaeffer
Professor Kathryn McCarty
Keli Garman
Sara Hamberg
Tracy Freuder

Studio Team:

Sarah and Gina
Kurt and Irene
Josh

Community Members:

Andy Duncan, Warwick Village
Glenn Christianson, Warwick Village

MEETING OBJECTIVES:

Meet with Arlandria community members to:

1. Give background information on the Visioning Project for Commonwealth Avenue;
2. Get feedback on preliminary studio designs;
3. Distribute and collect surveys concerning the project.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM DISCUSSION

The two Community members in attendance were at our meeting from 6pm until almost 9pm and gave us valuable feedback on the three preliminary design ideas. That feedback is outlined below:

TABLE 1: SARAH AND GINA'S DESIGN

Introduction:

Everyone introduced themselves and I gave a quick overview of what each student's role is in the project. We then asked Glenn to tell us about himself. Glenn first located his house on the aerial map. Glen lives on Commonwealth Avenue and also operates a business on Commonwealth Avenue. Things that are important to Glenn:

- Parking for his business
- Keeping his front yard and not losing it to road widening.

****Andy arrived later, after introductions.**

Presentation:

Sarah outlined the details about the studio and then began the presentation. Sarah identified the short comings of Commonwealth Avenue. It was very detailed analysis that showed medians vs. non medians and connected sidewalk vs. side walks that just end. Sarah and Gina offered their designs as ways to alleviate these issues.

When presenting the designs Gina and Sarah focused on how their design solves the previously identified problems. Sarah emphasized the importance of connectivity of all sidewalks and bike path. This is an important aspect for Andy who is an avid biker. Sarah, Gina and Andy further discussed bike lane options. One option eliminated on-street parking (in places) which was of concern to Glenn. To calm Glenn's concerns Sarah mentioned shared parking and better designs. She explained to Glenn that with better designs and signage people and business could operate with less parking but still maintain a good level of service. Gina then emphasized that at times it is important to examine the safety and on-street parking with doors swinging open is not safe for bikers. She explained that continues biking lanes that provide a safe route would actually encourage more biking and we could function with fewer parking spaces.

The next design presented by Sarah and Gina was a bit hard for Glenn and Andy to put their hands around. It involved some cutting edge techniques for storm water management that concerned Andy and Glenn. Sarah and Gina's design contained open draining for the storm water management. The design was difficult for Glenn and Andy to understand and they expressed concern over West Nile. Sarah and Gina explained that they had examined the causation of West Nile and that their design would not be a contributor. I felt this was very validating to Glenn and Andy and the 'common concern' appeared to create more rapport between the designers and citizens. Glenn and Andy were still unclear on how the water would drain.

I assumed the storm water was gravity flow or would be small drop off ledges creating a damming system that forced the water to keep moving. These were only preliminary designs so there will still be changes made. I would offer that Sarah and Gina should incorporate some small elevations of the storm water management system so the citizens can better understand the design.

End:

Overall Glenn and Andy were very impressed with Sarah and Gina's design. They liked the amount of green space and the complete connectivity of the entire avenue.

Group Wrap Up:

Sarah and Gina seemed happy with the feedback and the opportunity to present their design. They did express that they were nervous about presenting a product that was not finished but felt that the feedback was helpful. Sarah and Gina also expressed that the presentation style worked okay tonight but for the final presentation they would prefer the opportunity to pin the designs up. They said it would allow them to more easily compare the difficulties with the new improvements.

TABLE 2: IRENE AND KURT'S DESIGN

Strengths/Weaknesses of the Community (Arlandria – Warwick Village)

Strengths:

Sense of Community

Families

Bikeable

Bike lanes

Soft surface to run on

Jogging on bike lane is allowed

Pedestrian-oriented

Not too busy

Nice to walk

Art on the Avenue festival (October 7th): This is a one-day event, normally on Mt. Vernon; brings in 30,000 people and 250 vendors. They are looking to expand the event to Commonwealth Avenue.

Weaknesses:

Traffic and Parking and Safety

Disruption of bike lanes (ex) Monroe

"No Destinations" on Commonwealth like there are on Mt. Vernon = less sense of community

More open space/pocket parks needed

For Art on the Avenue Festival: would need more parking and to redirect traffic for the day

Strengths/Weaknesses of the Design (Irene/Kurt)

Alley as a bike lane:

Strengths:

No cars; more comfortable ride

One-Way Streets:

Strengths:

Good – need more space on those cross roads

Weaknesses:

Slower commute; could lead to misuse by criminals (drugs); must be sensitive to businesses

Weaknesses:

Must be sensitive to businesses; need to find a place for parking; Monroe after Mt. Vernon must remain 2-way; do not want a Gallow's Road (??)

General Strengths:

Liked the Underpass at the Metro idea
Liked more leisure bike-riding lanes, not just
Commuter lanes;
Liked the “traffic-calming through design” Idea

General Weaknesses:

Bike lanes/trails and pedestrian trails
should remain separate;

Other Ideas/Thoughts

- The Mount Vernon/Commonwealth intersection will soon be developed to include 250 condo unit. There is also a steep grade there;
- When the Four Mile Run bridge is completed it will be a large bike and pedestrian commute hub;
- Would like to see Four-Mile Run Plan incorporated;
- Want more of a community feel (“home” feel);
- Would like to see more consistent signage for bikes and recreation – arrows, cues;
- More bike- and pedestrian-friendly crossings near King Street Metro area;
- More gathering places – Rosemont at Monroe is a main gathering place Saturday mornings, but there is no parking;
- Mt. Vernon has more of a business feel, while Commonwealth is not meant to;
- *Los Tios* is a great Mexican-Salvadorian restaurant; they are so successful that they are expanding into the building next door!

Noteworthy participant quotation: “A Saturday morning on Commonwealth Ave is like a Saturday night in Dupont Circle.”

TABLE 3: JOSH’S DESIGN—The Living Street concept sets the vehicle traffic on one side of the median and the pedestrian and bike paths are on the other side of the median.

Pros	Cons
Separation from pedestrians Preservation of the big trees in the median Gathering space at the dog park Less traffic on Commonwealth Ave (they believe this would be majority of people’s reaction) Liked the “living street” continuing to four mile run A community garden – but it would need to be maintained, who would do it?	The affects on city traffic to other streets (this was a concern for one person because he felt each street should get its fair share) Concern for kids playing in the pedestrian streets Parking – where would people park if the street parking is taken away? (they believe people would rather it stay)

A4: Open House, May 2006

Group #4 – Creating Community Gathering Space

Community open space along Commonwealth Avenue will be created by diversifying and improving transportation options. Other improvements include:

- Exposing an urbanized Hoofs Run for improved stormwater management
- Creating improved retail space at the intersection of Mount Vernon and Commonwealth avenues by improving pedestrian access
- Reclaiming side of the boulevard for pedestrian and bicycle use only

What did you like about the plan? _____

What don't you like about the plan? _____

What would you do differently in the plan? _____

In the additional space provided, feel free to provide any additional comments such as outlining a composite alternative that incorporates elements of each of the four plans into one.

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Thank you for your time and comments. Over the summer, a team of students will compile a document incorporating the feedback gathered today that will be furnished to the Commonwealth Avenue community.



The Case for Commonwealth Avenue

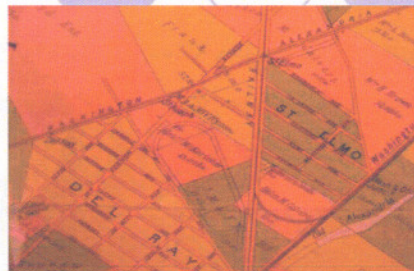
Creating a Pedestrian Oriented
Boulevard Park - and recreating
Del Ray's History

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Appendix B: The Case for Commonwealth Avenue

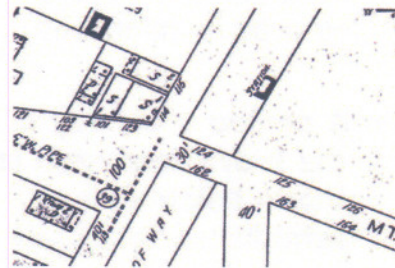
The Case for Commonwealth Avenue

- Commonwealth Avenue is the highly visible reminder of what was once the Alexandria Electric Railroad that played an essential part in the creation of the trolley car suburbs of Rosemont, Del Ray, Saint Elmo and the town of Potomac.
- This linear boulevard with its wide median and magnificent trees serves as a linear park stretching from Old Town to Four Mile Run.
- The public is attracted to its wide open character and gentle grades which are perfect for walking and jogging.



The Case for Commonwealth Avenue

- Many public places are located and linked by the Avenue including Cora Kelly School, Mount Vernon School and Rec Center and the Duncan Library. This picture of the Mount Ida Station is at the site of the present caboose at Mount Vernon School.
- Note the map (circa 1931) when Mount Ida went through the present day school property.
- There is a unique opportunity to facilitate the design and improvement of Commonwealth Avenue and its medians as a premier people oriented linear park in the Potomac West portion of Alexandria.



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The Case for Commonwealth Avenue

- Some pictures of Commonwealth Avenue in the snow.
- Showing its scale and relationship to the adjacent community.



Some Boulevards in other Communities

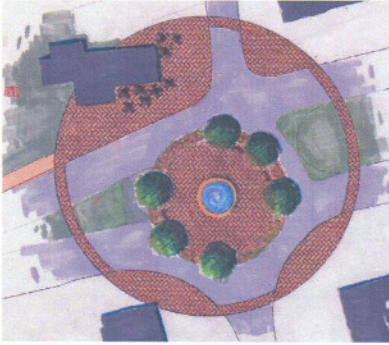
- To the right is Blackstone Boulevard in Providence, Rhode Island
- A trolley line ran down the center of the wide median - now used as a pedestrian way.
- A second greenway in the Providence area is shown below with well established trees and a green character.



How can we make these changes happen?

- Del Ray Citizens Association plans to sponsor a design competition with a cash prize for a plan and redesign of the Commonwealth Avenue Park that enhance its beauty and pedestrian utility.
- Local Design schools - Virginia Tech - Maryland would be encouraged to have students develop designs for the Avenue in Del Ray. Braddock to Commonwealth?)
- Design and use of the park for historic interpretation to help tell the history of this part of Alexandria would also be appropriate.
- This might include marking the boundaries of the town of Potomac and placing a marker and historic sign showing where the various trolley stops were.
- Crosswalk enhancements at intersections with stop signs and
- Enhanced tree planting opportunities in the median and along its sides.
- Replacement of the deteriorating and disappearing curbs with granite curbs which are elegant, durable and will last for a very long time. (Macarthur boulevard Median is a local example.
- Irrigation and de-compacting of the soil so that grass and trees can grow in a healthy environment.

Welcome to the Commonwealth Avenue Visioning Final Presentation



Over the course of the spring semester, graduate students from Virginia Tech's Alexandria Center have been working with residents from the communities surrounding Commonwealth Avenue to create alternatives for improving it as an open space corridor. The endeavor seeks to capitalize on Commonwealth Avenue's designation of a priority open space project by the City of Alexandria.

Community involvement, landscape architecture, and planning students have worked to gather information from Commonwealth Avenue residents and generate four alternatives for improved open space along the corridor. The four alternatives are on display for you to view and provide comments. Feel free to start with the project that interests you most but please review each alternative. Please take a moment to provide comments about the project.

The community and students wish to thank you for your time and input.

Group #1 – Linking Commonwealth

Creating linkages among Commonwealth Avenue neighborhoods through improved:

- Gateways along the length of Commonwealth to visually link the neighborhoods
 - Howell Avenue
 - Monroe Avenue
 - Walnut Street
 - King Street
 - Braddock Road
- A continuous bike route along the avenue from King Street to Four Mile Run
- Interpretive stormwater management that provides improved treatment facilities

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What did you like about the plan? _____

What don't you like about the plan? _____

What would you do differently in the plan? _____

Group #2 – The Living Street

The Living Street is a space where the pedestrian and bicyclist are at home and the automobile is a guest. Other improvements include:

- Transition of landscaping from formal to naturalistic throughout the neighborhoods
- Improved neighborhood identification using signage and other urban design elements
- Historic interpretation of the trolley line
- Community gardens for neighborhood residents

What did you like about the plan? _____

What don't you like about the plan? _____

What would you do differently in the plan? _____

Group #3 – Expanding and Connecting Open Space

Improving open space connections along the length of Commonwealth Avenue by:

- Creating a gateway park between Four Mile Run and Reed Avenue
- Providing continuous bike lanes and sidewalks along the length of the avenue
- Development of stormwater management bioretention basins using native plants
- Creation of an arboretum and other environmental education elements

What did you like about the plan? _____

What don't you like about the plan? _____

What would you do differently in the plan? _____

