

City of Alexandria

Urban Design Advisory Committee

September 2018 Meeting Notes

[FINAL]

Wednesday, September 12, 2018 at 9:00 a.m.

City Hall, Room 1101

Committee Members in Attendance:

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

Absent Committee Members:

Roger Waud (RW)

City Staff in Attendance:

Michael Swidrak (MS)	P&Z
Gary Wagner (GW)	P&Z
Stephanie Free (SF)	P&Z
Heba ElGawish (HE)	P&Z

Applicant Team in Attendance:

Catharine Puskar (CP)	Walsh Colucci (attorney)
Bob Brant (BB)	Walsh Colucci (attorney)
Nick Aello (NA)	Hord Coplan Macht (architect)
Trini Rodriguez (TR)	Parker Rodriguez (landscape architect)

Others in Attendance:

Dan Straub (DS)	Resident, former UDAC member
Frances Zorn (FZ)	Alexandria House resident
John Long (JL)	Alexandria House resident
Bruce Machanic (BM)	MRE Properties, former UDAC member
Eleanor Quigley (EQ)	Alexandria House Resident
David Vondle (DV)	Printers Row resident

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:05 a.m. as the September meeting of UDAC.

- The Committee considered a draft of the notes for the August meeting. MT proposed changes including three minor changes that are reflected in the final August notes. SK proposed editing the bullet point regarding the comments of DS, based on the suggestion of DS. EA moved to adopt the meeting notes with the above change included, and SK seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved 4-0.

NEW BUSINESS

First Presentation of development proposal at the WMATA Bus Barn Site (600 N. Royal Street)

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

- CP, representing the applicant, provided introductions of the applicant team.
- CP discussed the 2014 WMATA Bus Barn Task Force. The Task Force identified design principles for this block, which were incorporated into the Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTN-SAP). CP described how the applicant addressed the Task Force-endorsed design principles related to:
 - The “ground plane,” including the treatment of sidewalks and street trees, including the use of BMP (stormwater management “best management practice” tree wells.
 - The treatment of Wythe Street, which is identified as a “green street” and its importance as a connection between Washington Street and the Potomac River.
 - The proposed zoning, which is CRMU-X with an allowed affordable housing bonus.
 - Variation of heights to relate to neighboring properties (i.e. townhouses and Alexandria house), and breaking down building massing, so the development appears as separate buildings.
- CP noted the applicant will address comments outlined in the staff memo in the presentation. NA added that the applicant will vary the building colors and treatment of the building corners based on staff comments. TR stated that the applicant team had productive meeting with City staff the day before the UDAC meeting. NA added that the applicant is still discussing site access from Royal Street with City staff.
- NA and TR presented site context and architectural and landscape plans. TR noted that the proposal creates a site that is inviting for pedestrians. TR stated the applicant is looking at accentuating the building hyphens, which provide public views into the interior green space of the site.
- CP noted that the site grade changes about 8 feet from the northwest to southeast portion of the site.
- NA stated the main building entrance is on Wythe street – can see into amenities and courtyard on Wythe Street. EA asked for clarification on how the building was “transparent.” CP noted that the glassy nature of the portion of the building on Wythe

Street allows for views into the interior open space. TR added that the resident amenities are located on the Wythe Street building portion and can be seen from the glassy portion of the entrance.

- Based on a question from the community member, TR clarified that the precedent images of the amenities shown in the presentation are generally to scale in how they would be placed on site.
- TR further discussed the landscape plan, including the submerged transformers on the site by the Wythe Street right-of-way and that the transformer covers are integrated into the site design, and the inclusion of BMP bioretention tree pits along N. Royal, Wythe and Pendleton Streets.
- NA talked more about the building hyphen on N. Pitt Street, which includes a pedestrian bridge above and the ground-level is “open air” (with gate) with pocket park in front.
- EA asked why N. Royal Street is the location of the parking garage. NA answered that the grading of the site and the location of loading services at the Annie B. Rose building on the eastern side of the street makes N. Royal Street the most logical street frontage for parking and loading access. MT asked where on the block the proposed loading zone on the building is compared to the Annie B. Rose building. NA answered that the loading dock for the proposed building is located to the south of the Annie B. Rose loading across the street.
- NA pointed out the inclusion of roof terraces on 4th floor at southwest corner, 5th floor at northwest corner, 6th on northeast corner.
- EA asked if the 25 percent open space requirement is met, which the applicant confirmed that it is for the proposal.
- NA presented the building parti, which includes three separate “buildings” and a variety of architecture styles. The applicant uses four different brick colors, cementitious panels at higher levels and metal panel at lower levels. CP added that the applicant will simplify facades, continue to vary colors, including the reducing the amount of red brick used. NA added the building is a “transitional” style of architecture – blending elements of modern and contemporary architecture.
- NA added that the site will be served by a new bus stop at the corner of N. Pitt and Pendleton Streets.
- SK noted that the presentation has shown project development since the original project packet was submitted, based on staff comments. The noted changes have addressed several UDAC comments from the original packet submission.
- EA noted he approves of the incorporated height transitions per the Task Force recommendations, and likes the window patterns.
- EA noted he was concerned about site porosity. He agrees with staff comments on breaking up building massing further, and he would like further development of the N. Pitt and Pendleton Street facades. The Pendleton Street facades should look more like townhouses, with more openings on these blockfaces. He said some of the blocks resemble army barrack, and entire blocks are too uniform.

- CP said the applicant can address the comments in the staff memo, though the applicant disagrees on providing a publicly accessible connection between the street and interior open space. CP argued that it is a common condition in the area to have glimpses of interior open space without public access, like the Watergate development on N. Royal and N. Pitt Streets. The grading of the site also creates issues for the direct pedestrian connection.
- EA asked the applicant provide a building indentation on N. Pitt Street. CP said the applicant will study notching the building back at this point.
- The applicant noted that the pocket park on N. Pitt Street is 800-900 square feet, based on question from MT. MT noted that the blinds for the apartments on the first floor will often be closed.
- MT asked the applicant if trucks be able to pull into loading zone on N. Royal Street. The applicant stated that smaller trucks can utilize the loading zone, which is adequate, since the building will be apartments (not condominiums) and will have not retail. Smaller trucks (including trash trucks) can pull all the way into the loading zone
- MT noted that she likes Pendleton and N. Pitt Street facades.
- AO stated that she found the building massing is successful and that further refining the building hyphens will improve porosity. She prefers a two-story and not a three-story hyphen bridge.
- AO continued that she found the buildings to be too boxy, though the lower corner elements are successful. She noted that the applicant should simplify the architecture and increase the size of the pocket park, which could allow an area for dogs. The N. Pitt street English basements may be an issue with the collection of water and leaves.
- EA noted his praise for the architect, and would like to see improvements to the architecture.
- SK stated that the project development with City staff has helped. With respect to the Urban Design Standards and Guidelines for Old Town North (OTN-UDSG), SK stated that the applicant has done much to address the guidelines, and that the fine grained details of architecture are left to address. He stated his concerns about too much uniformity on N. Pitt Street façade, and that it seemed too commercial. He asked the applicant to study architectural details and deeper patterning (window treatments/sizes/materials). SK likes the visual porosity and believes the proposal would work without the direct pedestrian access. SK would like the applicant to further develop the area above the parking entry garage. He also likes the distinct entries, including the townhouse-style units and the pocket park, and likes the treatment of the Wythe street façade.
- TR confirmed that there is a paving treatment on top of the in-ground transformers, based on SK question.
- EQ stated that she likes the green infrastructure on three sides of the site, though the proposal gives the impression of a gated community. She asked the applicant to study saving the eight pin oak trees in the N. Pitt Street sidewalk, and would like to see further refinement of the townhouse-style units.

- JL asked what residents at Alexandria House will see when looking down on the roof of the building. NA stated that the residents will see a clustered condenser units and green roofs. No mechanical screening is proposed.
- FZ would like to see further refinement of parking entry on N. Royal Street, and the refinement of the site porosity to be able to see through the block.
- FZ asked the applicant which development applications are required. CP stated that the applicant requests a zoning, Development Special Use Permit, the affordable housing density (not height) bonus for an FAR of 2.91. The proposed unit count is around 280, including 8-10 affordable units.
- EQ asked if the parking in garage only for residents. CP answered that the intent is that all residents park in building, and the 310 spaces would be only for residents and meets the City parking requirement.
- BM noted that he was impressed with how building relates to varied site contexts (townhouses and multifamily buildings).
- DS agreed with all of the points made by the committee members and the community representatives in attendance and complemented the applicant on the development of the project concept including the building elevations with hyphens, the pocket park and the proposed streetscape improvements. He also commented on the unique site plan with a proposed building mass in the interior of the project and inquired about the possibility of expanding that inner building mass by increasing its height in return for possibly lower building heights along North Pitt Street.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:16 a.m.