

SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

SP #90 1750/1770 Crystal Drive

September 17, 2018

Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Elizabeth Gearin (SPRC Chair), Nancy Iacomini, James Lantelme, Kathleen McSweeney, Elizabeth Morton, David Ricks, James Schroll, Jane Siegel, Daniel Weir.

MEETING AGENDA

This was a special Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) meeting concerning JBGSmith's proposed site plan amendment application to renovate the existing office building at 1750/1770 Crystal Drive, and to keep the proposed use as office for the foreseeable future. The developer had previously proposed that this building be converted to a residential building.

The meeting began with introductions and a refresher by the SPRC Chair on SPRC ground rules and procedure. Staff made a presentation explaining the background of the current site plan amendment request, including the previous site plan amendment from 2015 to renovate the office building which is active, but not yet implemented. The applicant then made a presentation of their decision to put on hold the proposed conversion of the office building to a residential building, which had been the subject of Planning Commission review earlier in 2018. The developer explained that they are now requesting County Board approval to update the 2015 approval with the updated public improvements that had been discussed in the 2018 planning process.

SPRC DISCUSSION

- Elizabeth Gearin asked the applicant to explain why they were making this change after the extensive planning process for the new residential building.
 - Taylor Lawch explained that JBGSmith was trying to stay responsive to market conditions.
- Nancy Iacomini asked if the plaza was still part of the applicant's plans.
 - Staff explained that the plaza was tied to the corner building application.
- Staff was asked to explain the status of the various applications
 - All applications will be coming forward to the County Board in October. All the applications that were related to the conversion of the office building to residential will be deferred for five years.
- Chris Slatt stated that he believed a protected bike lane could still be possible to fit along Crystal Drive.

- Staff responded that that the applicant and staff had worked together, but the right-of-way is very limited and must accommodate multiple uses.
- Daniel Weir stated he concurred with Mr. Slatt's comments.
- David Ricks asked if the office renovation would be simultaneous with the construction of the grocery store and retail on the north end of the block.
 - Mr. Lawch responded that the north side retail (theater and grocer) would begin construction by the end of the year once approved by the County Board. The office building renovation might follow a little bit later, but expected that there the Crystal Drive improvements would be done more or less at the same time.
- Mr. Ricks also asked the applicant to explain the cutouts on the top floors of the office building. And encouraged a green wall or some other planting to provide a contrast to the rigidity of the façade grid.
 - The applicant explained that they are outdoor terraces on the 13th and 14th floors for the office tenants on those floors.
- Elizabeth Gearin also encouraged the applicant to think about planting on those levels.
- Jane Siegel asked what happens when the deferred site plan comes back? Could it be reactivated if office doesn't pan out?
 - Staff explained that if office doesn't pan out than the residential plan could be reactivated within the five years. But if the applicant commits to the office plan than the developer would be strongly encouraged to withdraw the residential application at the end of five years.
- Elizabeth Morton asked about the open space associated with this site plan area.
 - The developer explained that the plaza area in the rear would be open to the public (but not a part of the one-acre easement for public open space, which they still agree to deliver with the corner building.
 - The developer also added that outdoor café areas had been delineated adjacent to this (office) building, which will not be dedicated to the public (and will not reduce the size of the required easement).
- Kathleen McSweeney asked if there were retail tenants lined up other than the Alamo Theater in Phase I?
 - Taylor Lawch stated that so far Alamo was the only publicly committed new tenant, but that they were also working with Morton's steakhouse to stay in their current space in the ground floor of the 1750/1770 office building while construction occurs.
- Tom Korn asked about the timing of the Metro entrance delivery.
 - Staff stated that the three-party agreement was still being negotiated, a little money has been allocated for preliminary design of the entrance, but neither detailed design or construction of the entrance it will happen in the immediate future.
- Pamela Van Hine asked if anything was changing in this application with regard to the underground. She also concurred with other comments, including protected bike lanes.

- The applicant state that in this pending site plan amendment, that there will be no changes to the underground in the area of this site plan amendment (south end of the block). The present-day street entrance to the Underground will remain in place.
- Natasha Atkins stated she agreed with others, especially about the desire for protected bike lanes.
- Christer Ahl said that he understood the desire for JBGSmith to keep two options for the site, and to defer the residential request for five years, but stated that JBGSmith must communicate if they have a five-year plan for the site Plan B/C/D if office does not pan out. Does not want to see a long period of vacancy, especially on the ground floor retail, and that if office does not pan out that the applicant not wait the full five years to bring back a revised plan.
 - Taylor Lawch stated that JBGSmith also wants to make things happen quickly. Phase I will definitely begin at the end of 2018, and they think office use for the 1770 building is the way forward for now.
- Mr. Ahl also stated that the argument for the corner building is less compelling if the building remains office use, and if the applicant will not immediately be building the complete 60-foot frontage on the future plaza right away.
 - The applicant clarified that the residential building plan also did not have full build out of the full 60-foot frontage on the plaza until grading commenced for the corner building at that time. The ground floor uses also remain the same between the two plans.
- Judy Freshman asked the applicant why not do the full 60-foot buildout right away?
 - The applicant it would affect a required fire lane adjacent to the existing buildings to the rear. The fire lane issue could be resolved with construction of the park and corner building.
- David Ricks encouraged the developer to, at the County Board hearing, lay out the phasing scenarios carefully.
- Kathleen McSweeney asked about accessibility in the proposed adjacent park (although not a part of this phase of development).
 - The developer stated that 18th Street sidewalk will be accessible, and they were thinking of an elevator between the two levels of park.
- The SPRC chair summarized the comments she heard in the meeting as:
 - PC had recommended up to three SPRC meetings for the corner building (not part of this application)
 - Look again at protected bike lanes, perhaps not part of this application but as perhaps a larger study of the Crystal City right-of-way.
 - Inform the PC and community when ground finally breaks (staff stated community notification is a required standard condition).
 - Be consistent in the use of design images across all platforms Some out of date images on the internet may confuse people interested in the project.
 - Show phasing plans to the public and County Board
 - Develop a Plan B for if office does not pan out.

- We acknowledge that the community is still opposed to the corner building.

Public Speakers

- Barbara Selfridge stated that so far, the Metro street entrance was only planned to be a staircase, so that would increase pressure on the Metro elevators.
 - The developer replied that for that reason WMATA requires two elevators.
 - Staff stated that circulation and access to Metro was of the factors the Planning Commission recommended be incorporated into the review of the design of a corner building.
- Sheldon Johnson asked if the aluminum cladding was reflective, questioned the removal of public seating in the Underground, and expressed his disappointment at not having a grocer yet.
- Christer Ahl stated that the Crystal City Sector Plan envisioned office buildings facing Route 1 since that would be more desirable for advertising the tenants and a less desirable location for residential. Felt that Crystal Drive was the ideal place for residential uses.
- There was also a question about the progress towards polling places, and Mr. Lawch stated that JBGSmith will host a polling place this November election.