

City of Alexandria

Urban Design Advisory Committee

June 2018 Meeting Notes

[FINAL]

Wednesday, June 6, 2018 at 9:00 a.m.

City Hall, Room 2000

Date of Draft: June 7, 2018

Committee Members in Attendance:

Stephen Kulinski, Chair (SK)
Marie McKenney Tavernini, Vice Chair (MT)
Roger Waud (RW)
Engin Artemel (EA)
Abbey Oklak, Secretary (AO)

City Staff in Attendance:

Michael Swidrak (MS) P&Z
Heba ElGawish (HE) P&Z
Gary Wagner (GW) P&Z
Tamara Jovovic (TJ) Housing

Applicant Team in Attendance:

Ken Wire (KW) McGuire Woods
Whitney Smith (WS) Carr City Centers
Austin Flajser (AF) Carr City Centers
Matthew Buhts (MB) Carr City Centers
Ari Belmonte (AB) Carr City Centers
Abed Benzima (AB1) SK + I Architects
Andrew Czajowski (AC) SK + I Architects
Trini Rodriguez (TR) Parker Rodriguez

Others in Attendance:

Dan Straub (DS) Resident, former UDAC member
Carolyn Griffin (CG) MetroStage
Mark Feldheim (MF) MetroStage
Shirley Downs (SD) Arts Commission
Bruce Machanic (BM) Former UDAC member
Jim Dillon (JD) Printers Row resident, business owner
Kristyn Reed (KR) Printers Row resident
David Vondle (DV) Printers Row resident
Joe Teague (JT) Printers Row resident
Mark Salow (MS2) Printers Row resident

Margo Mehoke (MM)	Printers Row resident
Pat Holman (PH)	Printers Row resident
Maureen Glackin (MG)	Printers Row resident
Stephanie Letson (SL)	Printers Row resident
Maria Wasowski (MW)	Planning Commissioner
Mo Seifeldein (MS1)	Resident
Jake Denney (JD1)	Resident
Tom Soapes (TS)	Resident

INTRODUCTION

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:05 a.m. as the June meeting of UDAC.
- SK asked that Committee members and those in attendance introduce themselves.
- SK noted that the Committee will be reviewing the proposal based on the **Urban Design Guidelines (OTN UDSG)** that were approved with the **Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTN SAP)**.

OLD BUSINESS

- The Committee considered a draft of the notes for the January meeting that staff distributed to the Committee.
- MT asked that the following change be made to the January meeting notes:
 - *MT moved to adopt the meeting notes ~~with the above change included~~, and EA seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved 5-0.*
- MT moved to adopt the meeting notes with the above change included, and EA seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved 5-0.

NEW BUSINESS

First Presentation of development proposal at the Craddock Site (1201 N. Royal Street)

Note: A fact sheet on the project is located at alexandriava.gov/69556

- KW introduced the project to the Committee, noting this was the first time the project was presented to the public. KW noted that the applicant was integrally involved in the OTN SAP process and plans for redevelopment of this site were included in the plan. The proposed rezoning to CRMU-X as recommended in the OTN SAP allows the applicant flexibility in the number of dwelling units placed on site and in building massing, on which the applicant is still working to finalize.
- AF added that the development site is challenging due to its triangular shape, and the applicant is working to fit adequate underground parking and distribute massing appropriately, including placing most of the massing away from the adjacent residential blocks. AF also discussed the massing scheme, which includes the two buildings that are

connected through the pedestrian bridge and are separated by the arts walk arcade. The arts walk will potentially feature ground-floor “makerspaces” and display spaces for artists.

- AC further discussed the proposed architecture and massing. He discussed the smaller “jewel box” building at the corner of Third and N. Royal Streets, which reads as a three-story expression with ground-floor arts uses and three or four loft-style units above. Based on a question from MT, AC noted that the footbridge between the loft units and the main building allows for a single elevator core in the building, and that the loft units will have direct access to the elevator core and main building. TR added that the footbridge will add vitality to the arts walk area.
- AC discussed design precedents for the proposal, including architecture that recalls industrial buildings (with glass and metal elements) and with the red-brick masonry on the main building shoulders to recall both industrial and local architectural elements.
- KW noted that the proposal includes building shoulders with setbacks to the highest portion of the main building on both street frontages (N. Royal and Third Streets), which is per the OTN SAP is only required on N. Royal. AC noted that the main building height was set back 18 feet from the building shoulders, and terraces were to be located on the roof of the building shoulders.
- MT asked the applicant to confirm the loading location. The applicant stated that loading will be provided on-street on N. Royal Street and that residential move-ins are expected to be minimal since the building will be occupied as a condominium. It was also noted that the parking garage will also be accessed from N. Royal Street. The applicant will be studying the functionality of the parking and loading areas in relation to their proximity to the intersection of N. Royal Street and Bashford Lane.
- EA noted that he thought the rear (trail) elevation seemed flat. AC said that the trail façade is articulated with repeating projected bay windows and takes its vertical elements from the adjacent power plant structure.
- RW wanted confirmation of the existing conditions of the site, and the applicant stated that the site features metal structures (including for MetroStage), vacant retail space and surface parking. RW stated that the proposal would alter this part of Old Town North with the increased massing on the site.
- JD asked the applicant if they could provide height and massing context between the existing neighboring buildings and the proposal. The applicant stated it would provide these perspectives for the next submission.
- AF discussed how the applicant acknowledged that this site is located in a quieter portion of Old Town North, and the programming on this site, including the arts anchor, would take into account the neighborhood context. This is in contrast with the Crowne Plaza site, which the applicant stated has the purpose of attracting larger numbers of visitors to the site in a more prominently located portion of Old Town North.
- KW stated that the applicant plans to meet with City staff to discuss the arts and cultural anchor proposed for the site, in addition to building height and massing questions. As currently proposed, the main building exceeds the height limit for the block outlined in the Old Town North Small Area Plan. The applicant believes they can increase the building

height based on the zoning provisions in the new Old Town North Arts and Cultural District (Section 6-900 of the Zoning Ordinance). The increased building height is for a club room that is located on the roof with direct access to the rooftop amenities and does not contain additional units. By placing a roof on this club room, it adds to the building height based on the City Zoning Ordinance.

- KW also noted that the applicant plans to schedule a meeting with Printers Row residents to present updates and receive feedback.
- RW noted the increase in residents to the neighborhood with the development. KW added that the applicant will be providing a traffic study to the City for review.
- MT asked the applicant if there will be two levels of underground parking for the residents. AF confirmed, and stated that the building will be parked to market demand, which is higher for condominium than for rental.
- A resident asked the applicant about the demand for an arts space in this portion of Old Town North, and if the applicant is placing the arts space on site in order to obtain the density bonus (as outlined in Section 6-900 of the Zoning Ordinance) or if placing retail on site would be successful on site in lieu of the arts use. AF replied that the previous restaurant tenant found it not to be a viable location for a restaurant. AF added that there may be some viability for retail on site, though this will be increased with the future NRG site redevelopment. AF also noted that the inclusion of the arts space makes the project viable and will most likely produce less traffic demand than retail or commercial in the same location. Retail also adds a higher parking demand which would be hard to accommodate on the site.
- KW added that the applicant will be providing the space to the end arts user free of charge, which will increase the viability of the arts space.
- A Printers Row resident noted her support for walkable development and stated general support for the arts use, though asked the applicant to explore smaller retail or commercial uses like a café. The resident also asked if the applicant will be practicing environmentally sensitive remediation and construction practices, including soil testing. KW replied that the development will be held to rigorous City construction and mitigation standards, and that the buildings must be connected to separated storm sewers. AF added that the stormwater treatment will be improved from the existing condition of the site, which is primarily impervious cover.
- TR provided an overview of the proposed site and landscape design. The design will improve the streetscape around the site and connect directly with the Mount Vernon Trail (though staff and the applicant are currently studying the connection at the northern portion of the site). The rear portion of the building will feature direct connections from first-floor residential units to the trail. TR provided an updated program for the arts walk, which will have seating areas, landscaping and potentially public art. The arts walk will be approximately 35 feet wide.
- EA asked if the applicant is meeting its open space requirement. KW replied, and staff confirmed that the proposal is meeting the 25-percent requirement in the CRMU-X zone (other zones have a 40-percent requirement).

- KW answered a question related to if the arts end user is not able to continue operations at the location. KW stated that based on the City Zoning Ordinance, the space reserved for the arts organization must be used for approved arts-related uses (the Zoning Ordinance states that it must be a minimum of 30 years) and that this will be enshrined in covenant documents for the property.
- MW added that the Art League in Montgomery Center (800 block of N. Royal and N. Fairfax Streets) is an active destination, and that the location of the Art League and MetroStage in Old Town North was the impetus behind creating an arts district. SK noted that if the Art League relocated to space such as the one in this proposal, it would “free up” office space in Old Town North and could potentially help with getting a critical mass of arts-related uses in the neighborhood.
- MT added that while the arts user in this proposal would not have to purchase the space, they will have to pay condominium fees.
- In response to a question from a community member, SK stated and KW elaborated that this meeting would not include any vote on if the project meets the OTN UDSG, and the applicant expects two to three more presentations at UDAC meetings. SK added that the proposal as submitted meets most of the guidelines and standards in the OTN UDSG.
- A resident asked that the applicant study the inclusion of bump-outs and speedbumps to reduce the speed of traffic adjacent to the site.
- AO asked if bump-outs in landscape plans are proposed for the development, TR verified that was the case. AO also noted to the applicant that she does not think a tree should be placed in front of the arts walk entrance on Third Street. TR responded that they are working with City staff on the placement of street trees.
- CG, who runs MetroStage (currently located on the site), stated the OTN SAP created a vision for the future of the neighborhood, and the opportunity for the development of the arts district. This proposal would further the goal of providing more arts-related uses in the neighborhood.
- MW added that the development would bring context to the Art League and MetroStage (which is planning to relocate to the Crowne Plaza site). MW also noted that the cap on allowed square footage of arts and cultural anchors in Old Town North that are constructed with the density bonus (capped at 100,000 square feet) could always be increased in the future by City Council.
- SD asked the applicant to schedule a presentation with the Arts Commission, who have members that could help the applicant with issues related to design of the proposal and future end users. AF noted that the applicant will reach out to the Arts Commission.

Committee Discussion

- EA noted that the project is dense, though the density is decided by the zoning of the site and is out of the purview of UDAC. EA asked the applicant to study lighter colors noting a lighter gray color for the metal cladding will make the buildings look smaller. AB noted that the architects will study using lighter colors. EA added that he does not support the use of the industrial-style windows, and that the proposal should not mimic

the architecture of the existing decommissioned power plant. EA noted the angles and balconies on the trail are appreciated.

- MT noted that the proposal includes a large building on a small lot, and that the site could benefit from more ground-level open space. MT found that the buildings were not friendly in appearance, and do not “say” Old Town North.
- RW noted that the proposal changes the character of the area with the proposed massing.
- MT noted her concern with safety issues with walking in the arts walk at night. The applicant noted that the proposal will bring “eyes on the street” with the adjacent residential units. SK noted that the applicant can address this issue for the next meeting.
- AO noted the importance of pedestrian connectivity and designing the building and site within the neighborhood context, and that the site could benefit from more ground-level open space. AO also requested additional information comparing the adjacent properties to the proposed – both in perspective and street section.
- SK noted that the proposal was a “first good pass.” SK would like to see increased attention on the streetscape, and how the site and streetscape relate to neighboring properties. He noted that the general design scheme is successful but needs more development. This could include breaking down the building massing, especially in relation to the trail elevation, where the building appears monolithic.
- KW noted that the applicant will need a month to review City, neighbor and UDAC comments, and will look to resubmit to UDAC at that time.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:29 a.m.