

Date: September 3, 2023

To: Members and Staff of the Board of Architectural Review (BAR)

From: Princess Street Townhouse Association Board of Directors

Re: Response to Proposal for 301 North Fairfax

The Board of the Princess Street Townhouse Association (PSTHA) is writing to express its opposition to the 301 N Fairfax Concept Plan 3. PSTHA appeals to the BAR to reject Concept 3 and requests that the developers produce a design that supports the unique and essential historic characteristics of Old Town, meeting both the letter and the spirit of the Alexandria Design Guidelines and Article 10 zoning ordinances

Like so many residents, PSTHA, a community of 46 homes, finds the development incompatible with the neighborhood's height, mass, scale and architecture. There is a fragile balance and design sensibility to preserve if we are to remain a vital, forward looking, and unique historic city. This is all within the BAR's purview. And, while we respect the developer's goal to maximize square footage, height, mass, and scale to maximize profits, neither Concepts 2 nor 3 can accommodate this without a significant list of variances, special permissions, and operational features that circumvent the ordinances and guidelines that have been developed to ensure Alexandria's vitality and prosperity.

The Old Town Neighbors group, with whom we have collaborated, has submitted responses to Concepts 2 and 3 that address many of our concerns, particularly about the proposed building's size, height, mass and scale. While we note some design improvements in Concept 3, including brick stairs and stoops on the first floor, there are several additional items in Concepts 2 & 3 that we oppose and that are directly in conflict with City Design Guidelines and Zoning Ordinance, Article 10.

- Concept 3 still lacks a holistic design in itself and in relation to its surroundings. While the developer is entitled to a singular 301 N Fairfax vision, we ask the BAR to be strategic in evaluating every building and the impact it will have on future construction. There are two buildings of the same vintage on Lee and Princess. If they redevelop their properties, 301 N Fairfax will serve as a model for maximizing profit at the expense of the Old and Historic District as well as the Waterfront. The result would be a complete city block of incompatible construction.
- Concept 3 is approximately 275 feet along N. Fairfax. We understand from the Old Town Neighbors' Association that, according to the Floor Area Ratio and Open Space Calculations (FAR), which they reviewed with a city attorney, the number of units should be limited to 30 rather than the developer's 48. If this is the case, we ask that the BAR enforce the FAR. In addition, the Waterfront Small Area Plan seeks to "enhance visual cues and site lines for pedestrians, bicycles, vehicles, and all grid streets and alleys to increase accessibility." Fairfax at Queen is significant grid street in approaching the Waterfront. The building will detract from the Waterfront approach with its abrupt and disorienting mass.
- Design Guidelines state that materials used should "complement and reflect the architectural heritage of the City and reflect traditional materials." We see no evidence of historic elements, concrete or abstract, in the developer's design. And the extent to which fiber cement board and synthetic concrete are proposed is concerning. They are associated with low-cost construction and stylistically, do not age well.
- The City's ground cover requirement is being achieved by planting trees elsewhere in the City. This is yet another layer added to the building's visual inappropriateness for the neighborhood. This is a beautiful, walkable city and trees around buildings matter.
- We note that in the proposal, the architect compares the building's height to Old Town properties, many historic. However, it appears the application is focusing on the height in isolation. It is the height, width, mass, and scale that makes the building incompatible, not a single feature.

In summary, PSTHA supports development that is compatible with the existing neighborhood in scale, mass, height, and architectural appropriateness. We request that the BAR require the 301 N Fairfax development to meet both the letter as well as the spirit of our zoning guidelines and ordinances before a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued.