

**Old Town North Small Area Plan Update (OTN SAP Update)
Open Space, Recreation and Cultural Activities & Historic Preservation
Advisory Group Subcommittee Meeting #1**

**Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 4:30 – 6:00 PM
City Hall, Room 2000**

SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

OPEN SPACE

A presentation was provided by staff reflecting the key open space themes identified during Phase I (Visioning and Charrette Phase) of the OTN SAP Update planning process relating to green connections, new and enhanced open space opportunities, and trail connections. Strategies for achieving those themes were reviewed and discussed, along with recommendations for improvements specific to Montgomery Park, based on the City's pending Neighborhood Parks Improvement Plan.

Comment: Important to be careful about any recommendation relating to private property; should have concurrence of the property owner. Owner may need incentives.

Staff Response: Assurance is given that discussions will occur with the property owner of any parcel where the plan may want to explore new open space. The proposed improvement would not occur without the concurrence of the property owner.

Comment: NOTICe completed a survey of residents to gauge their ideas on possible uses on the NRG site. The findings reflect that people are interested in mixed use on that site along with open space, especially open space along the water.

Staff Questions on Open Space to the Subcommittee:

- (1) What are your thoughts about including smaller open spaces vs consolidated open spaces in the plan area?**

Subcommittee Response: A combination of the two is likely the best approach depending on the level of participation by property owners. This process should look at open space opportunities strategically to see where the open space is needed and how it can best be achieved.

- (2) Other New Open Spaces: Aside from NRG and the rail corridor, which if any other private sites should staff explore for improved open space?**

Subcommittee Response: In the case of conversions of private parking lots and areas of parcels with buildings for open space, all property owners may not want to participate or be ready to participate in improvements, because of cost and other factors. Some

opportunities may need to wait until redevelopment of a property occurs. These situations should not be the priority if willingness to currently participate is not there.

(3) Streetscape Improvements: On which streets/sidewalks should staff explore enhancements to – e.g., widening/environmental design?

Subcommittee Response: The community seems generally in favor of streetscape improvements throughout area as feasible, currently, and as properties redevelopment.

ARTS/ENTERTAINMENT AREA(S)

Staff provided an overview of state legislation relating to cultural district designation. Also provided was the map developed during Phase I (Visioning and Charrette Phase) of the OTN SAP Update planning process relating to a proposed OTN art/entertainment area(s). Additionally, information regarding financial and social value that art brings to a community and the pros and cons of cultural districts was shared. It was also stated that the City is currently undertaking a City-wide Arts and Culture Plan which may be able to help leverage the study process for an OTN arts/entertainment area. Finally, it was added that the City can also offer opportunities for temporary public art and for cultural programming.

Comment: Outside programming should take into consideration that OTN is in the flight path. However, there may be underutilized space that should be explored where additional cultural programming could occur.

Comment: May want to consider looking at combining Old Town and Old Town North as one cultural district with the Torpedo Factory at one end and Metro Stage at the other.

Staff Comment: An important additional piece of information regarding cultural district designation is that a cultural district, as defined by the state, only allows one district per City and there are other neighborhoods in the City that have expressed an interest. Unfortunately, a whole City cannot be designated as a cultural district. Therefore, if a designation occurs in Alexandria, the location is something that would need to be studied by the wider community and agreed to by policy makers. One key advantage of being designated as a cultural district is that it brings tax incentives for 10 years for cultural development.

Comment: If the City does not go for a cultural district, OTN can leverage other tools the City has including regulatory, programming and financial. An example of a regulatory tool may be not to count a building's art uses against its FAR.

Comment: While it was stated by staff that a cultural district designation may not be able to protect existing art uses (Metro Stage and the Art League), the community has clearly spoken that it is important to do that and that one key reason for an OTN arts/entertainment area would be for that purpose.

Comments: Metro Stage and the Art League are important assets to the community and attract wide followings (audiences) and students and offer unique classes and programming.

Comment: The notion of a temporary sculpture exhibit in Alexandria House Park should be further explored with the owners of that park and with the Art League.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Staff provided a presentation of a Historic Resources Map developed for Phase I (Visioning and Charrette Phase) of the OTN SAP Update planning process and a map of the Historic Theme Areas developed during the Charrette. Staff also solicited from the subcommittee ideas for next steps such as (1) completing a historical narrative of the area to match the Historic Resources Map; (2) updating the Historic Resources Map as necessary and (3) creating an OTN History/Interpretative Plan.

Comments: Creating an OTN History/Interpretative Plan is something that the subcommittee agreed should be pursued. In addition it was noted that the plan should address the architectural history of the area as well, noting that some of the buildings are now more than 50 years old and may be eligible for the national register.

Comment: There are a number of people in the neighborhood that can help with a History Plan and should be tapped.

Comment: Consider placing markers on buildings and sites to help commemorate historical places and buildings.

Comment: OTN overlaps part of the Alexandria Old and Historic District (Washington Street).

Comment: Washington Street is nearly 100 years old.