

Revised March 13, 2009

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 4, 2009

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: FAROLL HAMER, DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

SUBJECT: DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR MARCH, 2009, PART I
CONSIDERATION OF BOUNDARY EXPANSION FOR POTOMAC
YARD SMALL AREA PLAN

The process for the Potomac Yard Small Area Plan began on October 21, 2008, when the Potomac Yard advisory group met for the first time. The boundary for the plan included all of the Landbays of Potomac Yard, with the primary focus on the approximately 70-acre Landbay F (the existing retail center) and the approximately 12-acre* Landbay L near the Braddock Metro Station. (*See Attachment #1*) The CDD-Coordinated Development District zoning for the approximately 585,000 square-foot existing retail center limits additional development to 600,000 square feet. Therefore, additional density (more than approximately 15,000 square feet) requires approval of a rezoning, which is the basis of the Potomac Yard planning process. Landbay L currently permits a maximum of 358 residential units and 10,000 square feet of retail.

On January 31, 2009, the City held a community meeting on the current planning efforts for Potomac Yard. After staff presentations, the group of nearly 100 people separated into 9 tables as part of a design workshop exercise to discuss framework streets, open spaces, and other elements of a new Potomac Yard plan. During the reporting phase of that exercise, 7 of the 9 tables each independently discussed the possibility that:

- the Braddock fields at George Washington Middle School, directly adjacent to the Braddock Metro Station, should be included as a component of the Landbay L portion of the plan; and
- the Plan should consider placing density adjacent to the Braddock metro and locating some of the Braddock fields to Landbay L, near Simpson Fields (*See Attachment # 2*).

The groups described this concept as an opportunity to locate density closer to the Metro station, while providing a connected network of open space, parks and playfields for Potomac Yard and the surrounding neighborhoods. While this issue was not proposed or recommended by staff or the consultants as part of the community workshop, there was a consensus by the community members that this should be explored as part of the Potomac

*Edited to correct an unintended omission.

Yard planning process.

It should be noted that the density transfer that occurred last summer may have precipitated a heightened interest in this concept. As you will recall, several hundred thousand square feet of office (473,000 square feet) were transferred from Landbay L to Landbay H. As part of the density transfer, it was acknowledged that Landbay L should be reviewed comprehensively as part of the Potomac Yard planning effort and the approval included a condition that the owner of Landbay L could not proceed with a development proposal until the planning for Potomac Yard is completed or by June 1, 2010, whichever comes first. The intent of the condition was solely to provide for the evaluation of Landbay L comprehensively as part of the small area planning process. In addition, there was general discussion by members of the community regarding the advisability of density around the metro and the need to consider planning around the metro as part of the planning for the Landbay L density transfer.

At the most recent meeting of the Potomac Yard advisory group, staff asked the question: because so many of the small groups included it in their reports, did that mean that the advisory group as a whole would like to explore the possibility? We offered three planning options:

- 1. Delay planning for Landbay L and the Braddock Fields:**
 - a. Pro: It would be more likely that the plan would be completed in a timely way.
 - b. Con: the owner of Landbay L could actually go forward with the approved zoning for townhouses or apartments on the site before we could comprehensively evaluate Landbay L and its relationship to the adjoining Braddock Metro station.
- 2. Increase the Potomac Yard Plan area boundary to incorporate Braddock Fields, and treat it with the same level of detail as the rest of the plan:**
 - a. Con: The plan would be significantly delayed.
- 3. Phased Approach**—include Braddock Fields by conducting a threshold study that would examine the feasibility of the density shift/field relocation; and if feasible, develop some very conceptual or general design principles.

The Potomac Yard advisory group suggested that staff pursue the third option. The advisory group acknowledged that there are potential opportunities but also significant challenges including potential impacts to adjoining neighborhoods and the adjoining school. The advisory group members requested that City staff prepare a planning strategy for evaluating the feasibility of development adjacent to the Braddock metro station. It is critical to our department but also the advisory group members that any discussions regarding development adjacent to the Braddock metro involve all community stakeholders and residents in an open and transparent planning process. Our next step is to begin discussions with the adjoining communities, residents and school representatives.

The staff is preparing a list of issues that will need to be addressed, along with some preliminary information regarding existing conditions, for the advisory group to consider. These issues will also be discussed with the Planning Commission and City Council. Some of the threshold issues might include:

- Would the plan provide more or improved open space, playfields, and parks with better access and linkage?
- Does it help to reduce traffic?
- Does it make economic sense?
- Are there other benefits that make it worthwhile?

Preliminary investigation would include elements such as:

- Difficulty of construction on the fields (existing utilities may include underground stormwater tanks, kv, sewer, other)
- Cost of building a new pedestrian access to the Braddock Metro from the west side
- Coordination with the GW Middle School and ability to accommodate its future needs.
- Possibility of providing more open space for community and the students.
- Transportation, in particular how new development would affect neighborhood streets.
- Density that would be needed to create an economically feasible project.
- Compatibility with existing neighborhoods.
- Problem of night lighting for the existing fields in close proximity to residential neighborhood.

Also among the issues: the potential to provide a community retail center for Rosemont, possibly of a similar type and scale as Slater's Lane, and coordinated with potential redevelopment of the small shopping center (7-11, Subway) across Braddock Road.

Once we better understand the issues and opportunities and have citizen and community input, we can then work with the Potomac Yard advisory group and citizens to determine the next steps for the planning effort for Landbay L. We are currently in the process of scheduling meetings with adjoining neighborhood groups.

In addition, while the threshold study option selected by the Potomac Yard advisory group is less staff-intensive than a traditional small area plan, it does add to the work program and increase the scope of the planning effort. Staff has scheduled discussions of the planning work program with the Planning Commission and City Council in April and May.

Attachments :

Attachment # 1 – Potomac Yard Landbays

Attachment # 2 – Landbay L and Braddock Fields Aerial