

Meeting notes are recorded by City staff to provide a written summary of the Advisory Group discussion and comments from the public. They are not intended to be a verbatim transcription of events at the meeting.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Faroll Hamer, Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning, opened the meeting by welcoming the attendees and recognizing City and ARHA officials. (For full list of staff and consultant teams for the Braddock East and James Bland Redevelopment projects see notes of the first Advisory Group meeting on February 8, 2008).

Advisory Group attendance:

Gwen Menefee: Public Housing Advocate.

Salena Zellers: Braddock Neighborhood Resident.

Connie Ring: Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority Commissioner.

Leslie Zupan: Inner City Civic Association Representative.

John Komoroske: Planning Commissioner.

Janice Howard: At-Large Member.

Merrick Malone, At-Large Member.

Harvey Gray: Person knowledgeable about Parker Gray history.

Sylvia Sibrover: Northeast Citizens Association Representative.

Howard Katz: Developer with affordable/workforce housing development experience.

Advisory Group absentees:

John DuPree: At-Large Member.

Nakia Johnson: Public Housing Resident.

Mary Means noted that we would be adopting a new approach to questions and answers and would be incorporating comments from the public at intervals through the meeting but any clarifying questions could be asked at any time.

JAMES BLAND DEVELOPMENT SPECIAL USE PERMIT UPDATE:

Dirk Geratz, Principal Planner, Department of Planning & Zoning, provided an update on the Bland DSUP process. Since the last meeting the concept plan for the Bland proposals had been submitted and was being reviewed by City staff. There has also been a Joint Work Session between Planning Commission and the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) on June 3 which was an informative meeting. The next submission will be on June 30 which will include architecture. There is a further work session with BAR next week on June 25 to consider the architectural renderings. Community meetings are ongoing – last night EYA met with North East – and community meetings will be continuing during the summer.

Advisory Group Discussion:

Q. How will EYA fund underground parking?

A. There will be more town homes which self park; there will be a parking reduction for the multi-family units; and the public housing units will park on street. This means only one level of underground parking is required which makes it more viable.

BRADDOCK EAST PLAN FRAMEWORK

Faroll Hamer introduced the Conceptual Plan Framework that had been agreed between the City and ARHA board. She noted that it was important to distinguish between a redevelopment plan and a small area plan. James Bland is a redevelopment plan. Braddock East is a small area plan which deals with height, density and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) but there is no specificity in terms of architecture or design.

The Braddock metro plan initially talked about “deconcentration.” This term was rejected by ARHA as it implies an existing “concentration” which has negative connotations. Through detailed discussion with ARHA, it was decided to take a more positive approach by reference to the creation of mixed income communities. The agreed framework deals with issues that are usually covered in a small area plan. There will be no specific recommendations or discussion about the number of public housing units to be placed on or off site. To a certain extent an approximate number of units will be implicit in the development finance assumptions but it would be premature to make a recommendation as we do not know what economic factors will be at play in the future when these sites are developed.

Advisory Group Discussion:

C. Concern was expressed that there was a serious discussion about the legitimacy of this advisory group at City Council without the group knowing about it.

ICCA do not feel that the process is legitimate if it does not talk about targets for off-siting public housing. A precedent has been set with Chatham Square which off-sited 50% of the public housing units. This is recognized as a successful development and has won awards. We shouldn't be down-grading that success.

A. We are not down-grading the success of Chatham Square. The number of public housing units off-sited was just one of the variables. There are many factors that influence that figure.

Q. Also concerned about the agreement between ARHA and City Council regarding the 16 replacement units for Bland. In that ARHA requires fee-simple ownership. This limits the opportunities for finding replacement housing and increases the costs as the cost of land is included.

A. The original Resolution 830 gave property owners the option to defer to market rate after a certain time. This resulted in a loss of units. The only way to permanently preserve units as public housing is through fee-simple ownership by ARHA.

A. The basis of the agreement between ARHA and the City was to give ARHA the assurance that 16 units would be secured in time for the James Bland redevelopment.

C. Need the information that is being referred to.

A. It will be emailed to all of you.

C. Let's discuss this when we have all the information.

Q. Thought that 134 units were coming back. Are we talking about Bland or the rest of Braddock East?

A. The rest of Braddock East. 134 refers to the number of public housing units planned in the James Bland redevelopment.

C. Public housing residents need housing. Not in favor of disbanding communities to satisfy a select few.

Q. Does the framework replace the goals in the Braddock Road Plan?

A. No – it's a list of topics/contents of the Plan.

C. A lot of citizens worked hard on the Braddock Road Plan and it seems like we are changing focus. With regard to replacement units – if we don't give City Council a number they won't know what to plan for.

C. Safety should be included in the topics for the plan as that is the main concern of the Braddock Lofts residents.

C. The specific numbers of units to be replaced has to be worked out at a time when a specific project is imminent and the economic climate permits putting together financing. That's what happened at Chatham Square. We don't know what it will be like in 3 to 5 years' time. It's bad now.

We also need to think about residents' equity. It is their neighborhood, their community, their friends. We cannot pre-determine who will move out – it isn't fair. We can only determine this at the time it is developed.

A. We will not be departing from the principles set out in the Braddock Road Plan.

C. ARHA and its residents were not at the table for the Braddock Road plan and do not support the wording. The Braddock East Plan is segregating out public housing in a way that has not been done before in any small area plan.

A. We will consider this issue of the Replacement strategies for public housing in more depth at the July 15th meeting as it is not the topic of this meeting.

URBAN DESIGN GOALS FOR BRADDOCK EAST

(Refer to PowerPoint presentation)

Ben Carlson of Goody Clancy highlighted the key urban design considerations that came out of the Braddock Road process, including compatibility with the Parker Gray historic district, architectural variety, transitions in scale and massing, walkable streets, shoulder buildings and green edges. He identified factors in designing good public housing including providing well defined and defensible open spaces, providing choice in housing options and blending the public housing with the market housing. He also noted ARHA's requirements to avoid common hallways, locate families at or near ground level and provide individual entrances. However, it was noted that there are successful examples of public housing developments with units that are accessed off corridors where there are few children. It is also important to have children's play areas – preferably on each block -- and this should be designed to encourage children of all backgrounds to play there.

Q. There are currently play areas in the development. Are we proposing something similar for these developments?

A. Absolutely yes. It is one of the goals of the plan.

Ben Carlson continued to note that the Braddock Metro Plan recommended a parking reduction from the current Zoning Ordinance requirements in view of the proximity to the Metro.

Q. The parking schedule refers to 2 and 3 bedroom units. Will the 4 bedroom units at Adkins be included?

A. Yes. The schedule identifies different parking requirements for units with 2 or fewer bedrooms and 3 or more bedrooms; it is not limiting the number of bedrooms units may have.

Q. Will the proposed retail be inclusive, i.e. affordable for the public housing residents?

A. There is a commitment in the Braddock metro plan to provide/subsidize neighborhood retail serving all residents and this will apply to the Braddock East plan also.

Ben Carlson then went on to discuss density and FAR with reference to the financial analysis of development costs. From this it was concluded that for planning purposes, it is reasonable to assume that approximately 2 market rate units would be need to be developed per each existing public housing unit to meet a combination of financial, urban design, market and social goals.

Q. Clarification of how the 2:1 ratio works.

A. Using Adkins as an example – to replace the 90 existing units, 180 market rate units would be required which is a total of 270 units, i.e. three times the current density.

Ben Carlson noted that the above example assumes all the units go back on site. It actually costs more to replace the public housing units off-site due to the additional land costs of purchasing that land, although this could be offset by the opportunity to build more market rate units on site. He also indicated that the development cost assessment builds in a small amount for basic social services. Market rate units cost more than public housing units primarily due to the costs of the underground parking.

Advisory Group Discussion:

C. The additional land costs for off-siting public housing is why the agreement regarding the 16 replacement units for Bland is critical. Other options that do not involve ARHA having fee simple ownership would not have that land cost.

Q. Who would pick up the social services costs?

A. We need to look all over for longer-term sources of funding for the social services. Hope VI would help provide this if we were successful in a future bid. There are also other grant options or the option of increasing the development costs. It is recognized that social services are essential.

Q. Where do the development cost figures come from? Was Chatham Square data used? It's expensive building in Alexandria due to the delays resulting from public involvement.

A. The cost estimates are based on developments in the Washington Metropolitan area, including current projects in Bethesda.

Q. What is the assumed construction type? Steel and concrete framing would be more expensive than the costs assumed.

A. We are not assuming all steel and concrete. Assumed costs anticipate primarily stick framing, possibly including some concrete podiums.

Q. Is developer's profit included?

A. No, just costs.

Q. What about costs to the residents? Transport costs, proximity to Laundromat.

A. These are important considerations for choosing the location of any replacement housing. Development costs do include provision for moving expenses.

A. Alexandria has great transit so any new location is likely to be comparable.

Q. There are differences between the costs of land in BE than elsewhere in the City – that was fundamental to the consideration of Glebe park.

A. We have made the conservative assumption that the land cost will be the same, since other locations will need to have comparable accessibility and services. If off-site housing locations could be secured at lower cost; that would certainly help the financing picture.

C. ARHA's experience at Cameron Valley where the ratio was 2:1 is that it didn't work financially. That's why we ran out of money at Glebe Park. It's not in accord with our experience to date but every year and every situation is different.

Q. Are we considering other sources of potential funding? In Braddock developers are giving money to the affordable housing fund.

A. We do need to look at other funding options, including the affordable housing fund. It is likely that we are not going to get enough money through the development program itself so there will be a funding gap. This is not unusual. The fact that we are 80-90% there is very encouraging.

Q. What do we mean by small retail? Is this something the public housing residents can take ownership and be inclusive?

A. These are just different scenarios and not concrete but any retail could be subsidized as necessary to properly serve the spectrum of neighborhood residents.

C. The financial analysis is based on the assumption that off-site units have to be owned by ARHA – rather than rented – this is possibly why the City Council was trying to argue for alternative solutions.

Jeff Farner, Deputy Director for Urban Design, Planning & Zoning, continued with a discussion of urban design considerations for Braddock East. He began by explaining how some of the pieces of a redevelopment fit together and bump together. City Council and Planning Commission have to balance these issues.

The first issue is structured parking. This adds “visual FAR” or bulk to a development but does not count towards calculated FAR. An objective of urban design in Braddock is to incorporate mid-block alleys and/or open spaces to break up the blocks. This can be achieved much more effectively with below grade parking. However, we may need to reconsider parking ratios to accomplish this. The cost of parking is at least doubled if it is below grade. Parking assumptions are based on what has been discussed for James Bland. We would aim to restrict parking on-street for town house units and enforce the use of garage spaces for parking, not storage. Parking would be on the street for public housing residents. At James Bland, the 15% visitor parking requirement would be provided on-street. This is the same as at Chatham Square. Registered cars for public housing residents are about 0.7 cars per unit.

Q. Is there a proposal to allow visitors to be excluded from parking restrictions?

A. Yes it is an issue.

The second issue is height. Town houses would be about 40-45 ft high, i.e. 3 to 4 stories with a roof (comparable to Braddock Lofts). In this scenario we would get a 1.7-2.0 FAR which can incorporate alleys but leaves little room for open space. With regard to potential retail, an important consideration is that a grocery store has a 20ft floor to ceiling height. This is equivalent to two residential levels, so there are height implications.

Open space is the third issue. We need to consider the amount of children in public housing – about 1.75 children per unit. Need to provide play areas close to units and designed for safety.

There are a couple of options that achieve a 2.5 FAR in very different ways: Stick frame construction will limit height to 40-60 ft. With a 60ft tall building and town homes you get more open space than with all town homes. It is necessary to balance open space with height. More height = more open space. For example, Chatham Square is 2.3 FAR- this has less open space than if it had taller buildings.

For the purposes of the charrette next week you need to think about: trade offs for open space; importance of play areas for kids; height; breaks in buildings and blocks.

Q. Next week at the Charrette we will be considering Adkins. Does the fact that the Braddock Road Plan proposes a park across from Adkins (on the post office site) affect the amount of open space needed.

A. It would affect the need for a large open space serving the whole neighborhood, but Adkins itself would still need to incorporate spaces for smaller kids for safety reasons. Buildings must provide eyes on the park – not embedded spaces – visible from the street and contributing to the streetscape.

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC QUESTIONS/ COMMENT:

None

NEXT STEPS:

Andrea Barlow, Principal Planner Department of Planning and Zoning, presented the schedule for upcoming meetings. The Design Charrette is scheduled for the following Thursday June 26 and the next BEAG meeting is July 15, when we will be encouraging the BEAG members to talk about outstanding issues including replacement housing. The Community Barbeque for ARHA residents was cancelled on June 16 due to a severe storm and was to be rescheduled (date since confirmed as Saturday July 19th, 4-7pm).

Staff and the consultants will review the questions and requests for more information and respond to the Advisory Group at future meetings.

Future meetings:

BEAG-sponsored Design Charrette June 26

BEAG Meeting 6, July 15

ARHA Residents Barbecue, July 19

BEAG Meeting 7, Sept 3

BEAG Meeting 8 and community meeting, Sept 16