

TO: Alexandria City Council, June 12, 2010. Public Hearing

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6-12-10

My name is Kathleen Burns, from 1036 N. Pelham. (burnskathy@earthlink.net; PH703-824-1799) Although I serve on various Boards throughout the City, I am here to speak as a resident of the KMS Townhouses, as well as on behalf of the single-family homes on Pelham, Polk, Peele, Palmer Place and Pegram. We are very concerned about a growing safety and security issue in our neighborhood.

Poet Robert Frost once said: "Fences build good neighbors." I truly believe that.

I live near the intersection of Pelham and Polk Streets. For several decades, there has been a 6 ft-tall fence separating our houses from the former Jamestown Apartments. We had a long-standing written agreement with the prior owners that that fence would remain closed. The apartment owners said they did not want non-renters coming on to their private property, and they voiced concern that this was a major safety and security issue for their dwellings. We agreed. But then the property changed hands, and became Parkside of Alexandria Condominiums, with 378 units.

To set the scene: In the dead of night, a path was constructed through a heavily wooded area, with a steep, rutted slope; poor lighting; and a thicket of bushes in which an intruder could easily hide. And a gate was added, opening up traffic to Polk St. So now the agreement was abandoned, with no discussion with the people it impacted. The path is built on the City's right-of-way land, not on Parkside Land. But the City's Code Enforcement office has taken little interest in rectifying obvious violations, or in addressing our concerns. There were no public hearings nor public notices for this major change. The path does not meet Americans with Disability Standards nor any concept of safety. Our local police crossing guard Charlotte Ross has expressed concern that this was not a safe area for children traveling alone. She has noted that kids careen down on their bikes and shoot out behind parked cars where two steep streets intersect. This is a disaster waiting to happen. The ACPS school bus picks up the very few Parkside children, in front of their Parkside homes, so there is no need to take this dangerous, unsupervised route, especially in winter darkness. Because of the isolation of the wooded area, no one could hear the children's cries for help, if assistance was needed.

Of equal concern, we were made aware of a flyer that was circulated, advising residents to simply park in our neighborhood, and thus avoid having to pay for the parking sticker for Parkside. Or, use our neighborhood for all their "guest parking needs." WE were told there were "no available parking spots for residents." This isn't true. For several months, we went up to their adjoining parking lot between 8-10 p.m. every night, and always found from 10-20 parking spots for Parkside residents in the section adjoining KMS units. KMS people cannot park in the private Parkside lots, but Parkside people have no qualms about taking our very limited street parking spots.

Our townhouses have neither garages nor driveways, and parking is extremely limited. I understand from a friend who lives at Parkside that the residents recently held a meeting on the growing "crisis" of finding parking on the site. As a result, our neighborhood is being used as a satellite complex for people who don't live on our street. This rose to a crescendo during the snow season. One Parkside person got stuck on Polk Street 3 different times, sideways, and our block people had to dig him out, because it tied up the entire street.

We are asking the City to investigate this concern and we will be submitting a petition signed by neighbors on the streets I mentioned, as well as extensive supporting documentation. Thank you for your assistance.