

**Old Town North Small Area Plan Update (OTN SAP Update)  
Planning, Land Use and Design and Housing  
Advisory Group Subcommittee Meeting #2**

**Wednesday, March 9, 2016, 8:00 – 10:00 AM**  
Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority (ARHA)  
401 Wythe Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

**SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING NOTES**  
**DRAFT 3.21.2016**

**Planning, Land Use and Design & Housing Subcommittee**

- Co-Chair Maria Wasowski
- Co-Chair Kevin Harris
- Steven Arabia
- Engin Artemel
- Herb Cooper-Levy
- Austin Flajser
- Thomas Soapes

**PLANNING, LAND USE AND DESIGN**

City staff presented a number of land use and urban design maps for the Subcommittee’s review and discussion. Among those maps was the proposed Land Use map generated during the Charrette, and an Updated Urban Design Subareas map that builds upon both the 1992 Urban Design Subareas map and the proposed Land Use map. An Arts Corridor along Fairfax Street was also proposed, building on the idea of an Arts Area from the Charrette. The Arts Corridor could include possible public and private art installations, sculptures and other artistic interventions, streetscape improvements, and architectural enhancements to connote arrival into a special place. A graphic from the Charrette that looks at possible updates to the 1992 Retail Focus Areas map was also presented for the Subcommittee’s review and discussion. Additionally, City staff presented the idea of a Voluntary Streetscape Enhancements Toolbox for Existing Private Properties that could include possible tools and incentives for property owners to consider for improving blank walls and surface parking lots on their sites. Titling the program as voluntary eliminates the idea of property owners assuming that the enhancements are required rather than encouraged. Finally, staff indicated that the Office of the Arts has allocated \$25,000 to be used for a temporary art project in Old Town North. Staff solicited ideas from the Subcommittee in identifying locations for temporary arts installations in the community. It should be noted that the Office of the Arts has indicated that the art would need to be on public property.

**Subcommittee Comments:**

**Comment:** Alexandria House and Port Royal are both currently zoned for Mixed Use. Due to the zoning, a suggestion is that this site therefore might be more appropriate to fall within the

Mixed-Use Subarea. (Draft Updated Urban Design Subareas Map) **Follow-up:** As a follow-up, staff has confirmed that Alexandria House is currently zoned Commercial Residential Mixed Use - High (CRMU-H) and Port Royal is zoned Residential Commercial High (RCH). Of these uses, the respective Zoning Ordinance provisions specify those that are permitted and those that are subject to a special use permit. (Updated Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** Canal Center is zoned W-1/Waterfront Mixed Use, allowing residential, commercial, retail and more. However, the level of intended retail in Canal Center never came to full fruition, although there is a Japanese Restaurant in one of the buildings in Canal Center (off Montgomery Street) and a Carry-out (off the water's edge). This comment noted that strengthening the retail along Montgomery and connecting it to some expanded retail in Canal Center may help Canal Center and bring more visibility and activity to that area. Also, it was noted that perhaps thought should be given to exploring with the Sheraton Hotel the feasibility of opening up their restaurant to the street. (Draft Updated Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** Support for encouraging retail was expressed. However, this comment also noted that we might run the risk of making some of the development projects not feasible and have them end up with empty retail spaces and dead zones. Rather than focusing solely on retail, the SAP Update should continue to emphasize in guidelines how building orientations and entries can help activate and enhance the streetscape. (Draft Updated Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** The Design Principles for the Royal Street Bus Garage calls for a predominantly residential use with a limited amount of accessory retail, personal service or community serving use. Therefore, it is important that ground floor space be designed with flexibility. (Draft Updated Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** How do we build flexibility within developments in practical terms? **Response:** Having 15 to 18 feet of floor to ceiling height on the ground floor allows buildings to change over time to include retail if needed. (Draft Updated urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** For the temporary public art, it would be useful to identify locations that are most visible such as Montgomery and Madison Streets. It would also be a good opportunity to start enhancing and activating blank walls on those visible streets. (Temporary Art Project)

**Comment:** Since Fairfax Street is proposed as an Arts Corridor, having temporary art installations there would make sense. (Proposed Temporary Art Project)

**Comment:** How long does temporary art last? **Follow-up:** The City sets the end date with approval by the Alexandria Commission for the Arts. The end date is influenced by several factors such as the life span of the materials used, location of the art project and the maintenance time period. The City also takes input from the community and artists on the type and duration of the art project. (Proposed Temporary Art Project)

**Comment:** There is a good example of an art wall in Bethesda at the intersection of Bradley and Arlington Streets. This may be the public art mural project organized by the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District on the Capital Crescent Trail Retaining Wall located on Arlington Road in

Bethesda. **Follow-up:** Staff is looking for an online photo of this wall and noted during the meeting the possibility of taking a field visit to look at the wall if a photo cannot be located. (Proposed Voluntary Streetscape Enhancement Toolbox for Existing Property Owners and Proposed Temporary Art Project)

**Public Comments:**

**Comment:** There needs to be discussions with the HOAs of Port Royal, Alexandria House and others on where their properties lie within the Urban Design Subareas. **Response:** Alexandria House is currently zoned Commercial Residential Mixed Use - High (CRMU-H) and Port Royal is zoned Residential Commercial High. It includes commercial offices on the ground floor. City staff is in the process of meeting with different property owners and HOAs to discuss the ideas from the Charrette that are currently being studied as part of this process. (Draft Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** It would be appropriate to include Alexandria House and Port Royal as part of the Mixed-Use Subarea since they have the tallest height. (Draft Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Question:** Does the City require that developers show proof of tenants before building so that retail does not sit empty? **Response:** No; we typically do not. However, designing ground floor with the flexibility to evolve over time can be a useful tool. (Draft Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** Special Use Permits (SUPs) have been used a lot in Old Town North. Shouldn't the Small Area Plan have a stronger influence relative to this? **Response:** There is a misconception when it comes to SUPs. A SUP will mean that developments will go through additional review by the City staff, the community, the Planning Commission and City Council, allowing for higher public involvement which gives the community a chance to provide broad input. (Draft Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** Retail in the [1992 Old Town North Small Area Plan](#) (OTN SAP) is not a requirement but gives additional density to developments that provide ground floor retail on sites located in a Retail Focus Area. **Follow Up:** To clarify, pages 46 and 47 of the 1992 OTN SAP specifies the location of Retail Focus Areas, the uses permitted within Retail Focus Areas by right or by SUP, the amount of floor area to be devoted to retail on a site located within a given Retail Focus Area and the amount of additional density that is permitted per the provision of identified retail uses. (Draft Urban Design Subareas Map)

**Comment:** Sustainability would also be a good tool to add to the streetscape enhancements toolbox. **Response:** We will include that. (Proposed Voluntary Streetscape Enhancement Toolbox for Existing Private Properties)

**Comment:** Montgomery Park might provide a higher chance for success for a public art installation since it has the highest visibility and usability in the community. (Proposed Temporary Art Project)

**Comment:** Consider lighting the trees along St. Asaph and Montgomery Street retail corridors similar to how it's done on King Street as part of a temporary art project. (Proposed Temporary Art Project)

## **HOUSING**

Staff gave a presentation on City policies and other zoning, programmatic and financial tools from the Housing Master Plan that can help achieve affordable housing in Old Town North. After discussion with the Subcommittee, there was a consensus to:

- Pursuant to Section 7-700 the Zoning Ordinance, allow an increase under the Density Bonus Program from 20% to 30% as part of the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update.
- Utilize Resolution 830 for a one to one replacement of the Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority (ARHA) units on site.
- Apply the City's longest term of affordability (40 to 60 years) for affordable housing.
- Explore opportunities for affordable housing development, including artist housing.

Staff also 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. Some of these projects include performance, gallery and community space. A field trip to visit one or more of these developments was proposed to the Subcommittee and staff will identify a date and time soon.

### **Subcommittee Comments:**

**Question:** Can you clarify the Density Bonus Policy? **Response:** The Density Bonus Policy provides an additional 20% FAR in zones where residential is allowed and where one third of the additional square footage made possible through the bonus would be dedicated to affordable housing. A small area plan may stipulate more than 20%. (Density Bonus Policy)

**Question:** Under Resolution 830, are the units that the resolution is referring to at 30% of the Average Median Income? **Response:** Yes. Those are units that are deeply subsidized such as the ARHA units. Historically, Resolution 830 covered ARHA's public housing units. (Resolution 830)

**Comment:** Community and recreation spaces are good for kids and they also support the arts initiatives. (Community Spaces and the Arts)

**Question:** How long are the terms of affordability? **Response:** Typically, the terms are 30 to 60 years. In recent years, most set-aside units, provided by developers, in exchange for bonus density or by conversion of a financial contribution to onsite units, are affordable for 40 years. When the City makes financial investments in a development, usually with a nonprofit developer, the affordability term ranges from 40-60 years. Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) projects require terms of affordability terms of at least 30 years, but many have extended terms. Public housing annual contribution contracts (ACC) funds require 40 year commitment. (Terms of Housing Affordability)

**Question:** In the Oakville Small Area Plan, the terms of agreement was only 25 years, will that be a common theme? **Response:** No; Oakville was a Coordinated Development District (CDD) where the developer was not required to provide affordable housing. Through negotiations between the City and the developer, the voluntary monetary contribution was converted to onsite units. The City wanted a large number, 65. To achieve that target, the term of affordability was set at 25 years. Even with this reduction in the term of affordability, the value of the contribution of the target number is significantly more than if the City had received a standard monetary contribution. (Terms of Housing Affordability)

**Comment:** Concerned that 30% of Bonus Density might translate to a lot of extra housing units which would have traffic implications. Should we encourage this policy to be applied to properties that are closer to the Metro? **Response:** the City will be looking at this in conjunction with traffic studies that would determine if those developments work. (Bonus Density Policy)

**Comment:** Sometimes Developers do not utilize the Density Bonus Policy because it can trigger a change in the construction type of the building, for example from wood to concrete, as a result of the added density. (Bonus Density Policy)

**Comment:** The housing goal that came out of the Charrette is also consistent with the NOTICe Vision Statement for Old Town North that encourages diversity within the community. (Housing Affordability)

**Comment:** People who live in artist housing have contributed to revitalizing communities. (Housing Affordability and the Arts)

**Public Comments:**

**Comment:** Affordable housing near employment opportunities also supports small businesses to find employees near their business. It also helps alleviate traffic congestion. (Housing Affordability)

**Question:** Montgomery County has higher requirements. Is that typical of nearby jurisdictions?

**Response:** Montgomery County has an Inclusionary Housing Program which requires a certain percent of affordable housing within each development. Montgomery County also has more flexibility in terms of density and height, unlike the City of Alexandria where density and height are more regulated. (Housing Affordability)

**Question:** Can we mix artist housing with affordable housing? **Response:** Yes; artist housing will serve anyone who is qualified for affordable housing. (Artist Housing)

**Question:** How do we include livability standards particularly for the elderly and families with children? **Response:** Affordable housing developed with low income housing tax credit funding has strict requirements for accessibility. A big goal that came out of the charrette was for people to be able to age in place and to provide affordable housing to a diverse range of incomes, ages and abilities. (Housing Affordability)

**Comment:** The [Mount Rainier Artist Lofts](#) development is part of the [Gateway Arts District](#) along Route One that is a combination of housing and commercial space. (Artist Housing)

**Comment:** Incorporate the discussion of artist housing, studio spaces and affordability into the idea of an Innovation District. (Artist Housing)