



ADHOC PLANNING COMMISSION COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

Virginia Square Sector Plan/Virginia Square Site (Latitude Apartments - Site Plan #426) Meeting #3

October 14, 2013

Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Charles Monfort (Chair), Steve Cole, Brian Harner, Rosemary Ciotti, Nancy Iacomini

MEETING AGENDA

This was the third and final meeting of the Adhoc Planning Commission Committee to discuss Virginia Square Sector Plan guidance for the Virginia Square Site. Charles Monfort, who is chairing the item, provided introductory remarks. The chair allowed for public comment throughout the meeting.

Planning staff summarized previously distributed documents that analyzed the Latitude site plan project compliance with the Zoning Ordinance and relevant Virginia Square Sector Plan guidance. Staff also responded to questions about how site plan features were characterized. Overall, the discussion was focused on areas of noncompliance with zoning and sector plan guidance.

Lastly, a handout was distributed by the Monroe Condominiums representative that included a potential set of criteria for evaluating when to approve deviations from a sector plan.

DISCUSSION

Zoning Ordinance Compliance

- What about the proposed balconies? Is that a zoning issue or a site plan issue?
 - The proposed balconies are not a zoning issue, they will require an encroachment on the N. Monroe Street side because they extend over the public sidewalk, which is a site plan issue.
- Concern was raised about the requested parking modification; community members felt an office use would have less of an impact on evening and weekend parking availability in the neighborhood.

Sector Plan Guidance

- Concern that the matrix does not accurately display if the project meets sector plan goals.
- Should we be concerned about following sector plan guidance to the letter?
 - Sector plans are not the law, but provide policy guidance. Zoning is the law.

- Consideration of progress on sector plan goals may need to be evaluated beyond the boundaries of this site.
- Compliance with sector plan guidance can be viewed multiple ways (Ex: residential units could be viewed as satisfied already or as being fulfilled by this proposal)
- Concern that proposed open space goal would not be met with an office development on this site due to typical floorplate needed for an office use
 - This site may not be appropriate for a “traditional” office building; office uses may still be conceivable here but in a different form than what we are used to seeing now; perhaps for a smaller entity with different floorplate requirements
- Sector plan may have been too optimistic with regard to some of its goals, particularly cultural uses. Some components may need to be revisited.

Land Use

- Concern that not holding firm on office uses here may lead to it being abandoned on other sites as well
- Use mix suggested seems to be encouraging activity in the area all day long; the desire for shared parking plays into this as well
 - Yes, however times have changed, with more people working from home, many residential areas are more active during the day than previously assumed
- We should consider if it really is a bad thing that Virginia Square has become more residential over time. It is difficult to determine what degree of office is necessary to make Virginia Square the place we want. We shouldn't speculate about the specifics of a building type that can or cannot be accommodated on a particular site. We need to determine if an office use on this site is really required to make the neighborhood successful. If so, what do we need to do to bring it here?
- This site has the most potential for an office use, but it doesn't mean it necessarily has to be an office use. Concern that if residential use is approved here, we'll lose that potential. This project might be viewed differently if more medical office were already here or if the funeral home site were constructed.
- The site would be appropriate for office or for residential uses, but why is an office use here necessary to make Virginia Square a 24-hour place?
- Land use is not the issue. The issue is whether or not the project furthers sector plan goals. We need to be careful not to depart from the sector plan without adequate consideration. Both the GLUP and zoning would allow a mix of uses here and permit what the market will support, however the sector plan indicates what the community preference is.
- Everything on N. side of Fairfax is office, this would change that and locate a residential building in front of another residential building
 - Yes, but there is no inherent issue with having residential uses next to residential
- Shared parking would be increased with an office building as well; concern that shared parking proposed here would be taken up by visitors of the residential building and not be available for patrons of the cultural and retail uses on site

Proposed Evaluation Tool

- Matrix/checklist proposed by the committee member is somewhat process oriented; circumstances that may justify a departure from a sector plan are not easily objectified
- Goal of the tool is to provide a way to avoid making arbitrary and capricious decisions
- Planning Commission does not take financial impacts into account; planning should take the long view
- How does staff evaluate site plans?
 - We look at the General Land Use Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and sector plans in determining what we think is appropriate for the site and for the County as a whole.

Cultural Uses

- Thoughts from the arts committee on opportunities for this site?
 - The County does not have a facilities master plan for Arts. As a result we don't know what we have or what we need. It's difficult to assess what could/should be here.
 - Perhaps the commission could start its own study/plan in the meantime
- Between Maury Park and the library, there could certainly be additional arts/cultural uses in the area, as well as allied retail called for in the plan.
- Arlington could be an arts incubator. However, it's difficult for artists to find affordable housing and develop a presence on their own - the artists need a place to live first.

Final Comments/Observations

- Metro usage and on-street parking remain community concerns
- Many participants expressed an appreciation for this process and the resources devoted to it by the County
- Concern that several site plan issues still have not been addressed
 - These will be part of the discussion at both the Planning Commission and the County Board
- There still is no compelling reason to depart from the sector plan. Concern that this project will have a negative impact on nearby residents
- BVSCA has heard concerns mainly regarding parking and the negative impact of residential vs. office uses on the site.
- Cultural use remains undefined but could potentially accommodate rehearsal space. This would not require a lot of parking and could activate the space at night. Not 100% sure that having an office use here is necessary, perhaps we should take another look at the sector plan itself.
- The fundamental question is how to create a mixed use community.
- Would have been helpful if more people who were part of the sector plan process participated here. The office use was proposed here to attract a black box theater, provide shared parking, and obtain a public plaza. The sector plan is a living document and there are more things at stake than just land use. We should be looking at how to further all of the plan's goals, not just one.

- Residential still isn't appropriate here because we already have enough elsewhere and we should keep this site open for future office development.
- Chair will present a summary of this process at the November PC meeting.

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

- Provide information about existing parking utilization levels for residential projects in the area.
- Is there a significant difference with regard to parking and traffic for office vs. residential uses?

NEXT STEPS

- The PowerPoint presentation, meeting materials, and handouts will be posted to the Site Plan project page for the Latitude here:
http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/CPHD/planning/applications/site_plans/page87425.aspx
- The Latitude Site Plan project will be reviewed next by the Transportation Commission (10/30), Planning Commission (11/04 or 11/06), and County Board (11/16).