

Hunting Creek Area Stakeholder Group Meeting

Tuesday, July 31, 2007

City Hall Room 2000

7:00 p.m.

Introduction

Mr. John Komoroske, Vice Chair of the Planning Commission and the Hunting Creek Stakeholders Group Leader, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Komoroske provided a brief overview of the meeting agenda, and then introduced Mr. Carlos Cecchi, of IDI Group Companies to provide a presentation of the most recent development proposal for the Hunting Terrace site.

Presentation by IDI Group Companies

Mr. Carlos Cecchi, of IDI Group Companies, provided a description of the development proposal for the Hunting Terrace site. He began by showing aerial photographs of the Hunting Terrace site from a number of different vantage points to demonstrate that the development proposal is consistent with surrounding development patterns. For example, Mr. Cecchi indicated that the development proposal shares characteristics with areas such as Carlyle, Eisenhower East, and Fairfax County. Mr. Cecchi further contended that when viewed by aerial photography, the site appears to be an island, separated from Old Town by roads and accessible only by bridges. Due to these factors, IDI Group Companies contended that the Hunting Terrace site is an appropriate location to provide increased height and density in exchange for extraordinary affordable housing.

In addition to describing the rationale for the Hunting Terrace proposal, Mr. Cecchi also briefly described the history of the Hunting Creek Area, a history that includes the provision of affordable housing for Alexandrians, as well as the enhanced gateway to the City of Alexandria. Mr. Cecchi indicated that the urban deck creates an enhanced entrance to Old Town and the proposed plan offers an opportunity to extend this enhanced gateway through landscaping in the eighty-foot landscape buffer on South Washington Street. In addition to landscaping in the eighty-foot landscape buffer, IDI also incorporated a landscaped memorial circle to further enhance the gateway. Mr. Cecchi also indicated that when the Hunting Towers site is obtained by IDI, the grade of the site would be raised to the level of South Washington Street and a double row of street trees would be planted along the street.

Mr. Cecchi further described the Hunting Terrace proposal by stating that the two front buildings were articulated to include characteristics present in structures located in Old Town. Furthermore, a 66-foot separation between the front and rear buildings allowed, according to Mr. Cecchi, visual access into the site. This 66-foot building break serves as an internal street characterized by 14-foot sidewalks and street trees. Mr. Cecchi stated that the height of the rear buildings will transition from 7 stories to 14 stories and all parking is located within two levels of underground parking.

In addition to the site characteristics, Mr. Cecchi described the inspiration for the architectural design of the buildings. He indicated that the design team looked at buildings of historic architectural merit on Washington Street, such as the Cotton Factory and the former George Mason Hotel, as well as larger buildings of architectural merit in Washington, D.C. Beyond viewing a variety of building types, the design team also considered the characteristics of the Hunting Creek Area, including the Jones Point Lighthouse and the bridges in close proximity to the site. According to Mr. Cecchi, traditional architectural characteristics, lighthouses, and bridges inspired the architecture of the proposed structures.

Staff Presentation

Mr. Jeffrey Farner, Development Division Chief in the Department of Planning and Zoning, presented a number of images to the stakeholders and other meeting participants. Mr. Farner indicated that the images presented by staff as well as the images presented by IDI were accurate, but the images presented by each party varied slightly due to the vantage point from which the photo was taken. Mr. Farner also noted that it is important to consider the compatibility of development at the pedestrian scale, rather than an aerial view. Finally, Mr. Farner clarified that the urban deck was created to connect two areas of the City, which were historically disconnected, the Hunting Creek Area and Old Town and that rather than create a gateway to the City, the urban deck was created to repair the urban fabric, which was torn by the creation and recent widening of the Capital Beltway.

He indicated that the proposed buildings would be visible from the Capital Beltway as well as the George Washington Memorial Parkway. In order to understand the mass and scale of the proposed development, Planning and Zoning staff prepared illustrations using the computer and photographs taken at different vantage points south of the site on the George Washington Memorial Parkway as well as north of the site near Gunston Hall.

The images are available on the Planning and Zoning website:

http://alexandriava.gov/planningandzoning/pdf/huntingcreek_illustrations_073107.pdf.

After discussing these images, Mr. Farner provided an update on the status of the development application. He indicated that the City received a completeness site plan and City departments requested additional information necessary to process the application. In reviewing the development application, one of the issues of concern to staff is that this project reads as one building, rather than multiple buildings. While the proposed height is a concern, mass and scale are also issues of concern. Mr. Farner indicated that staff is also concerned with the quality of architectural design. While the Hunting Creek Area Plan allowed for increased height, compliance with the Washington Street Standards and development special use permit approval are required for this project.

Mr. Farner concluded the presentation by informing the stakeholders and meeting participants of the schedule anticipated for the development proposal. He indicated that a joint Planning Commission – Board of Architectural Review work session was being planned for early September and staff envisioned that the application would be heard by

the Board of Architectural Review at the October hearing and the Planning Commission and City Council at the November hearings. Mr. Farner clarified that these dates are tentative and based on timely resubmissions by IDI.

Questions and Comments from Stakeholders and Participants:

Comment: Has IDI considered creating informal spaces within the 50-foot landscape buffer to make the open space more livable? If not, IDI is encouraged to take a second look at the landscape design to provide informal spaces.

Question: Is the existing landscaping included in the images presented by Planning and Zoning Staff?

Response: No, the images presented do not show the revised grade or the proposed landscaping.

Question: What is the status of the VDOT negotiations?

Response: The negotiations are continuing to determine the fair market value. It is anticipated that the first step will be completed in September, with the second step completed in October. It is anticipated that a negotiated decision on fair market value will be determined by October.

Question: Does the anticipated hearing schedule consider the submission of revised plans?

Response: Staff currently believes that the development proposal will be heard at the November Planning Commission and City Council hearings, but this timeframe is based on timely resubmissions by IDI.

Question: Is it possible for the stakeholders to receive copies of the completeness plan?

Response: The completeness plan is a very large document. If the stakeholders desire specific information, that information can be provided. Alternatively, stakeholders and other interested parties can review the plans in the Planning and Zoning office.

Comment: The images shown by the Planning and Zoning staff are a misrepresentation of information if they do not include architectural details.

Response: IDI is willing to provide Planning and Zoning staff the computer model that includes the architectural details for insertion into images.

Comment: Planning and Zoning staff seem to be reviewing this project as they would any other: mass, scale, and height. The staff does not appear to be considering the affordable housing offered with this project. The normal process should not be followed.

Response: The Planning Commission and City Council have approved increased height and density in order to provide affordable housing, but it is

necessary to consider a balance of interests. Staff does not believe that enough is known to determine the trade-offs. The staff report to Planning Commission and City Council will include the details and the trade-offs.

Question: How does this plan conform to the 20% density bonus for affordable housing?

Response: The Hunting Creek Area Plan allows for increased height with a special use permit and an extraordinary affordable housing component.

Comment: There have been many references to this area as not being part of Old Town. As a resident of Old Town and the Hunting Creek area, I feel as though I live in Old Town. How does an extraordinary contribution of affordable housing begin with the elimination of 116 units?

Question: Are the Board of Architectural Review and Planning Commission meetings anticipated in October and November hearings or work sessions?

Response: A joint work session between Planning Commission and the BAR is scheduled for early September. It is then anticipated that the project will be scheduled for concept review at the October BAR hearing. The project will then be scheduled for the November hearings of the Planning Commission and City Council.

Comment: It is disconcerting that there have been very little facts, figures, and information presented about the affordable housing contribution. When will this information be presented? What are the specifics of this contribution? These issues have not been addressed thus far.

Comment: On behalf of community, please do not displace the residents of Hunting Terrace until it becomes absolutely necessary due to construction.

Response: Mr. Cecchi explained that this request is not possible for a number of reasons: Hunting Terrace has exceeded its useful life; the heating system needs to be replaced and will not withstand another winter; and VDOT announced that the residents must leave prior to IDI acquiring the property. IDI has extended the date a number of times and residents have been notified a number of times that they can relocate to Hunting Towers.

Comment: Staff should take additional time to ensure that the plans, renderings, and perspectives are coordinated with IDI to ensure that both parties agree that the representations are factual.

Response: This is not a static process and the staff is attempting to get this as up-to-date as possible.

Comment: The affordable housing component of this project needs to be detailed. The Office of Housing needs to start working with the concerned citizens to evaluate the knowledge that we currently have.

Comment: Work should be completed on the cost-benefit of the development project. The City is likely to have a net-increase in tax benefit from this project and it would be beneficial to see this. The City may see some tremendous economic benefits as well as affordable housing.

Comment: This site is not only in the Old and Historic Alexandria District; it is also subject to the Washington Street Standards. The proposal will not meet the Washington Street Standards and the Federal Government entrusted Washington Street to the City. This project will set the standard for redevelopment and will destroy the fabric of the Old and Historic District.

Comment: The affordable housing component of this proposal is the most important piece. Why is there so much resistance to height? If this does set a precedent, it is for decency and integrity to preserve affordable housing.

Comment: Height and density could be provided elsewhere, outside of the historic district.

Comment: The Council needs to establish criteria, a plan, and a goal for affordable housing.

Next Steps

Mr. Komoroske recapped the role and the intent of the Stakeholders Group. He indicated that it was clear consensus would not be achieved from the group, but a lot of valuable comments have been received. He stated that Planning and Zoning staff would compile a report of the issues, ideas, and comments generated throughout the Stakeholder Group process and would submit this to the group members for review. Finally, Mr. Komoroske stated that Planning and Zoning staff and IDI would collaborate to provide images that included the proposed design features, rather than just the massing.

Attendees

Stakeholder Group

Members

John Komoroske
Jim Mercury
Lewis Simon
Phillip Bradbury
Charles Benagh
Maurice Barboza
Ardith Campbell
Dentzer
Van Van Fleet
Maureen Dugan
Charles Trozzo

Nancy Carson
Jim Hoben
Herb Cooper-Levy
Michael Hobbs
Joan Renner
Marguerite Lang
David Bush

Other Participants

Joseph Canay
Enrico Cecchi
Maria Wildes
Pamela Hoefl

Michelle L'Heureux
Guiseppe Cecchi
Carlos Cecchi
Paul Beckman
Katy Cannady
Serrena Boriz
Mary Moore
Bruce McLeod
Dave Herbst
Pat Troy
Douglas Thurman
Julie Crenshaw Van
Fleet

Staff

Mark Jinks
Mildrilyn Davis
Melodie Baron
Faroll Hamer
Rich Josephson
Tom Canfield
Kathleen Beeton
Steve Milone
Jeffrey Farner
Gary Wagner
Lee Webb
Pat Mann
Jessica Ryan