



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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Response from Faroll Hamer, Director of Planning and Zoning, to Requests to Delay Consideration of the Landmark-Van Dorn Corridor Plan.

The Landmark-Van Dorn Corridor Plan is currently scheduled to be considered by the Planning Commission on January 6 and by the City Council on January 24, 2008. In the past few weeks, the City has received several requests to delay consideration of the Plan, such as by removing the Plan from the Planning Commission's January docket or by keeping the Plan on the January 6 docket but requesting that the Planning Commission defer adoption of the Plan by one month or more. Also on the Planning Commission's January 6 docket is a development project – Landmark Gateway – that is located in the Landmark-Van Dorn Corridor. The Landmark Gateway project requires a rezoning which is supported by the draft Landmark-Van Dorn Corridor Plan.

I understand the desire to have more time to review the plan. It is certainly desirable for the community to have adequate opportunity to absorb, analyze and comment on the plan. However, I should point out that although the final draft was not complete until December 23, most of what is in the document – and certainly all of the major recommendations – were presented publicly months ago and discussed regularly since then by the Advisory Group and in other public forums. For example, there were public worksessions in October followed by the release of a detailed initial draft in mid-November; the public comments on that initial draft are the basis for the changes to the initial draft that appear in the final draft. Although the final report documents on transportation impact and fiscal issues were not completed until early December, the findings from these studies were presented publicly in September and October. We don't have a problem with requests for additional review time, but it's not the case that a large amount of important material was not available until December 23.

I cannot in good conscience remove either the small area plan or the Landmark Gateway project from the docket, because of its link with the Landmark Gateway development project. The Landmark Gateway proposal has been reviewed in numerous community meetings over the past two years as well as by the Landmark-Van Dorn Corridor Small Area Plan Advisory Group. This project will be an important catalyst for an area that is struggling to turn itself into a vibrant revitalized community, and with the current

economic downturn and difficulty in securing loans, it may be the only chance in quite some time. The applicant has indicated that a critical deadline occurs at the end of January, and without an approval by that date, the project will be in serious jeopardy. It's a project that appears to be supported by almost everyone.

The Landmark Gateway development project requires a major rezoning. It has been Alexandria's practice to discourage stand-alone piecemeal rezonings that can ultimately create planning chaos. Rather, we encourage rezonings as part of a comprehensive Small Area Plan. Only in this way can the City be sure that it will have the infrastructure, transportation network and amenities in place to serve an entire planning area. A small area planning process makes it possible to incorporate community outreach and community input in a meaningful way, and it lets the community know what kind of redevelopment will occur in advance of specific development proposals. It's a critical tool for ensuring quality development. Without any certainty as to what the City expects for other nearby development, developers of new projects might hesitate to invest as much as we would like in quality design and materials.

For these reasons, my best professional judgment is that the Landmark-Van Dorn Corridor Small Area Plan should appear along with the Landmark Gateway development plan on the January docket. At that time the Planning Commission can exercise its discretion to scrutinize the Gateway project within the context of the Small Area Plan, and as long as it conforms to all of the essential elements proposed in the Landmark-Van Dorn Small Area Plan, it may exercise its discretion to approve the development project and defer the small area plan without necessarily setting a precedent that would encourage future piecemeal rezoning proposals.

The Department of Planning and Zoning will continue to take comments from the community through the final hearing with the City Council on January 24th. We will provide information concerning all of the advisory group's and community's issues as part of the hearings. We will also post comments and responses on the web.

Sincerely,

Faroll Hamer, Director
Department of Planning & Zoning