

City of Alexandria
Department of Planning and Zoning
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**Landmark/Van Dorn Advisory Group
Monday, June 16, 2008**

Meeting Summary

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

AG – Advisory Group

FH – comments by Faroll Hamer, Director of Planning and Zoning

EEK – comments from consultants from EEK, design and planning consultants

Welcome and Introductions

Faroll Hamer, Director of the Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning welcomed attendees to the meeting. She invited the Advisory Group to make any initial comments.

Advisory Group Comments:

None.

Historic Context of the Landmark/Van Dorn Area

Pam Cressey, City Archeologist, discussed the history of West End Alexandria. She noted that because this area had water resources, it has been populated for thousands of years and highlighted key changes in the area overtime such as the creation of a street network, annexation into the City of Alexandria, and the origin of the area name “West End.”

This presentation is available on the Planning and Zoning website:

<http://alexandriava.gov/planning/info/default.aspx?id=7014>

The original “West End” of Alexandria was near the Masonic Memorial, named somewhat ambiguously, since Hugh West, a tobacco trader, owned substantial property near the Eisenhower Metro. The family name was the source of the name for West Street in Old Town.

The early road system was developed by merchants to support trade between farms and other resource areas away from the Potomac and the shipping and trading areas in Alexandria.

Early historic development of the area includes plantations in the 18th Century and a number of Civil War fortifications used in the defense of Washington, D.C. in the 19th Century.

The expansion of the federal government before and during World War II brought the residential development of substantial areas. The West End area of Alexandria was annexed to the City in 1952. The street names for the area including Pickett, Whiting, Stevenson, and Van Dorn were given shortly after incorporation, and are names of Confederate military officers.

Edsall Road was named after Horace Edsall, owner of the Mount Hebron plantation and a mill in the area in the mid 19th Century. Edsall Siding was a stop on the rail line to the port of Alexandria in this area.

Advisory Group Questions and Comments:

Question: Was there a “landmark” at Landmark?

Response from Pam Cressey: Research cannot determine that. There was a family by the name of Archer in the area but no clear like to the name/term “landmark”.

Question: Dowell’s Tavern is a site in this area.

Response from Pam Cressey. There were three taverns in the Civil War period in the Lincolnia area. Dowells, Padgett’s and another with a name starting with a “U.”

Stormwater Management

Presentation was made by Lalit Sharma and Daniel Imig, City of Alexandria T&ES Environmental Quality and Hunter Loftin, Michael Baker Jr., Inc. Consultants to illustrate various and creative techniques for stormwater management.

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<http://alexandriava.gov/planning/info/default.aspx?id=7014>

Advisory Group Questions and Comments:

Question: As you develop your deliverables, how will it interplay with overall development? How does this relate to LEED standards? Pervious pavers – how are these looked at today – don’t those count as impervious area?

T&ES response. The objective is to make a more “organic development,” not just concrete. We are looking to identify features that are more natural, that look different in different seasons. As an example, the stormwater pond for Cameron Station has been turned into an attractive lake that is a feature of the redevelopment. We are not wedded to any one approach. We are looking for things that don’t just contribute to stormwater function, but add something to the site.

For something like pervious pavers, we will look at the entire strategy for the site.

Response by Faroll Hamer – This is exciting because we can do integrated things. When you look at water quantity and quality for individual sites, the solutions may not be as efficient as if some solutions were integrated for multiple sites, provide regional solutions. For example, a single pond at the bottom of the slope could provide for multiple properties. The median in Van Dorn could have a stormwater function. For Backlick Run, now it's a ditch, we could restore it to be something aesthetic that adds to the plan.

T&ES: The goal is to create solutions that are integrated into projects on the project site. This component allows opportunities to create connectivity throughout area and not site-by-site. Cameron Station and Mark Center both provided stormwater management for the entire site at the beginning. Doing this during the planning phase integrates all the sites and can plan for attractiveness and amenities. We can look at the area as a whole.

Question: How do you prevent one property owner from bearing more than their fair share of the stormwater management burdens/costs?

Consultant Response: Phasing will mitigate this. Examples are seen in Cameron Station and the Mark Center. As parts of the development are approved, they must fulfill a share of the stormwater management obligations.

Question: How do you phase development in situations with different property owners?

AG Member Response: The City can't force the bottom property owner to mitigate for upstream impacts. This is a regional process so the burden is shared.

Response by Faroll Hamer: One property owner at the bottom of the hill will not bear the entire burden. The public sector has a vital interest in this. This will be a public/private partnership.

AG Member Response. In some jurisdictions, there is a pro rata share charged for regional improvements as individual

Plan Development – Land Use Concepts, Planning and Design Principles

Leonardo Varone and Prashant Salvi of EEK consultants presented a summary of outcomes from the May 3 and May 30, 2008 workshops in addition to presenting planning and design principles that could be appropriate in the planning area to achieve community recommendations.

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Discussion during presentation

AG Question: "Improved street grid" – I see a lot of circles for Landmark – the planner for GGP was concerned about circles – as you move out from a circle, the blocks get

bigger – for example slide 13, it's not particularly walkable if you use radiating streets from a circle, the blocks get bigger. How about a town square model, like Savannah, so a grid can still be achieved?

AG Comment – We were talking about a traffic circle on Duke to get traffic into the site. On the site, there would be a central focus, not necessarily a big circle. The circle in the center of the mall was intended to be a public space, not a big traffic circle.

FH – Columbia is built on a circle, you lose track of where north, south, east and west are, get lost. It's very suburban. Blocks need to be short.

EEK comment – A circle is a way to represent an idea, when we were drawing in the groups – it's not necessarily a specific shape being represented.

AG comment. One idea was that where Sears automotive sits, that is a prime piece of property. If you had maybe a 15-story building along 395 you could see it from the Pentagon.

AG Comment. We weren't talking about generally about 15-20 story buildings all along 395, but a signature building – one building.

Question: How deep is the grade along Duke street from the bottom to the proposed elevated frontage streets?

Consultant response: 25 feet in order to provide for an overcrossing.

Comment: Don't suggest a link across I-395 if there is not something there that we are connecting to.

Discussion following presentation:

AG Comment - Parking - with additional density, developers should be able to put parking underground, particularly residential – residential shouldn't park on the street. That should be a principle.

AG Comment – Another alternative is to do structured surface parking – you can hide it – it's much more cost-effective.

Response. In the design workshops, the idea was presented to take advantage of grade to keep parking underground.

A lot of retail main streets accommodate surface parking. It's not the bulk of their parking, it's "teaser" parking. It slows traffic, creates a buffer between pedestrians and vehicles, but retailers and customers like it.

FH – Structured parking vs. underground parking. The City has pushed underground parking hard in Alexandria. You can create a parking structure and line it completely so you can't see it, you can use interstitial parking with retail, parking above, office above that. The problem with structured parking is that you can't have any porosity in the block. You can't see through the block. In Old Town and Parker-Gray, you see through alleys, between parcels, little bits of views into and through the blocks. In the Monarch project, parking is all underground. In the James Bland public housing project, five blocks, we have all parking either integrated in the townhouses, or underground.

AG Comment – From height and FAR standpoint, from Landmark all the way down Van Dorn. The redevelopments, you need to maintain an incentive to redevelop those properties. When you require open space, underground parking, restrict height, you make it harder. In terms of office, talking to brokers, there is no market here. You need to get some feedback from them why there is no office here. What are the deficiencies.

FH - The market study from Marc McCauley, he gave the requirements – visibility, accessibility, mixed-use development with amenities, those are the three basic things that office requires.

Public Comment

Comment: In the City Transportation Plan there are two transit corridors that intersect here at the mall site. This is an area that supports more density. The area adjacent to 395 is a problem unless you improve access. I like the idea of a traffic circles because the two parcels across from the mall are ripe for redevelopment, the circle provides good pedestrian and transit access across. Looking at Van Dorn, you have a nice median with trees – an opportunity for pedestrian access along the middle – like 16th street in Denver, Las Ramblas in Barcelona. Definitely favor underground parking over structured parking. Street frontages have to have active use – no structured parking at street level.