

August 8, 2006 Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force Meeting Minutes

– August 8, 2006 Meeting Minutes -  
Potomac Yard Fire Station and Affordable Housing Task Force

Andrew Hall, Task Force Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:13 pm in the cafeteria of the Mount Vernon Community School on Commonwealth Avenue.

The following Task Force representatives were in attendance:

Andrew Hall, Del Ray Citizens Association  
John Starcher, Warwick Village  
Jim Schwartz, Arlington Fire Chief and Del Ray resident  
Tom Welsh, PWBA  
Kate Rollins, Old Town Greens  
Melissa Watson, Lynhaven Civic Association

The following City employees were in attendance:

Councilman Paul Smedberg  
Gary Mesaris, Fire Chief  
Art Dahlberg, Director of Code Enforcement  
Brain Hannigan, Public Information Officer  
Jeff Farner, Development Division Chief, Planning and Zoning  
Amy Tarce, Planning and Zoning  
Raka Choudhury, Planning and Zoning  
Colleen Rafferty, Planning and Zoning  
Sandy Murphy, Office of Management and Budget  
Helen McIlvaine, Deputy Director, Office of Housing

The following guests were in attendance:

Tom Baycroft  
Judy Lowe  
Judy Harper  
Kevin Beekman  
David Fromm  
Amy Slack  
Larry Campbell  
Sylvia Sibrover

Minutes prepared by: Cameron Hall, Alexandria Fire Department

The Developer has submitted a letter requesting the Potomac Yard item that includes the proposed fire station and affordable housing be deferred to the October 3<sup>rd</sup> Planning Commission meeting. That formal letter is on the website along with meeting agendas and minutes. That website is [http://ci.alexandria.va.us/planningandzoning/potomac\\_yard.php](http://ci.alexandria.va.us/planningandzoning/potomac_yard.php)

The task force held a work session on Wednesday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>. The meeting minutes were submitted on August 8<sup>th</sup>, therefore, the minutes were not reviewed and approval has been tabled until next week.

### **Fire Station**

Chief Mesaris gave a brief overview of the fire station proposal. The main issue of concern for the Fire Department is service delivery. Officials from the Department and the City researched the service delivery changes using a computer model and four-minute response goals. The attached maps will show the current and proposed response times.

The Medical Director, Dr. Vafier for the Alexandria Fire Department has established a goal of four-minute response time standard. National standards range from four to eight minutes.

Station 202, on Windsor Avenue in Del Ray currently has redundant coverage, meaning that more than one station may respond to the area in four minutes or less. Moving the suppression units to Station 209, Potomac Yard will have little impact on the Del Ray area and allow for greater access to the northern portions of the City.

The EMS unit will remain at Station 202, Windsor Avenue. An EMS Supervisor will be added.

Response routes have not yet been determined for the Potomac Yard development. Possible routes include using the local roads inside the development and using controlled intersections, such as East Glebe, Swann, Howe, and Custis to cross into Del Ray. Fire personnel through a signal preemption if necessary could control the traffic lights.

Area schools were studied to determine the changes in response times. Please find the attached listing of school response times.

### **Affordable Housing**

Helen McIlvaine, of the Office of Housing presented the proposal for the affordable housing project. The presentation is attached.

The developer's voluntary affordable housing contribution for the overall site is estimated at \$10.5 million. They may fulfill that contribution through a monetary payment or through the commitment of specific units of affordable housing. The City and the Developer are working to identify potential sites, in order to achieve the greatest number of units.

The fire station proposal is planned to be four stories, containing approximately 60 units. The proposal includes underground parking, a community room, business center, fitness center, and access to a rooftop garden. Delivery of these units could happen as early as 2008. The firehouse would be delivered at the same time the first unit is ready to be occupied should this project continue.

Affordable housing is a term used to describe rental or for sale housing where the maximum rent/sales price is set at or below 60% of the area median income. The Washington metropolitan region has a median income of approximately \$90,300 for a household of four.

Proposed Income limits:

- 1 Person: \$37,920
- 2 Persons: \$43,320
- 3 Persons: \$48,780
- 4 Persons: \$54,180

The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program was enacted by the Federal Government, but is administered by the state's housing authority, the Virginia Housing Development Association (VHDA). The program enables private investments in the production of affordable housing. Developers apply for tax credits based on project costs. These credits are sold to entities with tax liabilities, which provide equity for the credits in return. The maximum gross rents per month, including utilities are \$1,015/one bedroom, \$1,219/two bedroom, and \$1,408/three bedroom.

Workforce housing is another option for the space. Workforce housing describes rental or for sale housing where the maximum rent is set at a level that is affordable for local working households with income at or above 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). This project has been modeled at 80% AMI.

Estimated income levels for this project:

- 1 Person: \$41,700
- 2 Persons: \$47,700
- 3 Persons: \$53,650
- 4 Persons: \$59,600

The mixed-use developments are considered "Smart Growth" in urban areas, as they allow for public facilities and maximize the use of land. If the fire station is not realized, the developer will still contribute his obligation of \$10.5 million. The advantage to the mixed-use building is that the city can leverage other funds like tax credits to further stretch the developer contribution.

The city has decided to try and enlarge the developer-funded fire station by adding an additional bay to the three bays in the initial proposal. This will be funded by the City and has been estimated approximate cost of \$500,000. The reason for the addition is to provide much needed space for fire apparatus and equipment. This is just a proposal and has not yet been presented to council.

During the initial concept plan in the late 1990s, the plan was to create an urban model, as opposed to a suburban one, for the Potomac Yard area. The plan included narrow streets and buildings placed close to the street. This could have presented problems with the turning radius of fire apparatus. The developer has proposed the fire station and affordable housing project in order to mitigate some of the code compliant issues, but this is an on-going negotiation.

Jeff Farner of Planning and Zoning, addressed concerns regarding the infrastructure accommodations for the project. The Monroe Street Bridge is being straightened; two additional north/south connections will be added, Potomac Avenue and Main Street. Potomac Avenue will run behind the shopping center and cross Four Mile Run. Main Street will be aligned in front of the Target shopping center. There have been discussions about a possible bus rapid transit (BRT) line at Route 1. The future configuration will require involvement of the community, review by City Staff, and approval by City Council. Additional plans and further activity will be completed in the next six to eight months as the project prepares for construction.

### **Fire Department Service Determinations and Budgets**

The Fire Department determines service according, but not limited, to population density, flow rate, and construction. Trends in response times are constantly monitored and changes and/or additions are made as necessary.

It is important to realize that a particular fire engine or truck may not be in its station at any given time. Pumpers are not designed for a certain community or neighborhood. The Fire Department is a system that works in conjunction with other jurisdictions. For example, if Engine 202 is committed on another emergency, the City of Alexandria may call upon Arlington's Crystal City unit to respond to the Del Ray area. All trucks and engines are capable of accommodating any neighborhood or community, as they are relatively the same in size. The reason that the pumper at station 202 is smaller is due to the size of the building, not the width of the streets.

The fire department system may also call upon personnel from other jurisdictions to move into an Alexandria station during large-scale emergencies or events.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 15, 2006 at the Mount Vernon Recreation Center on Commonwealth Avenue at 7pm. This will be a work session for the task force and while it is open to the public, public comment will not be allowed.