
Long Range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission (LRPC)
Meeting Summary
October 27, 2020, 7:00pm

This meeting was a virtual public meeting held through electronic communications means.

Planning Commissioners in attendance:

James Schroll (Chair, LRPC)
Elizabeth Gearin
Daniel Weir
Jim Lantelme
Jane Siegel
Sara Steinberger

Representatives in attendance:

Aaron Schuetz – Lyon Park; Bicycle Advisory Commission
Chris Slatt – Transportation Commission
Jennie Gwin – Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board
Jim Feaster – Pedestrian Advisory Commission

Staff in attendance:

Margaret Rhodes – CPHD, Planning
Tim Murphy – CPHD, Planning
Kris Krider – CPHD, Urban Design
Laura Shaub – CPHD, Urban Design
Lorin Farris – CPHD, Preservation
Angie de la Barrera – DES
Walter Gonzalez – DPR

Members of the public in attendance:

Anne Bodine
Zachary Zingsheim
Aaron Bettencourt
Micheline Castan-Smith
Matt Roberts
Kelly Shooshan

Pershing Drive Special General Land Use Plan Study

LRPC Chair James Schroll opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Commissioner Schroll recognized the members of several other Arlington County boards and commissions and civic leaders in attendance, as well as staff members.

Matt Roberts, representing the applicant, presented an overview of the request. Margaret Rhodes then provided background information on the Special GLUP Study process and on the subject site, contextual information, relevant plan guidance, the results of a community survey related to this process, a proposed process and scope and other information.

Discussion

Comments and questions included the following:

- Why did only 94 people respond to the survey?
- The trail is a really important asset in this area. Better connectivity and elimination of the service drive are crucial.

Retail

- Brick and mortar stores have struggled here. Adding more retail may not help. Retail could be an option, but should not necessarily be a requirement.
- Retail does best facing other retail. Adding retail on this site could help the existing retail thrive. Retail amenities for bike tourists and bike commuters would make sense here. Retail should not be precluded here. I.e., any zoning category that would not allow for retail, should not be considered.
- The Sheffield Court retail was demolished when the 2201 North Pershing Drive project was built. We do not need another gym or yoga studio. The community wants something more useful. Good tenants will not move to this location unless the prices make sense. If the prices are too high, retailers like a mattress store will be the only ones to sign leases. The community favors retail on Pershing Drive and Arlington Boulevard.
- We do not want to preclude retail here. There is a difference between personal services retail and general retail. The online engagement survey showed interest in community services, so these interests may align.
- The addition of retail here is a good idea. Bike trail improvements and the addition of some public space, even if privately owned, are also important. And adding a representative of the Park and Recreation Commission is advisable.
- There should be flexibility to allow for retail, Third Places and community spaces.
- The Chair indicated that there appeared to be a general consensus that the modeling should include an option for retail or retail equivalent space and Third Places along Pershing Drive and maybe along Arlington Boulevard.
- Flexibility is recommended and we should embrace retail and retail equivalent options. We should not be overly prescriptive with regards to the type of retail establishments that we would like to see, however.

Historic Preservation

- The façade and sign are great and iconic. They have a neat look and if there is any way to save them it should be pursued. Across the street they only saved 50 pieces of marble and stuck it on the façade and the Bob Peck “preservation” project was also unsuccessful. We would be willing to trade density elsewhere on site to save this gateway.
- Some of the elements here are Notable (per the Historic Resources Inventory) and notable. There is a greater opportunity on this site to consider preservation of certain elements.

- There is not a need to save the entire property, but some preservation should be undertaken, as well as documentation.
- There is only an echo of what was once there.
- The Arva Motel sign should be restored, rehabilitated, preserved and incorporated into the new development. Some Mid-Century elements are no longer there, but some may be in the lobby.
- The Chair summarized that there was support for the preservation of the sign and the lobby, but not the preservation of the entire building.

Access and Circulation

- Access off of Wayne Street, preferably across from the existing curb cut on the other side, is desirable. The Pershing Drive edge of the property is very close to Arlington Boulevard and the pedestrian and bicycle experience should be enhanced on Pershing Drive. Wayne Street, therefore, is strongly preferred as the access point.
- Traffic increased on Barton and 3rd Streets after the 22201 Pershing Drive project was built. Wayne Street is appropriate as a location for access, but there is a need to address cut-through traffic. There are a lot of young children in the Washington and Lee Apartments and in the neighborhood. We do not want traffic to cut-through the Washington and Lee Apartment complex to Arlington Boulevard. Parking is also a monster issue. The cars on the stub road in front of the site are from the apartments and the neighborhood. Some households have two to three cars. The parking ratio here should be 1:1.
- I agree with the previous comments and the stub road should be closed to vehicles to prioritize the trail.

Land Use

- Maybe the land use designation could be higher than “Medium” Residential. There is a need for affordable housing.
- Density is not the goal here. 70’ is really high and even 55’ is really high and out of scale with this single-family neighborhood. We need more green space. It would be better to have missing middle housing, as there are already too many rental units. Adding 300 more rental units does not benefit the neighborhood or Arlington. The neighborhood does not like “Low” Office-Apartment-Hotel or “Medium” Residential. Some people think an extended stay hotel for Fort Meyer could be good. People are not in favor of five plus stories. There should be less bulk and more green space. With the lower-scale Bromptons building, the Washington and Lee Apartments and the duplexes surrounding the site, three stories on Wayne Street could work with four stories being tolerable on Pershing Drive, if useful retail was provided. The building could be a little higher on Arlington Boulevard, but should step down on the “inland” side.
- Is “Low” Office-Apartment-Hotel or “Medium” Residential more conducive to affordable housing or open space?
- I like the “Low” Office-Apartment-Hotel option. Additional height allows flexibility to accommodate open space and transitions.
- The Chair noted that there is a tradeoff between density/height and transitions.

Other

- The Arlington Boulevard corridor has been designated a Primary Bicycle Corridor. This is an amazing opportunity for new trail-oriented development. There could be residential units where you roll right out onto the trail and there are eyes on the trail to enhance safety.

Public Comments

- The County should consider the tax burden of \$850/unit for residential development. Why is a high-level land use study being conducted for two acres? I have an interest in affordable housing. Retail has struggled in this area with the gun store. I am in favor of a Housing Conservation District, but need more information on this. The Alexandria Gateway project had a bad taper and transitions. This is a residential area. There are issues with parking overflow here. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings should be looked at more consistently.

Commissioner Schroll adjourned the meeting close to 9:00 pm.