

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2015

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: CARRIE SANDERS, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM # 6 – POTOMAC YARD METRORAIL STATION UPDATE

ISSUE: Provide an update to the Transportation Commission on the planning for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receive the following update.

BACKGROUND: The City is finalizing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and beginning design for an infill Metrorail station along the Blue and Yellow lines between the National Airport and Braddock Road Metrorail stations to serve Potomac Yard. A Metrorail station in the vicinity of Potomac Yard has been included in various plans over the years, including the *Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens Small Area Plan* (1999), the *Transportation Master Plan* (2008), and the *North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan* (2010).

The current financing plan for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station assumes a self-financing plan that will not require the use of current General Fund revenues. The City will fund the portion of the station construction costs not funded through other regional, state, and federal sources by issuing general obligation bonds. The bonds will be repaid using new Potomac Yard-generated tax revenues and developer contributions. Station construction will be managed by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), who will own and operate the station.

DISCUSSION: The City is currently completing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of the NEPA process. The Draft EIS was released for public review and comment in Spring 2015, and City Council selected Alternative B as the preferred alternative on May 20, 2015. City and WMATA staff, in coordination with the National Park Service (NPS) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), are working to complete the Final EIS while simultaneously beginning the development of conceptual design for inclusion in the Request for Proposals (RFP) for design and construction of the station.

Final EIS

A draft of the Final EIS is expected to be ready for agency review in early winter. The timing for public release of the document is dependent on the scope of the comments received from NPS and FTA. City staff's goal is to release the document in early 2016. Following public circulation of the document, NPS and FTA can each issue a Record of Decision (ROD), expected in spring 2016.

Design Process

WMATA plans to issue the RFP for a design-build contract in summer 2016. Over the next several months, WMATA and the City will be developing the set of standards, requirements, and expectations that the contractors will use to develop their bids. The conceptual design for the station will be an important part of those documents. The design process will include a series of meetings to solicit public input, as well as regular updates to City boards and commissions and City Council. The public process will be facilitated by a team from the City, WMATA, and the National Park Service. The goal is development of a conceptual design that has buy-in from residents, can be recommended for approval by relevant boards and commissions, and can be approved by City Council, the National Park Service, WMATA, and other approving agencies. The design process also includes amendments to Potomac Greens Park and Potomac Yard Park, which will require some re-design to accommodate the new elements associated with the Metrorail station entrances.

At the October 28, 2015 PYMIG meeting, the goal of the meeting was to discuss station and park design. At the meeting, members of PYMIG and the public provided feedback on principles and strategies to guide the design of the station and on elements that they would like to see included in the parks. The meeting was supplemented by a survey on AlexEngage that was available through November 8.

The design principles exercise at the Oct 28 meeting asked participants to indicate the degree of importance they would assign to each of four principles. It was noted that each of the principles is important, but understanding relative importance would be helpful when a design decision requires balancing one or more principle. The four principles are:

- **Appearance:** The station design and materials will be high quality, enduring, cohesive, and reflect the function of the station; the materials will be appropriate to the use and scale of the station.
- **Context:** The station design and configuration will balance the characteristics of the various settings – the adjoining parks, parkway, residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.
- **Environment:** The station and infrastructure will be designed to enhance its immediate environment of wetland, woodland, and open space; the station system design will make use of materials and strategies that are environmentally sensitive.

- Access: The station and its elements will make the transit experience pleasant and efficient.

Participants overwhelmingly voted for “access” as the most important design principle for the station. “Appearance” and “context” were also considered to be very important design principles.

The design strategies exercise asked participants to choose strategies to guide the selection of style, form, and materials for the station. The core structures and facilities of the station will be driven by the functional and operational requirements of WMATA, but the exterior appearance may be developed in a variety of ways through different styles, forms, or configurations.

Participants were asked to indicate their preference between:

- A structure that is well lit.
- A curvilinear or geometric form.
- A building that looks like a single facility or reads as multiple components.

Participants were shown images to help them understand these descriptions (Attachment 1).

Participants overwhelmingly supported a well-lit structure. Participants also expressed a preference for a curvilinear form, although a significant proportion preferred a geometric form. Participants were fairly evenly split between a building that looks like a single facility or reads as multiple components.

For Potomac Greens Park and Potomac Yard Park, participants were asked to indicate the uses they would like to see in each park. Preferred uses for Potomac Greens Park focused on walking trails and boardwalks through the wetland, as well as picnic benches and other spots for passive recreation. Preferred uses for Potomac Yard Park were more active, including bicycle and multiuse trails and event spaces.

The next PYMIG meeting will be on November 16, 2015. That meeting will focus on massing concepts for the station and design concepts for Potomac Greens Park.

Next Steps

The design process will continue over the next several months, with PYMIG meetings and monthly updates to boards, commissions, and City Council. The conceptual design is anticipated to be completed in Spring 2016, with City Council approval in June.

As noted above, the Final EIS will be circulated for public review early next year, followed by a Record of Decision from the National Park Service and the Federal Transit Administration.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – PYMIG Meeting Boards