

**PYPAG Meeting Summary**  
**Tuesday, April 21, 2009**

**PYPAG Members in attendance:**

Joe Bondi  
Michael Cison  
Allison Cryor DiNardo  
Darryl Dugan  
Garrett Erdle  
Bill Hendrickson  
Jennifer Mitchell  
Peter Pocock  
John Porter  
Frederick Rothmeijer  
Eric Wagner  
Maria Wasowski

**PYPAG Members not in attendance:**

Richard Calderon  
Deborah Johnson  
Jon Lindgren  
Dan McCaffery

Crystall Merlino  
Mariella Posey  
Sherry Sadai  
Noah Teates

**City Staff:**

Bethany Carton  
Tom Culpepper  
Jeff Farner  
Mark Jinks  
Helen McIlvaine  
Sandra Marks  
Kristen Mitten  
Valerie Peterson

**The Perspectives Group Staff:**

Doug Sarno

**WMATA Staff:**

John Thomas

Approximately 20 Members of the Public were in attendance.

## **Introduction**

The Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group (PYPAG) meeting began at 7:00 PM with Eric Wagner, Chair, starting the meeting. There were 12 PYPAG members in attendance. Mr. Wagner stated that there appears to be different levels of understanding of the block exercise from the last PYPAG meeting on March 26, 2009.

Jeff Farner, City of Alexandria Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z), stated that the topic of sustainability will require additional discussions, including subcommittees and other meetings. Mr. Farner indicated that Staff will be working through the summer, and will need feedback from PYPAG members to ensure that they are headed in the right direction. He stated that information related to the Metro feasibility and Landbay L are affecting the schedule.

Mr. Wagner stated that it is important to ensure that everyone is on the same page with respect to the use of the term “sustainability.” He also stated that PYPAG should establish clear guiding principles and recommendations, but be careful to leave the details to Staff. Mr. Farner noted that the final document will be a master plan, which is a broad policy document, and that more detailed pieces will follow.

## **Meeting Goals, Agenda, and Revised Schedule**

The facilitator, Doug Sarno, discussed the revised schedule. He stated that there are some concerns about the timing and feasibility of the Metrorail station, and how these concerns affect PYPAG’s work. He stated that PYPAG will have some definitive results from the Metrorail Station Feasibility Work Group at the May meeting. Noting that PYPAG developed principles considering a Metrorail station, he asked PYPAG to think about how the group might move forward with a no-Metro option. Mr. Sarno noted that the planned June public workshop has been postponed to September, and reviewed the April-June schedule. He stated that PYPAG needed to provide information to Cooper Robertson in June so that they can develop options over the summer.

Bill Hendrickson, PYPAG member, questioned if there was time to look at open space best practices. Mr. Sarno indicated that he would like to use the June PYPAG meeting to set up the development of options and to further discuss sustainability, open space, and the no-Metro option.

Mr. Hendrickson added that over the past 10 years, open space has been pushed off until the development stage, which he does not think is the appropriate stage to consider the use of open spaces. Mr. Wagner disagreed, stating that open space has been seriously considered in other planning efforts. He said that the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Open Space Committee have jurisdiction over the use of open space in the City. Noah Teates, PYPAG member, stated that he was concerned about the economic sustainability of requiring a developer to provide open space.

Mr. Farner stated that Staff can refine the work program to find ways to include discussions in certain topic areas, including open space. Mr. Sarno indicated that it would be helpful to understand the roles and responsibilities of the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Open Space Committee, and directed PYPAG members to put together bullet points on how they are thinking about open space.

Mr. Teates questioned if open space came up in the Eisenhower East planning process. Mr. Farner stated that open space was extensively discussed.

Mr. Sarno asked if there were any other topic areas that needed to be discussed further besides sustainability and open space. Mr. Farner indicated that parking will be a big issue for Staff.

### **Analysis of Station Location Alternatives**

Tom Culpepper, City of Alexandria Department of Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES), John Thomas, WMATA, and Mr. Farner gave a presentation on the location alternatives for a Metrorail station at Potomac Yard. Mr. Culpepper stated that at the end of the presentation, staff would like to hear from PYPAG what additional information is needed in order to make a decision.

Mr. Culpepper identified the location of the station reservation area, and alternative northern locations and locations interior to the body of the yard. Mr. Farner then identified constraints, including ownership, environmental conditions (open space and wetlands), relationships to Potomac Greens, Park Service restrictions and easements, the location of the CSX tracks, and FAA height restrictions. Mr. Culpepper stated that there is an area in the vicinity where the ownership is in question. Mr. Farner also noted that approximately 50% of the walkshed surrounding the reservation area is undevelopable.

Mr. Thomas then discussed track geometry, including the length of level, straight track required to accommodate a station, maximum grade, and curves. Other concerns he identified included elevators for ADA accessibility, a double cross-over, and ancillary space for operations.

Mr. Thomas walked through the details and costs of alternative A (Reserved site). Mr. Teates questioned the reason for the cost difference between center- and side-platform stations. Mr. Thomas explained that the side-platform stations require redundant elevations for each platform.

Mr. Farner discussed assumed uses and densities surrounding alternative A.

A PYPAG member questioned how the assumed densities compared to the Braddock and planned Braddock East densities. Mr. Farner stated that Carlyle and Eisenhower East have about 14 million sq. ft. of development.

Mr. Hendrickson questioned how staff derived the assumed densities. Mr. Farner stated that the assumed densities were based on a 2.5 FAR for Landbay F, and the approved densities for all other landbays in Potomac Yard.

A member of PYPAG questioned why there are low-density residential uses in Potomac Greens so close to the reservation area. Mr. Wagner explained that Potomac Greens has access only from Slater's Lane, and density was limited by traffic considerations. The PYPAG member questioned if Potomac Greens residents knew about the location of the Metro reservation area at the time they purchased their homes. Mr. Culpepper stated that the residents were made aware.

Mr. Wagner questioned if staff considered increasing the densities in the remainder of the landbays. Mr. Farner stated that assuming the same density proposed for Landbay F, there would be about 12.5 million sq. ft. of development surrounding the reservation area.

A member of PYPAG questioned if sq. ft. of development could be translated into ridership. Mr. Culpepper stated that next steps include examining ridership.

Mr. Wagner stated that the developers of Landbays I/J have agreed to phase development to allow for a reexamination of the areas closest to the reservation area. Mr. Farner confirmed this information.

A member of PYPAG questioned if it would be possible for the reservation area to be on the west side of the tracks. Mr. Culpepper stated that it is very important for the entrance to the station to be perceived as being from the west side.

Mr. Thomas walked through the details and costs of alternatives B1, B2, and B3 (northern sites) and Mr. Farner discussed assumed uses and densities surrounding alternatives B1, B2, and B3, and the implications to Rail Park.

A member of PYPAG questioned, with the relocation of tracks, if the old tracks would remain. Mr. Thomas indicated that the existing track would likely be abandoned.

Mr Thomas walked through the details and costs of alternatives C1 and C2 (Landbay F sites).

Mr. Wagner stated that based on the discussion the other night at the Metrorail Station Feasibility Work Group ("Work Group") meeting, alternative C2 is off the table due to the cost.

Mr. Farner discussed assumed uses and densities surrounding alternatives C1 and C2.

Jennifer Mitchell, PYPAG member, stated that another discussion at the Work Group meeting related to the dramatic impacts of these alternatives on adjacent development plans.

Mr. Thomas walked through the details and cost of alternative D.

Mr. Wagner stated that another topic of discussion at the Work Group meeting was the impacts of this alternative on the approved Linear Park in Landbay K.

Ms. Mitchell questioned the location of the tunnel entrances. Mr. Thomas indicated that their exact location is not yet known, but showed their approximate locations.

Mr. Hendrickson questioned the length of the pedestrian bridge needed for alternative B3, and the impact on wetlands and Potomac Greens Park. Mr. Thomas indicated that those issues have not yet been studied.

PYPAG discussed heights and grades for pedestrian bridges over Landbay K.

Frederick Rothmeijer, a member of PYPAG, noted that alternatives C1 and C2 would reduce densities in Landbay G.

Mr. Culpepper stated that next steps include finalizing the Analysis based on comments from the Work Group and PYPAG in May. He stated that Staff needs to gain a sense of which alternatives should and should not be considered.

Mr. Wagner clarified that alternatives C1 and C2 were essentially eliminated by the Work Group, and alternative D nearly was. Mr. Culpepper stated that the Work Group will determine which alternatives will not be considered.

Mr. Farner summarized the development potential for each of the alternatives.

A PYPAG member questioned how ridership forecasts for the alternatives are related to levels of development. Mr. Thomas stated that ridership forecasts have been done for the reservation area alternative A only.

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager, discussed funding considerations. Mr. Wagner noted that ridership is almost irrelevant because someone has to pay capital costs in order to get ridership, and will not pay for the station.

### **Public Comment**

A resident of Potomac Green stressed that the quality of life of residents be considered in choosing an alternative, and noted that alternative B3 would be preferred because it could be constructed during the day.

A member of the public cautioned against the dismissal of alternatives before their benefits are known.

## **Real Estate Economics**

Sarah Woodworth, W-ZHA gave a presentation on the basics of development economics. She stated that developers will invest in a project if they can get a return that pays back the development costs and gives them an adequate profit, and detailed the threshold returns for commercial development, apartments, and condominiums. Ms. Woodworth explained that proffers (when the developer is willing to spend money on community benefits like affordable housing) are a possibility when the return for the developer is higher than the threshold. She stated that it is important when negotiating proffers to be sensitive of a developer's need to make a profit.

Ms. Woodworth explained the basics of development costs based on an illustrative residential project. She detailed development costs for the illustrative project, including land, building (including site, construction, and fees), and parking costs.

She explained how a reduction in the number of parking spaces provided per residential unit for the illustrative project resulted in an increase in proffers. However, she noted that the market demand for residential units where fewer parking spaces are provided may not be strong unless, for example, transit is provided or the community is walkable.

Ms. Woodworth discussed how the provision of underground parking could increase development costs such that the project is no longer profitable for the developer unless rents are raised. She also discussed how the provision of above ground structured parking garages is not advantageous to the community. Finally, she discussed how the incorporation of above ground parking into the base of a residential building could trigger the use of different construction methods which increase developments costs.

Ms. Woodworth stated that the site costs at Potomac Yard may be higher than might be expected from a typical infill site because of infrastructure costs such as roads and utilities. She also noted that interest rates on financing and the cost of materials are other factors which impact development costs.

Ms. Woodworth then discussed Metro impact. She stated that property values within walking distance of a transit station will go up most for office, less so for residential, and negligibly for retail. She noted that office and residential rents and building densities increase close to Metro in Washington, D.C. and Alexandria. She examined the proffer potential assuming "Metro" and "No Metro" scenarios for rental residential, residential condominium, and office development. Finally, she stated first, that while office may potentially be the most profitable

use, in the short term market may be for rental residential, and that the market will change over time; and second, that absorption, or the amount and pace of development, is faster at “Metro” than “No Metro” locations.

Mr. Teates questioned if the developers of the landbays with existing approvals had done the math, and if Ms. Woodworth’s assumptions seemed reasonable. Mr. Rothmeijer stated that he thought the assumptions seemed reasonable.

Mr. Wagner questioned if any studies have been done which examined property values around other forms of dedicated transit, for example, BRT. Ms. Woodworth stated that the permanency of station and the frequency of trips dramatically impact value.

Allison DiNardo quoted a recent study in the Washington, D.C. area which found that only 20% of transit trips are due to commuting. She commented that it is interesting that the focus on transit is around commuting, when people are using transit for all sorts of other purposes.

A member of PYPAG questioned when in the process the discussion between the developer and the City occurs concerning proffers. Mr. Farner stated that the development community prefers to know expectations up front, which can be discussed during the master plan process. Details can be discussed in the development special use permit process. Mr. Wagner stated that it is important to know what the developer is willing to contribute in order to determine what the master plan will allow to be developed.

Mr. Farner noted that staff was surprised to learn that office rents at the Braddock station are similar to non-Metro rents, which indicates that a critical mass of density and mix of land uses also contribute to land values, in addition to proximity to Metro.

Mr. Wagner adjourned the meeting at 9:00 pm.