

City of Alexandria

Urban Design Advisory Committee

October 2018 Meeting Notes

[FINAL]

Wednesday, October 31, 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)
Tom Soapes (TS)

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 Members in Attendance:

Ken Wire (KW) McGuire Woods (attorney)
Whitney Smith (WS) Carr City Centers (developer)
Austin Flajser (AF) Carr City Centers (developer)
Ari Belmonte (AB) Carr City Centers (developer)
Ed Crocker (EC) Carr City Centers (developer)
Abed Benzima (AB1) SK + I Architects (architect)
Andrew Czajowski (AC) SK + I Architects (architect)
Catharine Puskar (CP) Walsh Colucci (attorney)
Nick Aello (NA) Hord Coplan Macht (architect)
Adam Stone (AD) Trammell Crow (developer)
Trey Kirby (TK) Trammell Crow (developer)
Trini Rodriguez (TR) Parker Rodriguez (landscape architect)

Community Members in Attendance:

Frances Zorn (FZ) Alexandria House resident
John Long (JL) Alexandria House resident
Bruch Machanic (BM) MRE Properties / Former UDAC member
Christie Susko (CS) Canal Place resident
Michelle Krocker (MK) Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance
Maria Wasowski (MW) Planning Commissioner

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:03 a.m. as the October meeting of UDAC.
- The Committee considered a draft of the notes for the September meeting. MT proposed minor changes to the Attendance list and a note in the New Business section on page 2 that are reflected in the final September notes. SK proposed editing the bullet point regarding the comments of meeting attendee Dan Straub (DS) on page 5, based on the suggestion of DS. EA moved to adopt the meeting notes with the above change included, and AO seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved 5-0.
- SK welcomed new committee member TS and thanked outgoing member Roger Waud for his service to the Committee.

NEW BUSINESS

Third 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 reintroduced the project to the Committee and those in attendance and noted the applicant has submitted a memo to the Committee for review regarding how the proposal meets the Urban Design Standards and Guidelines for Old Town North (UDSG).
- The presentation focused on changes to the building and site design since the August meeting, and the applicant provided brick and metal samples for Committee members to review.
- KW talked about the programming for the arts walk, including catenary lights and benches to provide areas to sit and texture.
- Concerning architecture, KW talked about the removal of mullions on the rear façade and the four window bays that are coplanar with adjacent 6-foot-deep balconies. The applicant is continuing to study materials/finishes for the underside of the balconies. KW mentioned that the building does not comply with the UDSG standard for a vista that terminates at the southeast corner of the site, stating that the “bookend” of the brick portion of the building reflects what is across the street at Printers Row, and is considered the best design solution at this portion of the site.
- KW continued, highlighting the maximization of on-street parking on Third and Royal Streets based on community and City comments. KW discussed the proposed art, which would be located on the transformer wall at the northwest corner of the site. It will be maintained by the property owner since it is on site. KW noted that parking is supplied on-site per the Zoning Ordinance for the residential use. MT asked where moving trucks would unload. KW answered that there is on-street loading designated for N. Royal Street to the

south of the parking garage entrance, and the length of space to be marked for loading will be determined with the City. The applicant anticipates low unit turnover as a condominium building. Additionally, the applicant is working with the City on safety concerns at the N. Royal Street and Bashford Lane intersection.

- EA asked if the condo association would take care of the arts use. KW responded that the applicant will draft a memorandum of understanding with the City regarding the arts user and identify a master association structure during the final site plan process. AF talked about the future potential arts tenant of the site, the Art League. The applicant and the Art League plan to place the most active uses and makerspaces by the windows in the jewel box at the southwest corner of the site, and place more of the instruction areas adjacent to the arts walk in the main building.
- EA noted that he likes the architecture, including the rear façade and the breakdown of massing and color. He noted his concerns with the design of the jewel box, and that the metal panels do not relate in color to what is chosen for the main building, and that the color should be lighter, and the building looks too “heavy.” He also encouraged the applicant to study more of an arcade design for the arts walk. AF responded that the catenary lights over the arts walk are meant to create an “outdoor room” effect.
- AO commented that the rear elevation treatment is successful with the simpler bay and mullion patterns that give “good shadow and motion.” AO noted that she would like the applicant to think about the treatment of the underside of the balconies similar to the precedent studies for views from the trail.
- KW talked about the rooftop open space, specifically the division between private terraces on the rooftop of the main building and the communal terrace at the eastern portion of the roof. The applicant has taken into consideration the need for green roofs to treat stormwater in tandem with the terraces. The rooftops of the brick-clad building shoulders are also accessible as terrace space. The jewel box features a green roof.
- TS noted that the applicant has generally addressed community concerns, though there is still issues with the building height, though they have been mitigated. KW added that the massing is placed at the north of the site, so any shadows from the development will be cast generally on the power plant site to the north. TS also discussed the importance of safety and functionality in the arts walk, and how lighting may help.
- AC added that the southwest corner is the highest point of the site, and that pedestrians on Third and Royal Streets will be led into the site by the subtle change in grade
- SK noted that the jewel box is distinct, though tied together with the other building forms. He noted the jewel box is a “background building” though will be activated by the activity adjacent to the windows, and that the building should not be too “cutesy.” EA added that the applicant could look to step the jewel box into the site, and not necessarily create a covered arcade. SK and AO noted that the jewel box placement on the site is best when at the property line, where the glass will provide activity close to the street. KW noted that the applicant will work on a condition of approval with City staff about the refinement of

the first-floor material of the jewel box. SK added that the upper floors look enlivened with the window scheme.

- EA noted that the applicant does not need to come back to UDAC for another presentation, and that he wanted to outline general concerns with the design for consideration. SK noted that the project is ready for a vote of endorsement by the Committee. MT noted the great improvements made by the design team since the first presentation and supports the design of the jewel box. MT also noted that the memo provided by the applicant was helpful for review.
- TS asked the applicant about the project schedule. KW replied that the proposal is going to Planning Commission and City Council in January for public hearings and that construction should commence later in 2019.
- **AO moved to endorse the project, MT seconded. The motion passed 5-0.**

Second 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 and noted the changes made to the project over the last two months. These changes included increasing open space on N. Pitt Street, narrowing the bridge, and narrowing N. Pitt Street. The applicant also studied building colors and breaking down facades on N. Pitt Street, including adding more brick on the Wythe Street façade and wrapping it around N. Pitt Street.
- CP then detailed site design changes made by the applicant after meeting with Planning and Zoning staff prior to the Committee meeting:
 - The hyphen on the Royal Street facade is now a full break connected by a bridge nearly identical to the bridge on the N. Pitt facade, revealing a clear view into courtyard, though there is still no direct pedestrian access from the street. The visual connection is now 30 feet wide.
 - The addition of more varied colors on the Wythe and N. Royal Street facades, and the placement of red brick on the lower floors of the facades.
- EA noted that the applicant was able to successfully incorporate many of the staff recommendations in the updated design as discussed in the staff project memo. He noted that he had concerns that there was still a “canyon effect” produced from the façade on N. Royal Street, and that the views of the rooftop mechanical units from the upper floors of Alexandria House have not been addressed. CP responded to the concern on the canyon effect that the applicant removed 10,000 square feet of floor area to break down the massing on N. Royal Street.

- TS asked if the applicant could camouflage the rooftop mechanical units. CP replied that the applicant can gang HVAC units, but that it is not possible to fully screen these units from above due to ventilation requirements. NA added that the construction materials (wood) limits placement of the HVAC units.
- MT noted concerns with the views of any units that have a direct view of the parking garage driveway. NA replied that the windows of the first-floor units are set high enough that they are not flush with the driveway ramp. CP added that the applicant will study extending the courtyard over the exposed ramp.
- AO expressed concern with the open-air driveway ramp, stating that it is a pedestrian safety hazard and not an urban condition. She did express her support for the building break connected by a bridge on N. Royal Street.
- TS agreed with the staff recommendation that building relief is needed, however he stated that the overall building design could use more creativity.
- CP responded to Committee critique, stating that the building heights are compliant with the Bus Barn Task Force recommendations, and the treatment of N. Royal Street addresses staff concerns, while the applicant is studying ways to increase site porosity. TS and EA concurred that the building and site layout require more refinement.
- SK asked if it is possible to reconcile the revised loading ramp design with the goal of increasing site porosity. He noted his concerns with pedestrian safety with the revised ramp design. CP added that the applicant must also take into consideration the grade changes on site, which change by 8 feet from the northwest to southeast corners of the site. TR noted the visual relief of seeing the courtyard from the N. Royal Street sidewalk. SK added that pedestrian safety should be a focus of design and that the design should not encourage pedestrian idling in the loading dock area to view the courtyard. AO added that she does not like the idea of the pedestrian view of the loading entrance from the sidewalk.
- EA asked if the applicant could make a building indentation on Wythe Street by N. Royal Street. GW responded that the corner of Wythe and N. Royal Streets is glassy and a story lower than adjacent and reads as a corner feature that breaks up the building massing. AO noted that she liked the increased separation of the four and six story building elements.
- TS supported the proposed midblock setback on Wythe Street, similar to what is proposed on the Edens / 530 First Street development. GW asked the Committee if vertical elements would help to refine the building massing.
- FZ asked the applicant if it could study a less reflective color for rooftop. CP responded that the applicant can study a darker shade that still meets green building requirements.
- FZ asked CP about HVAC screening. CP responded that the applicant can place the units set back from the rooftop and screened with a parapet, though it is difficult to enclose the space over the units, and the applicant will gang the units to reduce the visual impact as

seen from the upper floors of Alexandria House. NA added that the applicant can gang the units because no retail is proposed for the building, but a screen enclosure is not feasible due to ventilation requirements for the HVAC units on a completely residential building.

- FZ also asked if the applicant can relocate and save the existing street trees on N. Pitt Street, noting that stormwater runoff issues are a neighborhood problem. CP noted that the proposed BMP tree wells on N. Pitt Street will treat more stormwater than the existing green strip. The applicant is also narrowing N. Pitt Street in order to reduce impervious pavement width and widen the BMP tree well area.
- CS noted her concerns with narrowing N. Pitt Street, citing potential issues with bicycle traffic and deliveries. TR and CP noted that the existing travel lanes are wider than required by City standards, and that the narrowing is by approximately 1.5 feet. The road narrowing is a City initiative and helps to slow traffic and enhance pedestrian and vehicle safety. MT added that N. Royal Street is defined as a street bicyclists are encouraged to use per the Old Town North Small Area Plan.
- SK noted that the revised building color scheme was successful. EA added that the applicant should refine the N. Royal Street façade and study colors and building indentations.
- AO asked if Juliet balconies are proposed, which the applicant confirmed. AO added that adding depth to the facades can help.
- SK asked the applicant if a concrete podium is proposed with construction. The applicant confirmed that a one-story concrete podium is being constructed with the floors above as wood-frame construction.
- The Committee noted that the N. Pitt Street elevation is more successful with the color differentiation, though SK added that the applicant still needs to work on building refinements.
- CP noted the applicant will refine the treatment of the garage entrance on N. Royal Street and explore creating more depth on the N. Royal Street façade. They will also review the garage entrance for safety and visibility.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:40 a.m.