Meeting Summary

ROYAL STREET BUS GARAGE AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Saturday, February 8, 2014
Alexandria City Hall, City Council Workroom

Members Present:

Mary Lyman, Alexandria Planning Commission
Tom Soapes, North Old Town Independent Citizens' Association
Daniel Straub, Old Town North Urban Design Advisory Committee
Jim Doll, Chatham Square Homeowners Association
Steve Goodman, Garrett's Mill Homeowners Association
Richard Moncure, Portner's Landing Condominium Association
Mike Wenk, Alexandria House Homeowners Association
Cathy Puskar, NVBIA / NAIOP
Ken Wire, NVBIA / NAIOP
Roy Priest, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority
Carolyn Merck, At-Large, Old Town Civic Association
Nancy Appleby, At-Large

Members Absent:

Janet Powell, Portner's Landing Homeowners Association
Patricia "Velator" Smith, Annie B. Rose House
Joseph Resende, At-Large

City Staff:

Faroll Hamer, Department of Planning and Zoning
Jeff Farner, Department of Planning and Zoning
Rob Kerns, Department of Planning and Zoning
Carrie Beach, Department of Planning and Zoning
Jessica McVary, Department of Planning and Zoning
Richard Lawrence, Department of Planning and Zoning
Jerome Fletcher II, City Manager's Office

Guests:

Stan Wall, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Mike Schmitz, attended on behalf of Janet Powell to represent Portner's Landing Homeowners
Angela Hewitt, Alexandria House
Martin Hewitt, Alexandria House
Eliza Warner, Alexandria House
Jerry Warner, Alexandria House

Karl Golovin, Alexandria House
Erik Dahlberg, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Howard Wallach
Doug Owens, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority
Connie Staudinger, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority

Welcome and Introductions

Staff welcomed the Committee members and guests to the first meeting of the Advisory Committee and then asked the Committee Chair, Mary Lyman, to commence introductions.

After Committee introductions, staff introduced Stan Wall, the Director of the Office of Real Estate and Station Planning with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Mr. Wall provided a brief background of the facility relocation and WMATA's objectives for the Royal Street site.

Staff then provided a brief overview of the request for proposal process, as well as the typical development review process.

After a brief process discussion, staff presented the mission of the Advisory Committee, the Committee Ground Rules – as established through the What's Next Civic Engagement process – and then described the Committee's schedule.

Staff Presentation

The staff presentation began with background information, including the site history and existing conditions and then provided a virtual tour of the neighborhood to illustrate the site context.

The staff introduced the concept of redevelopment parameters and design standards and asked the group to begin to frame these concepts in three focus areas: street level character; open space – connections; and scale and transitions.

Prior to initiating the discussion on the street level character, a Committee member inquired if the group should consider the existing context of the site, or what will be there in the future. Staff advised the group to consider what will be there in the future.

A Committee member also inquired about the structural integrity of the existing building and requested more information at a future meeting.

Street Character Discussion

The Committee discussed the following items related to the street level character:

- As this is a full block, there is no "back" to the site. Where should the site access be located?
- Are there streets that are more sensitive to service level traffic curb cuts?

- The site should not be thought of in isolation, but rather should be considered in consultation with the surrounding neighborhood character and other redevelopment occurring in the area.
- The use of the site is an important consideration.
    - Mixed character, rather than exclusively townhomes might be important to consider. Use may be predominantly residential, but other uses – such as neighborhood amenities – shouldn't be precluded.
- The future use of the site will drive the discussion and define the parameters and standards of the redevelopment. It is also important to note the RM zoning history and the rezoning in 1992 of the site to RM to maintain an appropriate mix of residential and non-residential uses in Old Town North.
- Diversity and variety of uses/building types/housing types should not be precluded. A Lively mix of uses – strategically placed is part of the character of the larger area.
- The parameters and standards established should address the reality of the economics of the future redevelopment understanding and the building type and use will determine the economics (land value, value to developer, and city revenue).
- The redevelopment should be "balanced" with the existing community.
- Elements related to street level character include underground utilities; street trees and green connections; garage access from an internal alley; sensitive streets (where curb cuts should be located); variety of scale within the block (not monolithic); and varied streetscape.
- There was general consensus that the site should be predominantly residential with a varied streetscape. No consensus on what uses or if other uses are appropriate for the site.

Open Space Discussion

- The proximity to the Potomac River and the maintenance of open space are important considerations.
- Sustainability of open spaces is of key importance. Open spaces should be sustainable and maintained.
- Internal open spaces (public spaces located on the interior of the block) are less successful in terms of perception of true open space. Publicly accessible open spaces should feel public.
- Internal open space connections may pose potential security concerns for future residents of the site.
- Could consider a combination of on-site private open space for future users plus a contribution to existing park.
- As Portner's Landing and Ladrey High-rise are established, the streetscapes on North Pitt and North Royal Streets should be considered.
- If green connection is established on Wythe Street, there must be sensitivity to Chatham Square across Pendleton Street to ensure that building heights aren't maximized on the southern portion of the block. Appropriate transitions must be considered.
- Use also influences open space. If townhomes are proposed, then open space could be minimal because of the need to accommodate other services (i.e. parking).
- A mews concept could be considered for the site with a contribution to an existing park.

- The goal of the Small Area Plan was to reinforce an urban neighborhood. Setbacks may or may not contribute to open space and urban feel desired.
- The intended purpose of the open space should be clearly defined and understood; public/private, visually accessible or not, aesthetics or function, etc. If the intended purpose is for the public, location of spaces along the outside of the site is preferred.
- Ground level public open space can be used as a buffer and provides visual relief from the "urban canyon effect". Rooftop open spaces don't achieve this goal; should be for private open spaces.
- It is important to provide certainty to developers what tradeoffs (for open space) are appropriate and what the priorities/functions of the open spaces are. The community should also be mindful of the tradeoffs because they are one-time tradeoffs.
- A community member asked if the open space designs could be solicited as part of a design competition for architects. Staff responded that the establishment of design standards and parameters as part of the RFP would accomplish that goal with additional refinements occurring during the development review process.
- Elements related to open space include: a combination of public and private open space on the site; connectivity to the water important; private open space and focusing on the streetscape to give back to the public realm, possibly combined with a contribution to improvements; and public open space must be visually and physically accessible.

Scale and Transitions Discussion

- Varied heights could be considered on the site. On the eastern and southern sides of the block, heights should be comparable to the existing townhomes; however higher heights could be considered on the western and northern sides of the block.
- Lower heights might not mean equal to the heights across North Pitt and Pendleton Streets.
- Height needs to be considered in terms of construction type and floor to ceiling heights.
- It is important to ensure adequate sunlight at the street level when higher heights are contemplated.
- Consider how commercial versus residential uses will affect the scale. Additionally, the use will determine the height and scale of buildings.
- Consider a variety of building types on the site. Existing zoning (RM) will discourage mixed building elements within the block.
- Some ways to provide scale and height can be the use of building shoulders or placement of height in the center of block.
- Established standards for scale/height/design but should not be prescriptive for use.