

**Old Town North Small Area Plan Update (OTN SAP Update)
Planning, Land Use and Design & Housing
Advisory Group Subcommittee Meeting #3**

**Wednesday, March 22, 2016, 8:00 – 10:00 AM
City Hall, Sister Cities Conference Room 1101**

**SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING NOTES
DRAFT 3.29.2016**

Planning, Land Use and Design & Housing Subcommittee

- Co-Chair Maria Wasowski
- Co-Chair Kevin Harris
- Steven Arabia
- Engin Artemel
- Herb Cooper-Levy
- Austin Flajser
- Thomas Soapes

PLANNING, LAND USE AND DESIGN

This Subcommittee meeting began with an overview of themes for the OTN Urban Design Guidelines which will be updated from the current version, developed in 1994. Like the 1994 version, the updated OTN Urban Design Guidelines will address the OTN Urban Design Subareas, building heights, scale and transitions, building variety, signage, pedestrian level features, building materials, parking locations, and streetscape. A proposal designating North Fairfax Street as an Arts Corridor was recommended by staff as an alternative to the concept of designating OTN in whole or in part as an Arts District. City staff also presented an analysis of known and potential redevelopment sites in Old Town North including sites that are assessed for potential zoning and/or height changes. That number is very few. Finally, City staff gave a presentation on potential open space, land use, and building scale concepts for the NRG Site.

Comments:

Comment: This comment expressed support for the idea of possible art installations on private properties (with the owner’s consent and participation of course) and on public properties along North Fairfax Street, along with potentially installing temporary art-related streetscape improvements on a portion of North Fairfax Street to enhance it. (Proposed Art Corridor Map)

Question: Can you tell us if there are any future plans for the 901 N Pitt Street office building and whether it should be included in the Potential Development Sites map? **Response:** Carr Hospitality (owners of 901 N Pitt) indicated that the property is currently successful as an office building and is currently fully leased. However, the owner further indicated that it realizes that the building creates a mega block effect and suggested the idea of creating a through-block

pathway between the office building and Watergate Condominiums directly to the north, thereby connecting N. Pitt Street to Royal Street and Montgomery Park. The office building itself is designed as an atrium building and the owner indicated that it would not easily accommodate the addition of ground floor uses. The owner indicated that redevelopment of this site would likely be further down the road such as 10 years or possibly more. (Development Sites Analysis)

Question: How does the City intend to address the conversion issue of office to residential?

Response: There is an effort underway by the City and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) to study areas of the City which reflect the highest risk of conversions. The idea is to come up with strategies to support a balanced mix of uses within those areas. The study effort will look at Old Town North as part of this process aligning the timing of the study with the OTN SAP Update process as much as possible. (Development Sites Analysis)

Comment: The idea of building height transitions, through Urban Design Guidelines, is a positive approach to weaving new development into the community context. Design Principles were generated through the Royal Street Bus Garage Ad Hoc Advisory Group process, and they were a good strategy that takes the surrounding context into account. (Urban Design Guidelines Themes Discussion)

Comment: Having diversity in building heights prevents the City or neighborhood from looking like a flat table. (Urban Design Guidelines Themes Discussion)

Comment: In order for retail in Canal Center to be successful a residential population is needed to support nightlife. Maybe converting some of the buildings to residential to create the nighttime population will help enliven this area. (Development Sites Analysis)

Comment: In the 1992 Old Town North Small Area Plan (1992 OTN SAP), the biggest objective was to create a balanced land use mix. The Plan also identifies Alexandria House as the “tent pole” apex of Old Town North from which heights of surrounding buildings descend (1992 OTN SAP, page 50). (Urban Design Guidelines Themes Discussion)

Comment: On Madison Street, by the Rivergate community, there is currently a two foot grass strip next to the brick sidewalk. It would be more beneficial to have the sidewalk all the way to the curb with tree wells instead of the narrow strip of grass. (Urban Design Guidelines Themes Discussion)

Comment: Include FAR in the Urban Design Guidelines Themes discussion from slide 6 of today’s presentation. Include a similar example of pedestrian level features and building materials for residential uses that is shown on slide 13 for commercial buildings. Include a range of sidewalk dimensions on slide 16. **Response:** Yes; that can be done. (Urban Design Guidelines Themes Discussion)

Comment: In slide 13 of today’s presentation showing relationship of building to the street, wouldn’t it be more beneficial for ground floor commercial to have the entrance directly from the sidewalk? **Response:** Slide 13 only shows an example for residential buildings. We will

follow-up with examples for commercial ground floor uses. (Urban Design Guidelines Themes Discussion)

Comment: The owner of the Foreign Car Service when asked about their plans for redevelopment indicated that the business is planning to stay in the neighborhood and is not presently looking to redevelop. The owner further indicated that the business will continue to monitor the OTN SAP Update planning process. In particular, it will do so with respect to options for its property, recognizing that any change identified during the planning process does not require the owner to undertake those changes. (Development Sites Analysis)

Comment: There seems to be a natural synergy between the TransPotomac Plaza, Canal Center and Crowne Plaza Hotel properties. It would be valuable to look at those three developments together. **Response:** The City agrees. There are macro level discussions relating to transportation, open space and streetscape that relate to all three properties. Similarly, there are macro level features pertaining to the area where ARHA, WMATA and the Simpson Building are located and the same applies to the NRG site. In addition, creating connections that tie all three areas together is also possible through transportation, open space and streetscape strategies and design features. (Development Sites Analysis)

Question: What is the future plan for Crowne Plaza? **Response:** The owner of this site, Carr Hospitality, indicated it is studying redevelopment options for the parcel. Currently, additional FAR is needed to develop potential liner townhouses around the hotel to soften the frontage and break down the scale of the building. This is an example of how additional density can be a tool to improve the vibrancy of a block. The townhouses would be designed with front stoops that provide a town square feel, making the site more engaging to the streetscape. (Development Sites Analysis)

Question: Can we look at including affordable housing for artists within the residential developments in Old Town North? **Response:** Yes; artist housing could be explored as part of the affordable units contemplated for the existing area and, as we talk about future development of the NRG site, perhaps the owner can explore the potential for both artist housing and other art related components as part of that redevelopment process. (Development Sites Analysis)

Comment: We don't want to be in a position where we put everything we want that has not been done in the City into the NRG site. On the other hand, the feedback and direction for the NRG site has been good and conceptually something that a developer can potentially work with, recognizing that there will be constraints some of which we may not even be aware of right now. **Response:** NRG has indicated that it is looking for the highest and best use for the site. They envision mix use development, with possibly a potential innovative use as part of that mix use context. However, they have indicated they are seeking the community's input on how it defines innovative use. (NRG Concept)

Comment: We have not discussed adding a recreational element on the Waterfront open space by the NRG site. **Response:** During the Waterfront Plan, boat users have indicated that the NRG site is challenging for boats because it may need major dredging of the area next to the cliff. Plus, there is a big drop off from the cliff area to the water's edge. However, the Waterfront

Plan does include a non-motorized boat launch off the end of Montgomery Street. (NRG Concept)

Comment: The Rivergate Community is concerned about a non-motorized boat launch at the end of Montgomery as it could create a parking problem. (Waterfront Plan)

Comment: Aren't there opportunities for public parking in that surrounding area? **Response:** There is a parking study that will be conducted as part of this process. (Infrastructure Subcommittee - Transportation)

Comment: It would be helpful to know the area of open space on NRG. **Response:** The existing area of the rail/trail corridor is approximately 4 acres, and the existing area of the Waterfront open space to the east of the NRG site is approximately 5 acres. The conceptual Open Space diagram shown on slide 32 of today's presentation could potentially generate an additional 3 to 4 acres on the Waterfront Open Space and Linear Park combined. However, that number needs to be further analyzed before it is confirmed. (NRG Concept)

Question: Is there a need for a school under this OTN SAP Update? **Response:** Based on the development projections which staff hopes to complete by the end of April we will have a sense of the type/amount of public services that should also be contemplated. (NRG Concept)

Comment: Also consider "Production, Distribution, Repair" (PDR) uses on the NRG site. (NRG Concept)

Comment: The Subcommittee came to consensus to change the height strategy slide in today's presentation to extend the mid-scale height designation to the southeast corner of the NRG site. (NRG Concept)

Comment: Density is what creates active retail. Capping height at 50 feet will not achieve the needed density for retail, especially combined with the desire to maintain views to the Waterfront and maximize open space. **Response:** The low scale height area is closest to the parkway and it is set by the Washington Street Standards which govern that area. (NRG Concept)

Comment: We should be cognizant of the view to the water and from the water. Remember, the water acts as a gateway as well. (NRG Concept)

Question: Do we need to take into account any federal approvals or regulations on the NRG site? **Response:** We will have to keep in mind the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) flight path and the 1981 Waterfront Settlement Agreement. Also, any penetration of the waterbed outside the Virginia boundary would initiate NPS review. Similarly, Washington DC would be required to review construction within the water outside the Virginia boundary. (NRG Concept)

Comment: The conceptual streets shown on the NRG site are very important and retain the scale of Alexandria that we are used to. (NRG Concept)

Comment: With future development on the NRG site, how are we addressing climate change?
Response: The Infrastructure and Environmental Sustainability and Transportation Subcommittee is discussing the potential of an Eco-District which will provide sustainability guidelines for development in Old Town North. (Eco-District under another Subcommittee)

Question: Can the Substation on the Potomac River Generating Station site (NRG Site) be encapsulated or compressed? **Response:** The City hopes to explore the possibility of compressing the Substation with Pepco. (NRG Concept)

Comment: Important that we develop NRG as a magnet for innovative uses including incubator spaces. (NRG Concept)

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