

DRAFT
PYPAG Meeting Summary
Tuesday, December 16, 2008

PYPAG Members:

Joseph Bondi
Michael Caison
Richard Calderon
Darryl Dugan
Garrett Erdle
Bill Hendrickson
Deborah Johnson
Stephanie Landrum
Dan McCaffery
Jennifer Mitchell
Peter Pocock
John Porter
Mariella Posey
Frederick Rothmeijer
Noah Teates
Eric Wagner
Maria Wasowski

City Staff:

Jeff Farner
Valerie Peterson
Kristen Mitten

The Perspectives Group Staff:

Doug Sarno
James Lawson

Cooper Robertson Staff:

Jonie Fu
Bill Kenworthy

Approximately 15 Members of the Public were in attendance.

Introduction

The Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group (PYPAG) meeting began at 7:03 PM with Eric Wagner, Chair, welcoming the PYPAG members, the attending public and city staff. There were 17 PYPAG members in attendance.

Mr. Wagner stated that before the group started the evening's agenda he wished to address a recent posting on a blog site questioning the City's planning process. The blog also mentioned the PYPAG. Eric felt the article gave short shrift to the efforts of all attending. If all aspects of planning were already decided by the city as the blog indicated, then he would be at home tonight with his family instead of spending his time at these meetings. He stated that his goal as Chair was to make sure that everyone's voice is heard and for the process to be as transparent as possible. That being said, he believes with some degree of certainty that everyone will find something in the end that they do not agree with. He also stated that he would try to prevent any one voice from dominating the discussions and work of the group. That is one of the reasons the facilitator, Doug Sarno, is involved with this project. Eric made it clear that he respects the person who wrote the post on the blog, but he feels that they are wrong. PYPAG is an advisory group to the city staff. The staff will take the advice and findings of the group, but also use their professional judgment based on the information and decisions that are provided by this process. He said that if people feel their voices are not being heard then he requested that they please speak with him, Doug Sarno or the City staff.

Meeting Goals

The facilitator, Doug Sarno, then reviewed the agenda and goals for the meeting. The major goal of the meeting was to outline preliminary ideas for the principles that will guide the Potomac Yard planning process. The group was to begin to decide the guiding criteria needed to be considered for plan. He also explained the need for a small subcommittee to fully develop the principles over the coming months. The subcommittee will use the results of this meeting and results of the first public workshop (January 31, 2009) to organize what they have heard to create draft principles for this project. They will share these draft principles with the PYPAG in February for final adoption.

Planning Process

Mr. Sarno reminded the group that there is a lot of learning and work that has to happen for this group to move on. He then walked the group through the planned year-long process beginning in January 2009. The process begins with the planning principles that will be started tonight, and the PYPAG will host the first public workshop in January to ensure that a full range of perspectives are included in these principles.

The process starts broadly, identifying the principles and concepts that need to be considered. The group will also require a rich understanding of the many issues that are important to the planning, and meetings have been designed to

look at these many issues such as transportation and economics. Based on early input to the principles, a series of design options will then be developed for PYPAG and public input. A second public workshop will be held in April for this purpose. The monthly PYPAG meetings will continue through June 2009 and which point the City will take the PYPAG and public input and will work hard through the summer to develop a draft proposal for the plan area. The PYPAG will not meet during the summer months.

Doug then walked through the rest of the schedule and what needs to be accomplished each month. By June, the Transportation Study will be complete in addition to the PYPAG recommendations. In the fall of 2009, City staff will bring the draft back to PYPAG and the public for feedback. The City will then go through its traditional process with the plan, including public hearings with the Planning Commission and City Council.

Jeff Farner, City of Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning, added that traffic is a very important topic and a PYPAG subcommittee will be formed in April to focus on traffic-related issues. Doug Sarno added that traffic issues will be addressed and discussed throughout the entire process and will be included in the principles.

A question was raised regarding a Metrorail station coming to Potomac Yard. Cost of the station, placement, and ridership estimates will need to be discussed. It was stated that we should have ridership estimate numbers in April 2009. Eric Wagner suggested we could look at two parallel paths, one with Metro and one without. The PYPAG will do this, but city staff suggested that it explore the basic principles first. Metro is one of the key transportation issues, traffic is another.

A PYPAG member questioned how the group would discuss height and density if they did not have the Metro information until April. Doug Sarno responded by saying that as a group we need to learn about many issues and ramifications of choices before making any recommendations. Mr. Wagner stated that we will come across many more questions during the process that we have not yet considered.

Doug concluded the process review by reminding the group that this is an ambitious schedule. City staff and consultants are committed to making the meetings interesting and engaging.

Transportation Study Area

Valerie Peterson, from Planning and Zoning, and Sandra Marks, from Transportation and Environmental Services, gave a brief overview of the Transportation Study that will support the planning process and showed a map of the study area. The scope of the study is being finalized, but will look at existing conditions and the impacts of possible changes with different levels of development, with Metro and without Metro. The study will review how the

corridor functions on the main thoroughfares and throughout adjacent neighborhoods. It will also review the “ripple” effects outside of the study area. Specifically, the analysis will look at lanes, how many, signal timing, regional models including population, housing, and employment factors. Intersections will be rated A through F, just like in school. There was then discussion and suggestions that the boundaries for the study should expand to include other areas. The suggestions would be taken into consideration.

Planning Principles

Jonie Fu, planning consultant with Cooper Robertson, gave a presentation on what good planning principles may look like. She summarized the discussion from the November PYPAG meeting and shared examples of how principles influence a plan. Some of the examples of good urban design were: friendly, connected neighborhoods, focus on transit, reducing auto-dependency, open space connection, hidden parking, mix of uses (housing, offices, retail) civic structures, history, gateways into the city, sustainability (rainwater, storm water, energy, and building design).

Jonie shared examples of challenges and opportunities for Potomac Yard such as the shape of land (long, skinny and narrow), two parks, 400 feet away from water, transit (BRT, Metro). Other opportunities were: great location, Potomac Yard Avenue, Main Street, Route 1, Four Mile Run, and Potomac Yard becoming a memorable place.

She then showed images of place examples that were suggested by the group at the November meeting. The examples included the Country Club Plaza in Kansas City, Courthouse Square in Portland Oregon, the Pearl District in Portland Oregon, and Michigan Avenue in Chicago.

Cooper Robertson then discussed a project that they led in Stamford, Connecticut. The six overall principles for the Stamford project were:

- 1 – Bring Stamford to the Water
- 2 – Take Advantage of Transit
- 3 – Provide a Connected Public Space Network
- 4 – Create Memorable Places
- 5 – Provide Needed Neighborhood Services
- 6 – Build Distinctive Neighborhoods

Jonie challenged the PYPAG to think about identity and sense of place, streets, transportation, open space, building heights and scale, sustainability, architecture, and relationship to adjacent neighborhoods

Planning Principles Brainstorming

Doug Sarno then led the group in a Planning Principles exercise. The members of the group took half-sheets of paper and wrote down their individual ideas and concepts for principles which they would like to see used for the Potomac Yard

project. Then Doug went around the room asking each PYPAG member to share their ideas with the group. This continued until all ideas were shared.

After they were shared all attendees adjourned to the lobby where two large “sticky walls” were located and the PYPAG placed their half-sheets of principles on the walls. The Perspectives Group loosely placed the principles into categories. The PYPAG were then handed an amount of small red dots and small blue dots. They were then instructed to place the blue dots and any concept that they felt were essential to have in the plan. The red dots were placed on any concepts which they could not live with. Please see Appendix A for the results of this exercise.

Development of Subcommittee

Once the group returned to the meeting room, Doug asked for PYPAG members who would like to volunteer for the Principles Subcommittee to remain after the meeting was adjourned. Six members volunteered.

Eric Warner commented that the City’s Metro Feasibility committee has asked him to make an appointment to their group from the PYPAG. He then requested that interested parties submit an email to him by 12/17 explaining why they should be the appointee.

Public Comments

Doug asked for comments from the attending public.

David Fromm, public attendee, encouraged the PYPAG and City to make a strong effort to ensure the upcoming PYPAG Public Workshop is announced throughout the city. He feels the City needs to improve their publicity efforts. He would also like to see that public amenities (library, schools, group homes, teen centers, etc.) are included and taken into account. He feels they should be listed in detail. David then questioned the traffic report and stated that not all intersections were on the map. He asked if there would be stoplights in Potomac Yard. It was stated that all intersections in the plan would be included in the study. Jeff Farner then requested that emails be sent to him with intersections that they did not see included. Mr. Fromm then said that the Mayor of Charleston says to design the public spaces first and then worry about how the buildings fit in. He then stated that the City needs to optimize the use of the Metro that is already in existence.

Katy Cannady, public attendee, stated that it is very important for the Braddock area to be used in any of the area studies because of traffic pressure. The group needs to think about the increased traffic pressure on Route 1 and its effect on Old Town. She asked the group to remember that when expensive infrastructure is added, such as roads and bridges, it means there has to be higher density.

Danielle Fiddler, public attendee, reminded the group of the importance of keeping in mind of all of the small area plans as we go away from the City's Master Plan. Sustainability should be used as a lens as we look at the project and consider energy production, solar technology, and water connection as the river may be rising two to five feet in our lifetime. She asked the group to be innovative as a green city, and feels that this is a fabulous opportunity for a plan that reflects DC, but looks forward from the ground up. Danielle stated that open space is very important, and there is a 40% minimum requirement, don't miss opportunities for other green opportunities, green roofs, gardens, other green elements, we must hit as least 40% so be innovative in the trade offs. Jeff Farner clarified that the City goal is 40% open space overall, not just per parcel.

Jeff stated that the City is working on a green building policy and it should be out in January. The City's working principle is for projects to be LEED certified or comparable.

The meeting ended at 9:14 p.m. Members of the Planning Principles Subcommittee remained for an extra 15 minutes to plan additional meetings. The Planning Principle Subcommittee meetings will be publicly announced.