



## DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

DATE: July 10, 2020

TO: Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee (PYDAC)

FROM: Planning & Zoning Staff

SUBJECT: North Potomac Yard, Phase 1 Development – Public Realm Presentation

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### **Introduction**

The applicant, CPYR Theater, LLC CPYR Shopping Center, LLC and Virginia Tech Foundation Inc, have submitted a presentation on the Public Realm experience in Phase 1 redevelopment of North Potomac Yard. This presentation provides an overview of the key elements which will shape the pedestrian experience in Phase 1, including the streetscape design, open space design, building signage and wayfinding, and sitewide elements of sustainability. The PYDAC website contains a link to the applicant's presentation.

Staff has drafted this memorandum to supplement the applicant's submission and provide high-level feedback on each category of the applicant's presentation and staff recommendations on opportunities to continue refining designs to ensure the overall Public Realm composition achieves the Design Excellence standards for North Potomac Yard.

### **Streetscape Design and Common Area Elements:**

*Design Excellence Criteria: An active public realm (streets, sidewalks, streetscapes). The public realm prioritizes the pedestrian experience and ground floors of buildings include active uses, interior-exterior visibility, and high-quality architecture. Streetscape design incorporates the City's Complete Streets Design Guidelines, with amenities and infrastructure for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit. Site design incorporates high quality paving materials, site furnishings and lighting. Service areas will be designed to be compatible with the public realm and pedestrian experience while remaining as unobtrusive as possible.*

- **Unique Streetscape Design and Elements:** While staff finds the initial streetscape design and proposed materials will provide a positive pedestrian experience, staff would encourage further development of the designs to create a sustainable and unique streetscape experience.

- Identify sustainability features such as integrated stormwater, permeable pavers and other design elements that promote sustainability.
- Propose unique design elements, such as materials or site furnishings which highlight a sustainable or innovative identity for the Innovation District. Are there unique application of materials or designs that can be utilized?
- Develop a strong identity as the Innovation District. How do you know you're in the Innovation District when you're walking down New Street A or New Street B?

### **Open Space Design:**

*Design Excellence Criteria: A variety of open spaces are provided. A variety of open spaces, which contribute to the regional network, are provided. The District includes public and private open spaces that, in concert with the regional Potomac Yard Park, support a variety of active, social and passive uses in a mix of urban plazas, lawns, shared streets, rooftop open spaces and recreational areas.*

- **General Comments:** An objective of the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan was to create a network of unique open spaces across North Potomac Yard. The proposed open spaces in Phase 1, should continue to be refined to ensure greater differentiation in the design and programming of the spaces.
  - Further differentiate the intent of each open space through design features to support varied users.
  - Explore unique design features, site furniture, technological innovation or sustainable features within the open spaces to highlight the identity of the Innovation District. Current designs still feel generic and could be found in many communities.
- **Market Lawn:** Staff finds the general design of Market Lawn achieves the goals of the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan by providing a flexible space, to accommodate a variety of events and social gatherings such as outdoor movies, Farmer's Markets and event programming" that fit within the space. The combination of an uninterrupted hardscape and lawn area provides flexibility for day-to-day use for gathering and dining while simultaneously enabling events such as exercise classes or other social gatherings.
  - The location of the gathering space is sheltered by trees and sidewalks to create a space that encourages people to gather.
  - Shade trees create an enjoyable experience for people to sit and use the space.
- **Market Lawn Refinement:**
  - Continue to explore design treatments to integrate the internal "Garden Room" inside Building 14 to read as an extension of the Market Lawn area. Consider treatments to clearly signal that the Garden Room is a publicly accessible space and actively encourage people to enter the room.
  - Staff would encourage an extension of the streetscape design and unique site features to be integrated into the final design of the Lawn area to ensure any

movable seating or other features reflect the overall design and branding of the Innovation District.

- Metro Plaza: The North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan designated Metro Plaza as an, “iconic zone that can include public art features, furniture, and/or creative paving/landscaping” to highlight the Plaza’s role as a key civic space in North Potomac Yard and one of the key gateways into the community. Staff finds the current design does not achieve an iconic level of design or provide a design that encourages a civic gathering space.
- Metro Plaza Refinement:
  - Continue to more clearly define the intent and unique character of Metro Plaza and utilize a design which reflects the iconic status and civic intent of the space.
  - Staff would encourage opportunities for unique pavers, lighting or other site features which demonstrate the Plaza is a gateway into the Innovation District.
  - Consider the use of a focal design feature to set an identity. How can technology or sustainability, features of the Innovation District, be integrated into the Plaza design?
- Potomac Yard Park: The North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan envisioned Potomac Yard Park as a, “regional amenity for users of all ages and abilities and would provide active, social and passive recreational amenity areas” for individuals in North Potomac Yard. Staff finds the initial design is providing a range of passive and active uses that will achieve the goals of the small area plan.
- Potomac Yard Park Refinement:
  - Staff would encourage the continued refinement of the park design through the Parks and Recreation Commission to ensure the final amenities selected in the park meet the demonstrated recreational needs of the community.
- Block 10 Plaza: The applicant team has provided additional ground-level open space as a plaza area to create a larger, contiguous open space and visually connect to the Virginia Tech Campus and Market Lawn.
- Block 10 Plaza Refinement:
  - Continue to develop the design of the open space at Block 10 to show how the space responds to the proposed ground floor uses adjacent to the space.
  - Staff would encourage an extension of any unique site features to be integrated into the final design of the Plaza to ensure any movable seating or other unique features reflect the overall design and branding of the Innovation District.
- Virginia Tech Campus: The internal campus open space design allows for connections to Potomac Yard Park to the northeast as well as to Market Lawn associated with Building 14 and the Block 10 Plaza planned adjacent to Building 10.
- Virginia Tech Campus Refinement:
  - Continue to explore design treatments for the interim surface parking lots which could allow the space to provide additional purposes than just parking. Demonstrate a range of options for recreational uses, interim sustainability

- functions, or other designs that create a positive public experience for the duration of the interim parking use?
- Consider materials, landscaping and other treatments to minimize the visual presence of a surface parking lot. Are there opportunities for patterns in the surface, permeable pavers, additional landscaping islands or other designs?

### **Building Signage and Wayfinding:**

*Design Excellence Criteria: Building signage is unique and identifiable. Signage design integrates high quality graphics with a variety of diverse signage styles into the architectural elements and streetscape to form an attractive composition. Signage utilizes high-quality materials and appropriate lighting to ensure successful integration with the quality of buildings and site design. Signage is creative, unique to the user, and enhances the visual experience while providing clear, concise information and direction.*

- Staff finds the initial Coordinated Sign Plan for North Potomac Yard establishes a strong framework to deliver unique, high-quality and diverse signage.
- The proposed sign plan provides building signage, unique signage opportunities for commercial tenants, wayfinding signage for pedestrians and vehicles, and branding opportunities as the Innovation District.
- Materials and lighting styles identified within the plan will allow individuals tenants individuality to express their identity and brand while achieving a high-quality sign material and appearance.
- Templates for sign locations and dimensions will encourage flexibility of presentation while ensuring a high-level of consistency across North Potomac Yard to ensure signage is visible to provide guidance and safely installed.
- Continued Refinement:
  - Staff encourages the continued refinement of the square footages allotted per sign to ensure there is an appropriate balance of signs.

### **Sustainability:**

*Design Excellence Criteria: Environmental sustainability is integrated with the design of infrastructure, open spaces and buildings. The applicant will demonstrate an integrated building approach to design, open space and infrastructure to meet or exceed the sustainability goals. The District's Environmental Sustainability Master Plan demonstrates compliance with the goals and recommendations of the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan and identifies short-term, mid-term, and long-term strategies to achieve the goal of district-wide sustainability measures. Buildings and site design also comply with the applicable Green Building Policy and Landscape Guidelines.*

- Staff and the applicant team are continuing to develop the Environmental Sustainability Master Plan to meet the objectives of the Design Excellence Criteria.

Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee  
North Potomac Yard, Phase 1 Development – Public Realm  
July 10, 2020

- Staff would encourage continued refinement and promotion of the sitewide sustainability features that are integrated into the building and streetscape design.
- Staff would seek additional opportunities to showcase elements of sustainability through design, informational signage or other demonstrations.