

To: Alexandria Planning Commission and City Council  
From: Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee (PYDAC), September 20, 2006  
Re: Plan for land bay H at Potomac Yard and its compliance with design guidelines

For more than a year, PYDAC has been reviewing the land bay H proposal to ensure that it meets the Potomac Yard plan's design guidelines. PYDAC concludes that the proposal meets or comes close to meeting the intent of the guidelines, with the following reservations:

**The future of Route 1.** Although Route 1 is an important city gateway, the city lacks a clear, concrete vision of how it should function and what it should look like. Although standard design principles (for example, those regarding mass and scale) can be used to ensure overall design integrity, they do not substitute for a well-thought-out and articulated vision. *PYDAC urges the city to expedite its planned Route 1 study.*

**Landscaping.** The loss of green space on the east side of Route 1 because of new bus rapid transit lanes, as well as constraints relating to underground utilities, have made it difficult for the developer to meet the landscaping requirements. Extensive landscaping is essential to transforming Route 1 into an attractive urban boulevard. *PYDAC believes that landscaping requirements for land bays with Route 1 frontage must be fully met.*

**Alley treatment.** The alleys behind townhouses are wide, covered mostly in impermeable asphalt, and largely devoid of vegetation. They are essentially habitats for vehicles. But they could also be habitats for people. Children, for example, should be able to play in alleys, where traffic is slow and only occasional. *PYDAC believes that other land bays must incorporate creative alley designs, including much more landscaping and alternative (and permeable) paving materials.*

**Variation in townhouse design.** The guidelines call for variety in townhouse developments and specifically mention townhouses with back yards, detached garages, and granny flats. Although some variation is used in land bay H, it is minimal. Virtually all townhouses have embedded two-car garages with little or no private space. *PYDAC believes that more variation in townhouse layout, as well as more private space, is required in other land bays to meet the intent of the design guidelines.*

**Pedestrian crossings.** A key design principle is that development be "pedestrian friendly and pedestrian-oriented." Currently, however, the east-west pedestrian crossings (across Route 1, Main Street, and Potomac Avenue) are not sufficient to meet the guidelines. Building adequate, safe, and attractive crosswalks to encourage walking is essential. *PYDAC urges the Planning Commission and City Council to review this issue carefully and take steps to ensure that this important design principle is met.*

**Sustainable design.** Although the developer plans to use some "green" building methods and materials, major advances such as green roofs and innovative storm and waste water recycling will not be used. *PYDAC urges the City Council to provide incentives for more significant sustainable design at Potomac Yard.*

**Potomac Yard fire station. PYDAC has reviewed this proposal with respect to the guidelines, and there appears to be no conflict.** However, based on information provided by the developer, if the station is not approved, some adjustments to the land bay H development plan will be needed to allow adequate turning radii for fire trucks.