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To: BRAG Members

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Re: Arts and Recreational Programs & Facilities in Beauregard Corridor

Date: January 25, 2013

As you are aware I am very interested in the Art and Recreational "Place Making" benefits for the Beauregard area. Because transportation, affordable housing, the fire station and the renovation of the recreational field at the Ramsey School were priorities which the developer proffers were applied to there are no funds for Arts and Recreational programs and facilities. We do not have the money now. But we have a thirty year build for the proposed plan and so I have been speaking to various BRAG Members, City Staff, the developers, local community residents, and City Council Members to seek their advice and suggestions as to how best to plan for including such elements at a later point in time.

This is a work in progress and will have to change and adjust over time as more is learned but I wished to let you know about this effort so that you could have this in mind as we all examine the design regulations and other elements of the plan. My goal is to use this awareness so that the capacity and flexibility to include such a facility in the future is made easier.

Among the issues I have been initially focused on are:

1) Pools

Currently there are a number of pools in the area. A number of West End residents and participants in the Beauregard deliberations have expressed concern that that as we build we will loose those current pools and that if they are replaced there may be a fee for service which might preclude many people from benefiting from this. Also if the pools are only for residents of the units there is no opportunity for such pools to be used by other residents. Note also that two Senior Centers were added to the plan last spring and residents of this kind of facility often are encouraged to swim, particularly if they are injured, because this is a low stress sport that can be very therapeutic as well as enjoyable.

Many of the City's current pools are being closed due to budget constraints, and the big costs that need to be addressed are, land, construction, yearly maintenance and parking. Currently there are efforts to place pools at school sites because the City already owns the land but some schools, and it appears that John Adams and Ramsay are in this category, do not have sufficient land for such a purpose. City Staff dealing with aquatic facilities, and the Chair of the Parks and Recreation Commission have indicated that they are looking at trying to locate public pools in the West End but they are constrained by the current budget, funding, appropriate land. We also need to examine issues such as soil permeability, and soil structure, and the desires and interests of local residents. While building a pool on a roof of a building is a possibility it is more costly and requires a concrete rather than wood structure. In ground outdoor pools are less expensive. Pools have about a fifty year lifespan and need to be rehabilitated or replaced after that. The City has only one indoor pool. I promise to report back and share with you the results of my further research at a later point in time.

2) A Non-profit Foundation

Some BRAG Members and City Staff suggested that a non-profit foundation would be the best vehicle for programing Arts and Recreational activities. For example Wolf Trap is owned by the National Parks but the programing is done by a foundation. I have personally pledged to work to examine such models, and to raise money for such activities through grants from other foundations, corporate, individual, small business and government resources. For example I would like to see if the military bands could play in the Town Center and if DOD would consider contributing to such activities as their employees might enjoy them. I am currently looking into the Capitol Hill Community Foundation over near Eastern Market which is completely volunteer run. They raise money and provide grants for arts and recreational programing activities. They also have raised capital funds. For example they raised about \$450,000 for the merchant vendors of Eastern Market when it burned to pay for refrigerated truck s, and refrigerator cases in the temporary building that was created for the merchants while Eastern Market was reconstructed. An architect also donated his design services to create the temporary structure.

3) Using Artists and Artisans to Design & Create the City's Jewelry

I, and it turns out other advocates in Alexandria, recommended using Artists and Artisans to design and create such elements as bike racks, signs, fountains, bus shelters, street lights, park benches, small landscaped areas, etc., with an eye to making it more distinctive, and attractive and help to create a fun, welcoming vibe. This is a kind of branding of the City and neighborhoods and these elements are a kind of "jewelry" for the City. This can be done from scratch and or in combination with commercial products which are then embellished with artistic features. The Arts Commission is in the process of working to do this. A proposal made during the Beauregard planning process was to have such features reflect, and celebrate, the flora and fauna of the diverse population here in the West End and to honor the fact that in this area our trees and the greenery are very highly valued and appreciated. For example, our state flower is the dogwood, and monkeys, panthers and parrots are native to Central America where so many of our Salvadorian residents are from. Perhaps we could have the dogwood bus stop or a monkey bus stop.

4) A Mixed Use, City/Commercial Facility in the Town Center

During the plan process local residents advocated for additional meeting/recreational arts space in particular up in the Town Center area which could be used for meetings, adult education classes, jazzercise, dance lessons, yoga, music and dance performances, wine tastings, craft shows and the like and to be able to have some of these kinds of activities up in the central Town Plaza area as is done in Europe and in Central and South America. The idea is to make this a go to place where people can have fun, learn, have a meal, shop, take classes, hear music, fall in love or whatever.

While there is a meeting room down at the fire station and this is a City building it is smaller and parking is more limited. In addition there is going to be a higher concentration of population and commercial activities in the Town Center and such a space/facility can stimulate the popularity of an area and increase sales and City tax revenues. The Urban Land Institute studies, which focuses on development and smart growth, demonstrate this kind of positive impact and effect. My original suggestion had been if a ground floor of a building could house such a meeting/performance space then the balance of the building could be commercial. I also am trying to examine if it would be possible for the City to acquire additional space on other floors in the future. Cathy Puskar pointed out that if this were done that would require raising the height and density of the building because the per square footage of developer space was already agreed to in the plan and that it would need to be constructed in such a way that other floors could be added and that the construction materials would support this.

She also stated that shops and restaurants liked being on the ground floor for easy access for patrons. One issue that was raised was the approach in the Cherry Creek area of Denver. There the basements are dug out English basement style, with space of plantings and or tables in front of windows with an additional level of commercial space above that as well. Patrons go down a few steps to the lower level and up a few steps to the second level. There are many shops restaurants and the like in this area there and it looked to be very popular judged by the amount of foot traffic. Also raised was the issue of having an opportunity for artisans and crafts persons to be able to have space there for a combination shop/teaching facility as is done at the Torpedo Factory.

Also raised was the idea of a raised space in the plaza either in the outdoor square area or attached to a building but visible in the plaza for outdoor performances. Cathy recommended a raised space in the plaza area.

The above are referenced because these ideas are being explored. This is a work in progress which will be changed and adjusted as more information and input is available from all of the different interested parties as we go forward. If I have not yet spoken to you, I intend to. I am seeking the views, advice, concerns recommendations and suggestions from everyone I can whether they are City Staff, developers, residents, Commission Members, businesses, think tank people, non-profits, elected officials and the like. And please call me if you have suggestions and or concerns and areas you believe need to be explored. Right now I am in a big vacuum mode. This is how I do research, reading, learning and talking to as many people as possible. But I never want anyone blind sided or surprised especially people who are working on things in the same area and who have similar interests and concerns.

This report is just to provide information so that you can have these things in mind as you and we move forward. Hopefully this is helpful. After more work additional reports will be made to you. I was also recently approved as one of the members of the Commission on the Arts which hopefully will inform and enrich my ability to help the City and the West End and provide leverage when exploring the availability of funding for such projects. It is a long road and this is the first step.

Thank You,