

## Village at Shirlington Special General Land Use Plan Study Plus and Concept Plan July 2020

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### Founding of Shirlington, 1943-1949

Joseph Cherner, a Jewish immigrant from Russia with a successful automobile dealership and repair shop, sought land to open an airport when he first considered purchasing acreage south of Four Mile Run. He decided to invest in creating a shopping center there instead, a feat that necessitated raising the grade by as much as 13 feet with 200,000 cubic yards of fill, channelizing two creeks, and constructing roads and alleyways through the property. He formed the Shirlington Corporation with adjacent tract owners in August 1943, and retained a 70 percent share in the business. Cherner led the Shirlington Corporation to successfully apply to the Arlington County Board to change the zoning of their land from residential to commercial in November 1943. When founding Shirlington Business Center, Cherner attracted new businesses to the development by offering tenants very low rental rates in exchange for the Shirlington Corporation receiving a predetermined percentage of the business' profits.

Shirlington was named after Shirley Highway (Interstates 95 and 395), the name being a combination of "Shirley" and "Arlington." Shirley Highway, named for Henry G. Shirley, a highway commissioner for the Commonwealth of Virginia, established an automobile connection between Washington, D.C., and Woodbridge, Virginia, and was completed in September 1949. However, part of Shirley Highway, a two-lane connection from the Pentagon to State Route 7, opened in October 1943, just two months before the Shirlington Business Center's first shops opened. Cherner intended proximity to this new thoroughfare to promote traffic to the new shopping center.

In April 1952, the Shirlington Corporation requested that the County Board agree to vacate five inches along publicly held rights-of-way throughout Shirlington so that the corporation could face some of the existing brick buildings along South Quincy Street and 28th Street South with five inches of limestone to match the limestone façades of other buildings in the complex. The County Board approved the request the following month and deeded the five inches on July 7, 1952.

The Shirlington Business Center's first stores opened in December 1943. By July of the following year, the complex boasted a supermarket, gift shop, clothing cleaners, beauty parlor, and shoe repair shop. A second food market, post office, restaurant, theater, and medical offices were anticipated to open soon. The Shirlington Corporation obtained a Use Permit from Arlington County to open a gas station at the complex in February 1944 and the opening of a Gulf Service Station was announced in a July 1944 edition of The Evening

Star. The gas station was located at 2817 South Quincy Street, the same location of a current-day gas station. Although there is no building permit history between the 1940s and 1980s available for this location, it is likely that the extant building is the same service station built in 1944, although with substantial renovations.

Following Joseph Cherner's death in 1956, his wife Ruth (née Schlom) Cherner, assumed the role of the president of Shirlington Corporation. She led the company through a land swap with Arlington County in May 1957 that increased acreage at the north boundary of the Shirlington Business Center by seven acres. The additional acreage was taken from the County's Property Yard and in exchange Shirlington Business Corporation deeded fourteen acres north of the Property Yard to Arlington, so the County gained a net seven acres in this transaction. The Shirlington Corporation also agreed to pay the cost of relocating or replacing the County's buildings and other improvements as part of this deal.

Lansburgh's Department Store opened in the Shirlington Business Center in September 1959 on the former Property Yard land previously described. The 150,000-square foot store served as a new retail anchor for the shopping center.