

**Old Town North Small Area Plan Update (OTN SAP Update)
Open Space, Recreation and Cultural Activities & Historic Preservation
Advisory Group Subcommittee Meeting #2**

Wednesday, March 9, 2016, 4:00 – 6:00 PM
Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority (ARHA)
401 Wythe Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING NOTES
DRAFT 3.21.2016

OPEN SPACE

Using the Subcommittee’s guidance from Meeting #1, staff provided information relating to streetscape, trails, parks and community spaces. The studies included draft streetscape improvements with phasing strategies to help achieve the improvements (with the improvements in phase 1 focused on the ‘green streets’ and retail focused streets, and coordinated with the sites identified for future development); draft expanded and enhanced trail connections for pedestrians, bicyclists, and with the potential for a transport connection along the rail line; and a draft design for new open space on the NRG site. Also, shown were possible ways to maximize new public open space using a mixture of on-site and off-site developer contributions and the presentation recognized the importance of ensuring onsite open space for private use. In addition, staff gave an overview of components in the City’s Waterfront Plan (Phase I Olin Schematic Design) which address proposed improvements to parks in Old Town North.

Subcommittee Comments:

Question: Service trucks using loading docks in Montgomery Center hold up traffic on Fairfax Street in addition to having a bus route on that street. How will widening the sidewalk and narrowing the travel lanes impact the traffic? **Response:** When Montgomery Center does redevelop, there will be provisions to minimize impacts on parking, loading and unloading and traffic flow. **Follow-up:** Right now, there are loading and unloading areas immediately adjacent to Montgomery Center: (1) N. Fairfax Street – 2 loading and unloading areas; (2) Montgomery Street – 1 loading and unloading area; (3) N. Royal Street – 1 loading and unloading area; and (4) Madison Street – 3 loading and unloading areas. (Draft Streetscape Map)

Comment: The boulevard design presented for Royal Street is an attractive idea. One caution is that at certain times each day, runners and bicyclists block the street which is a challenge to others using it. (Draft Streetscape Map)

Comment: The axonometric in the presentation is good in that it shows the whole picture before going into the details. We can start exploring segregating certain commercial areas from residential to avoid traffic conflicts. Also research the Metro Way BRT streetscape design with the row of trees in the median in addition to the sidewalk street trees which provides the feeling of a green street. (Draft Streetscape Map)

Comment: Agree with use of developer contributions to help with streetscape improvements needed adjacent to redevelopment sites. Phasing of those improvements and the improvements adjacent to non-redevelopment sites should be up to the City. (Draft Phasing Plan for Streetscape Improvements)

Question: Not clear about the criteria for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of streetscape improvements.

Response: Phase 1 shown in red identifies the key areas that need improvements and that can be done either through adjacent redevelopment and/or prioritizing improvements on the ‘green streets’ and retail streets identified in the Charrette. Phase 2 shown in blue identifies portions of the right of way that should be improved but are not immediately adjacent to any planned redevelopment activity. (Draft Phasing Plan for Streetscape Improvements)

Question: Not sure how we can accomplish the enhancements shown on Second Street since there is no development happening there except for Old Colony Inn. **Response:** We can explore off-site contributions to fund the implementation of streetscape improvements on Second Street. (Draft Phasing Plan for Streetscape Improvements)

Question: What is the plan for the railroad? Still hearing the train, is it still operating?

Response: Staff does not believe it is still operating given the closure of the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) and the Robinson Terminal Warehouse. However, for PRGS they may be using the train to carry out equipment. Staff anticipates a conference call meeting with Norfolk Southern on April 8th and will inquire about the status of train operations in Old Town North. (Draft Trail Designs)

Comment: There is a clear interest in exploring a motorized transit connection. That interest has been expressed by the community and was heard from the Planning Commission and City Council. **Response:** The City will continue to study various options for the tracks including transit connections within Old Town North and to neighboring communities. The Transportation Subcommittee is also talking with the [National Rails-to-Trail Conservancy](#) about railbanking (securing the rails for interim trail use). (Draft Trail Designs)

Comment: While it is difficult to foresee what will end up on NRG, transit will be more beneficial as development occurs on that site. (Draft Trail Designs)

Comment: Have to keep in mind that the railroad property is still privately owned; also likes the idea of including environmental treatments for storm water management along the rails. (Draft Trail Designs)

Comment: Explore the possibility of expanding into the parking lots on the southern edge of the substation, particularly if a second substation is proposed. **Response:** Yes; but there will need to be a clear nexus between what is proposed and what is requested of the developer. (Draft NRG Open Space Design)

Comment: An important aspect for the NRG site is going to be traffic, particularly the entrance on Slaters Lane which is challenging. Is it possible to widen the sidewalk along E. Abingdon Street into the NRG parking lot to the east to improve the bicycle/pedestrian experience?

Response: The [Transportation Master Plan – Draft Bicycle/Pedestrian Chapter](#) addresses that portion of the Mt Vernon Trail and staff will give a briefing on the status of that effort during the full Advisory Group Meeting on March 24th. Just as a note, there is some overlap between the Open Space, Recreation, Cultural Activities & Historic Preservation Subcommittee and the Infrastructure and Environmental Sustainability and Transportation Subcommittee; staff and the Advisory Group can work to bridge the ideas and concerns generated from those two Subcommittees. This also applies to all Subcommittee recommendations where there is overlap. (Draft Trail Designs)

Comment: The NRG site is an opportunity to be positioned as a gateway to Alexandria. The site would be a logical place to establish an arts presence and a place for a potential sculpture garden. (Draft NRG Open Space Design)

Comment: Since Royal Street is proposed as a green/bike way, would like to see a visual terminus of Royal Street into NRG. (Draft Streetscape Map)

Comment: City to consider working with NPS on redoing the covered wood portion of the Mt Vernon trail immediately to the east of the PRGS building. The proposed second trail on the higher elevation as shown in the presentation seems logical.

Comment: Missing the graphic showing street ends to the Waterfront which was discussed during the Charrette. **Response:** Although the graphic is not shown, the City is committed to preserving and enhancing views of the river along East/West streets. **Follow-up:** A graphic from the Charrette included the views eastward and we will make sure we continue to utilize that graphic. (Waterfront Plan/Olin Design Improvements)

Public Comments:

Comment: Great job on the presentation and showing the streetscape enhancement elements such as the bulb-outs and enhanced tree canopy. It would be beneficial to coordinate with the discussion on transportation to identify different street typologies so that loading services are limited to arterial streets not collector streets. (Draft Streetscape Improvements Map)

Question: What is the width of the rail tracks easement? **Response:** The easement is approximately 100 feet. There would still be room for a trail connection even with the existing embankment and tracks. (Draft Trail Design)

Comment: Defining the edges for NRG site along the Waterfront and the rail corridor is a good idea and can set up the stage for ideas within the core of the site later on. **Response:** Yes, there are still a lot of unknowns particularly on what is underground. Setting up broad parameters allows for flexibility. (Draft NRG Open Space Design)

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND HISTORIC PRESENTATION

Staff presented case studies of artist housing and live/work spaces in the region particularly the [Brookland Artspace Lofts](#), the [Mount Rainier Artist Lofts](#) and [City Arts](#) in Baltimore. The idea of an Arts Corridor along Fairfax Street was also presented with the possibility of reinforcing the emphasis on Arts along that corridor through art installations, streetscape improvements, lighting, sculptures and other artistic interventions.

Additionally, during the Subcommittee's first meeting, staff was asked to pursue a History Plan, utilizing information compiled to-date by the City on both archaeological resources and buildings in the area. Staff reported that it will pursue professional services to document through graphics and narrative, the area's archaeological architectural resources and also identify possible interpretative elements and programming.

Finally, staff also reviewed elements of the City's Waterfront Plan (OLIN Schematic Design) that addresses proposed improvements to Waterfront Parks located in Old Town North and it reviewed Common Elements proposed by OLIN for paving and lighting along the Waterfront.

Subcommittee Comments:

Comment: Consider extending the Common Elements to the north that would celebrate the history of Old Town North. (Waterfront Plan and Common Elements)

Question: Is there a future potential site for artist housing? **Response:** The City is currently in discussion with Metro Stage and the Art League to understand their spatial needs. Also, the Office of the Arts held community meetings as part of the outreach effort for a draft City [Arts & Culture Plan](#). Through that effort, the goal is to also get a better understanding of the needs of other groups or entities that play an important role in the arts or that support the arts through for-profit or nonprofit relationships. (Draft Art Corridor and other Art-Related Ideas)

Comment: Should look at artist housing as development occurs in other parts of Old Town North. (Draft Art Corridor and other Art-related Ideas)

Comment: Would like to know how the artist housing projects shown in the presentation were financed. **Follow-up:** The [Brookland Artspace Lofts](#) was financed by the DC Department of Housing and Community Development and other public and private entities. The [Mount Rainier Artist Lofts](#) is part of the [Gateway Arts District](#) that stretches along the Route One Corridor and was financed by the Prince George's County Department of Housing and Community Development and was funded by multiple non-profit organizations such as the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. The [City Arts](#) in Baltimore funding included \$12.4 million in low-income housing tax credits. (Draft Art Corridor and other Art-Related Ideas)

Comment: Given the need for affordable housing in the area where small businesses struggle to find employees who live nearby, artist housing might not be as a high priority. (Draft Art Corridor and other Art-Related Ideas)

Field Trip – It was noted by staff that the Planning, Land Use and Design & Housing Subcommittee is interested in a field trip to some or all of the artist housing locations mentioned today. This Subcommittee noted that it will defer to the Planning, Land Use and Design & Housing Subcommittee to take the trip and report back.