

Docket Item # 12
Planning Commission Public Hearing
February 6, 2024

Consideration of approval of the Planning Commission minutes of the Public Hearing meeting of
February 6, 2024

*** * * M I N U T E S * * ***

ALEXANDRIA PLANNING COMMISSION

February 6, 2024, 7:00 P.M.,

Council Chamber

301 King Street, City Hall Alexandria, Virginia

Members Present:

Nathan Macek, Chair

Melissa McMahon, Vice Chair

David Brown

Mindy Lyle

Jody Manor

Vivian Ramirez

Stephen Koenig

Members Absent:

None

Staff Present:

Karl Moritz

Nancy Williams

Christina Zechman Brown

Cheran Ivery

Ann Horowitz

Rob Kerns

Catherine Miliaras

Daniel Wells

Maya Contreras

Jared Alves

Carson Lucarelli

Brian Dofflemyer

Tamara Jovovic

Dustin Smith

Department of Planning & Zoning

Department of Planning & Zoning

Office of the City Attorney

Office of the City Attorney

Department of Planning & Zoning

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Transportation & Environmental Services

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Office of Housing

Office of Climate Action

CALL TO ORDER

The Planning Commission Public Hearing was called to order at 7:00 p.m. All 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 you 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.

3. Special Use Permit #2023-00099
2000 Mount Vernon Avenue
Public Hearing and consideration for a Special Use Permit to waive the zoning requirements of Article IX of the Zoning Ordinance for a sign; zoned CL/Commercial low.
Applicant: Majestic Grill, Inc., represented by M. Catharine Puskar, 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 #2023-00099. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0 on the Consent Calendar

NEW BUSINESS:

3. Chair Macek recused himself from Item #3.

Special Use Permit #2023-00098

6055 Duke Street Public Hearing and consideration of a request for a Coordinated Sign Special Use Permit for a Comprehensive Sign Plan for the Hospital Campus, Block Q, and portions of Julia Johns Pl. and Westend Blvd. within the West End neighborhood; zoned CDD#29/Commercial development district #29.

Applicant: Inova Health Care Services, represented by M. Catharine Puskar, attorney

Speakers:

Cathy Puskar, attorney for the applicant, said that she discussed the concern expressed in the Planning Commission Discussion below with her applicant. She indicated the applicant indicated they are using this signage concept at their other campuses, and they believe that people will be able to find this campus as proposed.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Commissioner Manor, the Planning Commission voted to close the public hearing. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0, with Chair Macek recusing himself.

Discussion:

Commissioner Lyle discussed why the signs at the entrances to the hospital campus do not include the word hospital. She noted that the proposed signs adhere to the principle of progressive disclosure, which simplifies user interactions by focusing attention on the most important details first while revealing additional details only as needed. As a result, the user focuses on the task at hand with the fewest distractions possible. There will be blue hospital signs on 395, Duke, and Van Dorn streets. In the case of the hospital campus, the entrance signs will be followed by direction specific signs to individual entrances, buildings, and parking. This is effective with multiple entrances to allow the driver to find the exact location and prevent errors. She noted that the applicant feels strongly about using this approach here because it is specific to campus design.

Vice Chair McMahon asked about the staff memorandum dated January 31, 2024, including proposed Condition #9 and whether staff recommended including that condition with the motion. Staff confirmed that they would like to include that condition.

Commissioner Lyle asked if the additional condition is acceptable to the applicant. Cathy Puskar, attorney for the applicant, noted that the additional condition is acceptable.

Vice Chair McMahon thanked Commissioner Lyle for explaining the rationale for the signage program. Still, she believed that the signage at the entrances to the campus should include the word hospital to avoid confusion when people are driving to the campus during emergencies. She noted that not everyone may be familiar with Inova and so they could think it refers to a corporate or technical campus. She noted that it is just a recommendation

as a language adjustment.

9. CONDITION ADDED BY PLANNING COMMISSION: Within 90 days of the City Council approval, replace The Signage Location Plan Overview, A1.1 – Brand ID, Façade, and A1.3 – Brand ID, Façade sheets in the Comprehensive Sign Plan with the sheets provided with Exhibit A dated January 31, 2024. (PC)

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Commissioner Brown, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of SUP #2023-00098, Inova West End Comprehensive Sign Plan. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0, with Chair Macek recusing himself.

Reason:

The Planning Commission agreed with the staff analysis. The Commission found that the Comprehensive Sign Plan satisfied the Zoning Ordinance requirements by providing the same or greater benefits to the public as the sign regulations otherwise applicable.

4. Master Plan Amendment #2023-00008
Rezoning #2023-00006
Development Special Use Permit #2023-10012
1201 East Abingdon Drive
Public Hearing and consideration of requests for (A) an amendment to the Old Town North Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan to change the Recommended Height District Limits Map to allow for 65 feet in building height; (B) amendment to the official zoning map to change the zone for the site from OCM(50)/Office commercial medium (50) to CRMU-X/Commercial residential mixed use (Old Town North); (C) a Development Special Use Permit and Site Plan to construct a multi-unit building, including a Special Use Permit to increase the permitted floor area ratio to 2.5 in the CRMU-X zone; zoned OCM(50).
Applicant: PF III Abingdon, LLC, represented by Kenneth W. Wire, attorney

Speakers:

Andrea Haslinger, a resident of Pitt Street Station Townhouses, spoke in opposition of the project as currently proposed based on the massing and height. Ms. Haslinger also expressed concerns about building access from the North Saint Asaph Street extension and also noted that she did not receive any notice from the applicant.

Stephen Milone, representing Old Town Civic Association, spoke against the proposed height increase and suggested the project should explore wider streetscape improvements such as the landscape strip, and requested more Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers in the parking garage.

Ellen Mosher, Old Town resident, spoke in opposition to the project, expressing concerns about the height.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a motion by Vice Chair McMahan, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to close the Public Hearing. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

Discussion:

Commissioner Manor confirmed that he spoke with the City Attorney Office to confirm that he does not have a conflict of interest in the project and was able to cast a vote.

Vice Chair McMahan noted that the project will bring something new to a building that currently does not offer many benefits to the community with minimal disruptions to the surrounding fabric. Vice Chair McMahan also noted how the site design will speak to the streetscape in a way that removes a surface parking lot and activates the space. She expressed no concerns about the height increase and also acknowledged the importance of the affordable housing component of the project.

Commissioner Lyle agreed with the applicant's concerns about Condition #52, particularly with respect to not knowing the full cost of the bus shelter with conduit in the public right-of-way, and asked the applicant to work with staff on a revision to the condition to identify an agreed upon cost and to remove the requirement for electrical conduit to the bus shelter.

Commissioner Koenig noted that the project is creatively and pragmatically transforming a building that is outdated but still structurally sound and acknowledged that the transformation of the existing parking lot to an open space courtyard will be a great change. Commissioner Koenig expressed some concern about the number of projects coming forward with height limit increases but found it appropriate at this site.

Commissioner Brown noted that the Old Town North Small Area Plan has outdated language about office to residential conversions and expressed interest in an update to the plan that aligns with the current Citywide policy that encourages conversions.

Commissioner Ramirez expressed support in how the project will activate the area.

Chair Macek expressed support of the project based on the number of affordable units, the way the proposal will activate this portion of Old Town North, and that he was not concerned about the height increase based on the benefits provided and how the height does not exceed the height of the existing penthouse.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahan, the Planning Commission voted to adopt Master Plan Amendment Resolution #2023-00008. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahan, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval for Rezoning #2023-00006. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahan, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval for Development Special Use Permit #2023-10012 as amended. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

Reason:

While the Planning Commission was supportive about staff's recommendation for the applicant to provide a bus shelter at the nearby 11Y WMATA stop in order to meet the transit needs of the increased number of residents, they acknowledged the uncertainty related to the cost of providing conduit at the bus shelter to accommodate future real time LED screens. Therefore, they found it acceptable to remove that aspect of the condition related to the conduit while still providing for the purchase and installation of the physical bus shelter.

5. **COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS, COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS**

Vice Chair McMahon mentioned that the Transportation Commission is attempting to schedule a retreat which will likely happen in March or April. She will provide the Planning Commission with a date once a date has been selected. She expects the retreat to occur on a Saturday. The new Transportation Commissioners will have an opportunity to discuss the purpose of the Commission, logistical concerns, and other issues faced by the Commission.

Karl Moritz, Director of Planning & Zoning, provided an update on the status of a schedule for Master Plan Amendments and entitlements for the proposed Entertainment District. Director Moritz informed the Commissioners that they will receive an invitation to set up early briefings to discuss the schedule once decisions have been made at the state level and by the City Council on the agreement.

Chair Macek inquired about a potential policy or agreement that will be acted upon by the City Council prior to entering the planning process. Director Moritz confirmed that this would occur prior to submissions being made for review by the Planning Commission. Director Moritz stated that staff would provide information to the Commissioners concerning processes, expectations, analysis, outreach, etc. Chair Macek clarified that the question of whether the City endorses, and City government wants to pursue, the partnership for the arena is a decision to be made by Council. The planning related decisions associated with the arena approval as an entitlement process would then be considered by the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Brown asked if there is an earlier date that Commissioners would be obliged to make a conformity to a Master Plan assessment of a contract. Director Moritz stated that staff is currently looking at a Master Plan Amendment which would be an early phase decision for the Commissioners.

Chair Macek reported that the Waterfront Commission is looking at the proposal for the Robinson Terminal North development. There is likely to be a committee of Waterfront Commission members who will evaluate the site. The committee will evaluate the features of the proposed development rather than standards set forth by that block within the Waterfront Small Area Plan. The next meeting will be held in mid-February.

Director Moritz introduced the City's new City Attorney Cheran Ivery who recently joined the City of Alexandria following the retirement of Joanna Anderson. He indicated that Deputy City Attorney Christina Zechman Brown will continue to be assigned to the Planning Commission, but City Attorney Ivery wanted to attend tonight to observe the

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Planning Commission Public Hearing in person. She brings an extension background which has well prepared her for this role and her credentials and past experience can be found on the City's website under the City Attorney's Office [City Attorney | City of Alexandria, VA \(alexandriava.gov\)](#). City Attorney Ivery was welcomed by Chair Macek and members of the Planning Commission.

MINUTES

6. Consideration of the minutes from the January 4, 2024 Planning Commission meeting.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a Motion by Vice Chair McMahan, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to approve the minutes of January 4, 2024. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

ADJOURNMENT

7. The Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.