

BRAC Advisory Group Meeting

March 1, 2010

7pm – 9pm

Council Work Room

City Hall

Roll Call –

Present:

John Komoroske, Chairman of the Planning Commission
Jim Turkel, Chief, Belvoir Integration Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Jerry Dawson, Duke Realty
Dick Somers, Seminary Park Community Association
Dave Dexter - Chair, Seminary West
Don Buch, Citizen at Large
Dave Cavanaugh, Seminary Ridge
Julie Edelson, Lincolnia Hills/Heywood Glen
James Nozar, JBG Properties
Jayme Blakesley, Alexandria Transportation Commission
Stephanie Landrum, AEDP
Gerry Chiaruttini, Beauregard Heights Civic Association

Not Present:

Colonel Moffatt, Fort Belvoir Deputy Garrison Commander for Transformation and BRAC
Geoffrey Goodale – Vice Chair, Brookville-Seminary Valley
Ronald Sturman, Seminary Heights
Mark Benedict, Parkside of Alexandria
Nancy Jennings, Seminary Hill
Kathy Burns, West End Business Association

City Staff:

Faroll Hamer, Director of Planning and Zoning
Rich Baier, Director of Transportation and Environmental Services
Abi Lerner, Deputy Director of Transportation and Environmental Services
Bob Garbacz, Chief, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Ravi Raut, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Sandra Marks, Principal Planner, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Dirk Geratz, Principal Planner, Department of Planning and Zoning
Pat Escher, Principal Planner, Department of Planning and Zoning

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2. New Alternative – (Agenda item 3f) Abi Lerner presented a conceptual redesign of the Seminary Road and I-395 interchange. As the City is in the process of formulating a Beauregard Corridor Plan, it was thought to have the City’s consultants, EDSA & RKK, look at the interchange. The consultants reviewed the interchange and formulated a concept that would potentially ease congestion and provide for improved pedestrian access across I-395. The idea would eliminate the existing third level bridge and provide a north bound flyover that would originate from the HOV lanes and touch down on Seminary Road at the interchange of Seminary Road and Mark Center Drive. The ramp would divide prior to touching down connecting to the east and westbound lanes on Seminary Road. The lower portion of the interchange would be upgraded to improve vehicular circulation with additional travel lanes or a roundabout. The design may require additional lanes in both directions along Seminary Road and would have an open vegetated median in the middle. The median would be extended over I-395, connecting the east and west neighborhoods of the City. Abi did express concern about the traffic operations at the interchange signals. Detailed micro-simulation of this alternative is needed to assess the adequacy of traffic operations. There was discussion about the potential of bringing the flyover directly into the Mark Center site, but the group felt that the improvements should serve the neighborhood, not just the single site. This would be a more long range improvement – 10 to 20 year time frame.
3. Abi Lerner presented a variation on the alternative described in item 2. This alternative would keep the Seminary Road Bridge over I-395 and would provide an HOV connection to and from the south at the Seminary Road Bridge over I-395. The HOV connection would be controlled with a traffic signal. Under this alternative, modifications to Seminary Road west of I-395 similar to the ones described in item 2 above would be implemented. Detailed micro-simulation of this alternative is needed to assess the adequacy of traffic operations.
4. Direct Access Alternatives - The next portion of the discussion was led by Owen Curtis and was evaluating the direct access ramp alternatives.
 - (a) The first direct access would leave I-395 northbound HOV lanes and flyover the Remote Inspection Facility (RIF); touching down on the existing internal road. It does meet many of the group’s principles, but would need to have additional review to decide whether or not it is feasible. Duke Realty does not support the flyover the RIF as these roads are small private roads, there would be multiple conflicts with existing and proposed building entrances and it would place a lot of traffic on a non-signalized intersection. Jim Turkel of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also expressed his concerns about this alternative related to security of the Army facility.

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(b) The next option is a flyover the three story garage and touching down on the existing road system. This option is topographically difficult to construct and may not be feasible. Jim Turkel of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expressed his significant concerns about this alternative related to security of the Army facility.

(c) VDOT's Alternative D is superior to all the other alternatives from a transit/traffic stand point, but it would impact the preserve. The direct ramp over the RIF (flyover) does not provide good vehicular flow/movement and may require the acquisition of right of way.

(d) VDOT's Alternative A-1only goes into the south garage, may have negative impacts to the interstate and doesn't serve the entire site.

With regards to the EDSA design, an urban diamond could be substituted for the roundabout, however diamonds are not pedestrian friendly. The group expressed concern about only providing access to the garage and/or the site. It is also difficult to make a recommendation, when additional information is needed to investigate the feasibility of these alternatives.

The BRAC Advisory Group will recommend to the Council that staff should do some additional analysis about the new alternatives and other road improvements and report back to the group in 60 days and will discuss at the April meeting. It was felt by some members of the group that the new alternatives were good ideas as they addresses the neighborhood as a whole, add green space, provide for better transit and improves the interchange. Jim Nozar, with JBG Properties introduced their transportation planner Ian Lockwood. The group asked for what Ian's opinion was about the new alternative. He drew a variation of the new alternative which would maintain the bridge and widen it by one lane. He would maintain the existing roundabout keeping through traffic above on the bridge. This was similar to what Abi had proposed. Ian also proposed roundabouts at Seminary/Mark Center Drive and the Seminary/Beauregard intersections.

Dave will draft a letter to Council and forward to the group to review. It will reiterate that the group does not support the VDOT's alternatives. The group supports an alternative that would benefit the neighborhood and not just the Mark Center site which is different from their previous position. It will request the Council direct staff/VDOT to begin an IJR to review enhancements for the interchange, which provide a more comprehensive solution.

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5. Bigger Picture Transportation System Changes –

(a-c) This portion of the discussion was lead by Owen. The I-395 corridor is at or even above capacity. The primary reason for this is that this portion of the interstate is reduced from four lanes down to three. The southbound fourth lane is lost at the Duke Street interchange at the exact location that the Duke Street traffic enters the interstate. VDOT is currently performing road widening from Springfield southward, these widening improvements should be done in this portion of the interstate from Seminary Road past Duke Street in the southbound direction. Likewise the interstate widening should be done in the north bound direction from Duke Street, through Seminary Road and onto King Street interchange. These improvements would require the King Street overpass to be reconstructed. Owen believed that this widening could be done within the existing ROW, but he was unsure if the widening of the HOV lanes from 2 to 3 could be accommodated within ROW. He stated that we need to bring these large scale improvements to Council's attention so they can begin the discussion with VDOT about HOT/HOV lanes, sound barriers and private/public partnerships. The HOV lanes are at capacity and are losing their effectiveness. If there is no benefit to getting on the HOV lanes due to congestion, drives will no longer use them, creating a disincentive for carpooling. The HOV lanes currently carry 65% of all the person-trips traveling on the interstate.

(d) King Street should be widened to six lanes from Hampton to Skyline. It is a major commercial arterial road and its limited capacity it negatively impacting Seminary Road. Seminary Road is primarily a residential road and its character should be preserved.

6. Short Term Street Improvements – Owen had prepared a list of some ideas for solutions which will be review by the City. One small solution would require some striping that would funnel the westbound traffic into the southern lane while crossing the interstate. This movement would free up an additional lane for the oncoming interstate traffic and eliminate some potential weaving. Staff will review the complete list of short-term improvements and will provide written responses.

7. Other Traffic Issues – Dick Somers raised the issues for improvements west of Beauregard Street on Seminary Road and the need for inter-jurisdictional cooperation and coordination. There needs to be a sense of urgency to have these improvements in prior

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to the opening of the BRAC facility. These improvements should be consistent with guiding principle #10.

The group felt that all of the improvements need to be reviewed and prioritized and should be discussed at the next March 17th meeting.

8. Community Discussion – The Community raised concerns about:
- The long term improvements to all of Seminary Road – from Kenmore Avenue to N. Quaker Lane.
 - Does the Army know where the employees are coming from? Will they be coming from the Wilson Bridge and eventually up Seminary Road? The Army will provide that information in the coming months once they are assured that they have accurate information. Is the original Environmental Impact Statement posted on the web page? Pat Escher will follow up.
 - Children cross the Seminary Road going to and from the McGruder's grocery. Attention needs to be paid to that portion of the road to ensure safety.

Important Dates:

March 6th, JBG Meeting at William Ramsey School

March 11th, VDOT Meeting at Minnie Howard School

March 17th, BRAC Advisory Meeting at Beatley Library

9. Meeting was adjourned.