

City of Alexandria

Urban Design Advisory Committee

March 2017 Meeting Notes

[FINAL]

Wednesday, March 1 at 9:00am

City Hall, Room 1101

Date of Draft: March 23, 2017

Committee Members in Attendance:

Stephen Kulinski (SK)

Marie McKenney Tavernini (MT)

Bruce Machanic (BM)

Abbey Oklak (AO)

City Staff in Attendance:

Michael Swidrak (MS) P&Z

Heba ElGawish (HE) P&Z

Nancy Williams (NW) P&Z

Jeff Farner (JF) P&Z

Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z

Community Members in Attendance:

Maria Wasowski (MW) Planning Commissioner and Chair of Old Town North Small Area Plan Advisory Group

Tom Soapes (TS) President of NOTICE

Dan Straub (DS) Resident and former UDAC member

INTRODUCTION

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:02am as the March meeting of UDAC.
- SK introduced the members of UDAC to those in attendance.

OLD BUSINESS

- The Committee considered a draft of the minutes for the September meeting that staff distributed to the Committee.
- MT recommended the following changes:
 - Two mentions in Old Business and New Business of “MT motioned” should be changed to “MT moved.”

- MT and SK agreed that in New Business, MT offered her willingness to be Vice Chair, though SK made the motion to elect MT as Vice Chair.
- MT moved to adopt the meeting minutes with the above changes included, and SK seconded the motion. **The meeting minutes were approved 4-0.**

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of the Urban Design Standards & Guidelines for Old Town North

- MS introduced City staff (NW, HE, JF, CM) who have worked on the Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTN SAP) and the Urban Design Standards & Guidelines for Old Town North (UDSG). The UDSG can be considered an auxiliary document that will be adopted (and implemented) concurrently with the SAP.
- HE presented the following to UDAC:
 - An overview of the OTN SAP and timeline for review and approval by City Council. Additional SAP chapters will be available to review before the projected City Council hearing in June.
 - A review of the current draft of the UDSG, including the difference between standards and guidelines, and the character subareas.
- JF continued the presentation by providing background and insight on the utilization of the site and building design, streetscape and open space standards and guidelines.
- The Committee discussed with staff the importance of the future development at the NRG site, including the street grid, open space and the potential reuse of existing structures on the site. MT questioned JF about the proposed maximum 1600 square-foot block perimeters proposed as a standard in Chapter 5. JF responded that the City wants to retain the general grid-block pattern of Old Town and Old Town North, in relation to the development of the NRG site. The block perimeter maximum allows some development flexibility to design the blocks contextually.
- SK asked staff what about the UDSG makes it unique to Old Town North.
 - JF highlighted how the UDSG reflects the City’s current strategies on urban design, though the UDSG is context sensitive to Old Town North, for instance in terms of the neighborhood’s industrial heritage.
 - CM added that the Historic Interpretation Guide included in the OTN SAP package guides how future development can add historic interpretation elements that relate to the site and neighborhood as part of the development review process.
 - NW noted that the focus on art and the North Fairfax Street Arts Corridor sets the UDSG apart from other City design guidelines.
- BM said that the UDSG and/or the SAP should note that Old Town North is a “mixed design” as well as mixed-use neighborhood. JF responded that particular architectural styles are not dictated in the UDSG, reflecting the eclectic nature of the architecture in the neighborhood.

- TS said that the OTN SAP Advisory Group is currently in the midst of reviewing the utilization of standards versus guidelines in the UDSG, and minor edits may be forthcoming.
- DS commended the work of staff and the Advisory Group on the UDSG, and noted that the interconnectivity of land use and transportation is integral to future implementation efforts and development, and this will be reflected in the chapters of the OTN SAP that will be presented to City Council in June.
- BM made the suggestion that sidebars could be added to the UDSG highlighting projects in Old Town North that were approved with the current design guidelines and how they were successfully applied. He provided Printers Row (located between N. Fairfax and N. Royal Streets) as an example.
- AO positively noted how the UDSG is more flexible in its standard and design parameters than in recent City design guidelines.

Other New Business:

- BM followed up with MS on the progress of the database/table that documents each project reviewed by UDAC since its inception, including how the Committee at the time voted on each project. MS responded that the table should be ready for the next UDAC meeting for review, though it was difficult to obtain the actual votes on each project (MS is using memos issued by UDAC in the past that detailed the Committee’s review and potential endorsement of development projects). BM asked that the table be available to be publicly accessed on the Committee’s City webpage when finished.
- AO asked if any statement would be included in the UDSG detailing the use of the guidelines by UDAC in the future.
 - *Note: MS located this paragraph on page 8 in the UDSG:*

The Design Standards and Guidelines are intended to be utilized by development, design professionals, and businesses in Old Town North who may submit proposals for redevelopment. Others such as the community, City staff, the Urban Design Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission and the City Council will also utilize these Design Standards and Guidelines as they assess proposals in the Old Town North area.
- MS updated UDAC on the Robinson Terminal North project, which has been submitted to the City as a “Concept I” stage submission, with basic zoning, building footprint and open space information included.
- MS will soon confirm with UDAC members the next proposed meeting date.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:10 am.