

**City of Alexandria, Virginia**

**PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION**

**Special Meeting**

Thursday, May 7, 2015

7:00 p.m.

Lee Center – 1108 Jefferson St

Alexandria, VA 22314

**Summary Minutes**

**Commission Members Present:** Jennifer Atkins, Co-Chair, Rich Brune, Secretary, Stephen Beggs, William Cromley, Ripley Forbes.

**Absent:** Judy Coleman, Co-Chair (recused), Gina Baum, Alexis Browand, Brian McPherson, Catherine Poulin, Emma Schutzius.

**RPCA Staff Present:** James Spengler, Director, Ron Kagawa, Division Chief, Park Planning, Design and Capital Projects, Jack Browand, Division Chief, Public Information, Special Events and Waterfront Operations, Bethany Znidersic, Park Planner, Robin DeShields, Executive Assistant.

**Absent:** William Chesley, Deputy Director, Recreation Services, Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, Park Operations, Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator.

**Other City Staff Present:** Sandra Marks, Deputy Director, Transportation and Environmental Services, Ray Hayhurst, Urban Planner II, T&ES.

**Guests:** Jim Ashe, Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA), Lamanthia Barfield Joan Johnson, Phil Muse, Cassandra Ford, Rafael Lima and Adrien Lopez.

- I. **Call to Order:** Co- Chair Jennifer Akins called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.; a quorum of members was not present.
  
- II. **Public Hearing:** Potomac Yard Metrorail Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) – Staff Recommendation for the Preferred Alternative Presentation: Sandra Marks, Deputy Director, T&ES- Transportation and Bethany Znidersic, Park Planner, RPCA. Staff gave a presentation on the Potomac Yard Draft DEIS Metrorail Station Project. To view full copy of presentation go to: <http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/PRCCOMBINEDREPORTPOTOMACYARDSDEISMAY72015.pdf>)

Znidersic introduced T&ES staff Sandra Marks and Ray Hayhurst, and Jim Ashe of WMATA. She said that staff is seeking feedback and a recommendation from the Park and Recreation Commission (P&RC) on the Staff Recommendation of Alternative B for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) Locally Preferred Alternative, and specifically on its impacts to parks and on RPCA's local park plans.

City Council will hold a Public Hearing on May 16, 2015, and make a decision on May 20, 2015. The public comment period is open until May 18, 2015.

Marks provided background on the project and reviewed each Alternative considered and the process that was followed (See report). She said that Potomac Yard is one of the largest redevelopment sites left in the City, and the vision is to develop a lively community, including parks, and a new Metrorail station is a key to achieving that vision.

Background information and the Potomac Yard metro station DEIS can be reviewed at:  
<http://www.alexandriava.gov/potomacyard/default.aspx?id=56902#DEIS%20Document>

The North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan was approved in 2010; and the City began to evaluate potential station locations through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process which is required to qualify for federal funding. The City is also partnering with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and working with the National Park Service (NPS) because of potential impacts to the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP).

The DEIS process began in 2011, and the DEIS documents were released in March 2015, evaluating impacts of each of the Alternatives (See report).

Alternative B will provide maximum accessibility to the Metrorail station within 0.25 and 0.50 mile, and shows the highest ridership potential for residents and commuters. Marks said proximity matters when looking at Metro stations, since over 86% of office development is occurring within 0.25 mile of a Metro station. Alternative B was also identified in 2010 the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan.

Marks said the Planning Commission held a meeting this week and concurred with the staff recommendation and also determined that the plan was consistent with City planning documents.

A funding plan was developed to build the station, which doesn't rely on City General Fund money, but relies on a series of funding sources such as: state and federal grants, Potomac Yard development-related revenue, developer contributions, as well as revenues from the Special Tax District, new property taxes and sales taxes, etc.

Staff will be working with the public to design the station so that it fits into the surrounding neighborhood. The Alternatives include pedestrian bridges that would impact the parks. Alternative B encroaches slightly on the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Staff is working closely with NPS on the development of a Net Benefits Agreement to help mitigate these impacts.

Znidarsic said the input being sought from the P&RC primarily focuses on the Metrorail station's potential impact on Potomac Yard Park and Potomac Greens Park). Staff recommends that access points located in the parks be designed to minimize impacts, and to appear more like park features. Staff will work with the community to look at relocation and redesign of any park facilities affected by the pedestrian bridge landings. Any reconfiguration of Potomac Yards Park or Potomac Greens Park facilities would require an amendment to the existing Development Special Use Permit (DSUP), and approval by City Council and the Planning Commission.

Znidarsic said the GWMP/Scenic Easement land is owned by the City, and administered by the NPS. The 15 acre easement was put in place in 1999 to enable the Arlington portion of Potomac Yard to develop. Construction of Alternative B would take less than 2 acres of the easement. Realignment would require 0.16 acres of NPS land (about 7000 sq. ft.). Staff has been working closely with the NPS on the DEIS. In order for Alternative B to be implemented, the City and NPS would need to

approve a Net Benefits Agreement. In terms of use of the GWMP, the NPS will be involved in the design of the station and will work with staff to reduce impacts. The City has agreed to implement certain restrictions on development in North Potomac Yard, such as; limitations on heights, lighting and signage. The proposal would involve a land transfer of the Greens Area Scenic Easement (13 acres), in exchange for NPS land required to build the station. The NPS has agreed to keep the public access that exists there today. Other improvements will be made to Dangerfield Island, storm water management, Mt. Vernon Trail, and to the GWMP in the future (See report for the framework for the Net Benefits Agreement).

Znidarsic said construction access is a community concern, and a team has studied two options: Option 1, allows access from the Parkway, and Option 2, does not allow access from the Parkway (See slide). She said that Federal regulations and park policy prohibit issuing permits for commercial vehicles to access the Parkway when other options exist (with some exceptions). Staff is recommending using Option 2. Znidarsic reviewed impacts for Option 1 and 2, and the B-CSX Design Option, and Alternative D impacts (See presentation).

Znidarsic said the project is currently in the review and comment period of the Draft EIS process. Staff is seeking endorsement from the P&RC and will be discussing the recommendation with other boards and commissions prior to sharing with City Council.

**Next Steps:** City Council hearing on May 16, 2015, 9:30 a.m., Council Chambers, and City Council will vote on the Locally Preferred Alternative, on May 20, 2015. Following the meetings, the project will move into the final DEIS process, and staff anticipates having a Record of Decision to close out the NEPA process early in 2016.

Questions and comments:

Q. What is the total land swap with the NPS?

A. Alternative B involves 0.16 acres (7000 sq. ft. of land) and a land transfer of 13 acres of the GWMP Scenic Easement.

Q. What are the impacts of Alternative B on Potomac Green Parks, in terms of construction access; where will the pedestrian bridge landings be with respect to the playground, and where is the construction access at Carpenter Road.

A. Znidarsic reviewed slides of Alternative A and B, and explained the impacts of each, including the pedestrian bridge landing on the opposite side from the playground. She said construction access under staff recommended Option 2, does not include access from the GWMP. The orange buffer area shows the construction impacts for staging and access.

Q. Public comments were received concerning potential impacts of construction on the park, and the availability of the playground during construction. How will this be handled?

A. Once a preferred Alternative is chosen, more information will be available on the construction process and impacts. There will likely be times when the playground will be unavailable during construction; staff will try to reduce the impacts, and to minimize downtime. However, staff anticipates that there will be some limitations on use of the park during construction, for safety reasons.

Atkins noted the importance of the multi-use trail in Potomac Yard Park for biking, walking and connectivity issues. She asked about potential impacts to the trail in terms of metro landings points. She said many people use these and it is important that it remain usable during construction. In

addition, the P&RC feels it is important to provide significant bike parking when building the Potomac Yard Metrorail station.

Znidarsic said the Metrorail station will have an urban station design, with no Kiss-and-Ride, parking, or taxi stands on parkland. During the construction process, there is some potential that the trail may need to be closed for a time, but staff will try to provide adequate detours and rerouting, as needed. She said that bike parking is an important consideration that can be looked at during the final EIS.

Q. Is the size of the construction staging area, and vehicle storage needs a conservative estimate.

A. Marks said the area for staging is based on a conservative estimate, using a worst case scenario for construction needs. As staff moves closer to the final EIS stage this may be revised.

Q. What is the cost difference between Alternative B and Alternative B-CSX, and about density and population growth.

A. Marks said the lowest cost is Alternative A, followed by Alternative B. Alternative B-CSX costs about \$80 million more than Alternative B, and the B-CSX Design option moves the CSX tracks at the City's expense. Additionally, Alternatives B-CSX, and D both take away some developable land on the west side of the tracks, lowering the amount of potential density.

**Email Comments:**

1. Jennifer Gibbons, Alexandria, Virginia, May 5, 2015, said she lives in the Potomac Greens neighborhood. She supports the planned Potomac Yards Metrorail Station, but has concerns about impacts to the playground and safety of children. She said her daughter and many other children play each day at the playground located on the north end of the neighborhood. Once construction on the new metro station begins there will be heavy traffic on the main street in their neighborhood. Traffic that will then access the construction staging area via a new road that will cross over the current park and playground area. Gibson says that it is critical that the Park Commission take steps now to ensure the safety of the children during a likely two to three year construction period. She would like to see the Commission preserve as much of the park and playground as possible during the construction period. In addition, she would like to see the City erect fencing to enclose the park area so that children can play without out risk from the construction traffic on Potomac Greens Drive and Carpenter Road. She said a fence will also help protect children from increased traffic after completion of the new metro station, and the fence will help avoid unnecessary risk for the City and its residents. She said that the Potomac Greens Park playground is one of only a very few playgrounds in the City that is not enclosed. She asks if the Commission and City are unable to preserve the current playground during the construction of the new metro station, that the playground equipment be relocated to the grass field adjacent to the tot lot near the Potomac Greens Drive traffic circle, and that those playground areas be enclosed to protect young children from the construction traffic that will use the traffic circle area to access the construction staging area.

2. Gina Baum, Park and Recreation Commission, May 6, 2015: Alternative B is not the best option for open space and the park. Alternative A is preferred for its lower impact to open space and the park. If Alternative B is the final decision, City Council needs to allocate funds to replace lost play areas and relocate them nearby. In addition, as a result of construction, there will be increased maintenance costs to the park. Funds must be allocated for those increased costs. Council needs to

ask staff to: provide a budget for additional maintenance funds during construction, find suitable locations to relocate Potomac Yard play areas, and replace any lost (Alexandria) open space at a ratio greater than the amount of lost park land/open space. In other words, make Alexandria "more than whole."

3. Poul Hertel, 3716 Carriage House Ct., Alexandria, Virginia, May 6, 2015: He does not favor Alternative B due to its impacts to the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP). He said the GWMP is an Historic District, which helps define Alexandria's place on the tourist maps, and that people from all over the globe make a pilgrimage from Washington D.C. to Mount Vernon to pay their respects to the Father of this Country. The Parkway also represents a trust placed on the City by the Federal Government that it would maintain the highway for the purpose and dignity it was envisioned to convey. The GWMP is one of the finest federal parks in the United States, it uniquely intersperses the beauty of DC with the marvels of nature. It is also the reason we have the Old Town historic district, which was created in 1946 to protect the integrity and purpose of the parkway. The designers wanted to create a magnificent entranceway into the City, and put in easements to achieve it. Every guest who has visited us has remarked on the beauty of this entranceway into Alexandria. He said Alternative B is clearly visible from the Parkway, and it will largely extinguish the special entrance, especially with the 500 ft. very high bridge that runs practically parallel to the Parkway. The Park Service entered into an agreement (under significant political pressure) and while fixing up Dangerfield Island is laudable, it is not part of the purpose of the GWMP, and does not compensate for the degradation of the Parkway that he believes will transpire. He states that the notion that Alternative A is as visible and obtrusive to the parkway is absurd. He does not support the argument for Alternative B, (that because of its enhanced proximity it will create density), since the density is allowed only if the City gets Alternative B. From the Target retail store, the difference between stations A and B is only 500 ft. Alternative B is actually more than ½-mile from the center of the area of the additional density that is provided if chosen. Then suddenly, the ¼-mile rule is no longer as weighty. Alternative B is currently expected to cost the City \$13.9 million a year, or \$5.1 million more than Alternative A. However, the studies did not incorporate any value for the loss of scenic vistas. More importantly, the EIS should have included the cost of losing the Potomac Yard Shopping Center, which creates approximately \$14 million in annual sales revenue. If this cost is taken into consideration, it raises the annual costs of Alternative B to over \$28 million per year. Finally, the developer has expressed not only the desire to redo the whole plan, but also to pay a lot less than expected if he does get Alternative B. Therefore, he does not believe it makes sense for Alexandria to incur greater risk, pay higher debt servicing costs, and to destroy its cultural and scenic heritage? And to do so for a distance that is less than a short walk across the street to the Alexandria Courthouse from City Hall?

### **Public Comments:**

1. Joan C. Johnson, 1115 Cameron St., Alexandria Virginia, and resident of the Prescott Apartments (64 units), said she estimates that 40% of their residents rely on Metro, and at least another 10% use it occasionally. She said that the City had not publicized the upcoming public hearings about the Potomac Yard Metrorail station well enough, and that she only recently learned that a City decision on the Metrorail station was imminent when she saw a T.V. news story. She said that many citizens will not have an opportunity for input. She feels that more advertising is needed for meetings, and that another meeting should be held for residents.

Marks said staff recognizes they are unable to reach everyone about upcoming public meetings, even with the extensive planned outreach efforts. She said the planning process for the Metrorail Station has been going on for three years in concept, and that during the past several months, staff has met with at least a dozen Civic Associations. The City's outreach efforts were also covered by news outlets such as the *Alexandria Gazette Packet*, and the City regularly posted information about the public process on its website and via its e-news. Marks said about 100 residents attended the WMATA public hearing at Cora Kelly Recreation Center on April 30, 2015, and over 120 people attended three City open houses. In addition, over the past year, staff has briefed City Council as well as many of the City's advisory boards, and commissions. Marks provided information on additional upcoming public meetings: May 11, 2015, Transportation Commission, 7 p.m. in City Hall; May 13, 2015, Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Implementation Work Group (PYMIG), 7 p.m. in City Hall; May 16, 2015, City Council public hearing; and May 20, 2015 City Council meeting, at which Council plans to make its decision on the Alternative for the Metrorail station. Public comments can also be submitted online at [www.potomacyardmetro.com](http://www.potomacyardmetro.com). Atkins encouraged Ms. Johnson to attend an upcoming meeting, and/or to submit comments online.

2. Rafael Lima, 717 Diamond Ave., Alexandria, Virginia said he and his wife are representatives of the single family homeowners at Potomac Yards who will be directly affected by the proposed Metrorail station. He said their community in general welcomes the Metrorail station, but he has concerns about why their community is the only area being asked to contribute to financing the Metrorail station construction through a Special Tax District with an assessment on their homes of .10 cents/per \$100 of assessed value. He said this is likely to cost homeowners between \$900 to \$1,000 dollars a year for 30 years, and may increase over time. He said that due to these special taxes, it is important that the Potomac Yard community benefit as much as possible from the planned Metrorail station. He said perhaps Alternative A should be given more consideration, since it is the least expensive to construct. He asked the P&RC for its perspective on how the community would benefit from a park and recreation standpoint, and asked for a comparison of Alternative B as compared to Alternative A.

Atkins said that the P&RC has no jurisdiction over tax rates and/or tax districts. She asked staff to compare Alternative A and Alternative B, in terms of their cost and respective impacts on the parks. Marks said City Council approved the Special Tax District, and is aware there are some concerns from homeowners. She suggested Mr. Lima attend the May 16, 2015 City Council meeting.

Cromley asked Lima if he was informed when he purchased his house about the planned Special Tax District. He said the size of the tax surprised him, particularly since a major benefit of the station is to encourage businesses to locate to the area. However, revenues are expected to be directed to the City's general fund rather than to financing metro construction costs.

Lima said yes, he was informed of the special tax district, and is not against paying taxes; his concern is why only Potomac Yards single homeowners were targeted for the special tax. He asked why the City did not target commercial, industrial, and multi-family units, and leave out single family homes, or have everyone in the region contribute to the tax. He said other jurisdictions such as Fairfax County have different structures.

Znidarsic said each Alternative would have a different impact on park plans. Alternative A will have a lot of impacts on Potomac Yard Park, the infrastructure for the playground, the Special Events area, the landing for the southern pedestrian bridge. Additionally, the landings would be in the

widest part of the park, which could impact circulation and limit the usability of the widest part of the park. Znidersic reviewed impacts of Alternative D and B-CSX.

Atkins said Alternative A would decrease residents' ability to use the playground and the wider space at Swann Ave., and that Alternative B would primarily impact some of the more passive and inaccessible parts of Potomac Greens Park's northern end.

Lima asked if the P&RC could raise with City Council residents' concerns, about the Special Tax District, and its effect on single family homeowners. He asked if the project would bring any extra value or amenities in terms of parks and recreation, and said that the community should reap greater benefits other than just getting , the Metrorail station.

Cromley said that because the Potomac Yard development project is expected to be a 30 to 40 year build-out, he would recommend Lima and the Community Association actively lobby the City each time a developer applies for a Special Use Permit to build a section of the Potomac Yard area, and request that a portion of the developer contributions go back into the Potomac Yard community.

3. Lamanthia Barfield, 3635 Edison St., Alexandria, Virginia, said she lives in Del Ray and that most people walk to Mount Vernon Ave. in order to take the bus to the Braddock Rd., Crystal City and Pentagon Metro stations. She said it unlikely, that those residents would walk to the Potomac Yard Metrorail station, because it is further. She asked about the one acre playground, also asked staff to describe an urban station design. In addition, she asked about the timeframe over which the community would pay-off the debt service.

Znidersic said the playground referred to is small and is within the current one-acre portion of Potomac Greens Park. Marks explained that the urban station design, would be above-ground and have no kiss-and-ride or parking lot, everything would happen at the curb-side, or street level, e.g. bus and taxi stops would be on-street, similar to in-front of the Hotel Monaco in Old Town. Buses would pull to the curb for pick-up and drop-off, similar to Arlington's Ballston, Clarendon and Courthouse Metrorail stations. She said that local bus service would continue in the neighborhoods. The timeframe for construction would be approximately 30 to 36 months, with a goal of opening the Station in 2019. Marks said the timeframe for debt-payoff will be for 30 years, and she described the mix of financing planned from the Special Tax District, developer contributions, and local taxes

Cromley asked staff to respond to concerns raised by a resident's email expressing concern about the potential impacts on the George Washington Memorial Parkway from the planned metrorail station, and how staff plans to mitigate these impacts. He asked if the GWMP would benefit once the Metrorail station is open and traffic is diverted off the Parkway. He said that the National Park Service (NPS) concurrence with preferred Alternative B, indicates that NPS believes that it will benefit from Alternative B.

Znidersic said the City has been working with the NPS throughout the process, and is crafting the Net Benefits Agreement (See packet). As stated in their letter on this agreement, NPS is not objecting to recommendation of Alternative B.

Marks said Alternative B is the only alternative that impacts parks, and the Greens Area Scenic easement. She said if Alternative A were built there wouldn't be any requirements beyond regulatory ones. Staff is looking at doing landscape improvements, berming, and placing limitations on signage and lighting. Marks said the benefits to GWMP were not discussed specifically, however, if no Metrorail station is built, there will be increased traffic on roads, including the

Parkway. The Net Benefits Agreement provides about \$12 million dollars to the NPS, after the land swap; this is not available in the other Alternatives, so there is benefit on both sides.

Commission discussion:

Atkins asked the P&RC to provide comments on the preferred Alternative B, and its potential impacts to park plans, and open space. There was consensus for supporting Alternative B. Brune said he likes Alternative B, as long as there is no permanent encroachment onto the Parkway. He said that another benefit is that Alternative B is supported by the NPS. He said that the planned berming will help with the construction access road. Forbes and Cromley said they support Alternative B. Beggs said he supports Alternative B, and that the majority of impacts would occur during the construction staging process, and that the P&RC should pay close attention to how that is implemented.

Atkins said she generally supports Alternative B, and thinks Alternative A would be more damaging to the parks and open space. She said the P&RC should advise City Council to direct staff to ensure that, during construction, actions are taken to minimize the impact on the use of Potomac Greens Park, especially the playground, and also on Potomac Yard Park and the trail. She said that actions to mitigate the impacts should be put in place, and closures well publicized. Two other issues that need to be addressed are: providing bicycle parking and tying bike and trail use to the Metrorail station. The City also needs to plan and budget for park maintenance, and any additional maintenance costs.

Beggs asked Director Spengler if RPCA had asked City Council about increasing RPCA's budget to cover the costs of any work that may be needed to restore park areas, which are disturbed by the Metrorail station's construction.

Brune asked if WMATA would commit to covering some of the maintenance costs for the station and its surrounding area. Marks said one of the pedestrian bridges will be owned by WMATA and open only during WMATA hours, and the second bridge would be owned and maintained by the City, and open 24 hours.

The Commission asked Browand for assistance in determining if it met the legal requirement for a quorum. Browand said he will check the City Code, and with the City Clerk on what constitutes a majority of members, taking into account the absence of one member by recusal.

The Commission, agreed to vote on a motion to support Alternative B, and to leave the formal status of the motion passed to be determined until after the City Clerk had clarified whether the number of P&RC members in attendance qualified as a quorum, taking into account recusal of Co-Chair Coleman.

MOTION: Forbes moved that the P&RC approve Alternative B as recommended. Beggs seconded. Atkins modified the motion to include a recommendation that the City plan for maintenance and budget impacts on the NPS, and the impacts on the parks and trails usage during the construction phase, to ensure the City is planning for this in its budget, and also that bike transportation and storage be considered going forward.

The motion as modified was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Atkins will communicate the action to the absent Commissioners and draft a letter on behalf of the P&RC. The Commission will await a determination from the City Clerk on whether the P&RC needs to reconvene to take a second vote on the motion once a majority of Commissioners are present.

**III. Adjourned:** 8:17 p.m.

**IV. Next Meeting:** Agenda items and location for May 21, 2015 meeting, Charles Houston, 7:00 p.m., public hearing on Mount Jefferson Park Plan.