

URBAN DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TO: **Old Town North Urban Design Advisory Committee**

SUBJECT: Minutes of February Meeting

DATE: DRAFT: 10 February 2016
FINAL approved: 6 April 2016

FINAL

The Urban Design Advisory Committee met on Wednesday, February 10 at 9:00am at City Hall. The following members were in attendance at the meeting:

Steve Kulinski
Marie McKenney Tavernini
Roger Waud
Bruce Machanic, co-chair
Daniel Straub, co-chair.

The following Staff, representatives for the Applicants, and citizen representatives were also in attendance:

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|------------------|-----------------------|
| Rob Kerns | P&Z |
| Nancy Williams | P&Z |
| Heba Elgawish | P&Z |
| Michael Swidrak | P&Z |
| Maya Contreras | P&Z |
| Nathan Randall | P&Z |
| Jim Roberts | P&Z |
| Cathy Puskar | Attorney at Law |
| Amy Friedlander | Land Use Planner |
| Krista Di Iaconi | Edens |
| Eddie Meder | Gables |
| Chris Harvey | Hord Coplan Macht |
| Nick Aello | Hord Coplan Macht |
| Tom Soapes | NOTICE and AG-OTN SAP |

INTRODUCTION

- The meeting was called to order at 9:00am as the February meeting of UDAC.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Old Town North: Small Area Plan.** Staff (NW) gave a brief summary of the upcoming sub-committee meetings that are scheduled this week. They include the Economic Development/Retail sub-committee, the Infrastructure, Environmental Sustainability and Transportation sub-committee, and the overall Advisory Group meetings. Updates of all committee meetings and activities will be posted on the city's website.
- **Potential Development Projects.** Staff (MS) gave a brief summary of potential development projects that may be in the pipeline for committee review. The proposed update of the Canal Center site plan is currently being discussed with Staff.

OLD BUSINESS: PROJECT PRESENTATION, REVIEW and DISCUSSION

- **Redevelopment of 530 First Street (The Giant/ABC block).** This project was presented to the committee for review on January 6 and 27, and previously in October and November of 2015 (please see previous minutes for more detail explanation of the presentations, discussions, comments, motions and actions). Since the January 27 meeting addressed the five remaining major issues associated with the project and adjourned with a motion for the Applicant to continue to work with Staff on refinement and improvement of the First Street side of the project (Item 5), this meeting was specifically scheduled to address the following issue:

Item 5. Improved Building Articulation (varied setbacks) on the First Street elevation. Previous committee comments were made that the committee is concerned with a) the uniform building height of the cornice along the entire stretch of this building elevation, b) the lack of varied setbacks defined by Staff as "ins and outs", or "setbacks" on this elevation, c) the appearance that this elevation has not received the same

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'special' design attention that the other building sides have received resulting in a feeling that this elevation does not have the same design vitality and richness that the rest of the project engenders, d) a fear that this side of the project as currently designed will create an undesirable "canyon effect" along First Street, and e) that the hotel across the street certainly justifies a more appropriate building elevation concept design. Comments were also offered that it may be appropriate, and advantageous, to repeat design elements utilized on the other sides of the project in order to make First Street a more inviting space and place.

The Applicant presented the revised design concept for the First Street side of the project. Since the Applicant is emphasizing a "mercantile" design style for the project, they indicated that they have not received positive encouragement for adding new definition to the current "bays" on the elevation. However, they pointed out the following changes that have been proposed to the design concept for this elevation:

- a new building setback (approximately two feet) at the Pitt Street side of the elevation as a transition to the proposed townhouse units, and as a way to break-up the linearity of the elevation;
- a new building "hyphen", "vertical break" or building setback (approximately two feet) on the Saint Asaph Street side of the elevation as a design reflection of the currently proposed vertical building break for the stairwell tower next to the loading dock;
- a small drop in the building height at the new "hyphen"/setback noted above;
- an extension of the one missing platform pier/column on the retail base from the residential portion above in order to provide more continuity to the elevation;
- the reduction of the width of the parking garage entry/exit and loading dock entrance by approximately 10 feet resulting in the addition of another street tree on First Street; and
- the addition of an articulated garage door for the both parking and loading entrances.

In summary, these design measures are presented to help reduce the apparent overall mass and length of the First Street building elevation.

The following specific comments were offered:

- NOTICE (TS) commented that the refinements to the building elevation are a welcome improvement.
- UDAC (RW) commented on the need for a welcoming, or gathering, space on this side of the building that is similar, on a smaller scale, to the lively and welcoming gathering spaces proposed for Montgomery Street. In response, TS commented that NOTICE views this side of the building as the "traffic street" side, and therefore a gathering place on this side of the building would not be welcome. (NOTE: the Harris Teeter project has been designed with the major grocery entrance and "outdoor gathering space" along with the loading dock located on a "traffic street").
- UDAC (BM) indicated that the proposed changes are a very welcome step in the right direction, but that he was expecting to see more design effort to break up the apparent mass of this building elevation and to relieve the apparent undesirable "canyon effect" that would result. He also indicated that this project side still lacks the "design integrity" of the other project sides.
- UDAC (MT) indicated that the attention and refinement of the loading dock area is a very welcome outcome, but that she remains concerned with proposed community open space on the platform level and any future potential noise issues. She also indicated that a proposed welcoming, or gathering, space for the First Street side of the project would not be necessary since a coffee shop already exists in the hotel across the street and adjacent residents could easily walk to the other sides of the project to enjoy those proposed lively and welcoming gathering spaces.
- UDAC (SK) inquired about the depth of the proposed building hyphens/setbacks (2 feet), and commented that the changes to the loading dock and the building elevation are a very positive refinement that achieve some of the things the committee has been requesting.
- UDAC (DS) commented that the package that was electronically forwarded to the committee to review does not do proper justice to the subtle positive refinements that the Applicant is proposing. The proposed setback at the townhouse side of the elevation, the additional proposed setback toward the Saint Asaph Street, and the small drop in the building height at the new building "hyphen"/setback are very welcome refinements that do help to break up the apparent mass and length of the building elevation. However, at this stage of the review, it appears that these changes are minor and meager gestures that do not address the stated concerns of the committee. In addition, the committee remains concerned with how the overall building-elevation/streetscape

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composition for this building side is conceptually designed. (NOTE: please refer to the committee's previous request in the January 27 minutes that the Applicant work with Staff to resolve the remaining planning and design issues and return to present the overall consolidated concept design for the project). The committee has repeatedly commented that it supports the overall concept of this project, but that it has concerns with the First Street side of the project. Staff and the Applicant should understand that the remaining issues with the conceptual design of this project are the overall composition of the building-elevation/streetscape associated with the First Street side of the project. In addition, until Montgomery Street is changed to a two-way street network in the future, First Street will remain as an important vehicular entry to Alexandria. As a result, just as the committee is eager to support and endorse the development of a pedestrian retail corridor on Saint Asaph and on Montgomery Streets, it will continue to be concerned with the design (and the transportation/traffic impacts) of the corner of First and Saint Asaph Streets (regardless of the Applicant's individual program for this corner of the project.)

Discussion and Vote: The following motion was offered and voted upon:

• **Motion by DS (second by RW with friendly amendment/changes by SK):**

The committee supports the overall conceptual design of this project, but has continuing concerns regarding the First Street side of the project. The committee has indicated that this portion of the project needs further improvement and refinement in order to prevent an apparent undesirable "canyon effect" on this streetscape, and in order to address the concern that this side of the project has not received the same 'special' design attention that the other sides of the project have received. The current presentation and concept changes are an improvement, but do not address all of the committee's concerns and comments. As a result, UDAC encourages the Applicant to work with Staff to address the following specific issues:

- 1. That the Applicant further refine the proposed First Street elevation with respect to the uniform building cornice height and uniform building face in order to comply with the comments made by the committee.**
- 2. That the Applicant incorporate some of the design elements utilized on the Saint Asaph Street and Montgomery Street building elevations on the First Street elevation in order to improve and enliven this elevation and streetscape.**

Yes: BM, MT, SK, RW, DS

No: -

Motion Approved.

- **Other.** No additional business.

ADJOURNMENT

- The Committee adjourned at approximately 10:10am.