City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: AUGUST 28, 2012

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE BRADDOCK SMALL AREA PLAN PROPOSED PARK ON THE WYTHE STREET POST OFFICE BLOCK

This memorandum is an update on staff intentions and the issues involved for moving forward in the fall with planning for a park on the Wythe Street Post Office block in the Braddock Small Area Plan. Staff is proposing to begin planning for the portion of the park on the City owned 600 North Henry Street property, either as Phase I of the final park design or as a temporary installation (albeit one that could be in place for many years), working with the Braddock Implementation Advisory Group, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the community.

The Braddock Road Metro Station Small Area Plan was approved in March of 2008. The plan featured a minimum one-acre park on the block which currently includes the Post Office. In May of 2010, the City purchased the 600 North Henry Street property with City Open Space Funds for $2.35 million as the first step in the implementation process. At that time there was no available funding for park planning or construction. As a result, the site has been leased to a variety of existing and new tenants on a short-term basis, with the net income from the leases being deposited in the Open Space Fund.

Several recent events have spurred the need to start planning a park on this parcel. First, the City's leases for the 600 North Henry property are coming to an end, and the property is no longer viable without a likely major capital investment on the City's part. The HVAC system in this building, in particular, is beyond the end of its useful life. The last lease expires at the end of the year. At that time the property will become vacant, and a plan will be needed to ensure that it does not become a blight on the neighborhood.

Second, the first DSUP and Braddock Small Area Plan required developer contributions will come due roughly at the end of this year, when the use and occupancy permits are released for the 621 Payne Street apartment project, which is now under construction. As a related follow-up to the Braddock Small Area Plan approved in 2008, the City Council approved a Braddock Small Area Plan policy for developer contributions that would be supplemented by City funding based on 20% of the incremental tax from increased real estate values from the 13 designated development blocks in the Braddock Plan. The policy will also result in a substantial amount of developer contributions (about $2.2 million for community open space and $0.6 million for community amenities) over the next two to three years.

The Braddock Small Area Plan anticipates that there will be some private redevelopment on part of the United States Postal System (USPS) Wythe Street post office site, with the retail portion of the post office being relocated within the new development or nearby, and the distribution portion of the post office being relocated off-site. It was always expected that due to the nature of the federal post office system there would be significant hurdles. City staff have recently identified the consultant asset manager hired by the USPS to assist with these types of real estate opportunities, and this consultant, CBRE, has agreed to meet regularly to work on this project. We have begun to work with CBRE and the post office on first steps: identification of alternative distribution sites, future distribution needs, and an appropriate development envelope for the Braddock site (with the goal of maintaining a retail post office operation on this site incorporated into any development). Dealing with the USPS will be complex and it will take some time to get to a resolution of the possibility of USPS agreeing to development on part of their site. The private sector is very interested in this site and sees its development potential.

One of the issues related to the park design will be the possible preservation or memorialization of a portion of the now City-owned building at 600 North Henry Street. The eastern façade of the one- story brick ca. 1940 commercial building is a good example of the Streamline Moderne architectural style, characterized by the curving stainless steel canopy over the entry and steel windows with horizontal muntins. The building is not within our local Parker-Gray Historic District, so demolition would not require a Permit to Demolish from the BAR, but it is noted as a contributing structure in the recently adopted Parker Gray National Register Historic District. There are alternatives to the preservation of the building in situ, such as removing the entry canopy and windows, storing and reusing them as part of the new development on the site; or using the form of these architectural features as part of the design of the new development without actually preserving the features themselves.

600 North Henry Street

There are several reasons not to preserve the building, including the purchase of the land with City Open Space funds (and the need to reimburse the Open Space Fund the $2.35 million purchase price if the property is not used for open space); the difficulty of preserving just the front portion of a building that has a full basement; the necessity of making the park larger to

compensate for the loss of park acreage (the plan calls for a minimum one-acre park); and the difficulty of providing parking for uses within any remaining building.

Since the adoption of the Braddock Open Space Plan, the community has expected that the building at 600 North Henry would be demolished and a park would be constructed on this site. That was the City's intent when it bought 600 North Henry. That is the direction that City staff is taking this park planning process, but these issues will be presented to the community and the Parks and Recreation Commission for dialogue and deliberation, and will be integrated into the overall park planning process to help determine the park design and the ultimate disposition of 600 North Henry Street. In conjunction with this process, staff will reach out to the current tenants to provide them with information regarding the building and a timeline for terminating the tenancies. A Braddock Implementation Advisory Group/community meeting to discuss this topic is scheduled for September 24, 2012.

cc: Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager
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Jeremy McPike, Director, General Services