

City of Alexandria

Old Town North

Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)

September 2021 Meeting Notes

[DRAFT-PRELIMINARY]

Wednesday, September 8, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

City Hall, 301 King Street

Room 1101

Date of Draft: **September 17, 2021**

Committee Members in Attendance:

Stephen Kulinski, Chair (SK)

Thomas Soapes, Vice Chair (TS)

Abbey Oklak, Secretary (AO)

Katherine Bingler (KB)

Theresa del Ninno (TN)

City Staff in Attendance:

Michael Swidrak (MS) P&Z

Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z

Daniel Welles (DW) P&Z

Applicant Team Members in Attendance:

Megan Rappolt (MR) Wire Gill (attorney rep.)

Ken Wire (KW) Wire Gill (attorney rep.)

Grant Epstein (GE) Community Three (applicant)

Austin Flajser (AF) Carr Companies (applicant)

Wish Carr (WC) Carr Companies (applicant)

Michael Wilson (MW) Carr Companies (applicant)

Abed Benzina (AB) SK+I Architects

Yavuz Goncu (YG) SK+I Architects

Community Members in Attendance:

Mary Harris (MH) NOTICE (North Old Town Civic Association)

Adrienne Cadik (AC) Old Town North resident

Stephanie Gleichsner (SG) Stoladi Property Group

Brian Boyle (BB) Old Town North resident

Agnes Artemel (AA) Old Town North resident

Jim King (JK) Old Town North resident

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:02 a.m. as the September meeting of UDAC. SK welcomed TN in person to the Committee and noted her work as an architect in the area.
- The Committee considered a draft of the notes for the June meeting. KB moved to adopt the meeting notes, and TS seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved 5-0.

NEW BUSINESS

Third Presentation of development proposal at the Tidlock site (1033, 1055 and 1111 N. Fairfax Street)

Note: Presentation materials on the project are located at alexandriava.gov/69556

- KW introduced the applicant team and provided an overview of the project process to date and the applicant's aim for public hearing approval around the end of 2021.
- KW stated that the applicant has designed the proposal consistent with the Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTNSAP) and that the applicant seeks feedback and an endorsement from the Committee based on the review of the Old Town North Urban Design Standards and Guidelines (OTNUDSG).
- KW noted the design constraints that applicant has due to the reuse of existing building and underground garage structures. KW discussed the site and building layout, including the building height transition from the two-story (three-story when penthouse is included) commercial and arts anchor building to the nine-story rental and apartment buildings. The applicant looked at retaining and enhancing the open space adjacent to the retail and arts anchor building and from the end of Second Street eastward through the site between the rental and condo buildings.
- KW continued, stating that the applicant is planning to preserve the adjacent street trees on N. Fairfax Street, and is exploring color and artistic treatments to the brick garage wall at the street frontage.
- GE added that the applicant is planning for continuity between the two arts anchor spaces in the smaller commercial building and the rental building, where the arts anchor will have portions of the first floor. GE noted that the arts anchor use (the proposed user is the Levine School of Music) is planned as both an indoor and outdoor use.

Community Comments

- MH mentioned that NOTICe has met with the applicant and supplied comments on the proposed development. MH noted that the applicant should be using the OTNSAP as a guide for development and noted concerns regarding the amount of open space in the

development, including constructing the commercial and arts anchor building on an area that is currently plaza space for the office complex. MH expressed concerns regarding the amount of building height and its use for residential development, and if the development rights sought by the applicant are commensurate with the public benefit provided with the on-site affordable housing and arts anchor.

- KB stated that she has not seen the building or site plan change significantly since first presented to UDAC in 2019, and noted community concerns with the proposal. KB asked the applicant if makerspaces or if additional gallery or assembly space was considered.
- TN stated that it appeared that few or no changes had been made by the applicant since the last presentation to the Committee. TN asked if the buildings can provide more views to the Potomac River from the N. Fairfax Street frontage, and thought the rental and condo buildings should be more “background” buildings to the commercial/arts anchor building. TN also wanted more information about how the arts anchor would be integrated into the site design program, including with the adjacent parcels. TN supported the use of pavers on the internal alley, though would like the applicant to increase accessibility across the internal alley and from N. Fairfax Street into the site via the plaza across from Second Street (which is controlled by the owner of 1199 N. Fairfax Street).
- TS – Concurred with KB that the proposal had not significantly changed since the first submission to UDAC. TS specifically noted concerns with the proposed Mass and scale of the condo and rental buildings and the lack of a defined hyphen in the rental building.
- TS asked the applicant if they had a commitment with Levine to operate on the site. KW stated that Levine is intending to operate the arts anchor spaces but has not signed an agreement at this stage of the development process. GE added that Levine has designed the spaces specifically for use by the organization, and that Levine is an established organization that needs affordable space. TS added that the arts anchor should be usable and accessible for all in the community.
- AO Noted that she had provided written comments on the two review projects (**Note: comments uploaded to UDAC webpage**). AO stated that the OTNUDSG requires that a minimum of 15-25 percent of building footprints should be below the maximum height of the building, and that the applicant should apply this principle to the west elevation (in addition to the east/waterfront elevation). AO stated that the arts anchor footprint should be more prominent in the rental and commercial/arts buildings as viewed from the street and site. AO added that the existing Transpotomac Plaza office buildings have some recesses in the façades, and that the proposed buildings should contain more articulation. AO also noted that per the OTNUDSG, the rental and condo building entries should be more visible and prominent looking into the site from the street elevation and toward the accessible plaza between the rental and condo buildings.

- TS asked if there will be a public access easement for the plaza between the rental and condo buildings. KW stated that the applicant intends to provide public access in this area, but will be working out the specific legal language with City staff. KW also stated that the plaza directly across from Second Street at N. Fairfax Street is owned by the adjacent property owner and would not be part of the public access agreement.
- SK stated that the applicant had developed the scheme since the last UDAC review, though that massing has not changed, and the applicant should respond to community comments. SK noted that the applicant had addressed the materiality of the building façades. He stated that the open space connections and design need further development. KW responded that the applicant does not plan to remove building hyphen/connector in the rental building. Per OTNSAP and OTNUDSG, the applicant will be studying additional treatments and building articulation.
- SK asked if there was pedestrian access around the existing garage entries. KW stated that the garage entries are located on the adjacent office properties, but the applicant intends to work with the adjacent property owners on the landscaping and access for residents around these areas.

Additional Committee Discussion

- SK noted that the applicant needs to provide changes to the proposal in order to proceed with UDAC review and potential Committee endorsement.
- TN stated that the proposed massing appears larger than what was envisioned in the OTNSAP due to the applicant's utilization of density bonuses (for affordable housing units and an arts anchor).

First Presentation of development proposal at 901 N. Pitt Street

Note: Presentation materials on the project are located at alexandriava.gov/69556

- KW introduced the applicant team, including the project architect (SK+I Architects) and developer (Carr Companies).
- AF discussed the applicant's work to create a midblock connection that connects Montgomery Park to the community from the west (per the OTNSAP). AF added that the applicant is utilizing density bonuses for both on-site affordable housing and providing an arts anchor.
- AB provided the architectural overview of the site, including the three separate building volumes, including two interlocking seven and eight-story volumes fronting Montgomery, N. Royal and N. Pitt streets, and mews-style four-story units fronting the mid-block pedestrian connection between N. Royal and N. Pitt streets. AB added that the proposed

height variation is consistent with the OTNUDSG and included the terrace above the seventh floor at the southeast corner of the building as an example.

- The applicant discussed the ground floor of the building, including the garage entrance location on N. Pitt Street, the retail spaces at the southeast and southwest corners of the building, and the location of the arts anchor on N. Royal Street across from Montgomery Park, and a block away from the arts anchor at the Venue (901 N. Fairfax Street).
- *AO had to leave the meeting at 9:56am due to an excused absence.*

Community Comments

- JK asked for additional perspectives of the building from the north/Watergate of Alexandria condominiums perspective.
- SK asked about the transformers at the northeast corner of the site. KW stated that the transformers are proposed to be above-grade, but will be screened as seen from the site, Watergate and the adjacent street.
- TS expressed the concerns of Watergate of Alexandria residents based on his discussions with fellow residents. The greatest concern for the residents is the location of the proposed garage entrance, which will be generally located across N. Pitt Street from the loading dock at the Gables Old Town North development and close to one of the two Watergate garage entrances. Residents have concerns regarding congestion and safety with the additional garage entrance, and the potential conflicts between delivery and service vehicles with area pedestrians.
- TS supported the inclusion of the midblock walkway, though wanted to understand the proposed design treatment at the northern property line, and ensure a visual barrier between the Watergate development and the site. TS asked about sidewalk width. AF responded that the width is to be finalized, though the sidewalk will not be as wide as the sidewalk across N. Pitt Street at the Gables development, where the building is inset from the property line and there is “café seating” adjacent to the building.
- TS asked what the defined benefits are for the community from the proposed density bonuses, specifically stating that the benefits should relate to the adjacent residential uses. TS also stated concern regarding the construction of an arts anchor space that may not be filled.
- KB asked the percentage of affordable housing in the project. AF responded that the project would have 6 percent of units as affordable (approx. 60 percent of area median income). KB stated this was too low of a percentage of affordable units. AF responded that the number of provided affordable housing units is consistent with the requirements of bonus density for the provision of affordable housing (Section 7-700 of the Zoning Ordinance.

- TN stated that the proposed massing looks appropriate. TN added that developing Montgomery Street as promenade with more building indentation would be successful. TN noted that the design appears to encourage pedestrian activity with retail at the corner, similar to the Gables development across the street. TN said the applicant should continue to refine the garage entrance but cannot see where else it could be located on the site.
- SK read AO’s written comments to the Committee (*Note: comments uploaded to UDAC webpage*).
- SK agreed with AO’s written comments. SK stated that the proposal has room for improvements for the facades and materials, the latter of which appear monolithic. SK added that the separate building volumes are good design, but can be too confusing if too complex or different in design. SK supported the design of the building corners, and that the arts anchor space should be reinforced via design. SK supported the location of the arts anchor across from Montgomery Park and the 901 N. Fairfax arts space. The park may need changes to be incorporated fully into the Arts District.
- SK asked the applicant was providing parking for the arts anchor planned at the site, and also for the other two arts anchors (at the Muse and the Venue developments) that were going to have parking located at the current 901 N. Pitt Street office site. AF stated that the applicant has identified two parking garages that can potentially be used in the neighborhood. SK reiterated that there should be a district parking solution for the arts anchors.
- SK stated that the prominence of the entry to the building needs to be better defined. SK added that the redevelopment is less challenging contextually to the Tidlock project, though considerations have to be made to provide transitions to the neighboring Watergate development.

Other New Business

- MS formally introduced the OTNUDSG Matrix, a document that each applicant will be required to fill and submit. The Matrix will facilitate design review as the applicant will need to state which standards and guidelines the project complies, and where a deviation from the standards and guidelines are needed, with an explanation. MS stated that a “cleanup” update to the Matrix will be provided in the next few months.
- The Committee discussed the need to see functioning arts anchors to understand their place in the neighborhood and future developments. CM mentioned that the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) is coordinating with arts organizations and developers on utilizing arts anchor spaces in Old Town North.
- The Committee and City staff discussed a tour of recently reviewed UDAC projects in the fall, likely in late October or November (pending).

- KB asked staff about the Hilco proposal for the PRGS (power plant site). Staff mentioned that the City provided initial comments to the applicant on their Coordinated Development District submission, and that a future presentation will be scheduled.
- SK noted that even with UDAC endorsements aside, the overall quality of projects being reviewed by UDAC have been improving

Committee Elections

- SK noted that AO had stated her desire to remain as Secretary.
- SK motioned to nominate AO as Secretary and TS seconded. Motion passed 4-0 (AO absent).
- SK motioned to nominate TS as Vice Chair and TN seconded. Motion passed 4-0 (AO absent).
- TS motioned to nominate SK as Chair, TN seconded. Motion passed 4-0 (AO absent).

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:46 a.m.