

# The Mayors' Institute on City Design

The National Endowment for the Arts

The United States Conference of Mayors

The American Architectural Foundation

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MICD Alumni Technical Assistance Program  
Final Report  
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## Introduction

Since 1986, the Mayors' Institute on City Design has helped transform communities through design by preparing mayors as the chief urban designers of their cities. The Mayors' institute achieves its mission by organizing sessions where a select group of mayors engage leading design experts to find solutions to the most critical urban design challenges facing their cities.

Every year, the partner organizations plan and manage six to eight Mayors' Institute sessions held throughout the country. Each two and one half day session is limited to less than twenty participants, half mayors and half a multi-disciplinary team of outstanding city design and development professionals. Sessions are organized around case-study problems.

Each mayor presents a problem from his or her city for the other mayors and designers to discuss. Mayors present a range of challenges, including waterfront redevelopment, downtown revitalization, transportation planning and the design of new public buildings and facilities. Following each presentation, mayors and designers identify important issues, offer suggestions, and discuss potential solutions. The interchange sparks lively debate, opens new perspectives, and generates creative ideas. Members of the resource team also make presentations on the role of their profession in the process of city design, illustrated by outstanding examples and best practices.

Mayor Euille was invited to attend Mayors' Institute 41 in Chicago, IL, where he presented the Braddock Road neighborhood revitalization plan. In 2009, the Mayors' Institute awarded the City of Alexandria a grant to further study another challenging site, Potomac Yard, through the Mayors' Institute on City Design Alumni Technical Assistance Program.

The Mayors' institute on City Design is a partnership program of the American Architectural Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and the United State Conference of Mayors. The Alumni Technical Assistance program is made possible by a generous \$250,000 gift of the Edward W. Rose III Family Fund of the Dallas Foundation, directed to the National Endowment for the Arts by Mrs. Deedie Potter Rose, a former member of the National Council on the Arts.



## About the Resource Team

Maurice Cox was appointed Director of Design for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in October 2007. Mr. Cox supervises the NEA grant making process in design and participates in the Mayors' Institute on City Design, the Governors' Institute on Community Design and Your Town: The Citizens' Institute on Rural Design while providing professional leadership in architecture and design to the nation. Mr. Cox is an associate professor at the University of Virginia's School of Architecture and served as Mayor of Charlottesville from 2002-2004. A recipient of the 2004-5 Loeb Fellow at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and the 2006 John Hejduk Award for Architecture, Mr. Cox has lectured widely on the topics of democratic design, civic engagement and the designer's role as leader. He received his architectural education from the Cooper Union School of Architecture and taught at Syracuse University's School of Architecture, Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and the University of Maryland's School of Architecture.

Hilary Bertsch has a broad range of experience and expertise in the design of large-scale architectural projects; transit centers, urban retail, waterfront developments and academic complexes. Her portfolio exhibits a consistent sensitivity to existing urban contexts, where building design focuses on creating new public environments. Some of her most notable work includes: San Pedro Waterfront & Promenade in Los Angeles, Buffalo Inner Harbor, Oceanfront Asbury Park (NJ), The Peninsula at Bayonne Harbor (NJ) and Harbor Point at Baltimore's Inner Harbor. Today Ms. Bertsch is the leader of EE&K's effort, working for Struever Fidelco Cappelli LLC,

on the redevelopment of Yonkers, NY. Ms. Bertsch is a graduate of Brown University and received her Masters of Architecture from the University of Texas at Austin.

Jim Charlier provides consulting services to public and private clients throughout North America at his Boulder, CO-based firm, Charlier Associates, Inc. Since the 1970s, Mr. Charlier has served in senior positions with the Iowa and Florida DOTs and as part of the Florida Governor's Task Force on Urban Growth Patterns which provided a foundation for state growth management systems in several states. Mr. Charlier has taught classes in transportation and growth management for the Lincoln Institute on Land Policy and currently at the University of Colorado. His experience as a resource team member is vast, serving with the Governors' Institute on Community Design, MICD, American Institute of Architects Sustainable Design Assessment Team and EPA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program. In 2008, he prepared Transportation for America's legislative platform for reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program. Jim is an active member of the American Planning Association, the Congress for New Urbanism, the Institute of Transportation Engineers and the Urban Land Institute.

Chris Leinberger is a land use strategist, developer, teacher, consultant and author, focusing on alternative methods of creating the built environment. Currently he is a Visiting Fellow at The Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, researching and developing strategies to create and maintain "walkable urban" places as well as management models for metropolitan areas. He is also a Professor of Practice and Director of the Graduate Real Estate Development Program at the University of Michigan. Leinberger is a founding partner of Arcadia Land Company, a progressive real estate development firm with projects in Independence, Missouri and the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Mr. Leinberger's prolific career includes award-winning articles for the Atlantic Monthly, Wall Street Journal, Urban Land magazine, several books, including "The Option of Urbanism, Investing in a New American Dream" and "Strategy for Real Estate Companies." Chris is a graduate of Swarthmore College and Harvard Business School.

## MICD Alumni Technical Assistance – Alexandria Program Participants

Host Mayor: The Honorable William Euille

### City of Alexandria Staff:

Rich Baier: Acting Director, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities;  
Emily Baker: Acting Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services;  
Tom Canfield: City Architect;  
Beth Carton: Park Planner;  
Mildrilyn Davis: Director, Office of Housing;  
Jeff Farner: Deputy Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;  
Claire Gron: Planner II, Department of Planning and Zoning;  
Faroll Hamer: Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;  
Yon Lambert: Pedestrian / Bicycle Coordinator;  
Helen McIlvaine: Deputy Director, Office of Housing;  
Sandra Marks: Principal Transportation Planner;  
Karl Moritz: Deputy Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;  
Valerie Peterson: Principal Planner, Department of Planning and Zoning; and  
William Skrabak: Director, Office of Environmental Quality.

### Alexandria Participants:

Joe Antunovich, AIA: Principal, Antunovich Associates, Chicago, Illinois;  
David Fromm: Del Ray Civic Association;  
Marguerite Lang: Rosemont Citizens' Association;  
Jon Lindgren: Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group;  
Dan McCaffery: President, McCaffery Interests, Chicago, Illinois;  
Jennifer Mitchell: Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group;  
Eric Wagner: Chair, Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group and Member, City of  
Alexandria Planning Commission;  
Maria Wasowski: Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group; and  
Melissa Watson: Lynhaven Civic Association.

### MICD Design Resource Team:

Hilary Bertsch, AIA: Associate Principal, Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects,  
New York, New York;  
James F. Charlier, AICP: President, Charlier Associates, Inc., Boulder, Colorado; and  
Chris Leinberger: Visiting Fellow, Brookings Institution, Washington, District of Columbia.

### Mayors' Institute Leadership and Staff:

Susan Begley: Design Specialist, National Endowment for the Arts;  
Story Bellows LEED AP: Director, Mayors' Institute on City Design;  
Elizabeth Blazeovich: Special Projects Manager, Mayors' Institute on City Design;  
Ron Bogle: President & CEO, American Architectural Foundation;  
Maurice Cox: Director of Design, National Endowment for the Arts;  
Graham Stroh: Program Manager, American Architectural Foundation; and  
Philip Zurman: Visiting Fellow, American Architectural Foundation.

## Observations

City of Alexandria Planning and Zoning staff led the MICD Resource Team on a tour to Potomac Yard and surrounding Alexandria and Arlington, Virginia neighborhoods. To access the site, the City staff drove along Route 1, a major transportation artery that provides vehicles with a straight-forward thoroughfare to and from the Potomac Yard shopping center. New residential development is located at the historic rail yard's southern edge, in addition to a new mixed-use municipal firehouse. Directly north are several cleared lots, big box retail outlets and surface parking lots. The east and north borders of Potomac Yard are defined by two waterways, the Potomac River and Four Mile Run, respectively.

The MICD Resource Team noted new mid-rise, mixed-use developments north of Four Mile Run in Arlington, Virginia, as well as vibrant residential neighborhoods just west of Potomac Yard. The close proximity of the site to Ronald Regan National Airport, historic neighborhoods and lively commercial corridors like Old Town and Del Ray in Alexandria, George Washington Parkway and trail system and the Potomac River convinced the MICD Resource Team that this location would provide for a great mixed-use development and multi-modal, regional transportation hub.

Additionally, after the MICD Resource Team spoke with several community stakeholders and the developer's representatives, they determined that Potomac Yard is locally, regionally and nationally significant and could provide new development opportunities for community open space and programmed amenities, national retail and residential housing, and multi-modal transportation.

Challenges the MICD Resource Team identified while on tour included the size and scale of Route 1 and the vehicular carrying capacity. The street width and the vehicular speeds pose dangerous for pedestrians walking to the site from neighborhoods west of the site. Additionally, the big box retail located at Potomac Yard caters to patrons with cars and not pedestrians.

The City of Alexandria's Potomac Yard development creates a unique opportunity for a new, regionally significant multi-modal transportation hub that could provide residential, commercial and recreational opportunities. Assets and opportunities noted by the team included:

- Rich historic context;
- Parkway access;
- Existing transportation hub for vehicular traffic with adjacent Metrorail service / opportunity for multi-modal transportation hub – Metrorail, bus / BRT, streetcar / trolley, bike, walk;
- Regional attractions; Del Ray and Old Town commercial districts, Crystal and Pentagon cities, Ronald Regan National Airport, George Washington trail system, Potomac River;
- Route 1 - a major transportation artery with incredible width;
- Local, region and nation interest for the site, from diverse stakeholders (Alexandrians, national retail and residential housing interests, regional transportation interests, etc.);

After the tour, interviews with local stakeholders and City staff revealed the following key challenges and questions, including:

- Width of Route 1 and characteristics (height, age, integrity) of buildings adjacent;
- Current vehicle oriented big box development; from car-centric to people-centric;

- Demands incurred for current regional retail destination and finding the right mix of uses; Can the City garner support for another clustered, destination mixed-use development?
- Engaging developers who understand the need for phased development and can grapple with the city of the question of - how do you build Metro density before Metro?
- Buy-in at all government levels for development of a Metrorail stop and other regional transportation infrastructure; where should the City site the proposed Metro stop? Is Route 1 ready for bus rapid transit?
- Establishing public water frontage, both on the Potomac River and Four Mile Run;
- Creating a street grid that is compatible with the existing adjacent historic neighborhood fabric;
- Parking – phasing strategies / densities;
- Planning for a tremendous amount of open space;
- Public / Private partnerships for long-term care and maintenance of civic space;
- Building heights that comply with FAA guidelines and restrictions;
- Financing and timing of development;

## Conclusions

The MICD Resource Team presented the following recommendations.

\* Refer to the attached MICD Resource Team Final Presentation slides for corresponding images.

## Land Use and Organization

The developer and City should work with other Landbay developers to assemble parcels and reorganize the land uses proposed for the totality of Potomac Yard. While completing this exercise, the City should recognize the site's edges, specifically Crystal City and adjacent neighborhoods.

## Transportation

Multi-modal transit network must address scale, function, and urban design. Many regional transportation modes use the Route 1 corridor including commercial vehicles, Metrorail buses, cyclists and pedestrians. The City must determine if Route 1 is actually a highway or a street and then determine what the route should become. In addition, a Metrorail station is proposed for the site. With such a wealth of transportation options, the City of Alexandria should capitalize on the opportunity to work with regional transportation networks and establish efficient and innovative strategies for circulation people to, from and through Potomac Yard.

To promote multi-modal connectivity, plan for and establish a street grid that mimics the pedestrian-friendly blocks located in adjacent neighborhoods. Planning for development at

this scale avoids poor connectivity seen through massive, congested arterials, increased driving per household, transit voids, inactive living, poor emergency service access and reduced travel safety and convenience for pedestrians.

## Building Developments and Urban Designs

With so many regional examples of successful transit oriented development (TOD), design cues should be taken from these destinations – particularly related to height, scale and density of adjacent buildings. Planning for and implementing a new Metrorail stop is an expensive and complex prospect, but a priority of both the city and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority (WMATA). If there is continued local, regional and federal support for this rail stop, the City should plan to phase Potomac Yard's development, taking into account the location of the stop, its role in a greater multi-modal transportation network intersecting the site and the economic effects that the stop has on development.

The City should strive to plan for mixed-use developments and encourage developers to think of Potomac Yards as a district, realizing that each new building and open space created will have an effect on the next. Efforts should be made to establish connections between adjacent neighborhoods to Potomac Yard, not only physical but cultural. By promoting local business development, dense, pedestrian-friendly residential and commercial mixed use environments and adequate open space, the City will create a unique neighborhood that will compliment those that thrive today in Alexandria; Old Town and Del Ray.

## Open Space

With incredible natural resources and park systems intersecting and adjacent to Potomac Yard, this development affords the opportunity for the City to link the existing network of park trails and river systems through the site. Create an urban park space within the development. This affords for programmable space that could be used for commercial, recreational or social activities such as farmers markets and concerts. Care and maintenance of the park should fall under the responsibilities of the business improvement district or property management. Successful urban park models include the Olympic Sculpture Park (Seattle, Washington) and The High Line and Battery Park City (New York, New York).

## Communication

Mayor Euille and The City of Alexandria staff have worked hard to educate their constituents about Potomac Yard's development. Continue to work the community and the developer and explain incentives and opportunities like creating a carbon negative development site or registering the development through the LEED for Neighborhood Development program. The term "sustainability" can carry a variety of meanings, so it is helpful to communicate what the development goals are, both for the City and developer, and keep accountable to those goals.



Figs. 1 & 2: Existing conditions at Potomac Yard.





Figs. 3 & 4: Alexandria stakeholders share their observations with the MICD Resource Team.



Figs. 5 & 6: Mayor Euille and City of Alexandria staff work with MICD Resource Team members to further analyze the site lay-out and context.