Long Range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission (LRPC)
Meeting Summary
September 10, 2020, 7:00pm

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

Planning Commissioners in attendance:
Elizabeth Gearin
James Schroll (Chair, LRPC)
Daniel Weir
James Lantelme
Jane C. Siegel

Planning Commissioners absent:
Denyse “Nia” Bagley
Stephen Hughes
Elizabeth Morton
Devanshi P. Patel
Tenley Peterson
Leonardo Sarli
Sara Steinberger

Staff in attendance:
Kellie Brown, Comprehensive Planning Section Supervisor, CPHD - Planning
Nick Rogers, Principal Planner, CPHD - Planning
Matt Mattauszek, Master Planner, CPHD – Planning
Adam Watson, Principal Planner, CPHD - Planning
Marco Rivero, Principal Planner, DPR – Planning and Development
Jennifer Smith, Comprehensive Planning Manager, CPHD - Planning
Pablo Lopez, Associate Planner, CPHD - Planning
Joanne Gabor, Master Planner, DES – Development Services
Peter Schulz, Principal Planner, CPHD - Planning
Courtney Badger, Principal Planner, CPHD - Planning

Crystal City Block Plan M – Block Plan Review of 2000/2001 S. Bell St. and 223
23rd St/2250 Crystal Drive site plan applications.

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

Commissioner Schroll recognized the presenters of the meeting’s agenda item, as well as the members of several other Arlington County boards and commissions and civic leaders in attendance.

Mr. Matt Mattauszek presented an overview of the Block M sector plan analysis. He described how block plans ensure overall development consisted with the goals and objectives of the Crystal City Sector Plan. Mr. Mattauszek outlined two primary purposes of the LRPC meeting: 1) to discern whether LRPC felt that the two site plans to be presented achieved the goals of the sector plan, and 2) to develop consensus among the LRPC on major issues to be further studied before the site plans were scheduled for Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) review.
Mr. Mattauszek presented an overview of staff’s review of the two site plans for conformance with the sector plan, which included feedback from community members. He framed staff’s review such that one group of issues highlighted were central to conformance with the block plan. These issues related to the proposed street network and circulation, proposed open space, and changes to the underground pedestrian connections. The second group of issues were more germane for the SPRC review to come later. These issues related to architectural features, retail frontages, and built-to lines. Mr. Mattauszek listed several requests by the site plan applicant for deviations from the sector plan guidance.

Mr. Mattauszek further organized staff’s overall review in the following manner:

- **Street network**: Impacts on transit services
- **Open space network**: Number of open spaces, reconfiguration/relocation of open spaces, timing of establishment of open spaces with future development, interim open spaces
- **Underground connection**: Purpose it should serve each block, protection from inclement weather, alignment with sector plan goals

Commissioner Schroll acknowledged Andrew VanHorn and Robert Vaughan with JBG Smith for a presentation on the two site plans. Mr. Vaughan provided the overview, discussing JBG Smith’s fundamental approach to the development of the subject properties by breaking down existing superblocks. He explained how the existing block pattern restricted pedestrian choice and forced out loading and parking from primary retail corridors. Mr. Vaughan provided several examples of comparative block patterns from well-known, successful urban centers in the United States.

Mr. Vaughan explained that JBG Smith was one of two property owners on Block M, with the other being Dweck, who owned the Crystal Plaza Apartments. He reviewed the sector plan goals relevant to the two applications and mentioned aspects of conformance and deviation from the sector plan. Mr. Vaughan then focused his presentation on three topics:

- **Clark-Bell Street Alignment**: Mr. Vaughan showed potential block design layouts which would advance the streets’ realignment in a different manner than envisioned by the sector plan but still enabling the connection with future development by other property owners. He presented hypothetical redevelopment phasing scenarios for Block M.
- **Open Space**: Mr. Vaughan presented an alternative arrangement of public open space, including a 7,200 square foot pedestrian plaza and interim open space which would eventually total 13,000 square feet of open space.
- **Underground connectivity**: Mr. Vaughan explained the proposed new construction resulting from the two site plans would fundamentally change the nature of the access and connectivity of the existing underground passageway, but still maintain it without changing the nature of the underground retail spaces. He noted the five foot elevation different between grades at opposite ends of the underground connection, and shared artistic renderings of a new entrance with landscaping and public art.

Mr. Vaughan explained JBG Smith’s preferred development approach for the northern side of 23rd Street; instead of preserving the existing building currently leased to Jaleo and adding a large building next to it, he proposed the demolition of the building recommended for preservation. This would enable the construction of two new buildings – a Phase 1 residential
building at the middle of the block, and a Phase 2 office building at the southeastern block corner to be constructed upon securing a significant anchor prelease tenant. The residential building would have an alleyway behind it for access to underground parking and loading. Interim open space would be provided in the location of the Phase 2 office building until a tenant was secured and construction commenced.

Mr. Vaughan presented prospective block layouts which reconfigured the location and orientation of Parks #10 and #11 as shown in the sector plan. This would result in a 13,000 square foot park to the west of the realigned Clark-Bell Street, with interim park spaces along 23rd Street. He presented conceptual designs for a 23rd Street park space with upper and lower level open space, and a prospective schedule for when these open spaces would be phased into the overall development proposal.

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Once Mr. Vaughan’s presentation concluded, Commissioner Schroll solicited comments and feedback from LRPC attendees.

**Northern Side of the Block**

**Transportation**

- The angles of alignment for the proposed street network could constrain transit bus movements and turning.
- The ultimate road alignment should be coordinated jointly with Dweck, the other property owner on Block M.
- General questions about the deviation request for the preferred street width alignment along Clark-Bell, and general comments for support of providing the sector plan’s recommended street width (Mr. Vaughan noted that this issue was still one of active discussion between the applicant and staff).
- If the built-to lines along Clark-Bell are too constraining, it could be more challenging to locate bike facilities for what the sector plan designates as a primary bike corridor.

**Open Space**

- The overall distribution and total amount of Block M’s open space should be discussed in aggregate as opposed to separate conversations pertaining to each site plan.  
- The site plans should not preclude the establishment of the minimum amount of open space as recommended in the sector plan for Block M.

**Underground**

- Several LRPC attendees asked clarifying questions of Mr. Vaughan about changes to the pedestrian experience in getting to the Crystal Plaza Shops that would result from JBG Smith’s proposal.
- One of the key principles in the sector plan states that the underground connection should be utilized as the primary way to transport pedestrians from north to south

**Southern Side of the Block**

**General Comments**

- LRPC attendees commented on several difficulties associated with the intersection of Richmond Highway (Route 1) and 23rd Street
Mr. Vaughan explained that JBG Smith would construct public improvements to narrow 23rd Street along the JBG Smith project’s frontage at the time of construction.

Ms. Joanne Gabor explained that DES is conducting a full analysis of the traffic signal and its timing at this intersection to optimize it.

- Mr. Vaughan clarified that the “Avenue B” shown in his presentation would be constructed once the Phase 1 residential building was constructed after fielding a question about the timing from an LRPC attendee.
- Some LRPC attendees felt that the sector plan contained precedent language for changes the road alignment and the alternative distribution of smaller park spaces as proposed by JBG Smith.
- LRPC attendees asked about the circulation pattern around the Phase 1 residential building along 23rd street, and Mr. Vaughan explained that the proposed configuration of the alleyway and the circulation was based on the grade of the site and the long-term plans to construct Clark-Bell Street.
- LRPC attendees expressed concerns about pedestrian conflicts with vehicles in both the interim and ultimate development scenarios.
- Mr. Vaughn fielded questions from the LRPC about the expected time frame for developing the Phase 2 office building and the redevelopment of the office building currently occupied by WeWork. He stated that JBG Smith would not be constructing the Phase 2 office building speculatively, and that while the WeWork building’s lease still had some years before expiring, JBG Smith felt it could provide the depicted open space near the building in the near term.
- LRPC attendees asked more questions about redevelopment of surrounding buildings withing Block M, with particular attention to breaking up the block upon redevelopment.
  - Nora McMullen with Dweck Properties discussed feasibility analysis that her company had conducted surrounding partial demolition of the existing Crystal Plaza Apartments, which did not generate realistic feasible scenarios for partial redevelopment. She commented that Dweck was not contemplating redevelopment of the Crystal Plaza Apartments for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Mattauszek reminded the LRPC that the sector plan did not depict each parcel’s prescribed redevelopment at ultimate buildout, and that Block M’s full buildout was not a prerequisite for presenting a finalized Block Plan to the County Board.

Commissioner Schroll polled the LRPC to ascertain whether LRPC could endorse one or both of the site plans to move forward to SPRC review.

LRPC attendees discussed outstanding issues with the open space they felt could be handled during the SPRC review. Others expressed displeasure with the proposed changes to the underground connection resulting in pedestrians being unprotected from inclement weather compared to the existing protected corridor. LRPC attendees shared their support for an 80-foot wide cross section for Clark-Bell Street instead of the 72-foot wide cross section proposed by JBG Smith, stating that this felt more like a LRPC issue to resolve which would impact Block M’s built-to lines.

Mr. Mattauszek recommended that the identified transportation issues be scheduled first on the agenda for the next review meeting, whether it was convened by LRPC or SPRC, and following
that discussion topic with more detailed items such as architecture and similar site-specific matters.

**Public Comments.**

1. Mr. Ben Nichols expressed support for the LRPC’s observations on the two site plan’s lack of conformance with the sector plan’s recommendation for bike features.
2. Ms. Carol Fuller shared her concerns about the lack of a underground connection for this block plan similar to the current one. She explained that Crystal City residents overall do not support disconnecting this underground connection. Connectivity is critical, and would not be sensible for pedestrians to alternatively leave the Metrorail station’s underground passageway, walk above ground through a parking garage, and then return to the underground tunnel. She hoped an engineered solution could be identified to maintain a connected, protected tunnel.
3. Mr. Arthur Fox highlighted the sector plan’s vision for Block M to be the entertainment center of Crystal City and called upon JBG Smith to share its ideas for transforming the block to achieve this vision. He noted that the intersection of Richmond Highway and 23rd Street has been problematic for years, and called upon DES to combine its efforts with the Block M process to fix the intersection.

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Comm. Schroll adjourned the meeting at 9:17pm.