

## SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

### **Ballston Quarter (SP #193) SPRC Meeting #3 September 16, 2015**

**Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Steve Cole, Ginger Brown, Rosemary Ciotti, Nancy Iacomini**

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### **MEETING AGENDA**

This was the third 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 #2. The focus of the SPRC was:

- Transportation; and
- Open Space

Consistent with SPRC Meeting #2, there were periods for the community to comment on the agenda items. The meeting concluded with wrap up and a summary of the main discussion points by the SPRC Chair.

### **SPRC DISCUSSION**

#### **Applicant Presentation in Response to Comments/Issues from SPRC #2:**

The applicant presented updates on the following outstanding issues and comments from the community and committee members:

- Pedestrian Bridge
- Randolph Street Connection
- Mews Design
- Glebe Road

#### *SPRC Comment*

- Randolph Street Connection
  - A member indicated preference for a straight on connection as what was presented it was noted still felt like a back door. Appreciation was expressed

- that something was being done, but it was indicated that it would be a lost opportunity if it's not more.
- It was noted that people know how to use the entrance and what was shown by the applicant would be a more pleasant experience and great improvement.
  - Additionally it was commented that there was hope for a secondary celebrated entrance. The Applicant was referred to study Battery Park. It was asked whether the connection could look into the lobby of the residential building to me much more of an experience. Further it was stated that the path of travel should be made interesting.
    - The Applicant indicated that they did not want to over promise and under deliver and that they had intentionally been focusing their efforts on key places and areas on the site.
  - It was noted that the Applicant was being too ambivalent about everything but Wilson Boulevard and that they should do more and be bolder in other areas. It was expressed that the Applicant consider eliminating some turns in the space by eliminating some retail, that the pathway should be widened and that there would be fewer turns and blind spots. It was asked whether there could be openings in the walls throughout the corridor to see into the retail.
  - Another comment was made that the door and façade for the Randolph Street connection should be expanded.
    - The applicant noted that they would encourage tenants to have their doors open so that people could walk through but could not make this promise.
  - A member noted that Randolph Street needs to be considered as a retail street and that the de-emphasis of the entrance to the corridor does not help.
- Pedestrian Bridge
    - It was asked that there would be thought about a bridge over Glebe Road noting a desire to re-open the discussion.
    - It was asked that a comparison be provided of the existing and proposed location of the pedestrian bridge. It was also asked what the timing would be and what could be done to minimize the amount of time the bridge would be out of commission.
      - The Applicant noted that there would be approximately 21 months where there would not be a bridge.
      - The SPRC Chair noted that more of schedule and timing would be discussed at the next meeting.
    - A question was asked regarding the process for the bridge design and timing.
      - Staff noted hoping to be able to come report back on this prior to the conclusion of the SPRC review.
    - A member reiterated the importance of the design of the pedestrian bridge.
    - A member indicated that there were documents indicating that the developer would not be funding the bridge.

- Staff noted not having any such documents and requesting that a copy be shared for review. Staff also indicated that the bridge funding had not been determined or finalized.
  - It was asked whether the existing art work on the bridge would be retained.
    - The SPRC Chair noted that that would be part of a separate process/discussion and he could not say.
  - A question was raised regarding the number of elevators there would be to connect to the mall indicating that the single new elevator shown at the plaza was problematic.
    - The applicant noted that the new elevator would be 50-60 feet from the Blade (elevator banks) which will take you to all of the levels throughout the plaza and mall.
- Mews
  - A member noted their concerns about how the mews works economically questions why people will want to go there and how it will be a good rentable space.
    - The SPRC Chair noted that that was not the purview of the SPRC but that the Applicant knows their business and it is a big risk for them.

#### *Community Comments*

- A question was asked about whether or not changes to the Code would allow for the bridge to be built and in particular connecting to the NSF building.
  - It was noted that Staff would work with ISD to review any code related issues or concerns.
- A question was asked about how the transition would work from metro to the garage to the bridge when the project is under construction. It was suggested that the applicant provide a temporary bridge or covered pathway during construction and that no CO be issued for the new mall unless the bridge is in place.
- A comment was made about the mall entrance not being opened to the street and asking what would draw people in from the street. It was further noted that narrowing of Wilson Boulevard would discourage drive by traffic.
- It was noted that there did not seem to be a plan for ventilation of the bridge. It was noted that the bridge at 9<sup>th</sup> street has ventilation and it is better than the existing pedestrian bridge over Wilson.

#### **Transportation:**

The applicant made a presentation on the various proposed transportation related elements of the plans including street cross sections, parking, loading and access to and through the site. Staff provided some additional comments on the Applicant's proposal. Following are comments of the committee. There were not comments from the community on the transportation elements presented by the Applicant.

- It was noted that the Applicant was showing handicap spaces on Glebe to be removed and that those spaces were required to meet garage requirements for van accessible spaces per ADA.
  - The Applicant noted that this was an issue also raised by VDOT that they would be addressing it.
- A committee member asked that the clear widths, dimensions and streetscape details be provided.
  - The SPRC Chair noted that this would be covered in detail with the discussion on open space to come.
- A question was asked about whether there were midblock places of refuge for pedestrians crossing Wilson and would the narrowing of Wilson and proposed elimination of the median be an issue for elderly and disabled or slow walkers.
  - Staff noted that it was a challenge to balance the needs of various users.
- It was asked whether there was a need for a bus stop on Wilson along the site's frontage.
  - Staff noted there was a bus stop on Wilson on the block and another one was not needed.
- Staff was asked their thoughts on the need for and whether there would be a crosswalk on Glebe at 7<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Staff noted that there was no proposal for one with this project.
- It was further commented that Glebe should not be considered piecemeal and that we need to understand what may be desirable and what might happen in the future. Staff was encouraged to think holistically and to be more aggressive in what it wants.
- A question was asked as to whether there was an improvement or shooting gallery for pedestrians on Wilson?
- Concerns were raised about eliminating the median on Wilson as to pedestrian safety. It was reiterated that the removal of the median on Wilson was not going to provide a better pedestrian experience. It was noted that medians are respites, they should be lighted and designed as a place where people want to stop. It was also noted that while County policy won't require a median on Wilson, it should be considered for the mid-block crossing.
- It was asked whether or not the median support was needed for the bridge?
  - The applicant replied it was not.
- A question was raised as to who was paying for the improvements.
  - Staff noted that this has not been still under consideration and to be determined; it would be part of the discussion related to the public private partnership.
- A question was raised as to where pick/up and drop off would be located?
- It was noted that the extended curb at Randolph would exacerbate issues for vehicles.
- It was noted that the off-peak parking on Glebe is a bad idea/danger for bicyclists.
- It was indicated that a condition was needed for access to remain 24-7.
- Ashton Height representative indicated a concern about parking ratios because the overflow ends up in the neighborhood. Further it was noted that there should be a road

diet provided for Randolph with curb cuts and bus parking on both sides of the street. It was indicated that additional parking for the residential building with the reduced ratio could occur at the mall. It was requested that parking ratios and utilization be provided for Founders Square and Liberty Center

- It was asked whether the TIA takes into account Founders Square and office development. And a concern was mentioned about trip generation.
  - Staff responded that it does.
- Additional concern was expressed about the crosswalks on Wilson and Glebe and asked that consideration be given to providing a crosswalk under the pedestrian bridge.
- With respect to Glebe Road, it was noted that there needs to be a good respite in the center of the road with the elimination of the Glebe Road bridge. It was suggested that one of the turning lanes be changed into space for a respite and reiterated that 7<sup>th</sup> Street needs a signal.
- It was indicated that the success of crossing Wilson depends on if the street is perceived as multimodal.
- It was noted that the committee needs to look at loading and unloading throughout the site.
- It was asked whether the fencing currently in the median on Wilson Boulevard would also be eliminated and iterated that it should be removed.
- Safety on surrounding streets was raised as a concern; that traffic was chaotic and would be more so with additional people and retail. It was indicated the safety of residents should be ensured to the greatest extent possible.
- A question was raised about whether there should be some on-street parking for retail.
- A question was asked about the location of pick up and drop off for the residential building and also the office building on Glebe, and that it had not been discussed.
- It was reiterated that drop off and pick up is important and that it should be better understood how it will work. Also that if a representative for Bluemont were not in attendance, they would have stronger comments about Glebe Road.

### **Open Space:**

The applicant presented their proposed open space plan and program including an inventory of existing and proposed open spaces; streetscape and information on clear sidewalk widths, paving, planting, hardscape, furniture, lighting, etc. SPRC comments included the following:

- It was noted that on Wilson, the curb lane width was being underestimated with respect to loading and unloading and that it should be about 10 ft. It was also noted that the handicap spaces on Glebe would need to be replaced. Additional comments included the need to consolidate some of the bike racks; that all the streetscape improvements being shown would likely not fit due to utility constraints;
- It was noted that transportation takes precedence over the trees at the bus shelter. It was also noted that the bus stop on Randolph should be celebrated.
- It was again reiterated that more attention needed to be given the curb side management.

- It was noted that parking was underutilized in the garage and also that the BID would work with Forest City on spaces being offered and that there was lots of opportunities.
- There were additional questions about curb side management and uses.
- A question was raised as to who would own the open spaces and would they be open to the public.
  - Staff/Applicant noted that the open space would be private with public access/easements.
- Concern was further noted over the steps on Wilson as being an obstacle.
- Regarding the west plaza, it was expressed that the lower plaza should be described more and that fun needed to be built in as opposed to relying only on programming of the space.
- It was again reiterated that pick up and drop off needed to be discussed further, there were too few recycling cans; lighting was an issue as was the amount of grey paving and the color should be reconsidered.
- The importance of pruning trees incorrectly was noted and that a site plan condition should be considered for this. It was noted that benches were too long and would encourage skate boarding and homeless. It was also noted that there was too little green space on site and a lot of cement.
- It was indicated that in looking at the amount of open space, while it has been increased, there will be an addition of 406 residential units and more retail and that there needed to be more open space than what is being shown to meet demand.
- The amphitheater was liked as well as the wood decking and seating. Luminaires and lights in the amphitheater were noted as being needed as well as the median on Wilson.
- Pleasure was expressed regarding the soil depth proposed for the street trees.
- Agreement was expressed regarding the multidimensional audience for the open spaces including having something for children.
- Maintenance was indicated as being important and that public easements should allow for gathering and not just moving through the spaces.
- Nervousness was expressed about the plaza/amphitheater and the need for more views from seated within to understand how people will feel in the space and how tenants will feel about the space. It was noted that there is no desire that it be a cold pit where people don't know what's going on.
- It was suggested that the bicycle parking be relocated from the plaza and again that the trees be removed from the bus stop on Randolph. Also it was suggested that another bench was needed at the bus stop for people who don't want to use the shelter.
- It was reiterated that the plaza dimensions at the top and bottom are a concern, and specifically, what happens 90% of the time when there is no program.
- A question was asked to whether there would be food trucks on Wilson.
  - It was indicated this was not likely given the nearby location for food trucks.

#### *Community Comment*

- A member of the UFC noted that there can never be too many trees only badly planned and maintained trees. It was further noted she was thrilled with the soil panels and

suggested considering the rooftop area as there is exciting work being done with trees on rooftops. She also noted changes to the site development standards to address issues with maintenance.

**SPRC Chair Summary:**

The SPRC Chair summarized the primary points expressed by committee members and the community as follows:

- Concern regarding the design of Wilson, Glebe and Randolph streets crossings.
- Concern regarding the design of open space and the design of the Wilson Boulevard frontage.

**NEXT STEPS**

The next SPRC Meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 28, 2015. The discussion for the meeting will include:

- Applicant Presentation in Response to Comments and Questions of September 16
- Residential Building & Office Renovation Follow Up
- Signs
- Phasing and Construction Issues