

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JULY 7, 2022

TO: URBAN DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (UDAC)

FROM: CATHERINE MILIARAS, PRINCIPAL PLANNER, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

SUBJECT: 815 N. ROYAL STREET (MONTGOMERY CENTER)

The Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC) is scheduled to review the proposal for redevelopment of the Montgomery Center site on July 13th. UDAC is authorized to review development applications to determine compliance with the Old Town North Urban Design Standards and Guidelines (OTNUDSG, adopted as part of the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update in 2018) prior to Planning Commission and City Council review. All development site plans (DSPs) and development special use permits (DSUPs) must be reviewed by UDAC for compliance with the OTNUDSG. Issues related to parking, loading, special use permits and the like, while important aspects of any project, are more thoroughly reviewed by Planning Commission and City Council.

The applicant introduced the proposed project at the May UDAC meeting and the committee provided preliminary comments related to the paseo/service alley and open space and were generally supportive of the direction of the redevelopment. This second review is an opportunity to provide more comprehensive comments on the proposed design. The applicant has specifically requested feedback on two possible color palettes for the building skin. Staff notes that the city comments sent May 17th regarding the Concept II submission identified the following issue areas: the paseo/internal service alley design and functionality; expanding retail; and site and building design.

Paseo/internal service alley design and functionality

Incorporating a paseo/internal service alley within the building footprint is a creative approach that will remove loading/unloading from the surrounding streets. Both T&ES and P&Z staff have concerns about how the design of the space may create conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. Particularly challenging will be achieving the goal of making this a vibrant space safe for pedestrians, while also accommodating service uses. In order to enliven the covered paseo and draw pedestrians in from Madison Street, staff has urged the applicant to provide active retail uses on both sides of the southern entrance to the paseo. This would more closely mirror the existing retail uses fronting all four block faces.

Expanding retail

All four sides of the block currently have active retail and/or personal service uses, and the applicant was encouraged to study adding additional retail on the site, particularly at the entrance to the paseo. Additional retail at this location would help to make the paseo feel more welcoming to pedestrians.

Site and building design

The applicant was encouraged to consider a through lobby for the southern residential building along N. Fairfax Street. This would give a strong presence on N. Fairfax Street and provide greater connectivity to the covered drop off. The current Madison Street lobby entrance at the end of the one-way street minimizes its prominence and accessibility.