

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JULY 20, 2016

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: CARRIE SANDERS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, T&ES

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM #5 – OLD TOWN NORTH SMALL AREA PLAN UPDATE

ISSUE: Receive an update on the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission receive the update on the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update.

BACKGROUND: The current Old Town North Small Area Plan was adopted in 1992. The planning effort to update this small area plan began in September 2015 with the appointment of an Advisory Group and is anticipated to conclude in January 2017 with the Plan's adoption. As part of this process, a week-long charrette was held in November 2016 to identify issues, needs, and ideas for a broad range of categories including transportation, housing, land use, and open space. The transportation analysis for this update will be conducted in three phases over the planning period. The first phase of analysis was conducted in spring 2016 and included a preliminary examination of the potential two-way conversion of Madison and Montgomery Streets, identifying potential railbanking needs and considerations of the Norfolk Southern rail spur, streetscape improvement needs, street connectivity options, and considerations for transit in the area. The second phase of analysis was conducted in spring/summer 2016 and included a parking study to determine the existing parking utilization (on-street and certain off-street locations) in the Old Town North area, and preliminary recommendations. The third phase of analysis, to be conducted in fall 2016, is a more detailed transportation study that identifies the traffic impacts associated with the proposed land use changes. The third phase will include recommendations related to streets, non-motorized improvements, transit improvements and parking. A mini-charrette occurred from June 23-25, which was used to begin developing small area plan recommendations based on the community input received to date. The recommendations will be used as inputs for scenarios in the larger transportation study (Phase 3).

For more information, please visit: <http://www.alexandriava.gov/86032>

DISCUSSION: Staff has completed the Phase 1 and Phase 2 transportation analysis, which has been presented to the Advisory Committee. A summary of some of the key results from these phases follows below:

Madison / Montgomery Two-Way Conversion (Phase 1)

The Transportation Long Range Plan (LRP) includes a study to evaluate the conversion of Madison and Montgomery Streets from one-way to two-way operation. In addition, because Montgomery Street is proposed as a commercial/retail corridor, a two-way operation has been recommended as being vital to the success of the retail corridor. Converting the streets would require new or modified traffic signals and conduits, new four-way stop configurations, potential utility impacts, and intersection improvements such as at Washington Street and Montgomery that could include a potential southbound left turn and/or westbound left turn. The traffic study in Phase 3 will include more in-depth analysis of the needs and traffic impacts.

Madison Street was recommended in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan as an enhanced bicycle facility. The potential conversion for Madison Street would need to be coordinated with the development of the enhanced bicycle corridor to determine impacts and potential design solutions, and will also be analyzed in the traffic study. Transit would continue to operate on Madison and Montgomery as it does now with any possible conversions.

Streetscape Improvements / Royal Street Neighborhood Bikeway (Phase 1)

Staff have been developing preliminary streetscape improvements for the study area that include possible improvements such as wider sidewalks, bulb-outs, landscaping, trees and stormwater management improvements. The recently approved Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan recommends a neighborhood bikeway on Royal Street to connect the north and south ends of the Mt. Vernon Trail. This bikeway would function as an additional north-south route, parallel to Union Street, through Old Town. The neighborhood bikeway would create a more direct and comfortable route for bicyclists using tools such as traffic calming measures, signage, pedestrian improvements, and streetscape improvements.

Norfolk Southern Rail Spur / Railbanking (Phase 1)

The existing rail spur that connects from the mainline through Old Town North to Pendleton Street is owned by Norfolk Southern. Staff has been evaluating options to use the spur for other uses, such as a linear park and improved non-motorized facility, or for transit. One option involves the railbanking process. Railbanking is a federal program where the rail right of way is preserved and kept intact as a rail corridor in case rail service needs to be reinstated in the future. In the interim the land can be used by a public agency or non-profit for a public use such as a trail. In general, the likelihood of restarting rail service is typically very small. Many public trails, including the Capital Crescent Trail in DC are the result of the railbanking process. Staff has had preliminary discussions with Norfolk Southern about using the railbanking process for the rail corridor and Norfolk Southern indicated they do not see a need to continue this segment in the future. However, they would like to preserve an active status of the line to accommodate work related to decommissioning the NRG site, including demolition, remediation, and redevelopment.

Transit Considerations (Phase 1)

During the charrette process, citizens suggested the consideration of the Norfolk Southern rail spur for high capacity transit, such as a streetcar, light rail, or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). If the City were to construct these types of transit options, the City would be required to purchase the rail right-of-way, rather than pursue rail banking due to the heavy investment required of such systems. Staff have conducted a preliminary evaluation for using the right of way for a potential street car, light rail, or BRT. Staff have concluded that it is not feasible to use the right-of-way for this type of transit for a number of reasons: 1) it would be challenging to connect to either the Braddock Road

or future Potomac Yard metrorail stations; 2) it is unlikely that a high capacity transit along this corridor would generate enough ridership due to the adjacent land uses and density; and 3) the project would likely lack competitiveness for federal funding due to the cost to benefit ratio among other federal criteria. Instead, staff recommends using the existing street grid, and future streets within the NRG site, to improve transit service and connectivity to metrorail stations. This recommendation does not preclude longer term use of the spur/right-of-way for a transit service should the right-of-way be fully purchased.

Parking Study (Phase 2)

The parking study (Phase 2 analysis) for Old Town North is complete. Data was collected during May, and the consultant is in the process of preparing summary and preliminary recommendations. The study collected occupancy data for on-street parking on all the streets in the planning area and eight off-street parking locations. The observed peak for on-street parking was 72% occupied, which occurred on a weekday evening. The Friday evening and Saturday peaks were 52% and 67%, respectively. While this indicates there is available parking within the entire study area, the study noted several blocks with parking occupancies above 85%. Many of these were blocks around the retail uses, of which many are currently unrestricted parking. With regard to off-street parking, the peak occupancy for each of the eight garages that were surveyed was well below 85%, indicating there is a substantial amount of vacant parking in these garages. The consultant's recommendations will address implementing shared parking and new meter or time restricted on-street parking locations.

Phase 3 – Transportation Study

The City staff has worked with the Advisory Committee to identify future development sites, including the NRG site, land uses and densities, the Plan's street network, and population and employment projections. The proposed development, street layout, and population and employment projections will be used in Phase 3 for the transportation study's 2040 build scenario. The City is in the process of selecting a consultant for the transportation study, and anticipates to begin Phase 3 in summer 2016. Phase 3 is expected to be completed by late 2016. The 2040 Build scenario will be compared with existing conditions, and a 2040 baseline scenario, which only assumes current planned and programmed improvements and developments. The transportation study will also conduct additional analysis for the two-way conversion of Madison-Montgomery, non-motorized connections and impacts, parking needs, and additional mitigation measures.