

City of Alexandria

Urban Design Advisory Committee

December 2019 Meeting Notes

[DRAFT - PRELIMINARY]

Wednesday, December 11, 2019 at 9:00 a.m.

City Hall, Room 1101

Date of Draft: December 13, 2019

Committee Members in Attendance:

Stephen Kulinski, Chair (SK)
Thomas Soapes, Vice Chair (TS)
Abbey Oklak, Secretary (AO)
Katherine Bingler (KB)
Engin Artemel (EA)

City Staff in Attendance:

Michael Swidrak (MS) P&Z
Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z
Ana Vicinanza (AV) RP&CA
Brian Dofflemyer (BD) T&ES
Tamara Jovovic (TJ) Office of Housing

Applicant Team Members in Attendance:

Ken Wire (KW) Wire Gill (attorney rep.)
Megan Rappolt (MR) Wire Gill (attorney rep.)
Grant Epstein (GE) Community Three (developer)

Community Members in Attendance:

Mary Harris (MH) NOTICe
Karen Branding (KB1) NOTICe
John Long (JL) Old Town North resident
Maria Wasowski (MW) Planning Commissioner
Bruce Machanic (BM) MRE Properties

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:05 a.m. as the December meeting of UDAC. SK welcomed KB to the Committee and thanked Marie Tavernini for her years of service (KB replaced Marie Tavernini in April 2019).

- The Committee considered a draft of the notes for the December 2018 meeting. TS moved to adopt the meeting notes with the above change included, and EA seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved 4-0 (with KB abstaining).

NEW BUSINESS

First Presentation of development proposal at the Transpotomac Plaza Site (1033, 1055 and 1111 N. Fairfax Street)

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

- KW introduced the site and the proposal, stating that the development consists of the redevelopment of three out of five office building parcels in the Transpotomac Plaza, which were constructed in the early 1980s. The five buildings share a garage below all of the parcels. The redevelopment of the site was envisioned in the Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTN SAP), including the general site layout and the proposed rezoning to CRMU-X.
- GE further discussed project background and the proposal. GE talked about the existing challenges to redevelopment, including the property line and cross-easement management and the roof of the existing parking garage which is located a few feet above street level. GE also discussed the opportunities of redevelopment, including adaptive reuse and creating an integrated development that works in coordination with the current and future plans of the Transpotomac Plaza site as a whole.
- GE talked about the improvements proposed to the adjacent office properties, including the raised crosswalk in the alley and the activation of the plaza through the placement and activities planned in the standalone building. GE mentioned that the applicant is coordinating with the adjacent property owners / property association on these improvements to the adjacent properties, and already had received general approval to make improvements to the alley portion not located on their site.
- GE noted after a question from AO that the lawn area to the south of the standalone building will be accessed adjacent to the standalone building after some regrading work within the existing southern plaza area. GE also touched upon the street trees on N. Fairfax Street, which will remain with the redevelopment.
- TS asked the applicant team the number of residential units and parking spaces. GE responded that the proposal has 238 multifamily (both condo and rental) units and 217 parking spaces (which requires a parking reduction special use permit), and that the 217 is also the number of spaces currently owned by the current property owner of the three-building project site. GE noted that there are 650 parking spaces total in the parking garage, with the remaining spaces owned by the buildings to the north and south. KW says the applicant plans to pursue a shared parking agreement for the remainder of the spaces for nighttime and weekend events related to the retail and arts anchor spaces.

- GE confirmed that there is no office use planned with the redevelopment, only the office uses remaining in the two adjacent Transpotomac Plaza buildings outside of the site area, based on a question from EA.
- GE and KW noted that the proposal focuses on activating the adjacent Mt. Vernon Trail and Tide Lock Park to the east through the site and building design along the eastern property line and planned open space.
- GE talked further about the building design, noting the design differences between the condominium and rental buildings (the latter has an extra floor of brick cladding and a glass-and-metal building “hyphen,” and that the standalone building planned for the current southern portion of the plaza will be designed to react specifically to the areas in front of each of its four facades.
- SK asked for clarification on the volume and programming of the standalone building. GE answered that the applicant is placing the arts anchor entirely on the ground floor, split between the southern half of the standalone building and the rental building, and that the building is two stories with “an active roof.”
- EA asked about the viability of the retail space proposed. GE answered that a “destination restaurant” is envisioned for the site, and that the standalone building is meant to be flexible between the arts and retail (restaurant) uses. GE noted further that the splitting of the arts anchor into two spaces of unequal size may be beneficial to the future arts anchor operator, and it may support the functions of two separate arts users.
- EA asked if the garage wall could be brought lower to better integrate the site with the N. Fairfax Street sidewalk and create an ADA-accessible entrance to the arts anchor. GE responded that the garage roof height limited the ability to fully integrate the site with the adjacent street, and that the vehicular entrance into the site at the southern end of the site ramps upward from the street to the plaza level. GE noted that the standalone building will be placed directly on top of the garage wall facing the street at the property line.
- AO asked about the site addition to the east of the lawn area. GE specified that awnings are proposed to be added in this location to provide areas of covered seating / activity by the standalone building.
- TS asked if the sidewalk on N. Fairfax Street is remaining in its existing condition. GE answered that the applicant is planning to expand the sidewalk and narrow the roadway to accommodate a 14-foot-wide sidewalk (including the existing trees). AO asked if grates or other tree well coverings could be placed along the street to increase the area where pedestrians can walk along the sidewalk. Staff noted that there are constraints regarding the placement of grates or other covering over the tree wells due to how the street trees were planted and that staff is working with the applicant on maximizing the sidewalk area without damaging the mature street trees.

- TS requested the applicant provide larger images of project renderings from the N. Fairfax Street perspective with the next UDAC submission.
- AO noted that the internal alley should be pedestrianized to the extent possible. SK followed up by asking the applicant if trash activities could be handled in the garage. KW responded that loading activities were not envisioned for the garage (based on clearance) with the original construction of the development, but there may be potential for studying the matter in the future. The internal alley was designed for trash and loading activities, with each building currently having a trash / loading room adjacent to the alley.
- EA commented that the rental building appeared to have a long façade and asked it could potentially be broken up with a central arcade. TS also noted concerns about removing the building opening between 1033 and 1055 N. Fairfax Street. GE responded by saying that first floor programming issues and service considerations were taken into account with the proposed building layout. He added that only one building opening is being filled in with the proposal, and the area between 1055 and 1111 N. Fairfax Street is being enhanced as an open space. MW noted that the standalone building will break up the massing of the rental building as viewed from N. Fairfax Street. SK added that the mature tree cover in season will also mask the rental building massing.
- MH asked the applicant to clarify the Transpotomac Plaza ownership structure. GE responded that the north and south buildings in the development (1001 and 1199 N. Fairfax Street) are owned separately and are not part of the development proposal, which considers the three buildings at the center of Transpotomac Plaza.
- MH also asked if some of the plaza will be removed as part of the development proposal. GE confirmed that the southern portion of the plaza would be removed to place the standalone arts anchor / retail building on the site. GE stated that the southern plaza circle area was less important to keep than the northern plaza circle, which helps to redirect pedestrian activity from Second Street through the site into the enhanced open space.
- KB1 asked the applicant how the common open space areas that are not owned by the applicant on the Transpotomac Plaza will be controlled by the applicant. GE responded that the property association allows guests of all the buildings to utilize the open space areas. Additionally, parking access is shared between each building with cross easements, so there is no issue for any resident of the proposed buildings to access their parking spaces. KW added that the applicant will work out the parking details with the City through the parking management plan that is part of the development approval process.
- EA noted that he likes the proposed architecture, notably the white brick on the condominium building. SK added that the applicant has made a “great start” to designing the project, noting that the site is not a blank slate. He asked the applicant to continue to articulate the building facades.
- KW finalized the presentation by noting that the applicant will review City staff and UDAC comments and return to the Committee in February or March with a follow-up presentation.

Committee Elections

- SK introduced the Committee election agenda item, noting that the Committee elects its officers on a yearly basis.
- **TS moved to endorse SK for Chair, TS for Vice Chair and AO for Secretary; KB seconded. The motion passed 5-0.**

Other New Business

- The Committee and staff briefly discussed updates to projects that were previously endorsed by UDAC, including the WMATA Bus Barn project, the Crowne Plaza redevelopment and the Craddock Site redevelopment. The aforementioned sites are soon to go under construction, with the Crowne Plaza redevelopment currently under construction.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:10 a.m.

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