

City of Alexandria  
Department of Planning and Zoning  
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**Landmark/Van Dorn Advisory Group  
Thursday, July 21, 2008**

**Meeting Summary**

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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 – Indicates comment or question by a member of the Landmark/Van Dorn Advisory Group.

[] – Text in brackets indicates comments or clarifications added by staff after the advisory group meeting.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Faroll Hamer, Director of the Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning welcomed attendees to the meeting. Three presentations will be made tonight – EEK will present the Plan Framework as it stands, General Growth Properties (GGP) will present its revised draft concept for Landmark Mall access, and Burgess & Niple will present its analysis on transportation and access. She invited the Advisory Group to make any initial comments.

*Advisory Group Comments:*  
None.

**Landmark/Van Dorn Plan Framework**

Matt Bell of Ehrenkrantz, Ekstut & Kuhn (EEK) presented the Plan Framework which included a recap of the community's goals, the proposed street grid network, neighborhood centers, open space, heights, floor area ratio, and mix of land uses.

This presentation may be found on the City of Alexandria website at:  
[http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/landmark-vandorn/2008\\_07\\_21LVD\\_EEK.pdf](http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/landmark-vandorn/2008_07_21LVD_EEK.pdf)

*Advisory Group Questions and Comments*

Comment:

A total of 5.6 million square feet is being proposed for the mall site and the site is small. The amount of development is slightly less than has been proposed at Potomac Yard, so the development will be very dense. GGP's proposed FAR of 2.3 does not include parking garages. Carlyle is an example of a development where the parking garages were not counted. Garages will not be counted so the actual FAR is going to be higher. The City should require underground parking. GGP should proffer to include the garages in their density.

Will be a need for a lot of parking above grade. The whole garage on Landmark today is not counted to density. If it were, it would come closer to the 1.0 FAR permitted.

The notion that we will reduce auto dependence with this much development doesn't make sense. The notion that this will support transit. Today, the taxpayers pay  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the cost of transit. We aren't saving because we have transit.

There is too much residential use at the mall. On other sites, residential is OK.

The increase in uses will result in more car trips and more traffic. Transit will be subsidized by taxpayers so transit does not save money. There is too much residential in proposed Landmark Mall development program. The City should reduce the amount of residential to decrease the proposed FAR.

Response from Staff: The City learned from Carlyle. The structured garages were not counted in the beginning but were counted by the end of the development of Carlyle. The City does pay a substantial amount of the cost of transit.

Comment: Use comparisons are helpful. It is hard to park at Carlyle during the day and access the underground parking. The amount of retail (6%) is too low. Because of the difficulty of parking I tend to avoid the area. It's not inviting, it's just an office park. Most of the retail is small lunch restaurants, no destination retail.

Response: Mark Jinks – soon the parking will be paid on the street in Carlyle. This should free up more of the on-street parking.

Response: On-street parking in the Landmark area will be paid (ie parking meters) like Old Town.

Comments: Slide 37 – proposed heights. Where did these recommendations come from?

Response from Consultant/Staff: At community workshops participants identified ranges of heights and the locations of the tallest buildings. We used those relative heights to distribute the development program proposed by GGP, plus our professional advice. We also worked with the planning staff.

Everything presented has come from community workshops, planning staff, and consultant input

Response from AG: Those heights came out of the workshops.

Response from AG: My highest height was 15 stories and not 25 stories. 15 stories is a tall building.

Response from AG: There were a lot of different opinions. I don't see 15 stories as high. I see twice that as a tall building; 15 stories is mid-range.

Response from AG: Where are the higher buildings going?

Response from Consultant: Along I-395. Throughout project area there will be a variety of heights, not just a uniform area at 25 stories.

Comment: If you have 10-story buildings, it doesn't mean you have increased your FAR at all – it will be on much less land, with more open space.

Response: That's true. The City will look at how the buildings define the streets and blocks for the neighborhood. That will cause them to fill out their sites at the lower levels. It won't be like Mark Center where you have the Hilton going straight up and nothing else around.

Comment: We should be more concerned about how buildings look and function instead of how tall it is. I wish we could see an example of a 25 story building for reference.

Response from Consultant: An example is the Empire State Building in New York City. When you are walking past it, you don't even realize how tall it is because of how it behaves at the street level, stepbacks on the tower. That is most important.

Response from AG: Also the Spanish Embassy in DC.

Response from AG: St. Matthew's property in DC on Rhode Island Avenue.

MB: Buildings have an obligation to define the public space that they are in. Today buildings in the area are far back on their sites, and do not shape the public environment.

Response from AG: Building heights should be evaluated within its context.

Comment: What happened to the Duke and Van Dorn Street "Dupont Circle" and the pedestrian experience and pedestrian connections that come from that?

Response: We are still reviewing the access, how we will make pedestrian connections across Duke Street.

Comment: Parking is an issue. Our development will have underground parking but other retail uses need above-grade parking (such as a Giant grocery store).

Response: That is true. In DC surface parking is counted toward the development's FAR, which pushes parking below grade.

Comment: GGP could proffer below-grade parking. The people who worked on Carlyle are disappointed because the garages have added so much to the density that wasn't anticipated.

Comment: Will we be given a draft of the Plan? What is the process?

Response: In September you will see a draft.

Comment: Has the GGP development program been adopted? I want the garages counted in the FAR. 2.5 would be OK if the garages are counted in FAR.

Response from GGP: Most of parking is below ground. We also need to define what is underground when we have a site that falls 100 feet from one side to the other.

Comment from AG: Is the issue that structured parking is visible? What is the issue with structured parking?

Response from staff: Above-grade parking is not just an issue of visibility. It makes blocky buildings. The issue is that structured parking creates a block that is not visually permeable; you cannot see through it. Also structured parking removes area that available land that could be used to activate a space (such as residential or retail uses). You also don't get the porosity of the block since the parking can take up the whole block.

Response from AG: If parking is included in FAR, we should state/define the amount of open space we desire.

Comment: Is City proposing 2.5 FAR on mall site and GGP wants 2.3 FAR?

Response: We are studying 2.5 FAR for the transportation model.

Response from AG: The previous plan prepared by the staff provided a 2.0 FAR for mall site. This one is suggesting a 2.5 FAR.

Response from Staff: The initial plan was mostly residential on the mall site. We got the feeling from the AG and from the sustainability task force that more office was desirable. This GGP proposal does have more office. This is the kind of density to provide additional tax base, to support retail, to pay for the level of improvements required, to pay for BRT and other benefits. This seemed like one of the few places in the City where additional significant office could be possible. It has good visibility from I-395, it is a place where we can put signature buildings.

Response from AG: I think 2.5 FAR is a little low for that site because the City is in the midst of attracting offices to relocate to Alexandria. We have lacked economic development for 20 years and our property taxes keep rising. Commercial office and retail are revenue-producing. We should look at density as an economic development tool and not as a gift to developers.

Question from AG for Mark Jinks. If we did this kind of development, would the residential tax rate go down?

Response from Mark Jinks. The residential tax rate has a lot of components. All other things being equal, the commercial taxes ought to bring a lot more than it costs to support it. If we assume \$400 per square foot, 5 million square feet, that's \$2 billion. That plus sales tax, the Landmark site would probably produce about \$20 million a year in taxes, compared to today, maybe \$3 million.

Follow-up question. With all the transit that we are going to add, residential will pay part of that?

Response: Certainly.

### **Proposed Landmark mall Access Option**

Alan Ward of Sasaki presented General Growth Properties' revised draft concept for access into the mall site. Overall, the concept includes two street-level access points on Duke Street and three above-grade access points on both Duke and Van Dorn. In addition, the draft concept identifies a location for a transportation hub within the mall site.

The presentation may be found on the City of Alexandria website at:  
[http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/landmark-vandorn/LVDUrban11\\_17Illustrative.pdf](http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/landmark-vandorn/LVDUrban11_17Illustrative.pdf)

#### *Advisory Group Questions and Comments*

Comment: How would eastbound Duke access southbound Van Dorn?  
(*Consultant demonstrates on a map*) There are a number of ways to make this movement. One can use a left turn at the ramps east of Van Dorn street, or left turn through the mall site. It's a block pattern with choices.

Comment: Would the BRT lanes take away traffic lanes?

Response: Additional lanes would be provided for BRT along the mall site. The additional lane may not be needed east of the ramps to Van Dorn. A substantial part of the traffic leaves Duke at the Mall. The BRT can use the third lane east of the Van Dorn Street bridge.

Comment. The transit hub was at the center of the mall site on the last presentation. Does it make sense to move it to the edge of the site on Duke? Does it make sense for the bus/trolley to go through the site?

Response from Consultant: It was moved because there were concerns that the bus/trolley would expend too much time within the site, slowing the transit significantly.

Comment: The proposed transit may be some sort of trolley. Is this feasible given the proposed street improvements?

Response: It could slow the transit down if it had to travel through the mall site. It would be good to combine the Duke and Van Dorn transit stations at a single point to maximize connections and also consider a transit-only lane along the frontage streets along Duke.

Response from AG: It is a good idea for GGP to bring the transit hub within the site because the site is so large.

Response from Consultant: GGP may provide an internal metro shuttle to get people into the site.

## Transportation Framework and Initial Analysis

David Metcalf of Burgess & Niple and David Fields of Nelson Nygaard presented an analysis of the various options proposed for access into the mall site, improvements to Duke Street, and transit.

The presentation may be found on the City of Alexandria website at:

[http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/landmark-vandom/2008\\_07\\_21LVDTransportation.pdf](http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/landmark-vandom/2008_07_21LVDTransportation.pdf)

### *Advisory Group Questions and Comments*

Comment: Do you know where the bicycle lanes and pedestrian access will be in these options?

Response: These concepts haven't gotten to that level of detail yet, but if we can get any of these options to work for vehicles, we can overlay really good pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on top of it.

Comment: Can you add the topography and buildings to the traffic simulation display?

Response: Yes.

Comment: Where did you get the goals?

Response: Community workshops, these were presented at the May 19, 2008 meeting.

Comment: Transit hub should be in center of Landmark Mall site because it'll be closer to where people work and shop. People want that transit near where they work or shop. On the edges it isn't as attractive.

Comment from GGP: Putting it on the edge is not a problem because the entire site is a 5-minute walk.

Response from AG: Someone who is riding bus/trolley from North Van Dorn to the metro shouldn't have to spend a lot of time to ride through mall site to get to the metro.

Comment from GGP: The plan also anticipates higher FAR on the south side of Duke Street, so along Duke is really in the center.

Comment: You [Consultant] stated that an increase in the frequency of BRT routes will increase ridership. Is there a transition period where there will not be enough ridership to support transit?

Response: As development is coming on line, some of the demand may be there without the BRT lanes but the City will respond to provide the lanes as the demand increases. It may start without the dedicated lanes, with more frequent service. When there is a major increase in development, then the major transit improvements could be phased in.

Comment: Are there more developers proposing to redevelop in the planning area and want to present their plans to the Advisory Group and get our feedback? We want this to be realistic for developers.

Response: City is constantly reaching out to developers and we have had some developers approach the City. We have a consultant that will contact developers to determine what would it take for this investment to take place. How much money is available for amenities and how much it'll cost to develop. There are currently no projects in the pipeline that have submitted plans to the City that are beyond preliminary. But we can invite developers that want to share that information and that are far along in development process.

#### *Public Questions and Comments*

Comment: I am concerned that there has not been any discussion of schools, fire stations, hospitals, and the influx of traffic on Edsall Road and Van Dorn.

Response: We will look at services such as schools and fire stations.

Question: Is there a route that takes residents of the planning area to metro now?

Response: Yes [A number of City DASH bus routes serve both the planning area and the Van Dorn Street and King Street Metro stations.]

#### **Next Steps**

Traffic analysis will be complete in August. The next regular meeting of the advisory group will be held on September 15, 2008 at 6:30 P.M. at Landmark Mall.