

Development Projects: Inconsistencies with Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan (BMNP)

The following is City staff's response to concerns raised by members of the Braddock Implementation Advisory Group

James Bland/Old Town Commons

Braddock IAG Concern: Streetscape along Wythe Street is not consistent with Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan Guidelines

Wythe Street is identified in the BMNP as a “walking street” and should be exclusively brick, a minimum of 6-8 feet wide, and 14 feet wide from curb to building face. The previous sidewalk width along Wythe Street at the James Bland development was 4 feet. The sidewalk that was constructed as part of the James Bland redevelopment is concrete, 6 feet wide, and 14.5 feet wide from curb to building face. Per the BMNP,

“All sidewalk areas for new development shall be a minimum of 14 feet from the curb to the face of the building. Where retail or other active uses are provided, wider sidewalks, (16 to 20 feet) are required, occupying a portion of the development parcel if necessary. A portion of the 14 feet may be landscaped for residential uses if compatible with the character of the street, but maintain a 6- to 8-foot minimum sidewalk width in these areas. All sidewalk and planter bed edges shall be flush with grade.”

Street trees were not possible for this half block because of existing underground utilities that could not be relocated. Instead street trees were planted along other portions of Wythe Street and Columbus Street.

At the time of development approval, it was determined that new sidewalks adjacent to the James Bland redevelopment phases would be concrete and this was identified as a condition of approval in the staff report. This was not consistent with the BMNP, which required the sidewalk on Wythe Street to be brick. The staff report contained no explanation for the deviation.

New development should comply with the BMNP and when it does not, the staff report should clearly state the justification for the deviation. The staff report for the Braddock Place development is a good example of staff bringing the issue of a possible deviation to the attention of the public. Staff is developing internal processes, in the form of a development checklist, to ensure any deviation is immediately highlighted, examined, and, if suggested for approval, clarified in the staff report before any decision is made.

Belle Pre/The Madison

Braddock IAG Concern: Streetscape along Fayette Street is not consistent with Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan Guidelines

Fayette Street is identified in the BMNP as a “walking street” and should be exclusively brick, a minimum of 6-8 feet wide, and 14 feet wide from curb to building face. The sidewalk along the Belle Pre is a hybrid: both concrete and brick. The development plan pre-dates the adoption of the BMNP and was approved in January 2008 with City-standard concrete sidewalks. The applicant proposed to provide elements to enhance the pedestrian experience by installing pedestrian-scaled lighting, street trees, and underground utilities. Also, staff recommended that the applicant incorporate the railroad tracks still

existing on the North Fayette Street side into the project as well as the brick banding along Fayette Street, which the applicant has done.

Braddock Metro Place (1261 Madison Place) DSUP#2011-0024

Braddock IAG Concern: Building height is not consistent with Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan Guidelines

The developer presented two development options. Option A included 165 multi-family residential units and was 99 feet at its highest point. The portion of the building closest to the townhouses was four floors (approximately 45 feet in height), with two deep setbacks, one that steps back at the fifth floor and another that steps back at the eighth floor, before reaching the full ten floors. Option A proposed the increased height in exchange for a provision of 10 on-site affordable workforce housing units; pursuant to section 7-700 of the Zoning Ordinance. Option B included 141 multi-family residential units and was 77 feet (eight floors) at the highest part of the building. The portion of the building closest to the townhouses was six floors (approximately 58 feet in height), and has one deep step-back that steps back at the seventh floor, before reaching its ultimate height of 77 feet.

The BMNP set the maximum proposed height for 1261 Madison Place at 77 feet. The Plan also strongly recommended mixed-income housing and building height setbacks. Staff, Planning Commission, and the City Council had to balance competing community benefits, provided by the two options, with the guidelines of the Plan. Staff recommended approval of Option B. However, the public benefit of providing on-site affordable workforce housing, improved neighborhood compatibility created by greater building setbacks from the adjacent townhomes outweighed the concerns related to additional building height. There was community support on both sides of the discussion.

Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) Central Office Relocation to 1330 Braddock Place

Braddock IAG Concern: Public School use is not consistent with Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan Guidelines

In 2013, ACPS announced that it would move its Central Office from the West End to the Braddock Neighborhood in an office building located at 1330 Braddock Place in June 2014. The property is zoned CRMU/H Commercial residential mixed use (high) and business office use is a permitted use; without the requirement of a special use permit.

ACPS has publicly expressed interest in locating an adult education program and T.C. Williams High School Satellite Campus at the site. Those uses qualify as *public school* use within the Zoning Ordinance. As of November 2013, when the Zoning Ordinance was amended to allow this, *public school* is a permitted use within CRMU/H. In 2013, staff was presented with two proposals (Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services and Alexandria City Public Schools) to locate *public school* and *social service* uses in office and mixed-use zones. Staff recommended changes to specific zoning classifications to permit *public school* as a permitted use in office and mixed use zones and *social services* as a permitted use with a Special Use Permit in mixed use zones. The rationale for the determination includes, per the staff report,

“Staff believes that these public uses are compatible with other non-residential uses in mixed-use neighborhoods. Moreover, now that Alexandria has become more urbanized, it is essential to develop urban models of public facilities and to locate government functions in the same neighborhoods where people live, work, shop and recreate.”