

## SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

### **Ballston Quarter (SP #193) SPRC Meeting #5 October 12, 2015**

**Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Steve Cole, Chris Forinash, Brian Harner, Erik Gutshall, Jane Siegel, James Schroll, Stephen Hughes, Rosemary Ciotti**

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### **MEETING AGENDA**

This was the fifth SPRC meeting on the Ballston Quarter development proposals. The meeting began with an introduction by the SPRC Chair including an overview of the agenda for the meeting and meeting structure. The applicant presented a response to the issues and comments from the community and committee members raised at SPRC meeting #4:

- Macy's and the office building renovations;
- Pedestrian access on Wilson during construction;
- Residential parking ratio
- Pedestrian paths to metro from during construction; and
- Residential amenity spaces.

After the presentation on outstanding issues and the committee gave comments, the primary topics for SPRC including: signs, community benefits and the Ballston Quarter vision were presented and commented on. The meeting concluded with final wrap up comments by the committee.

### **SPRC COMMENTS**

#### **Applicant Response to Comments/Questions from SPRC #4**

- The applicant clarified that in the presentation materials the reference to 0.8 spaces per unit was related to the utilization rate targeted by the applicant.
- The representative from Ashton Heights CA asked clarifying questions regarding whether in examples presented where the utilization was 0.8 spaces per unit whether the parking spaces were unbundled and noted that if so, this was not a good indication of the parking. It was again noted that one space per unit was needed by AHCA. A few members indicated that they were comfortable with the 0.7 space per unit ratio proposed with the failsafe access to monthly permits at the resident's expense in the

County garage. Further questions were asked and answered by staff regarding how spaces in the County garage might be made available for the residential building.

- The applicant showed amenities for dogs in the building about which there was a clarifying question asked regarding maintenance and also where this had been provided before.
- It was confirmed that there were no changes made to the façade for Macy's beyond what had previously been shown but rather further clarification regarding what was being proposed in terms of improvements.
- It was requested that the staff report document a concern regarding the safety for bicyclists with on-street parking on Glebe Road.
- It was noted that pedestrian access during construction and access to the garage during construction be shown together with concern again reiterated by a few members for the proposal to close much of Wilson Boulevard to pedestrian traffic during construction. In addition, it was noted that access to the Metro be clearly shown and explicitly include specific signs and lighting. It was further noted that there would be additional concerns regarding pedestrian access during construction should the project at Founders Square resume construction and both projects propose Randolph to be closed to pedestrians.
- It was reiterated that there was not more done to enliven the façade of Macy's and the applicant was encouraged to think more about what can be done in this regard.

### Signs

- The applicant presented proposed signs for the project with a focus on placemaking. The majority of the members were supportive of the signs shown. It was noted by several members that it would be a lost opportunity if the signs were limited to the Wilson Boulevard frontage and pointed out that Macy's and especially Glebe Road needed signs. The applicant was encouraged to think holistically around the block with other properties in this regard.
- There were a few comments that the applicant be thoughtful about sponsorship and marketing and that the signs not be used for corporate sponsorship.
- There were questions regarding the process for approving the signs and any Zoning Ordinance amendment. While one member commented that the signs were appropriate and that they should be allowed for commercial districts all over the County, this was not a consensus. One committee member suggested that a special designation or sign district be considered at this location only.
- A committee member suggested that care be taken with regard to what the pedestrian will actually see at street level in terms of signs and again iterated that some projections on Glebe Road would be better.
- A member suggested that Ballston be placed on the pedestrian bridge and that there be no directional signs on the residential building.

### Community Benefits

- Staff made a presentation on the proposed public private partnership and community benefits.
- Community members generally felt that the benefits proposed were things already provided with the project and questions were asked regarding how the benefits could be quantified.
- Clarification was asked regarding how the public private partnership and community benefits would be considered separately in response to presentation that the site plan would stand on its own and would be obligated to meet site plan conditions regardless of the public private partnership.
- It was reiterated that the site plan benefits seemed sparse and that a lot was being given away with most of the benefits not going to the community but rather to the developer. They were noted as being “light” by several members and “typical/standard” by several others.
- There was a request to know how much the bridge would cost by the time of the Planning Commission hearing as well as a question as to whether there would be renderings of the bridge provided to the Planning Commission.
- It was noted that the County has always been a partner in the mall as an asset and an investment by the community. Additional comments included wanting to know what kind of deal the County was getting and questioning whether the County is incentivizing other developers to run down their property to get help. It was questioned as to how good the County was at negotiating a deal.
- There was clarification regarding improvements to the elevators being a requirement of the site plan.
- It was noted that public access from Wilson and Glebe should be a condition.
- A question was asked about whether the County Manager had considered putting together a team of legal counsel to review/be part of the deal, specifically consultation with outside counsel.
- It was noted by Ballston Virginia Square Civic Association that the biggest concern is the loss of community use in the mall with a question asked about whether space would be made available for community use when the mall is reconfigured. It was also noted that the artwork on the bridge be retained and that there be historic documentation of Ballston on the site.
- A question was raised as to whether NSF had agreed to replace the bridge and also what the bridge design process would be.
- A member noted that the term public private partnership should not be used as that is a state specific term not applicable to this proposal.
- District energy and further implementation of the Community Energy Plan were noted as considerations for community benefits with the project in addition to community/recreational use by the County of the lower plaza, affordable on-site housing units, more multimodal connectivity to Glebe Road and a contribution to the western entrance of the Ballston Metro station. In addition, it was noted that the concourse should be designed such that it opens to Glebe Road.

- It was reiterated that the history of Ballston be captured on site and follow up questions about what makes the plaza and mews “open spaces”. It was further noted that the public art contribution needed to remain and should be directed to the bridge so that it is a work of art.
- One member noted challenges with retail and malls and noted that the suggestions made by committee members with regard to community benefits were good. It was further noted that a well curated group of tenants is a community benefit.
- It was reiterated that the community benefits were pretty standard and that there was the absence of a broader context. It was encouraged that staff look at the entire block and the County and BID look at what needs to be improved; need extraordinary community investment around the area overall.
- Surprise was noted at the lack of reference to affordable housing.
- The partnership it was noted needs more airing, should be well publicized and available early on.
- The approach of separating the partnership from the site plan was noted by one member as positive. It was noted that community benefits be finalized by the time the project comes to Planning Commission and again iterated that benefits are light. It was requested that if possible, a value or dollar amount being considered for community benefits be provided to Planning Commission.
- Benefits for consideration again reiterated included: on-site affordable housing, extending the hours of access beyond Metro closing, providing a quality place in the mall for children to play along with the provision of play equipment, considering the bridge as art work, and providing a contribution to the western entrance of the Ballston Metro station.

### **Ballston Quarter Vision**

- The applicant presented their vision for Ballston Quarter focusing on their proposed tenant mix. After the presentation there were a few comments and questions about the size of tenant spaces, restaurants features and potential stores, whether some tenants would need to be incentivized and potential for programmable space for community uses.
- It was noted that the presentation be aligned with programming of open spaces. Again meeting rooms, voting and use of incidental space at the ground level by the community were indicated as needs.

### **Wrap Up**

- Just prior to committee wrap up, there were a few community comments:
  - There was thanks expressed for the steps the applicant took related to the pedestrian bridge.
  - There were clarifications asked regarding the bridge and safe pedestrian access during construction on Glebe Road.
- It was noted by the Ashton Heights Civic Association representative that the site plan seemed more like a business plan and there were many unknowns. It was noted that

the site plan could not be disassociated from the partnership with a comment regarding how this could be done in terms of knowing what the County is buying. The committee member was generally pleased with the project but looking for more in the way of community benefits.

- Lack of clarity on the improvements to Glebe Road was noted and it was further indicated that the County needed to go all in on any improvements needed.
- It was again reiterated that it was a good project but that Glebe Road should be more broadly considered.
- It was expressed that it was unfortunate that the whole site is not completely being redeveloped as again it was indicated that there needed to be more focus on Glebe Road. The signs for the site were considered interesting and that the community benefits package needed to be better by Planning Commission.
- Again there was agreement on previous comments regarding Glebe Road frontage; it was stated that what was presented was attractive but that the issue was that the project was more of a business plan. There was again noted lack of certainty with regard to sorting out the give and take and what information County Board members were privy to that Planning Commission is not. With the exception of Glebe Road it was noted that the project would be a great addition to Ballston but that community benefits were muddled and could not be evaluated.
- Parking spaces on Glebe Road were noted as a hazard for bicycles as well as it was noted that there would be a loss of Crepe Myrtles in the median on Glebe Road.
- A member summarized that the project does not go far enough in terms of making a transformative difference and that it was a lost opportunity for pedestrians – to break up the site between Wilson and Glebe (north-south) and from the center of the project to Randolph (east-west). The project was noted as being too bifurcated with no main entrance shown for all on Wilson Boulevard. Again uncertainty was noted with respect to what the County is paying for or being asked to subsidize.
- The Ballston Virginia Square CA representative summarized by thanking the applicant and noting that overall while the civic association thinks it's a good project, there is still concern about community benefits.
- It was stated that the loss of community benefits and paying to get them back was troubling. Further that the overall value for tax payers was a concern. It was encouraged that community benefits be closely looked at by the County Board and the Planning Commission.
- One member noted that the financial subsidy to the developer was the partnership. The member felt personally that the project was not good enough for support but not bad enough to not get approved and that there were not enough community benefits.
- It was again noted that it was a good project but that Glebe Road and community benefits were still a concern in terms of what the County is getting. It was iterated that signs and wayfinding at the garage were important.
- Continued concern was echoed regarding Glebe Road and also the pedestrian passage between Wilson and Glebe through the site. It was stated that community benefits needed to be reevaluated and that there needed to be a community center.

- While again the comment was made that there needed to be a better list of community benefits, it was noted that taxes generated would be a benefit.
- A member indicated that this was the third site plan with huge County participation including DARPA and Boeing. It was stated that the case needed to be made similar to those projects and with simple language and numbers, early and often.
- Prior to conclusion by the SPRC Chair, the PC Chair thanked the applicant and staff as well as the SPRC Chair and again iterated that the full package of community benefits be ready for the Planning Commission. The SPRC Chair concluded the SPRC process for the project by thanking SPRC colleagues and encouraging consideration for something being done with Glebe Road.

**NEXT STEPS**

Transportation Commission, October 29

Planning Commission, November 2/4

County Board, November 14/17