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# Arlington **Rebuilds a Community** and its Roots

*By Douglas Gordon, Hon. AIA*

The Shelton was the first of AHC and Bonstra|Harsign's additions to the Nauck community. It serves as a welcoming center piece for families new to the historic community.

**N**auck is a historic black community in southern Arlington County that in recent decades had skirted the fringe of losing its identity. One of a handful of Freedmen's communities that flourished in the region before and after the Civil War, Nauck continued through a long litany of hardships and, subsequently, a gradual loss of identity. It was the strong role of the county planners and consultants, taking their cue from community groups—including area churches—that brought both revitalization and a re-establishment of the old sense of neighborhood.

Working with community groups, Arlington County formed the Nauck Village Center plan in 2004 and—with planners and designers Rhodeside & Harwell Inc., Clark Nexsen, Development Economics, Gensler & Associates, and the Lukmire Partnership—developed and began implementing the Nauck Town Square Plan from 2006 on. The form-based master plan blended high-density and affordable housing with a community center, and an adjacent school and playgrounds.

Part of the vision was to replace a 1960s 22-unit apartment building with a 94-unit complex that would include street retail, an enclosed play area, and direct connection to the still-planned town square at Shirlington and 24th roads.

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## The Shelton

A vital driver for getting the first apartment complex built, the Shelton, was AHC Inc., a private, nonprofit developer of affordable housing based in Arlington. Founded in 1975, AHC produces and preserves affordable housing, provides homeownership services, and offers residents onsite educational services. AHC worked in close cooperation with the Arlington Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development.

Once AHC got involved with replacing the 22-unit apartment building they learned of the Nauck plan and the county's incentives to spur redevelopment, including tax abatements and additional density. "We realized that if we were going to have a bigger impact, we'd have to buy some adjacent parcels," recalls AHC Multifamily Group Vice President John M. Welsh.

AHC also became familiar with the Bonder & Amanda Johnson Community Development Corporation (BAJCDC), founded in 1999 to maintain the Nauck community's presence in the face of imminent gentrification of the area due to its prime location. The BAJCDC had been working with the Macedonia Baptist Church to acquire land for development of affordable housing, including a parcel across the street from the church.

Through conversations with the church and BAJCDC leaders, AHC found that their apartment-building vision had not gone forward but that they had already been working with architects Bonstral Haresign. "We were looking for an architect for the Shelton, and we wanted to try somebody new," Welsh says. Via many meetings, the county and community agreed that the development would enhance the neighborhood greatly. The developer got financial support from the county in return for both additional affordable units and community space. "We got it built and leased out very quickly," Welsh says. "It's been a good asset for us."

**The Shelton, U-shaped in plan, includes a landscaped interior courtyard open at one end yet secure from the street by a code-locked gate.**



**Interior finishes and a grand street façade give the Shelton considerable consumer appeal far above the gone-but-not-missed 1960s-era Section 8 apartment building it replaced.**







The Macedonian, built on land owned by the Baptist church just across the street, was intended for older residents and has proved a magnet for parishioners and people who had moved from the neighborhood.



An Earthcraft-certified apartment complex, the Macedonian features green amenities inside and out, including this green roof to entice residents out into the sunlight and fresh air.

## The Macedonian

The project that resulted from the BAJCDC plan, opened in May 2011 and also designed by Bonstral Haresign with AHC, is the Macedonian, a 36-unit project that includes ground floor space for a community business/employment-opportunity incubator. The Macedonian is also the most energy-efficient multi-family affordable new housing building in Northern Virginia, according to the architect. It is the first such project in Arlington certified by EarthCraft, a sustainable-housing-construction body for the Southeast U.S. based in Georgia.

“The Macedonia Baptist Church certainly played a big role in this project,” says Arlington City Council Member Christopher Zimmerman. He points in particular to the strong role of area churches, including the Lomax AME Zion and Mt. Zion Baptist churches. In addition to church pastors, Zimmerman is grateful for community organizers, he says, including long-time Nauck Civic Association President Dr. Alfred O. Taylor Jr., who believes “those plans are most successful that are most based in the community.”

“The concept of The Arlington Way is that the community has to be integrally involved in what we’re planning to do,” Zimmerman explains. “The consciousness of a strong community with deep roots and strong feelings imbues the whole redevelopment process.”

“We wanted to be able to partner with someone who had a shared mission,” recalls the Rev. Leonard Hamlin Sr., pastor of the Macedonia Baptist Church. “We were already working with



our architect when we began talking to several developers and saw an opportunity for a shared mission with AHC. We owned the land and brought them on board.

“It was a challenging learning process working with the developer, architects, and planners,” Hamlin adds.” When you bring that many different people to the table, you tend to have competing interests. And everyone has to play their particular role in the process, and strongly. One that we played was to advocate for the community. What most people fear is rapid gentrification; immediate transitions of certain neighborhoods. We reminded everybody what the project was really all about: benefit for people in the community and having an open door for more people to come in.”

“They were prepared to go ahead and redevelop their property, but they had no experience,” Welsh recalls. “So we set out together as their joint-venture development partner and we got that done.”

“AHC is a pretty remarkable affordable housing developer,” adds Bonstral Haresign Principal David Haresign, FAIA. “They hired us initially because they thought that we’d make their affordable housing look market rate. And, judging from the comments we’ve received from residents and the community, we delivered.”

Welsh returns the compliment: “It’s good to find an architect who understands the business of development: the practical matters of getting approvals, what things are going to cost, what the salient design issues are, and how we resolve them.”



The two new apartment buildings and streetscape improvements are just a beginning but have already changed the feel and spirit of a community willing to work hard for that transformation.

For the people in the county and people in the community, Welsh concludes: “There was an increase in the affordable housing and a notable public investment in infrastructure. And to have two new housing resources that were well-designed and provide good services, this development also has encouraged some people who had moved away to come back and re-establish their roots in the neighborhood.”



# Land Swap Creates a Smooth Transition

For decades, Wilson Boulevard from Roslyn to Ballston has been the pride of Arlington's transit-oriented development. Over the past two decades or so the county facilitated the replacement of low-rise commercial and residential units along the corridor, dating mostly from the 1940s and '50s, with mid- and high-rise apartment, hotel, and office buildings along with street-level retail strongly supported by Metro's bus and rail services.

Once Wilson moves southwest past Glebe Road, though, the edge-cityscape settles into a more suburban mix of garden apartment complexes and single-family neighborhoods. That transition was once demarcated by the eye-catching diamond-necklace façade of the Bob Peck Chevrolet showroom. When that went away in 2008, it left a transitional gap at one of Arlington's best-known crossroads.

Enter the JBG Companies, a high-end developer that brought on Cooper Cary to design a 10-story mixed-use office building to anchor that site. The building's sweeping 10-story curtain-wall façade accentuates the sight lines of both North Glebe Road and Wilson Boulevard and includes its own diamond necklace at street level to emulate the former dealership's signature identity.

## The rest of the story

At the same time, JBG planned a block of high-end townhouses for the adjacent lot, and affordable-housing developer AHC owned a nearby parcel on which it wanted to replace a 21-apartment property and a subdivided house with a 90-unit apartment building.

Arlington County wanted the affordable housing as well as an acceptable transition between the signature 800 Glebe Road building and the low-rise residential areas beyond.

"The neighborhood drove this development in many ways," says AHC Vice President John Welsh. "They had a very solid civic association with a lot of support. They were steadfast and there was not a lot of vitriol, so the county council members took them very seriously."

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The Jordan, far left, holds its own at the Arlington crossroads of Glebe and Wilson, left, which is now grandly anchored by 800/900 Glebe Road  
(rendering above courtesy of Cooper Cary).





The central courtyard, with its intermittent-flow fountain and greenery, provides residents with play space that seems far away—and is secure from—the busy traffic corridors that course just around the corner.

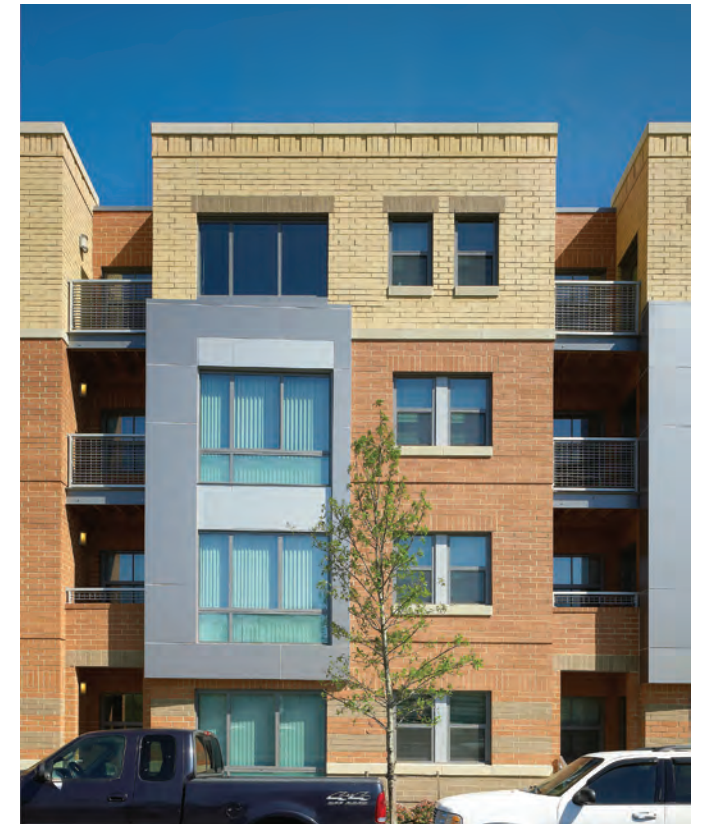


The site AHC had to develop was small, which would require a tall building. Neighbors didn't like that and, initially, JBG did not want to be involved with AHC. Both developers' projects languished while the civic association debated acceptable building heights and the county continued to push for affordable housing units. Eventually, JBG warmed to the idea of somehow incorporating the affordable housing development into their overall plan.

"We ultimately got together on a mutual arrangement for working together and going through the site-plan approval process," Welsh remembers. The resulting solution included a swap of parcels that put the Earthcraft-certified, 90-unit Jordan, designed by Bonstra|Haresign, next to 800 Glebe. The 19 luxury townhomes, now under construction by JBG, go on the lot originally owned by AHC and serve as an elegant transition to the existing neighborhoods to the southwest. The market-rate and affordable-housing developer partnership ended up being close enough that parking for the new AHC units is sandwiched into the parking levels for the JBG mixed-use office building.

"The Jordan land swap was a little tricky," says Arlington County Council Member Christopher Zimmerman. "On the one hand you have a major high-value real-estate deal on Glebe Road. On the other hand, we have a residential neighborhood. Those are politically sensitive, and one of the things that Arlington has been particularly successful with is its transitions between high-density areas near Metro to much lower density single-family neighborhoods. Part of the challenge of this kind of development is creating less of a barrier and more of a transition. The county considered this to be a terminal vista going west on Wilson Boulevard, and we wanted something there that made a statement."

"People viewed our affordable housing project as a great transitional use and physical step-down from Ballston's high-rises to Bluemont's townhouses and single-family residences," summarizes Bonstra|Haresign Principal David Haresign, FAIA, of the balancing act. "We essentially rode JBG's coattails on the entitlements side and gave JBG the public benefit they needed to get approval."



**Bonstra|Haresign's meticulous attention to detail inside and out has already made this one of the more desirable addresses in Arlington.**  
**The 90 units rented out in 90 days**  
**reports *Sustainable Communities e-News*.**



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