



 Arlington  
Heritage Alliance

# ARLINGTON ON ALERT

**Arlington's Most Endangered Places  
2007**



## **ARLINGTON'S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES - 2007**

**IS THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY HISTORIC?** Without question. Two World Wars, a burgeoning population, architectural and technological innovations, increasing diversity—all were hallmarks of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and all can be found in Arlington County.

Yet several remarkable examples of Arlington County's 20<sup>th</sup>-century architectural heritage are at risk, according to the Arlington Heritage Alliance's 2007 list of the most endangered historic places in Arlington.

Modeled after the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "11 Most Endangered Historic Places" list, this seventh-annual local list includes specific properties and property types—such as the **Parkland Gardens Apartments, Apartment Bungalows, and Mid-Century Libraries**—as well as the more general categories of **Historic Residential Neighborhoods** and **Commercial Districts**.

In this report, we discuss the threats facing these endangered places and why they are so significant to Arlington County's history. We also provide updates on previously endangered places—**Buckingham Village, Lustron houses, Fort Ethan Allen, and the Bob Peck Chevrolet Dealership**.

Founded in 1989, the Arlington Heritage Alliance is the only private, nonprofit organization in Arlington County, Virginia, devoted to the protection and promotion of Arlington's historic and natural resources. If you'd like to learn more about preservation in Arlington, or to get involved in one of our ongoing projects, visit our web site at [www.arlingtonheritage.org](http://www.arlingtonheritage.org).



## **PARKLAND GARDENS APARTMENTS (2105 North Glebe Road)**

\* World War II-era garden apartments that may be demolished and replaced with condominiums and townhouses, eliminating affordable housing

### Threat

Parkland Gardens, a 149-unit garden apartment complex built in 1943 at the height of the housing shortage that coincided with the war workers' population boom in Arlington, is threatened with redevelopment. A private company, Wundoria Hills, LLC, purchased the six- and a quarter-acre property near the intersection of North Glebe Road and Old Lee Highway in April 2005. The units now stand empty. Plans have been submitted to the county for redevelopment of the site with townhouses and condominiums. Under current zoning, up to 120 townhouses could be built on the property, replacing what had been committed affordable housing units conveniently located along several bus lines.

### History

Parkland Gardens is an excellent example of 1940s garden apartment complex architecture. The garden apartment complex is a housing form developed in the 1920s and 1930s that incorporates multiple two- or three-story apartment buildings with central entrances, no lobbies, and no elevators, all arranged within a landscaped setting. The design ideals behind garden apartments derived from those of the international, utopian "Garden City" movement, which promoted more humane living conditions by dispersing the population from overcrowded cities to self-sufficient enclaves established in rural areas.

While the goals of the Garden City movement were never fully embraced in the United States, they greatly influenced designers and planners who were struggling to economically and humanely house many middle-class workers within easy reach of the nation's major cities. Thus, the garden apartment complex was born. Arlington became the national laboratory for the construction of this new garden apartment complex idea. Because of the rapid expansion of the federal government's workforce in the Washington, D.C., area during and after World War II,

Photo Credit: Eric Dobson



**The green, inviting landscape  
of Parkland Gardens**



the county saw the construction of approximately 70 garden apartment complexes between 1934 and 1954. Arlington's national prominence in the development of this housing type has been recognized by the National Register of Historic Places, and it has been established that many of Arlington's garden apartment complexes are eligible for listing on the Register. In fact, six of Arlington's garden apartment complexes have already been listed, including Colonial Village, Buckingham Village, and Westover.

Not only do garden apartment complex such as Parkland Gardens have historic significance, many provide affordable and convenient housing to Arlington's least affluent residents. They also serve as important community incubators, where residents find support and help.

Garden apartment complexes are by design low-scale and have a high percentage of open and green space. Most are attractive places with mature tree canopies and open lawns and thus contribute to Arlington's designation as a "Tree City." The maintenance of this low-scale, low-density housing form makes sense from a historic, environmental, and social justice standpoint.

#### Solutions

AHA would like to see the county government implement targeted economic incentives that would encourage owners or developers of Arlington's historic garden apartments to preserve these historic properties and maintain their affordability. In combination with state and federal historic preservation tax credits and low incoming housing tax credits, local tax breaks or other economic incentives could save these historically, environmentally, and socially important resources in the county.



## APARTMENT BUNGALOWS

- \* Pre-World War II houses characterized by square building footprint, pyramidal roofs, central chimney, and wrap-around windows on each corner of the house
- \* Design was influenced by the Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and International styles.
- \* Included on AHA's most endangered list in 2006

### Threat

Arlington's Apartment Bungalows represent an architecturally significant Modern housing type that has become increasingly rare in the county. Like other housing types that give Arlington's historic neighborhoods their distinctive character, apartment bungalows are threatened by teardowns and infill development and are increasingly being razed to make way for out-of-scale single-family houses (colloquially known as "McMansions") and townhouses. Although no formal survey has been done, evidence suggests that at least ten such houses have been lost in Arlington in the last seven years, with at least one more demolished since May 2006.

### History

Scattered throughout Arlington, but mainly located in Ballston, Hall's Hill, Bluemont/Westover Hills, and Alcova Heights, these late 1930s houses are notable for their square footprint, pyramidal roofs, central chimney, and wrap-around windows. Similar houses are called "pyramid cottages" elsewhere in the country. Made of stucco, brick, and stone, the bungalows were minimal in their applied ornamentation and represent outstanding examples of the Modern movement in residential architecture.



Photo Credit: Lauren Hassel

**Apartment bungalows are modest and often dwarfed by adjacent houses**

In addition to their architectural features, these houses are also historically important, representing a period in Arlington's history when this once-rural community experienced an influx of new residents who moved to the area to work for the government during World War II. Like other one-story housing types such as Lustrons, these houses were built quickly and were reasonably priced, and many were purchased by returning veterans. These homes contribute to neighborhood character and integrity in at least four historic Arlington neighborhoods. They suit the size of their lots and fit in with other residential types found in Arlington, such as Colonials, four-squares, Sears houses, and other modest house styles.

### Solutions

Recently, after flooding significantly damaged an apartment bungalow, the house was sensitively rehabilitated and renovated in a way that protected its historic character. AHA encourages other homeowners to consider sensitive additions and renovations of these houses instead of demolishing them.



## **ARLINGTON'S FIRST PURPOSE-BUILT BRANCH LIBRARIES (Westover, Cherrydale, Glencarlyn)**

\* Mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century libraries are becoming physically obsolete and are threatened with demolition and redevelopment

### Threat

In an era of changing library services and patron demands, Arlington County's earliest purpose-built branch libraries are threatened with becoming physically obsolete, as the county continues to invest in new branches such as the Shirlington Library. Older branches, including Cherrydale, have been threatened with closure due to funding cuts.

In conjunction with Arlington County Public Schools, plans are in the works to relocate the 1963 Westover Branch library from its first, purpose-built building at the corner of N. Lexington and N. McKinley Streets. This would include the demolition of the existing building despite its distinctive, mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture and the nearly 45 years it has served as a community landmark.

### History

In the 1950s, Arlington County developed a six-year improvement plan that would represent a program for capital improvements in essential public facilities and services. County officials began pursuing a campaign for a "new era of branch library building and service," as *The Washington Post* then reported. In 1961, the county opened its first purpose-built public library branch building in the Cherrydale neighborhood on Military Road. The Westover and Glencarlyn branches followed two years later. While Cherrydale had to be funded through the regular capital budget because of the failure of a local bond issue voted on in May 1960, the second two branches to open were paid for through a \$495,000 bond issue approved by county voters in November 1961.

Both the Westover and Cherrydale branches are designed in a contemporary, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century style that complements the county's progressive ideas about expanding branch library services. Glencarlyn's design harkens back to the Colonial Williamsburg model and reflects the community's continued interest in its historic roots.

All three of these branch libraries are important social and architectural landmarks within their neighborhoods and reflect an era of civic improvement that transformed Arlington County after World War II.



Photo Credit: Arlington County

**The Westover Library**



### Solutions

While AHA supports the expansion and improvement of the county's branch libraries and library system, in particular the relocation of the Westover branch to the former Walter Reed School, we hope to raise awareness of the architectural, historical, and social significance of these early branch libraries in the county, and to suggest that there may be viable alternatives to demolition. Sympathetic additions, creative reuse plans, and the transfer of buildings to private entities for preservation-minded redevelopment are all possible routes that will save these facilities, while allowing the library system to respond to new and expanding demands.



Photo Credit: Arlington County

**The Cherrydale Library**



## **HISTORIC RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS**

- \* Arlington has many historic and distinctive residential neighborhoods, with more than a dozen areas listed in the National Register of Historic Places
- \* Included on AHA's most endangered list in 2001, 2005, and 2006

### Threat

Arlington is the smallest self-governing county in the nation, and it is also one of the most populated in terms of density per square mile. As Arlington County continues to be rightly praised for its leadership on smart growth and for encouraging compact, infill development, our historic neighborhoods are increasingly threatened by new, out-of-scale houses and high-rises.

The county has certainly recognized the value of its neighborhoods by nominating several to the National Register of Historic Places, creating the Neighborhood Conservation Area Program, and instituting Neighborhood Day, but the physical fabric of these neighborhoods is threatened by a convergence of social values and economic factors. The situation becomes more dire every year, and so AHA has placed historic residential neighborhoods on the endangered list for the fourth time.

### History

Arlington County possesses a unique collection of individual neighborhoods, each with its own history, building forms, architectural styles, and landscape features. Although large homes remain popular with today's homebuyers, people are still attracted to the quaint and charming look and feel of Arlington's older, established neighborhoods, which is attributable to the scale, placement, and architecture of the older homes.



Photo Credit: Kim O'Connell

During the past decade, small houses on large lots have routinely been torn down and replaced by much larger ones that do not fit in with the scale and character of the rest of the surrounding neighborhood. The "McMansion" trend destroys existing historic buildings and the quaint streetscapes of our historically scaled neighborhoods, creating jarring and incompatible structures in their place—and thus detracting from a neighborhood's desirability and its value.

### **Out-of-scale infill housing (left) casting a shadow on a historic house (right)**

### Solutions

In 2005, the County Board approved a lot coverage zoning amendment that will help to manage the size and form of new additions to historic houses. Although AHA supported the zoning amendment as one way to ensure that historic neighborhoods retain the scale and





amenities that attracted people in the first place, this effort alone will not prevent the continued development of out-of-character houses and other structures in Arlington's most treasured neighborhoods. AHA encourages homeowners to seek out tax credit programs and other incentives that would help them to rehabilitate their historic houses rather than replace them with super-sized eyesores.

Furthermore, AHA recommends working with architects who are able to meet their clients' needs for increased space and functionality, without compromising the historic character of the house or neighborhood. Each year, the Arlington County Preservation Design Awards honor those local firms that have this kind of proven track record; more information on award winners is available from the county preservation program.



## HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

\* Low-scale, mostly early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings and the distinctive businesses that occupy them. They exist in many Arlington neighborhoods, particularly along Wilson Boulevard in Clarendon and along Columbia Pike in South Arlington.

\* Clarendon and Columbia Pike buildings have been on AHA's most endangered list since 2002.

### Threat

Big-box, high-rent, cookie-cutter business development threatens to force out more and more low-scale business districts with individual and original businesses and their owners. Many residents enjoy the charm, choices, and services provided by locally owned shops and restaurants. But we will continue to lose individual centers to a suburban-mall concept of commercial development until the county and property owners recognize the value of preserving and reusing distinctive, low-scale architecture and individual businesses as a desirable focal point for commercial neighborhoods.

Clarendon is one of the most successful restaurant destinations in the area, but the low-scale buildings that have historically housed these businesses are under constant threat. Renewal along Columbia Pike has already displaced a number of small businesses and has yet to show much "progress." Residents who want to preserve identity and a feeling of neighborhood are concerned.

### History

Many of Arlington's close-in neighborhoods have commercial districts that have served the needs of changing populations over the years. Clarendon, for example, evolved from Arlington's "downtown" in the 1940s and 50s into an exotic "Little Saigon" in the 1970s and now to a lively restaurant district with an uncertain future for some of the very buildings that make it a destination point. By contrast, others, such as Westover's thriving business center, offer a mix of restaurants, shops—both locally owned and chain-operated—and services that meet the needs of residents and provide an anchor and identity to the neighborhood.

Shirlington is an example of a district that has undergone sudden and dramatic change while still trying to keep a relatively low-scale profile and diversity of uses that may or may not serve its new residents and visitors. Many are in flux, between large-scale development and the need to retain historic and architecturally interesting buildings that can be adapted to new uses.



Photo Credit: Eric Dobson

**A historic commercial building in Shirlington, now threatened with demolition**



### *Wilson Boulevard/Clarendon*

While a number of new and stylish restaurants and gathering places have opened and flourished on Wilson Boulevard in recent years, there are areas of empty and decaying buildings that once housed successful eating places and businesses. The half block that once housed Café Dalat has been vacant for almost two years and, while the owner talked of attracting new “upscale” businesses, AHA has recently learned that CVS Pharmacy will occupy the entire space under a long-term lease. According to sources, the buildings will be gutted but the exteriors will remain the same, which we find difficult to fathom given the recent deterioration in the exteriors. This development does not bode well for the “sensitive” restoration of which the owner originally spoke.

Immediately to the west, the former Odd Fellows building will house a new restaurant developed by the owners of the Clarendon Ballroom, Tallula, and the (soon-to-be demolished) Clarendon Grill. This is encouraging news as this team has followed good adaptive practices and introduced lively commercial uses. The new Liberty Tavern in the former Masonic Building also displays good design and creative use of an older and historic structure. Farther east, Clarendon retains some interesting shops and businesses, including a newly located Mrs. McGregor’s Gift and Garden Shop, though in much-reduced quarters.

All along Wilson Boulevard are striking examples of early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, much of which reflects Arlington’s coming of age in the automotive era, that provide opportunities for sensitive and creative development. Unfortunately, the National Tire and Battery location in a great 1940s Bob Peck Car Dealership building, is being considered for another national drug chain lease. Its future adaptation is uncertain. As plans develop, we will keep members and interested persons informed through our listserv bulletins.



Photo Credit: Kim O’Connell

**The historic Rees Building in Clarendon, which has been vacant for more than a year**

### *Historic Buildings along Columbia Pike*

Columbia Pike redevelopment was launched after a long process and with great fanfare several years ago. The master Revitalization Plan includes historic planning as a tool for successful revitalization and it includes a well-developed list of more than 30 buildings that “should be seriously considered through the course of any future redevelopment.” Yet many businesses have left, little development has occurred, and residents are concerned about the loss or disruption of local businesses and services, as well as loss of neighborhood character.



### Solutions

While the recent Clarendon Sector Plan ([www.planclarendon.com](http://www.planclarendon.com)) and Columbia Pike Revitalization Plan offer some encouragement for preservation, property owners must be persuaded and rewarded with incentives to achieve such goals. More needs to be done to reach out to commercial business owners to participate in the implementation of these plans and recognize the long-term ecological, social, and economic value of reinvesting in historic commercial buildings.

AHA and the county's Historic Affairs and Landmark Review Board continue to monitor historic buildings and development activity along Wilson Boulevard and the Pike. We will keep members, other organizations, and the public informed on any adverse effects on historic commercial buildings.



## **WATCH LIST:**

### **BUCKINGHAM VILLAGE**

\* Included on AHA's most endangered list in 2006

Last year, historic Buckingham Village—one of the county's most significant examples of garden city planning and a National Register-listed apartment complex—was threatened with the proposed redevelopment of two distinct areas (known as “villages”), which would have demolished historic buildings and eliminated much-needed affordable housing to make way for upscale townhouses. This raised the ire of housing advocates and historic preservationists alike.



In June 2007, however, the Arlington County Board unanimously and officially approved a plan that would allow redevelopment of part of Buckingham Village but also include the construction and preservation of about 300 affordable housing units. As part of the approved plan, the county will outlay \$32.1 million to expand the Buckingham Village historic district and preserve affordable housing in that section.

Although AHA applauds the Arlington County Board for taking this important leadership role in preserving a majority of Buckingham Village, the complex, like other historic garden apartments, remains vulnerable to redevelopment. AHA will continue to monitor the situation.

### **LUSTRON HOUSES**

\* Included on AHA's most endangered list in 2001, 2005, and 2006

Built between 1948 and 1950, Lustron houses were inexpensive prefabricated steel-paneled structures designed to address the post-World War II housing crisis. Lustrons are threatened both as a very rare building type within the county, but also because the modest homes are vulnerable to the rampant tear-downs that have replaced many of Arlington's historic houses with large-scale houses. This year, only four Lustrons remain in the county, after a Lustron house in the Barcroft neighborhood was demolished in April.



Yet Arlington also has a nearly unprecedented Lustron preservation opportunity. Last May, a nearly mint-condition gray Lustron was carefully disassembled in the expectation that it would be reassembled and put to a new use. Although this is an important first step in saving this Lustron, more than a year has passed since then, and its fate remains unclear until the county commits to fund and plan for its move and reconstruction. The county's other remaining Lustrons remain vulnerable to demolition, making it even more important that Arlington County preserve and interpret this extremely rare resource.



## **WATCH LIST:**

### **FORT ETHAN ALLEN**

\* Included on AHA's most endangered list every year from 2001 through 2006



Fort Ethan Allen is one of two county-owned Civil War forts constructed as part of the Defenses of Washington. For many years, the remains of Fort Ethan Allen were endangered due to the inappropriate siting of a Community Canine Area (CCA)—often known as a dog park—located within the heart of the fort's historic district. Last year, Arlington County moved the dog park to a nearby location.

At the same time, AHA received a grant from the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program to develop a Cultural Landscape Documentation Report for the fort. Prepared by GAI Consultants, Inc., that documentation work has been completed, which includes an inventory of all the fort's remaining landscape features, an evaluation of their current condition, and guidance for future interpretation. AHA now hopes to work with county leaders and others to seek funding for the next phases in the long-term preservation and interpretation of Fort Ethan Allen.

### **BOB PECK CHEVROLET DEALERSHIP**

\* Called a "missed opportunity" in AHA's 2006 most endangered list



The Bob Peck Chevrolet Dealership at the corner of Glebe Road and Wilson Boulevard has been an Arlington landmark since it opened in 1964. Its distinctive transparent circular auto showroom, with a blue diamond canopy motif spelling out the dealership name, is widely hailed as an outstanding example of automotive commercial architecture. The current owner, the JBG Companies of Chevy Chase, plans to use the site for the development of a 12-story mixed-use structure.

The building has been vacated and some light demolition has begun. As of June, the owners have stated that, while plans for developing the site are moving ahead, details of the redevelopment plan are still under discussion and to be determined. In the meantime, AHA is keeping in contact with JBG, and a thorough photo-documentation of the interior and exterior of the buildings is being arranged as well.

Watch List Photo Credits:  
Buckingham/Lustron –  
Kim O'Connell;  
Fort Ethan Allen drawing –  
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Bob Peck – Tom Dickinson