

Docket Item #8
Planning Commission Public Hearing
June 22, 2023

Consideration of approval of the Planning Commission minutes of the Public Hearing meeting of June 22, 2023.

* * * M I N U T E S * * *
ALEXANDRIA PLANNING COMMISSION
June 22, 2023, 7:00 p.m.
Council Chamber
Alexandria, Virginia

Members Present:

Nathan Macek, Chair
David Brown
Stephen Koenig
Mindy Lyle
Jody Manor

Members Excused:

Vivian Ramirez

Staff Present:

Karl W. Moritz	Department of Planning & Zoning
Christina Zechman Brown	Office of the City Attorney
Nancy Williams	Department of Planning & Zoning
Jeff Farner	Department of Planning & Zoning
Mavis Stanfield	Department of Planning & Zoning
Carrie Beach	Department of Planning & Zoning
Patrick Silva	Department of Planning & Zoning
Ryan Freed	Office of Climate Action
Jennifer Monaco	Department of Transportation & Environmental Services
Christopher Ziemann	Department of Transportation & Environmental Services

1. **Call to Order.**

The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. with Commissioner Vivian Ramirez excused. All other members were present at the Call to Order.

Chair Macek then read the following statement into record:

“If you wish to speak on a docket item and have not already signed up to do so, please fill out a Speaker Form online by following the “Sign Up to Speak” hyperlink present on the cover page of this evening’s Public Hearing docket or in person by filling out a hardcopy speaker form, which can be found on either materials tables (located immediately outside the Chambers or at the back of the Chambers), and providing it to Ms. Williams, who has her hand raised.

Please note, comments from the public are limited to 3 minutes per speaker, with the exception of applicants and their representation. To make your public comment through the Zoom application, please click on the "Raise Hand" button located on the Zoom

taskbar once you hear your name called upon to make your statement, in order to let staff know it is you who needs to be unmuted in order to make your public comment.

To make your public comment if you are dialing into tonight's meeting via phone, please press *9 to execute the "Raise Hand" function once you hear your name called upon to make your statement, followed by *6 to toggle the unmute function. To make your public comment in person, please come up to either podium located at the front of the Chambers when you hear your name called upon to make your statement. Before starting your public comment, please first identify yourself by first and last name.

The City encourages and welcomes public comment from all residents on Planning Commission matters. In keeping with that principle, and with the principle of inclusiveness, this is a reminder of the shared expectation that the content and tenor of public comments always be civil and respectful. Thank you for honoring those principles.

A reminder to all, including Commissioners, Staff, and Speakers in the Chamber to please speak clearly into the microphone to ensure all are able to hear in a clear manner."

CONSENT CALENDAR:

Chair Macek inquired as to whether there were any changes to tonight's Docket. Staff responded that there were no changes to the Docket.

2. Special Use Permit #2023-00036
5380 Eisenhower Avenue
Public Hearing and consideration of a request for a Special Use Permit for an extension of a Special Use Permit term and for a condition amendment to allow parking space assignments for tenants (amending SUP #2017-0100); zoned: OCH/ Office Commercial High.
Applicant: Boundary 5380 Eisenhower LLC, represented by Robert D. Brant, attorney

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval for Special Use Permit #2023-00036. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0 on the Consent Calendar.

NEW BUSINESS:

3. Public Hearing and consideration of the FY 2024 Long Range Planning Interdepartmental Work Program
Staff: City of Alexandria, Departments of Planning & Zoning, Office of Housing, Transportation & Environmental Services, and Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities

Carrie Beach, Planning and Zoning, and Ryan Freed, City Manager's Office, presented the docket item and answered questions from the Planning Commission.

Speakers:

Scott Barstow, 801 N. Pitt Street, spoke in support of including the update of the City's new Green Building Policy in the Long-Range Planning Interdepartmental Work Program. Mr. Barstow noted that the City is facing a climate emergency. He urged the Planning Commission to require the installation of fully electric infrastructure for space heating, water heating, and cooking. He asked the Planning Commission to stipulate that due to the climate emergency, the City's Green Building Policy should be superseded by the Environmental Action Plan - 2040 (EAP 2040) and that the Small Area Plan for the Landmark redevelopment be consistent with the EAP-2040. Mr. Barstow urged the Planning Commission to develop an energy and resilience plan for the Landmark development, based upon a zero-net energy analysis of the energy use and production measures needed for the development to be consistent with meeting Alexandria's greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.

Kathy Hoekstra, 1310 N. Chambliss St., Chair of the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC), spoke on behalf of the EPC. Hoekstra urged the Planning Commission to make all buildings in Alexandria net-zero carbon emissions ready by 2025. She asked that 43 percent of all the existing housing units in the City be retrofitted for net-zero carbon emissions by 2025. Ms. Hoekstra offered the assistance of the EPC to the Office of Climate Action in any way possible to address the climate crisis.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, The Planning Commission voted to close the public hearing.

On a motion by Commissioner Koenig, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval for the FY 2024 Long Range Interdepartmental Work Program, The motion carried on a vote of 6-0.

Commissioner Koenig proposed two amendments to the original motion. The first amendment was to accept the staff's proposal to shift to a two-year approval cycle. The second amendment recommended that the City Council modify the scheduling of the Green Building Policy update to set the hearings for June of 2024 as proposed by the EPC and Planning Commission in the February 2023 joint recommendations.

Discussion on the motion to amend: Commissioner Brown expressed support for a faster end date for the project. He would like to see the project be concluded six months faster than the projected date at the end of calendar year 2024. Vice Chair McMahon concurred with the amendment and suggested that opting for a narrower scope than the broader scope described by staff could help staff to achieve the preferred outcomes within the shorter timelines that are recommended in the amendment.

On a motion to be by Commissioner Koenig, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Commission voted to accept the motion on the amendment. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0.

Chair Macek took a vote on the main motion which was moved by Commissioner Lyle and seconded by Vice Chair McMahon. The main motion carried on a vote of 6-0.

4. Discussion Item: Duke Street in Motion discussion regarding the Duke Street Transitway Advisory Group recommendation to Council on a preferred design concept for the Duke Street corridor from King Street to West End Alexandria.
Staff: City of Alexandria, Department of Transportation & Environmental Services

Discussion:

The Planning Commission recognized the Duke Street Transitway Advisory Group's efforts to improve the public transit and transportation experience of all users within the Duke Street corridor. Chair Macek asked about staff's consideration of the design, existing transit, and the infrastructure's ability to accommodate the use of all busses within the corridor. He requested context about the decision to forego leveraging the project for the purpose of procuring federal dollars to enhance the size and scope of the project. Staff explained that they were seeking to focus on delivering the short-term goals that were laid out for the community and did not want to risk potentially prolonging the

process by requesting additional dollars. However, they could incorporate that request into a long-term goal.

Commissioner Brown asked for clarity concerning the status of the process and whether the ideas were still in the initial phases of discovery. He expressed a concern about the position of the changes in the corridor at the intersection of Duke Street and Quaker Lane being on the north side rather than the south side of the corridor. Staff determined that the decision was made to utilize the north side because that is where the most space was available to work with. Vice Chair McMahon inquired about the feedback that staff has received from the neighbors along the corridor and what staff has done to address those concerns. Staff stated that they are working to address specific concerns that may not be clearly defined at this early stage of the process.

Chair Macek asked staff how they are monitoring and addressing the post pandemic traffic changes within the corridor area. Staff responded by indicating the continuous efforts to monitor the changing conditions and assured Chair Macek that they would take the data into consideration to make any necessary adjustments to accommodate changes in traffic patterns. Chair Macek asked staff to provide context concerning the ability of the current plan, as presented to the City Council, to consider and incorporate changes to the design elements based upon feedback from the public. Staff provided feedback about the work of the City Council to present a resolution that would empower staff to incorporate the recommendations of the Advisory Group into this phase of the process.

Vice Chair McMahon emphasized that the project is being implemented in the spirit of the prioritization of all users within the community. Commissioner Lyle explained that the Advisory Group looked at the entire corridor and spoke with several groups before making the decisions about the design plans that have been made at this stage. She said that there was a consensus among the stakeholders about the best direction for the design. Commissioner Lyle reassured the board that the Advisory Group is doing their due diligence to mitigate the potential traffic challenges that the design may present. Chair Macek reemphasized the opportunity to leverage the funding allocated to the plan to potentially attract federal dollars which could be utilized to expand the scope of the project and address potential deficits within the plan. He encouraged the Planning Commission to look at the plan in a way that is fully supportive of the vision that the plan has for the city.

Speakers:

Jim Moran, President of the Taylor Run Citizens' Association, expressed his organization's support for making improvements to Duke Street. However, he expressed concern that the plan makes recommendations that benefit commuter traffic at the expense of people who live in the neighborhoods along the corridor. He stated that the community is being impacted by two projects that theoretically should be coordinated to achieve the same goal. Mr. Moran requested an impact study on Janneys Lane and East Taylor Run. He expressed an issue with the addition of dedicated bike lanes in the plans, the change to one way traffic, and the slip lane. However, his organization does support the addition of a middle-dedicated bus lane.

Charles Brinkman, 2930 Viewpoint Road, Longview Hill Civic Association, expressed a concern that his neighborhood could only be accessed via a service road that is incorporated in the plan. He stated that while his organization supports the plan's overall goals, he finds it difficult to support the current version of the plan as presented when certain features of the design may be up for later negotiations. He expressed concerns that the current version of the plan could have a negative impact on traffic conditions and his organization could not support the plan without knowing what changes to current high traffic areas are included in future versions of the plan.

Oliver Boehm, 49 East Taylor Run Parkway, expressed that while he is in support of the overall goals of the plan, he strongly objects to certain design elements. He stated that the public engagement aspect of the plan is not well coordinated. He provided several ideas that he would like to see implemented into the project.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Commission voted to close the public hearing. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission asked Chair Macek to draft a letter to the City Council expressing the Planning Commission's general support for bus rapid transit in the Duke Street corridor and the design concepts recommended by the Advisory Group, but noting concerns that the scope of improvements considered by the Advisory Group was limited to \$87 million in existing project funding, and encouraging the City to pursue project funding from the Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Grants program to provide for a more fully developed project to help address community concerns regarding the concepts. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0.

Reason: The Planning Commission supports the efforts of the Advisory Group and agree with the overall direction of the plan, but is concerned that the project seek additional funding to help address community concerns regarding existing Duke Street proposals. The Planning Commission letter to City Council is included as an attachment to the meeting minutes.

OTHER BUSINESS:

5. Special Use Permit #2023-00040

99 Canal Center Plaza

Public Hearing and consideration of a Special Use Permit for two temporary trailers and for and for live entertainment; zoned: CRMU-H/Commercial residential mixed-use (high).

Applicant: Chalkboard Canal Center, LLC, represented by Kenneth Wire, attorney

Mavis Stanfield, Planning & Zoning, presented this docket item and answered questions of Planning Commission.

Speakers:

Mr. Harry Hart, speaking on behalf of his partner, Ken Wire, Attorney for the applicant, stated that he was the land use attorney who brought the Canal Center application to fruition 40 years ago. The property is zoned Commercial residential mixed-use, which allows the outdoor restaurants in commercial complexes by-right. He outlined the application request. He noted that this property was seen as a way to enliven the waterfront 40 years ago. He read from a letter of support from Michael Spotz stating the community has really enjoyed the outdoor events at Canal Center and that the Planning Commission should not let a small minority of residents shut it down. The events have been going on since before the residents moved into the Venue, which is the condominium where Mr. Spotz lives.

He concluded by saying that the property is zoned to be enlivened and this activity is necessary. This application will help achieve this goal. He stated that the applicant agrees with all the proposed changes to the conditions.

4. **PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:** On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Commission voted to close the public hearing. The motion carried on a of 6-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of Special Use Permit #2023-00040, as amended. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0.

6. Planning Commissioners' Reports, Comments & Questions

Chair Macek encouraged the public to visit the Senator John Warner docking facilities near Waterfront Park.

Planning Commissioner Lyle reminded the board about the AlexWest planning meeting at the Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School on June 28, 2023, at 6:30 PM.

Nancy Williams, Planning & Zoning, informed the Planning Commissioners about the Agenda for the upcoming Joint Planning Commission and City Council Work Session. She indicated it is scheduled for June 26, 2023, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at the Durant Center.

Chair Macek invited the public to attend the Waterfront Commission's Waterfront Walk on Saturday June 24, 2023, at Windmill Hill Park. The walk begins at 9:00 a.m.

Vice Chair McMahon inquired about the expectations or assignments from staff for members of the Planning Commission to upcoming committees. Karl Moritz, Planning and Zoning, will provide a list of assignments to the Planning Commissioners once they are available.

Planning Commissioner Manor reiterated his support for the Waterfront Commission's waterfront event and the use of the waterfront area to bring tourism to the City of Alexandria.

Chair Macek requested clarity about the November Planning Commission meeting date.

MINUTES:

7. Consideration of the minutes from the June 6, 2023, Planning Commission meeting.

On a motion by Vice Chair McMahon, seconded by Planning Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to approve consideration of the minutes of June 6, 2023. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0, with Vice Chair McMahon excused.

ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Commission Public Hearing was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of Council:

This letter summarizes the position of the Alexandria Planning Commission regarding the proposed Duke Street Transitway Advisory Group recommendation.

The Planning Commission supports the concept of bus rapid transit (BRT) in the Duke Street corridor. BRT is necessary to support the City's future vision for housing and development along Duke Street, which will be addressed through the upcoming Duke Street Small Area Plan Update. BRT will provide a faster, more reliable and convenient means of transport to key points along Duke Street, including the King Street Metro, Alexandria Commons, Foxchase, and West End Alexandria, where the new Inova Alexandria Hospital is being constructed.

The Planning Commission endorses the design concepts recommended by the Advisory Group for initial bus, private vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian travel improvements to the corridor. We believe the proposed concepts are the best option for improvements that can be funded within an \$87 million budget, funded by grants awarded by the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTa).

We are concerned, however, that the Duke Street Transitway Advisory Group was not presented with design options for investments in the corridor beyond the \$87 million funded by NVTa. Additional funding could help to address some of the community concerns regarding existing Duke Street proposals, including mainline, service road and cycle track configurations; intersection geometry; and traffic signal coordination and bus prioritization. Additional funding could support the purchase of additional right of way to balance and support the mobility needs of all users of the corridor, and more fully develop infrastructure necessary to support BRT along the entirety of the corridor. It could also help to hedge potential increases in project costs due to high construction cost escalation.

The City should consider pursuing funding for the corridor from the U.S. Federal Transit Administration [Capital Investment Grants](#) (CIG) program. CIG offers up to \$150 million in federal funding for "Small Starts" transit capital projects of up to \$400 million in cost. Leveraging the \$87 million in regional funds received to-date, combined federal and regional grants could potentially provide funding of up to \$237 million for BRT improvements in the corridor, without requiring any additional City funding.

Pursuing CIG funds now would enable the city to leverage its \$87 million NVTa grants to secure federal money. If the regional grant funds are expended to partially improve the corridor prior to receiving a federal Small Starts grant agreement, they *cannot be counted* as match on federal funds. Securing a federal CIG grant at a later date, to support further development of the corridor in the future, will require the city to identify new state, regional, or City funds to match a federal grant.

In the meantime, we recommend that Duke Street BRT project development continue. We encourage the City to consider how additional funding could support additional design features to enhance mobility in the corridor, and in parallel, pursue FTA funding from the CIG program.

Transportation improvements to the Duke Street corridor are of vital interest to the City, and it is important that the project be carried out in a manner that is fully supportive of the mobility needs of Duke Street users.

Thank you for your consideration of the Planning Commission's viewpoints regarding the Duke Street Transitway.

Sincerely,

Nathan Macek, Chair
Alexandria Planning Commission