

SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

SPRC Meeting #2, June 8, 2015

Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Erik Gutshall (Chair), Steve Sockwell, Rosemary Ciotti, Jane Siegel, Nancy Iacomini, James Schroll, Chris Forinash

MEETING AGENDA

This was the second Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) meeting to review proposed major site plan amendment SP #46, located at 4000 and 4040 Fairfax Drive. The applicant proposes a 22-story residential building on the site of the existing Carpool restaurant at 4000 Fairfax Drive.

Staff made a presentation summarizing the discussion at the first SPRC meeting on May 13 for the benefit of members who were not able to attend that meeting, as well as some follow up information on the three other residential buildings in the "C-O-A" district that had height modifications above 216 feet, as well as the heights of buildings in the immediate vicinity of the Carpool site. The applicant made a presentation on the building architecture and streetscape.

The following was the agenda for the meeting:

- 4) Building Architecture
 - a) Design Issues
 - i) Building form (height, massing, tapering, setbacks)
 - ii) Facade treatments, materials, fenestration
 - iii) Roof line/penthouse form and materials
 - iv) Street level activism/entrances & exits
 - v) LEED/Earthcraft/Green Home Choice Score
 - vi) Accessibility
 - ~~vii) Historic Preservation (if applicable)~~
 - b) Retail Spaces (if applicable)
 - i) Location, size, ceiling heights
 - ii) Storefront designs and transparency
 - iii) Mix of tenants (small v. large, local v. national)
 - c) Service Issues
 - i) Utility equipment
 - ii) Venting location and type
 - iii) Location and visibility of loading and trash service
 - iv) Exterior/rooftop lighting

SPRC DISCUSSION

Because of the light turnout at the first SPRC meeting on May 13, before beginning the Committee's discussion of architectural matters, the Chair permitted questions and brief comments on Agenda items 1-3 that were covered by the first meeting.

- Carrie Johnson: How is any potential Webb Building redevelopment affected by this proposal? Does the applicant have a concept for redeveloping the Webb Building? Requested that the staff report explain the development ramifications.
 - Applicant explained that the nature of the "C-O-A" district is that by combining the two lots, more density is permitted than if the lots were developed separately. By combining the lots, up to 6.0 FAR (6.5 if the total project is at least 90% residential) is permitted. The Webb Building has approximately 185,000 sq, feet that will remain for the future. If the Webb Building is redeveloped, this density could be transferred to a new residential building.
- Nancy Iacomini: Would like to see Webb Building not redevelop. Midcentury modern buildings should be preserved.
- Bill Gearhart: If the Webb Building redevelops, how would access be maintained to the residential building, since access is from Randolph Street?
 - Applicant will have a presentation during Transportation discussion.
- Are the curbs where staff wants them?
 - Staff is working with the applicant and we are getting there.
- Is a parking lane being eliminated? Is the building line different from what other building lines are?
 - Parking is maintained on Fairfax Drive and Quincy Street. The curb line has not been finally set, but will be in general consistent with what surrounds.

Architecture

- Jane Siegel: How much of the façade is glass vs. masonry? And will the glass be very reflective and harmful for birds?
 - Applicant replied about 50/50 glass/masonry. The glass will have a UV filter to give it a light blue coloration and also be non-reflective. The applicant also shared sample materials at this time, including glass samples.
- C. Johnson: Is the parapet wall screening mechanical units? Is all the space on the roof used?
 - The parapet screens only mechanical equipment, but the mechanical equipment does not occupy the entire roof.
- C. Johnson: The Sector Plan does not call for this to be a gateway site. The highest heights should be at the Metro entrance and then taper away. We should look at Ballston as a whole rather than block-by-block. Also, rooftop amenities (e.g., the club room) may be too prominent with occupiable space above the 216' height limit and interior lighting visible to the surrounding community.

- Staff responded that neither the Sector Plan nor the GLUP have guidance on concentrating or sculpting heights. The “C-O-A” zoning regulations permits the maximum height of 216’ in any area of covered by the “C-O-A” zoning, and the surrounding “C-O-A” residential buildings to this proposed site (and the building across the street in Virginia Square zoned “RA-H-3.2”) are at, or very close to, 216 feet in height. [Additional information: The proposed building, at 229 feet, will not be the tallest in Ballston, and Alta Vista (which is located at the Metro station entrance), at 246 feet in height, will remain the tallest structure in all of Ballston. Another building, also 246 feet in height, was approved at the planned western entrance of the Ballston station, but has not been constructed.] An SPRC member requested additional information about the “bulls-eye” concept which will be provided in the next staff report.
- Chris Forinash: While the Ballston Plan does not provide detailed guidance, this a prominent site due to its location at the entrance to the Ballston Sector, and the topography and the bend in Fairfax Drive. Building could possibly be a little shorter.
- N. Iacomini: likes the design in general but that reduction of height by a floor would probably not be detrimental to the architecture as the applicant argued.
- C. Johnson: Question if the “flat roofed” option the applicant showed, where the three towers are equal height, actually accommodates more density?
 - Applicant stated that each scenario accommodates the same density.
- N. Iacomini: Statement that while Fairfax Drive was envisioned in the original plans as the main street of Ballston, conditions over the decades have shifted the epicenter to Wilson Boulevard being the center, with the most retail, foot traffic, and the Mall.
- Bill Ross: Don’t want to discourage interesting design, but height could be reduced with little harm.
- Tom Korns: Site seems like a gateway site, and the Bull’s-eye concept has been largely lost. Prefers a block-by-block planning basis at least for Ballston.
- Rosemary Ciotti: It is a prominent corner, especially since Quincy Street was extended and became a major arterial after the plan was adopted. Would like the plaza to seem more open and inviting, seat walls may discourage people from entering. The intersection, with plazas on other corners is important and should be celebrated. Some plazas in Ballston suffer and the retail suffers because they are hidden. Pointed to Quincy Station across the street, where some retail is not visible at all from the street.
 - Applicant stated that the seat walls help with the grade change at that corner, so that the plaza is flat.
- At this point, the Chair asked Justin Falango of the County Urban Design and Research team of his thoughts on the architecture. Falango stated that he generally likes the building but would like to see an expression line between the 2nd and third floor, a little

more color contrast, and something to be done to decorate the blank wall at the rear of the property.

- The Chair also stated that he would like the blank wall to be improved also.
- The Chair, while generally supporting the direct access from the bike room to the street, also requested the applicant and staff examine if there is a possibility of pedestrian and bicycle conflicts at that location, and requested that staff and the applicant give it some thought and study what other jurisdictions have done, whether there is warning signage, or special paving, that would alleviate potential conflicts.
- T. Korn: How would bikes enter the room, and would there be automatic doors?
 - Applicant responded that there would be a pass.
- C. Johnson: Could the landscaping around the Webb Building be improved to be more interesting?
 - Applicant stated that the landscaping is relatively new, and will grow out, but they could take a look at what they could do to improve it.
- At this point, there was general discussion about how the applicant was making up the required minimum 10% landscaping.
 - Applicant stated that the Carpool site alone was approximately 9%.
 - The Chair requested that the applicant provide detailed breakout of the landscaping proposed, including by level (grade, rooftop, etc.) and which portion of the site (4000 or 4040 Fairfax Dr.)

Transportation

Due to lack of time, the Chair permitted applicant and staff presentations on transportation, including the applicant's proposed parking ratio of .8 spaces per unit and 29% compact parking ratio. The applicant stated that they will also have knockout panels between the two parking garages if conditions require connecting the garages. Jane Kim of DES stated that the County is currently working on a residential parking reduction policy but it will not be ready for this site plan. Comments on transportation from the Committee were not taken at this time due to lack of time.

Wrap-Up

Steve Sockwell: Liked the architecture but applicant can improve the blank wall on the west façade. Still needs to know how the streetscape would work.

B. Gearhart: Want cross-sections existing and proposed for next time. Better drawings showing the back of the building. Can Quincy Street be used as the parking and loading and the driveway on Fairfax Drive closed up?

James Schroll: Generally likes the project, but would like the applicant to observe the plaza across the street to see what works and doesn't work in making inviting public plazas. Also would like to see the applicant come up with ideas to reduce potential pedestrian/bike conflict.

J. Siegel: Generally favorable to the Project, likes the commitment to LEED Gold. Lighting of the building, esp. rooftop should not reflect into the neighborhood. Neutral on the height issue, feels that this is a prominent site.

R. Ciotti: Make sure the retail unit heights reflect the recommendations of the new Retail Action Plan. Please reexamine the accessibility of the project, especially the public plaza.

N. Iacomini: Building seems very light, maybe a few darker contrasts somewhere? This building can still be prominent without the additional height. Would like the applicant to provide a view of the building from Washington-Lee High School?

C. Johnson: Would like additional context views including Fairfax Drive looking west and from the other side of Quincy. If the additional height is just screening wall, can do something more interesting there or cut it back? Some larger dwelling units would encourage a more diverse population in Ballston, since this is an FAR zone wouldn't affect density.

B. Ross: Like the project in general, wants to see how the plaza will relate to the other plazas on the other corners.

Collier Cook: Okay with architecture, but the bathroom vents kind of stick out. Some places have hidden them in the window areas. The street widths seem to keep changing. Would like confidence in the parking justification.

T. Korn: Great location, likes the architecture. Concerned about upgrading the landscaping around the Webb Building.