



## SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

**Ballston Quarter (SP #193)**  
**SPRC Meeting #2**  
**July 30, 2015**

**Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Steve Cole, Chris Forinash, Ginger Brown, Rosemary Ciotti, Erik Gutshall, Brian Harner, and James Schroll**

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### MEETING AGENDA

This was the second SPRC meeting on the Ballston Quarter development proposals. The meeting began with an introduction by the SPRC Chair followed by a presentation by the applicant responding to comments and questions from SPRC Meeting #1. In providing the introduction, the SPRC Chair noted that while the applicant would be showing a proposal to include a bridge, the detailed discussion regarding that bridge would occur at SPRC Meeting #3 as part of the transportation discussion. The focus of the SPRC discussion for the meeting included:

- Site Design and Characteristics; and
- Building Architecture

Consistent with SPRC Meeting #1, there were periods for public comment as part of the SPRC discussion. Following the SPRC discussion the meeting concluded with wrap up by committee members and a summary of the main discussion points by the SPRC Chair.

### SPRC DISCUSSION

#### **Applicant Review and Response to Issues from SPRC #1:**

The applicant presented a review and response to the issues from SPRC #1 including the pedestrian bridge and the unit mix. The applicant showed the location of a potential bridge that could be constructed across Wilson Boulevard and a proposed alignment. The applicant noted that as proposed there would be a shorter distance across the bridge to the mall than what currently exists today and it would be connected to the central point of vertical circulation, the proposed blade. With regard to the unit mix, the applicant demonstrated how units could be combined to respond to changing demographics and demand in the future. The discussion and comments following the applicant's presentation are provided below:

- There was a question as to the difficulty in making the changes to the units as shown.

- The applicant responded that it would not be dissimilar to re-tenanting an office space.
- Another follow up question was asked regarding what would cause the developer to make the changes to the units shown.
  - The applicant responded that it would be difficult to say but perhaps related to vacancies.
- It was asked if staff could add to its report for the record the proposed unit mix.
  - Staff responded that this is something that could be considered recognizing that it is only proposed and the unit mix is not something that is being approved with the project.
- Another question was asked regarding whether or not there were any Zoning issues that would make it difficult for units to be combined.
  - Staff replied that there were not. It would be a matter of the process whether the changes could occur administratively or would require County Board action, but physically there would be no as long as the changes meet code.
- A request was made for clarification of the number of units by which the project would be reduced if the units as shown were to be combined on each floor.
- It was asked whether any consideration had been given to making the residential building condos.
  - The applicant replied no indicating that rental is what the market currently dictates.
- A citizen thanked the applicant for their response to the pedestrian bridge concerns and noted the applicant said all the right things. The citizen referenced for everyone's attention the County Board's actions of December 2, 1986.
- It was noted that there was concern regarding the alignment of the proposed bridge in getting people to the Metro and parking and that there needs to be a continuous related condition in the interim.
  - The SPRC Chair noted that any temporary improvements would be addressed during the topic of construction phasing.
- A citizen asked when we would get the final seal and deal on the bridge.
  - The SPRC Chair noted that this would occur with County Board approval.
  - The applicant noted that they were committed to pursuing a project with a bridge through to County Board action.
- An SPRC member indicated concern regarding the four-party agreement related to the bridge.
  - The applicant clarified the parties and the agreements and indicated cooperation with all.
- A resident asked what the County's position was on the bridge.
  - The Planning Division Director indicated the County was committed to review the applicant's proposal with a bridge and making the project work.
- An SPRC member asked whether or not the County was a legal party to the bridge because of the conditions.

- Staff replied that conditions are enforced by the County and with the original site plan approval there was a condition requiring construction of the bridge. Staff noted that this condition had been fulfilled and with a site plan amendment under review, there would likely be new conditions that would be considered.
- A citizen asked how many more meetings the community will need to attend before there is a final decision on the bridge.
  - The SPRC Chair again replied, that there would not be a final decision on the bridge until the County Board takes action.
- It was asked that the applicant clarify the alternative bridge alignment for the visually impaired asking specifically if it was covered with protection from the elements and whether the applicant will need to look at agreements with WMATA and FTA.
  - The applicant replied that the bridge would be covered.
  - The SPRC Chair indicated certainty that the County will endeavor to meet all of its legal agreements and requirements.

### **Site Design and Characteristics:**

The applicant presented several graphics and images related to site design and layout. After the presentation, staff reiterated comments provided in the report regarding connectivity through the site and in relationship to adjacent and surrounding networks as something that needs to continue to be considered and evaluated.

#### ***General***

- It was asked that the applicant clarify the space on Wilson Boulevard in front of the mall at Macy's including providing dimensions of the west plaza.
  - The applicant clarified this space and noted that the dimensions of the plaza as 100 ft x 50 ft.
- It was noted that it would be helpful to have a profile of the buildings on both sides of the streets to note façade locations.
- A question was asked as to whether the proposal includes a review of Macy's
  - The SPRC Chair responded that it did not.

#### ***Connectivity – Pedestrian***

- A committee member commented on the desire line of people getting from Metro to the mall to Glebe. It was noted that a direct line of site is needed from Wilson to Glebe to funnel pedestrian traffic there. Also, it was noted that the east-west connection should have a clear line of site. It was suggested that the building could be lifted up to allow for cut through traffic under the building to Randolph Street. Another committee member was in agreement with these comments.
  - The applicant noted their belief that the project is highly connective and that they want people on the street as they will have great store fronts.
- A request was made that a map in all directions around the site be provided showing pedestrian crossings and bus stops, etc. at the next meeting.

- It was asked of staff whether the interior passage way being developed at the adjacent Founder's Square project is supposed to continue through the block. In addition it was asked whether we can do something better to humanize Randolph Street.

### *Retail*

- It was noted that this project provides an opportunity to make Glebe road habitable and that the applicant should anticipate that ground level retail could have doors on both sides with reference to conditions for the Pentagon Row site plan.
- A committee member interested in tenancy asked who the retailers are that the applicant referenced and whether there are indications that they are waiting in the wings to move in after renovations.
  - The applicant noted that they do not disclose names of potential tenants in the absence of signed leases but noted that several best in class national, regional, and local tenants, chef driven restaurants are considering it. The applicant further noted that they are looking at a cared over tenant mix and that they are not trying to compete with other large scale retail centers.
    - It was noted that small spaces for startups should be provided if possible.
      - The applicant agreed.

### *Site Circulation/Ground Floor/Public Realm*

- In addition, appreciation was expressed for the challenges faced by the design team but again it was reiterated that there needs to be more work on the public circulation of the mall. It was asked that the ground floor plan be shown in terms of how it connects with the street.
- Clarification on the E-trade building entrance on Glebe was requested in relation to the ground floor plan. It was asked if the doorway entrance would be upgraded.
  - The applicant responded, that was the goal after walking through this entrance.
- It was noted that pedestrian circulation will change during the holiday season and asked how this will function. A question was also asked about whether there would be a big tree in the plaza and for clarification about the location of the market.
  - The applicant noted that the doors would open wide with an area of market stalls and that during the holidays it is designed to be a place where people gather still. It is intended to be a highly programmed space and that people would be walking under cover in most of the space.
- It was asked that the applicant clarify what happens after you enter through the E-Trade building.

### *Public Spaces*

- A committee member indicated that they had trouble understanding how the center would operate on the ground floor. Specifically, how would the mews bring people into the retail? In addition, it was asked if the applicant had given any consideration to bringing the plaza up to the ground level.

- The applicant stated that the plan is fundamentally the same as it is today and that it has been designed to be a destination/urban space. They noted that they would rely on the power of Wilson Boulevard. Further the applicant stated that it would be impractical to come straight into the mew from Randolph Street.
- In response to considerations for raising the plaza, the applicant noted that the steps would be landscaped seating areas and not just steps but an amphitheater of activity.
- It was requested that future materials distinguish between the County owned areas and the areas of private property in the public realm.
- The quality of the architects on the project team was recognized but it was noted that there needs to be something more enticing than hotel lounge seating at the bottom of the plaza.
- A committee member asked for the width of the mews.
  - The applicant indicated it was 18 feet wide.
  - As a follow up the staff was asked to provide its recommendation on an appropriate width of the mews in relation to comments about it being widened.
- Comments were again expressed in appreciation of the struggles faced by the architects noting that from a place making perspective, the project won't create energy from the blocks around it but rather that it needs to have magnetism in and of itself. Questions were asked as to why the mews did not connect from outdoor space to outdoor space and whether or not the west plaza has enough power and magnetism to draw people in. The applicant was asked whether any consideration had been given to enlarging the plaza strengthening the edges and centers.
  - The applicant responded that it is all driven by tenancy, retail wants and practical considerations.
- It was noted that the Wilson Boulevard façade is driving the proposal. Concern was noted that the full Wilson Boulevard frontage is not shown. A request was made that the elevation of the west plaza also be shown.
- Concerns were raised regarding safety with the platform. It was noted that access would be needed in case of emergency.

### **Building Architecture:**

After a presentation by the applicant on the architecture for the proposed buildings to include the mall renovations, the new proposed residential building and the office building renovations, the follow discussion ensued.

#### ***General***

- It was asked in relation to the retail circulation, whether the service area could be enlarged?
  - The applicant noted it did not need to be enlarged but that they should re-characterize how the space is represented.
- A committee member noted that they would like to see an extended sidewalk for vehicles on Wilson Boulevard – a lay by area for pick up and drop off and valet.

- The applicant noted that there is currently street side parking on Wilson and there is an opportunity to consider this further.
- A committee member requested to have more thorough discussion regarding the accessibility details of the project.

### ***Mall Renovations***

- Several members noted that they were concerned about the brick on the Wilson Boulevard façade. It was commented that the brick was a detraction that takes away from what the applicant is trying to do. It was offered up that glass or an alternate treatment be considered. It was asked whether this was the existing brick. It was noted that it was unfortunate to keep the bricks on the Wilson Boulevard façade that the renderings are confusing, and the elevations need to be coordinated. A challenge noted with the warehouse look was that it is not a cohesive urban space that the community is looking for.
- There were several comments relating that the mall character remains unchanged.
- It was further noted that the transitions between interior and exterior, modern architecture feels more like interior mall than brick architecture and to look at breaking the pattern a bit. It was also suggested that the walkways between the two sides of the mall could be thinned out so there is less slab; that this might “de-mall” it a bit more. It was noted that the applicant should break the monotony of the modern design a bit and that maybe the blade or east plaza become the place of creation.
- The façade of the mall entry fronting onto the plaza was noted as possibly needing something more to it to be iconic that there was too much equivalency from top to bottom.
- It was reiterated that Macy’s should be looked at as a blank slate as it needs completely new treatment. It was further noted that although it was beyond the scope, the needs to be outreach to Macy’s to do something better with their façade that’s more creative.
- The extremely mall noted environment was again reiterated and it was noted that it does not communicate that this is a new day. That the design was not complementary but too contrasting and that this should be re-thought in terms of the materials.

### ***Residential Building***

- With regard to the residential building, it was noted that the form was a good choice. However there was a concern raised regarding transparency. Additional comments on the residential building included the lack of expression of the cornice line.

### ***Office Building Renovations***

- With respect to the office building renovation, it was noted that the space created by the new office entry towers need to have more activation. It was asked if the space can be more engaging with the Macy’s building and whether there could be more height on the office entry towers.
  - The applicant indicated that they would explore this but noting their sensitivity to Macy’s

- It was stated that they should be creative.

### ***Randolph Street***

- The Randolph Street frontage was noted as being mysterious. It was noted that something is needed to draw people more clearly into the interior that let's someone know that the mall is there until you get to Wilson Boulevard. In addition, it was noted that the eastern entrance to the project was creating a dead zone from Virginia Square and Mosaic Park without a lot of clues being provided about what's there. It was further noted that there is a lack of indication that the outdoor spaces are outdoors.

### ***Blade and Vertical Circulation***

- It was commented that more vertical connections are needed between levels and that the narrowness of the project needs to be addressed.
- It was noted that the blade would be successful.

### ***East and West Plaza***

- It was noted that it needs to be better signaled that the plaza and other spaces are public spaces. It was asked whether there was enough of a buffer zone being provided and space to program the plaza as represented by the applicant noting that it may need more depth. Further concern was noted about the entry of the plaza dropping into space.
- In reviewing the east plaza, it was noted that the applicant should be careful not to cross the line in paying homage to industrial architecture.
- In reviewing the west plaza, a question was raised about whether signs shown meeting the provisions of the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance and that the applicant should make sure the representation is accurate.
- A question was asked how you access the retail steps into the plaza and how it is protected by someone coming from the Metro.
- It was noted that it would be nice if some of the public spaces were family friendly areas attractive to children.
- A committee member noted that they thought the west plaza was going to be a much bigger deal and that the applicant needs to tone down the expectations some.

### ***The Mews***

- Cady's Ally was referenced as a good example to explore with respect to the mews with further discussion and questions about how to move away from mall to something else.
- A question was asked about how lighted the mews would be and how it would be lit and how it would give an outdoor feel in the winter months.
  - The applicant described that they had completed sun studies and that the mews receives light and that it will be a wonderful space.

### **Public Comment:**

- A comment was made complimenting the developer on their decision regarding the bridge.
- It was noted that a contrast in materials was needed for the visually impaired at entrances and on the ground, that it should not just be white-on-white.
- Concern was expressed about ramping that might be needed and markings for the plaza and stairs was noted.

#### SPRC Wrap Up:

- It was noted that there will need to be a long discussion on the TIA at the next meeting.
- There was agreement with prior committee comments on Glebe Road and signs. Further it was noted that a justification for the parking ratio and TDM will need to be discussed and that there were concerns regarding parking and loading.
- Keeping a bridge was identified as being a correct conclusion however, there was concern expressed by several members that there was no study to keep the existing bridge. Agreement was expressed with comments related to circulation from Randolph Street to the mews as missing and it was noted that there is lack of cut through traffic being encouraged.
- Concern was expressed for the vertical circulation beyond the blade, asking whether there is other vertical circulation on the other end of the project.
- Thanks was expressed by several regarding the applicant's decision regarding the bridge. It was noted that frameless windows should be reconsidered and that consideration should be given to the Glebe bridge plan.
- Questions regarding whether entrances line up with the cross walks were raised.
- It was noted that the east plaza needs interesting outdoor materials to invite people to come in.
- A comment was made about not understanding Macy's lobby in relation to west plaza entry.
- Concern was expressed about the parking ratio and safety for pedestrians on the street. The importance of Glebe Road was again recognized and additional concern was expressed regarding programming of the plaza space. It was noted that community benefits related to bonus density and height were being considered by the Ashton Heights civic association.
- It was noted that there was cautious optimism about the proposal as an asset but that there was still a feeling of this being a repositioning. It was noted that Bluemont would be evaluating bonus density and height in relation to other projects under review and the impact on their neighborhood.
- Agreement was expressed regarding the blank walls on the Macy's façade. It was asked whether the police had reviewed the plans as there was concern expressed regarding the amount of dead space in Ballston and would happen to the plaza spaces after dark.
  - The police receive a copy of all site plan applications filed and review them with respect to their compliance and consistency with the CPTED program.
- It was expressed that there needs to be a better understanding of access and more internal circulation – elevators, etc.

- A better depiction of materials and more artist renderings were requested.
- The Ballston BID noted that they were committed to working with the mall to program the public spaces.
- It was noted that the entrance alignment was not realistic and that the applicant should bring more creativity from the plaza to the interior in terms of design and architecture to make it look less “mall-like” and more of a retail street. It was suggested that the white bridge spans between the warehouse and modern design of the mall could be a different material altogether.

### **SPRC Chair Summary:**

The SPRC Chair concluded based on the discussion that everyone really wants the redevelopment to work and that comments were made in the right spirit. The main points of discussion were summarized as follows:

#### ***Site Design***

- Connectivity at the east plaza to the mews and Randolph Street was considered important.
- The narrowness of the mews was a concern.
- The function, size, and programming of both plazas was an issue.
- Questions remained about tenant mix.

#### ***Architecture***

- The northern end of the residential building on Randolph Street breaks the notion of wrapping the corner with retail.
- How the mall relates to the street, and pick up and drop off is an outstanding question.
- There was general support for the blade.
- The relationship between the new and the old material of the mall was an issue.
- Macy’s participation was considered important with the County encouraged to reach out.
- There are concerns about safety and security.
- Signs should be reviewed with staff to ensure they can be approved as represented.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The next SPRC Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 16, 2015. The discussion for the meeting will focus on transportation and open space issues.