

## SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

### Crystal Houses (SP #13)

SPRC Meeting #1

Crystal House 2 | Club Room

1900 S. Eads Street | Arlington, Virginia 22202

May 20, 2019 | 7-9 p.m. (walking tour beginning at 6 p.m.)

**Planning Commissioners in Attendance:** Jim Lantelme (chair), Nancy Iacomini, Daniel Weir, Elizabeth Gearin, James Schroll, Jane Siegel

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### MEETING AGENDA

- 1) Introduction from Chair
- 2) Informational Presentation
  - a) Site Background and Context (Staff)
  - b) Overview of Site Plan (Applicant)
  - c) Review of Site Plan Proposal (Staff)
- 2) Land Use & Zoning
  - a) Relationship of site to GLUP, sector plans, etc.
  - b) Relationship of project to existing zoning
  - j) Requested modification of use regulations (if any)
- 3) Site Design and Characteristics
  - a) Allocation of uses on the site
  - b) Relationship and orientation of proposed buildings to public space and other buildings
  - c) View vistas through site
  - d) Visibility of site or buildings from significant neighboring perspectives
  - e) Compliance with adopted planning document
- 4) Wrap-Up
- 5) Public Comment
- 6) Next Steps

### INTRODUCTION

Commissioner Lantelme made introductions and spoke briefly about the meeting topics.

## STAFF PRESENTATION

**Matthew Pfeiffer, Arlington County CPHD Planning Division** presented information on the site's history, including construction of the original Crystal Houses and the site plan's incorporation with the Crystal Towers site; the 2006 and 2017 site plan approvals, and existing conditions at the site. Staff also presented relevant policy guidance from the Crystal City Sector Plan, and provided a preliminary analysis including an analysis of the site's compliance with sector plan guidance on transitions, connections, massing, and building placement.

## APPLICANT PRESENTATION

**Luz del Mar Rosado, Lessard Design**, presented an overview of the applicant's proposed site and building design, including the conceptual building placement for Crystal Houses 7 and 8, for which the applicant is still working out details.

## LAND USE AND ZONING

- An SPRC member commented that this is a unique block. It is an edge block across from a single-family neighborhood, but it also is across from the metro. During the sector plan process, the infill buildings fronting Fern Street were seen as a compromise. The pedestrian path alignment wasn't studied in detail. The notion of the existing site as a "towers in the park" style development was discussed and considered during the process.
- An SPRC member asked the applicant whether they were planning on building the site plan and holding, or would sell the asset after entitlement? The applicant responded that they will definitely sell CH-1&2 and are still evaluating whether to sell new buildings.
- An SPRC member expressed concern that the subject block will remain a super block and will not be integrated well enough into the surrounding city.
- An SPRC member asked whether the proposed sidewalks both internally and external to the site meet standard sidewalk dimensions in the streetscape guidelines?
- An SPRC member asked staff to provide additional information about tree replacement and canopy coverage.
- An SPRC member commented that having a connection through the site is important to pedestrians and cyclists, and that the pathway should connect to 20<sup>th</sup> Street S.
- An SPRC member asked whether the proposed CH-7 & 8 buildings will be townhouses or stacked flats? The applicant answered that they have not decided but are evaluating both options.
- An SPRC member asked what the streetscape dimensions are, and the applicant responded that there are 18' streetscapes.

## SITE DESIGN

- An SPRC member commented that they wish to hear more from the people in the room that were present during the sector plan process. The member noted that the sector plan is a starting point.
- An SPRC member commented that the building footprints for CH-7 & 8 are different than shown on the sector plan illustrative plan. In addition, that member noted, they would question the wisdom of placing buildings on this frontage at all; this portion of the site lends itself to be open.

Residents to the west should be able to see the green space and see the site amenities, not see a wall of buildings.

- An SPRC member agreed with the previous comments that they do not like CH-7 and 8; it does not provide a good transition to the western neighborhoods. It feels like a gate.
- An SPRC member commented that they have concerns about the architecture of the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Eads Street; it doesn't feel welcoming.
- An SPRC member asked whether the passageway through CH-3 is a breezeway, or is it a keycard access through the building? The applicant answered that it would be keycard access.
- An SPRC member mentioned that the internal circulation pattern still seems very privatized and suburban; internal streets should be redesigned to feel more like actual streets.
- An SPRC member commented that they were concerned about the building placement of CH-8 because they would like the pedestrian pathway to connect to 20<sup>th</sup> Street.
- An SPRC member asked the applicant to provide additional perspective renderings related to CH-7 & 8; specifically, which parts of the site would still be visible? Should the footprints be modified, or should the buildings be broken up in some fashion? More thought should be given as to the experience of the neighborhoods to the west.
- An SPRC member stated that they thought it was good to have more units on Fern Street, because the County is urbanizing. However, the SPRC needs to see additional perspective renderings of the new buildings, and more analysis and study of the viewsheds. It could even be advantageous to not have the buildings on Fern, and to just use the space for additional plantings.
- Having CH-7 & 8 is only advantageous if these are missing-middle housing types such as individually owned condo units. The building placement interrupts the transition, and blocks access to the park.
- An SPRC member opined about splitting CH-8 footprint so that there is a view corridor created to the park.
- What are the site's opportunities for reforestation? The surface parking lots should be removed and planted up.
- An SPRC member expressed concern about the loss of trees and opined that they don't like the placement of CH-7 & 8 because neighbors will be looking into big buildings. They also see the sites as opportunity for additional plantings.
- An SPRC member commented that the site plan represents a huge increase in density and a massive decrease in open space.

### **SPRC WRAP-UP COMMENTS**

- **Christer Ahl (CCRC):**
  - Would like to reinforce the issue of parking.
- **Pamela Van Hine (Pedestrian Advisory Committee):**
  - Expressed concerns about CH-3; more than half is 11 stories high, and that will have an impact on the existing buildings.
  - Also, the architecture of the corner of 18<sup>th</sup>/Eads needs help.

- **Judy Freshman (Crystal City Civic Association):**
  - Strongly supports reforestation along Fern Street, and not new buildings.
- **Daniel Weir (Planning Commission):**
  - The County shouldn't walk away from additional housing at this site given its importance.
  - There could be a way to do housing along Fern Street and implement it in a way that meets everyone's goals.
- **Nancy Iacomini (Planning Commission):**
  - At the next meeting, staff needs to provide a whole lot more information on tree canopy. There is a lot of concern about tree canopy and green space at this site.
  - CH-7 could be ok, but CH-8 doesn't work for a variety of reasons
  - Would like to spend time during the architecture discussion talking about the materials. Concerned about the tops of the buildings, especially CH-5.
- **Evelio Rubiella (Urban Forestry Commission):**
  - Concerned about CH-7 & 8. Would much prefer this area be used for additional plantings.
  - The new buildings should have green roofs
- **Jane Siegel (Planning Commission):**
  - Why isn't retail being provided? There is an opportunity for retail here.
  - It has been an interesting discussion about CH-7 & 8. It doesn't have to be all or nothing.
- **Scott Miles (Aurora Highlands Civic Association):**
  - Interested in permeability through the site. There are pedestrian paths in the interior of the site that are used by residents. For example, 21<sup>st</sup> Street connects to Restaurant Row. Interested in seeing these maintained and enhanced.
- **Jim Lantelme (Planning Commission, Project Chair):**
  - Among important points to consider for next meeting are:
    - Applicant should address concerns about reforestation
    - Provide additional renderings and viewshed perspectives.

*Statement by Crystal City Business Improvement District: A brief comment was heard from **Rob Mandle** from the Crystal City BID who opined on the following topics:*

- This site plan provides an incredible increase in the amount of public open space over what the plan calls for.
- These parks will become part of the Green Print for the area.
- CH-7 & 8 are interesting. There are potential issues, but at the same time this represents missing middle housing types that should be embraced.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- A member of the public mentioned that they fought during the sector plan process to get as much green space as possible. This plan represents an enormous increase in density, and it deserves more green space and more plantings.

- What are the views from 23<sup>rd</sup> Street?
- What is the height limit on the Restaurant Row block?
- A member of the public mentioned that they echo the comments about recapturing the tree canopy, as trees provide services in carbon capture and flood control.
- A member of the public made the following comments:
  - This is a really important site, especially to the disability community in terms of locating housing close to the metro. The site is also close to the elevator to the Crystal City Underground.
  - The applicant should provide additional information on accessibility
  - ADU's are so important at this site; it has maximum visibility. Concerned about the size of ADU's and whether they can accommodate accessible tenants.

**NEXT STEPS**

- The next SPRC meeting will be held on June 24, 2019.