10/15/2014

Courthouse Square Working Group Meeting #13

Working Group Discussion:

(Transcribed by Andrew D’huyvetter)

Attendees:

Working Group
Nancy Iacomini / Leo Sarli / Peter Owen / Bill Ross / Jon Kinney / Loria Porcaro / Evelyn Gee

County Staff
Kris Krider / Jason Beske / Andrew D’huyvetter / Diane Probus / Richard Hartman

County Board Members
Walter Tejada

Public
Matt Allman / Robert Vaughan / Kedrick Whitmore/

Courthouse WG Meeting #13 10/15/14

OVERVIEW

- Staff presented a process and timeline slide to frame the next 5-6 months of the study.
  - A framework plan will be presented to the County Board in December 2014.
  - A public outreach event is scheduled for February 2015.
  - A sector plan addendum is anticipated to go to the board in the spring of 2015.
- Staff conducted a presentation of preliminary staff recommendations. Comments and discussion were ongoing throughout the presentation and after the presentations. Notes are structured by major charge item in the presentation.
- Working group members are tasked to review preliminary staff recommendations and respond to them at the 10/29 working group meeting.

PRESENTATION - CIRCULATION

- When would county owned property be disposed? Where does it fit into phasing, before or after the sector plan addendum? What is County policy? How will we arrive at the disposition of that parcel (the temporary homeless shelter parcel).
  - We will utilize existing planning guidance: the 1993 Courthouse Sector Plan Addendum.
  - JBG indicated they would likely wait for some plan guidance.
- Lyon village has concerns about the Veitch/Wilson/Clarendon intersection.
  - The sightlines can be difficult to traverse.
• Neighborhoods are concerned about ease of access to parking.
• What will happen to the north neck of the metro tunnel to colonial place?
  o It is county owned.
  o It seems unsafe, confusing, and ugly.
• From the experience of the driver, where are the entrances to the underground parking?
  o Do not want overly signed.
• Can we use the Verizon plaza topography as an entrance?
• There is intense interest in those who will drive to the square or be a pedestrian in the square.
• Show the approaches in a future slide show.
• If too much circulation is underground, there will be no one on the plaza.
• Are we backing into a parking ratio?
• The taxi stand location is great. We should do it now.
• Will the CHP existing north entrance function if this entrance serves the square garage? Are there conflicts with buses and pedestrians at the pork chop?
• Why not put the bus stops east of Uhle St. by the memorial trees?
  o Proximity is better to metro west of Uhle St.
• Need a road diet slide.
• There is a dearth of park and ride options in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor metro stations, G1 could help with this.
• This plan is not orienting for pedestrians.
  o They will need way-finding
• Can we do a park without a county building?
• This is a question of a park vs a civic plaza. Need an overall cohesive aesthetic.
  o Concern that people won’t know where they are without having to read something.
  o Concern that we are getting the little elements right but that we are not developing into a cohesive place-making visionary place.
  o The expectations don’t meet the vision.
  o We need more piazza photos from the consultants.
• Places happen over time. Place will come with the open space.
• Fundamentally don’t agree that not knowing what civic hall will be is a good planning process.
• Several elements have big question marks.
• This is a framework plan, it is ok for there to be opportunities for additional detail in future stages.

PRESENTATION - OPEN SPACE

• Regarding Veitch and 14th, are those exterior escalators? Like at Pompidou Center?
  o This is more engaging with neighborhood circulation patterns.
  o At N. Courthouse Rd. and 14th St. N., there is no existing focal element.
  o It could be a public art or stormwater opportunity.
• Could we transform 14th St. N. and N. Courthouse Rd. from a signaled intersection into a traffic circle?
  o This is difficult to do with existing building footprints.
  o This is a missed opportunity.
Verizon plaza has the opportunity to be a draw but we are waving our wand on architecture and programming. Are we presuming private sector anchoring?

Want to keep options open in terms of use and ownership.

By keeping optionality we are reducing the promise of the place.
  - Not asking for total finality
  - But too little finality at this stage
  - Need to know what we are transitioning towards.

Optionality is an important board question.

Issue of policy and use and changes brings back the Virginia Square discussion surrounding the Latitude Site Plan.
  - We had the opposite issue during the Clarendon sector plan process, we had to fight for office.

Nervous to say leave to chance.

We can specify the building footprints and the function of the building.

Staff and working group recommendations can be different.

It is not outside of the realm of possibility to have more than one option. It is not unusual to have a set of options.

What goes into the JBG building?
  - We need to finalize some options to give the neighborhood some clarity in making a decision.

At the 10/29 WG meeting it is the WG’s option to say ‘this is where the county building is going.’

PRESENTATION - BUILDINGS

These goals could apply to any square in Arlington. How is this different that something like Welbourne Square?

210’ tall to respect the mall seems like a solid recommendation.

What about something architecturally significant to go above 210’?
  - A public benefit?
  - We already have an observation deck in Rosslyn (proposed).
  - We currently have no good rationale to go taller.
  - You could see all of Arlington from a tall building here.
  - Going taller could be for exceptional public benefit on site or off site.

Flat buildings have boring roofs. Don’t make these boring roofs.

210’ is staff’s recommendation. This will see a slight poke above the existing skyline. But not dramatic.

Can we use public land for public good here?

Can we preserve and TDR the four courts block?

This brings up C-O Rosslyn, where developers knew in advance what community benefits were desired.

There is a disconnect between the discussion and text on the recommended Landmark Block height. Is 230’ possible?

The C-O Rosslyn model has been successful.

Suggest WG consider an absolute height cap. Is this 210’?
• The top needs to be interesting.
• Can we have affordable retail?
  o This is the vicious cycle of the financing process.
  o If we can have affordable housing we should have affordable retail.
• There are design opportunities for affordable retail in the square.
  o Liner retail.
  o Pop-up vendors.
  o Market vendors.
  o A variety of retail sizes.
  o Plan should strive to create variety and flexibility.
• Can we give extra density for subsidized rents?
• This discussion could be a recommendation for the 29th.
• Concern over the retail viability of this plan.
  o There is a dead zone on the east side (jail, courthouse, cultural center, trees)
  o This depends on having people.
  o It is not clear on the anchors.
  o Verizon plaza may just end up dentist’s offices and nail salons.
  o Need to know primary uses.
• What is mixed use? Residential, office, or hotel?
• We can show a workable county building, but what’s in the vision?
  o The CSW location is the worst spot in the plan.
  o This says the county building is the least important in the plan.
• The county building is not the most important experience in the plan.
• Where is protesting going to be?
  o Zuchotti park like setting offers an opportunity.
• What about the symbolic importance of the building?
  o The symbolism is in the space itself.
• At the end of the day the county building is just another office building.
  o That is a slap in the face to the Arlington way and our democracy. This is the core element we are trying to achieve. This space must define the role between the public and government.
• There are numerous architectural opportunities for a front door.
• This whole discussion is a footnote and I am disturbed by it.
• I appreciate the open space and circulation recommendations.
• One thing that bothers me is where is the government building going? We need to make a statement and know our front door.
• If this is the mall, then county building at CSW is like the American Indian museum with a jail off to the side.
• We can have great urban design and bad architecture and the space will still work. You can’t have great architecture and bad urban design and expect the space to work. This space doesn’t feel right.
  o Please articulate more than feelings.
  o I have been trying all along.
  o Within constraints there is creativity. This plan is too constraint bound.
Our axis and scale are all off. We should be diversifying the street grid. The N. Uhle St. street promenade axis results in a dead end. We are just putting public art on it to fix that problem.

There are a lot of possibilities that we have not engaged.

END OF FORMAL PRESENTATION – GENERAL DISCUSSION

- We will continue this discussion in October and November.
- We have hit some major community benefit points for further discussion:
  - Affordable retail
  - Additional height
  - The tops of buildings
  - Historic preservation
  - Affordable Housing
- Consider a menu of possible benefits.
- Also what additional elements should be considered in additional studies?
- I have a process question.
  - There are critical decisions being made in December. Then nothing.
  - Are you going back to stakeholder groups?
  - There is one public engagement effort planned for February between now and final sector plan adoption.
- There have been limited opportunities for direct public engagement.
- I have concerns about the results from community participation being used in the plan. If staff says that the plan is what the public said I do not support this statement. This has only been a partial success.
- What type of public engagement do you then recommend? Detail it for me.
  - We need to ID key unresolved questions.
    - Those that are not resolved should be shopped around, instead of having staff answer them.
    - They should go back to the same groups.
    - Give them time to have an internal discussion.
    - Then convene these groups together and have a moderated discussion amongst each other to work out their priorities.
    - Then reconvene the groups.
    - After this effort, then go to the County Board to make a decision.
    - Hard decisions are either avoided or bulldozed
  - The timeline and questions during engagement are infeasible to claim that this plan is the results of public input. Fully answering this claim is infeasible with the current timeline.