

City of Alexandria

Old Town North

Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)

February 2024 Meeting Notes

[FINAL]

Wednesday, February 7 at 9:00 a.m.

Hybrid: City Hall, Room 2000 and via Zoom

Recording Link:

https://alexandria.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=29&coa_view_id=29&coa_clip_id=6155

Committee Members in Attendance

Steve Kulinski, Chair (SK)

Tom Soapes (TS)

Katherine Bingler (KB)

Zaira Suarez (ZS)

Abbey Oklak (AO)

City Staff in Attendance

Daniel Welles (DW) P&Z

Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z

Michael Swidrak (MS) P&Z

Applicant Members in Attendance

Ken Wire (KW) Wire-Gill

Megan Rappolt (MR) Wire-Gill

Greg Hoffman (GH) Rooney Properties

Christian Bailey (CB) Morris Adjimi Architects

Luke Harding (LH) Morris Adjimi Architects

Matt Clark (MC) LandDesign

Community Members in Attendance (in Person or Virtual only if a Question was asked)

Agnes Artemel (AA)

Lynn Jordan (LJ), *via Zoom*

Mary Harris (MH)

Ann Shack (AS)

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:01 a.m. as the February 7, 2024 meeting of UDAC.

NEW BUSINESS

Note: Presentation materials on the below items are located at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/boards-and-commissions/urban-design-advisory-committee-serving-old-town-north>

First Presentation of the proposed redevelopment at Robinson Terminal North

- KW introduced the project and the project team, including owner/developer Rooney Properties, represented by GH. KW noted that the two-block site is one of most complicated sites in City, and the proposal necessitates review by the Board of Architectural Review and Waterfront Commission in addition to UDAC. A proposal for the site was reviewed by UDAC and approved by City Council in 2015. That approval has since expired.
- KW clarified that the site is approximately 3 acres, with 2 acres on the east block and 1 acre on the west block, based on a question from MH.
- KW noted that the northern portion of the east block is currently being developed by AlexRenew as the RiverRenew stormwater facility that will include a public park that will connect directly to the remainder of the east block.
- KW outlined the existing Waterfront Settlement Agreement for the property dating back to the early 1980s and administered by the National Park Service for the Federal Government. The agreement sets the parameters for maximum height and FAR on each building in addition to permitted uses and reservation of the waterfront-adjacent portions of the east block as open space.
- KW mentioned that due to the projected in-depth nature of the review for the current proposal, the applicant presentation is at an initial concept level, with staff, the Waterfront Commission and BAR presenting initial feedback before a second concept submission is made with the City. The initial community meeting is scheduled for February 29.
- AS stated that the contamination and removal of materials on the east parcel is an issue. KW noted that the applicant understands the contamination that is located underneath the site and N. Union Street and has proposed to build atop the existing concrete slab on the west block that contains the contamination underground.
- KW noted that since the previous proposal, the applicant proposes to remove the connected pier due to its poor condition and the removal of contamination under the existing structure. The piles would remain in place.
- KW noted that the proposal includes 88 residential units with about 9,000 square feet of retail spread across the two blocks.
- CB presented the architectural design and background. He began by discussing his firm's work in designing contextual architecture and work in historic places.
- CB described the architectural plan stepping down in height toward the waterfront and how the main portions of the east block building are split and connected by a lower two-story glass hyphen to increase views and porosity toward the water from the west block.

- TS asked the applicant if the river views are available from the midpoint of the N. Union Street block. CB and KW responded that the glass hyphen does not permit views through to the waterfront but allows light and sky to come through. TS asked the applicant to study a visual connection to waterfront from this point.
- AO asked if the applicant could provide street sections and sidewalk widths with the next submission based on recommendations in the Old Town North Small Area Plan and Urban Design Standards and Guidelines.
- GH and KW highlighted the two-level retail terrace at north end of west block and the direct views to the waterfront. This space would likely be reserved for a restaurant tenant.
- CB noted that Maisonettes, or two-story apartments, were proposed for east block.
- CB outlined the design characteristics from local examples, including the use of ribbed brick, open corners and residential character for the buildings.
- KW noted the grade changes for the site which are at least 5 feet from north to south on the east block. This explains the proposal that the first-floor units on the on east are located several feet above the sidewalk elevation.
- Matt Clark (MC) provided an overview of the landscape design, including a rethinking of the open spaces since the previous proposal. MC said the applicant is looking at increasing public access and views and integrating site into the waterfront.
- MC noted the topography and grade changes and how they inform design – including connections to the RiverRenew plaza that will be located a few feet above the remainder of the open space to the south.
- AS asked if the railroad tracks embedded into the north end of the west block (where no building is proposed) will be removed. KW said that the applicant is working toward that end with the relevant entities.
- MH mentioned West’s Point at the end of Oronoco Street and its historical significance. KW noted that the applicant understands the historic nature of the area and will be working on interpretive elements and making the open space on site accessible to the public.
- AA added that the open space and walkway along the water’s edge should feel public and serve as an alternate pedestrian north-south route to N. Union Street. She added that she would be interested in working with the applicant to include the open space in the Old Town Arts Walk. AA also advocated for a hotel use for the west building, which the applicant stated is not feasible.
- LJ asked (via Zoom) the applicant to study the use of more historic materials as opposed to industrial-style materials. KW responded that the design of the buildings should be “simple” and “elegant.”
- LJ also asked the applicant if the glass hyphen on the east block could be changed or removed to allow for public roof access. KW responded that the applicant needs the glass hyphen to provide private residential access to each wing of the building and access directly from the underground garage to the lobby.
- TS noted the importance of incorporating historic-interpretive elements throughout the site design.

- KB asked the applicant how the proposal responds to the floodplain. KW responded that the buildings exceed the base flood elevation at a given point by at least 1 foot.
- AO wanted more discussion of how the proposal meets the Old Town North Small Area Plan and the Urban Design Standards and Guidelines, specifically mentioning how the proposal will enhance the Union Street streetscape to be more accommodating to bicycle and pedestrian traffic.
- AO noted her support of the use of materials and material texture in the proposal.
- KW said that the applicant will likely come back to UDAC for a presentation in April or May for their second concept-level submission.
- SK said that the current proposal is more modest in scope than the previous approved proposal from 2015, but has the ability to provide similar results as the previous approval.
- SK noted the importance of site design going forward, including the visual and pedestrian connections between the northern ends and the southern ends of the site.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:24 a.m.