

Docket Item #13
Planning Commission Public Hearing
April 4, 2024

Consideration of approval of the Planning Commission minutes of the Public Hearing meeting of
April 4, 2024.

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

ALEXANDRIA PLANNING COMMISSION

April 4, 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

Tony LaColla

Sam Shelby

Rachel Drescher

Ann Horowitz

Patrick Silva

Michael D’Orazio

Maya Contreras

Jared Alves

Rob Kerns

Carson Lucarelli

Brian Dofflemyer

Ryan Knight

David Sharon

Arthur Wickes

Julia Taylor

Department of Planning & Zoning

Department of Planning & Zoning

Office of the City Attorney

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Transportation & Environmental Services

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Office of Management and Budget

Office of Management and Budget

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Planning Commission Public Hearing of April 4, 2024 was called to order at 7:02 p.m. All members were present, with Commissioner Ramirez arriving at 7:15 p.m.

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.”

2. WORK SESSION

The Planning Commission held a Work Session on the proposed Sign Ordinance.

Discussion Item: Sign Ordinance Update

Staff: City of Alexandria, Department of Planning & Zoning

Rachel Drescher, Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z), gave a brief presentation outlining the topics planned to be considered for the Sign Ordinance update. This included making the ordinance more user friendly, consideration of currently prohibited signage (digital signs, A-frame signs, noncomplying pole signs, painted wall signs/murals, and illuminated signs over 35 feet in height).

Discussion:

Commissioner Manor asked about the difference between a pole sign and monument sign. Staff explained monument signs have a structural base, whereas pole signs are mounted on a pole or post and are over 6 feet in height.

Vice-Chair McMahon asked about liability to the City if A-frames are allowed. Staff explained if these are approved applicants would be required to receive an encroachment permit and have liability insurance. Chair Macek noted that there is already an administrative process for parklets that could serve as a model for allowing A-frames as permitted encroachments.

Vice-Chair McMahon asked if staff's input with Special Use Permits for illuminated signs over 35 feet has shaped their design. Staff stated that most, if not all the signs, comply with the Sign Ordinance except for their illumination. Commissioner Brown suggested that only controversial sign cases should come before the Planning Commission. Commissioner Lyle agreed with Commissioner Brown, highlighting the benefit digital signs are to schools.

Commissioner Lyle stated that if the City continues to prohibit A-frames then stricter enforcement of illegal A-frame signs should occur. Commissioner Manor stated there is a demand for A-frame signs and that they provide an opportunity for businesses to advertise creatively.

Vice-Chair McMahon encouraged simplification of the sign review process. In regard to digital signs, she noted the challenge of regulating this type of signage without being able to regulate the content of the sign. Regarding A-Frames, she suggested a size limit, distance from entrance, and sidewalk clearance. Regarding murals, she encouraged allowing them and that she sees some challenges in creating a wall coverage maximum.

Chair Macek stated a brochure was created years ago as a result of a Sign Ordinance Ad-Hoc group recommendation, and asked whether this is still in circulation. Staff stated this is not in current circulation, but certainly something that can be updated. Chair Macek encouraged creating design guidelines and visual examples for by-right signs.

For digital signs, Chair Macek suggested regulations such as flicker rate and pixelation, which would require higher end signs. He cautioned allowing digital signs on Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations because this would open the door for outdoor advertising. Regarding A-Frames, Chair Macek stated they are much less impactful to the streetscape than outdoor dining and supported regulations that would require A-frames to be adjacent to the business. Chair Macek asked staff to reach out to the Alexandria Commission for People with Disabilities for their input. For noncomplying pole signs, Chair Macek suggested allowing existing pole signs to remain unless the tenant changes.

Commissioner Koenig agreed with Vice-Chair McMahon to be more lenient with regulation for murals as there is potential to improve the architecture with this type of imagery.

Commissioner Brown asked for a staff memorandum that would highlight staff recommendations prior to the next Planning Commission meeting, if possible.

PUBLIC HEARING

Chair Macek inquired as to whether there were any changes to tonight's Docket. Staff responded that there was one change in that staff is requesting to defer Item #4, -- Public Hearing and consideration of a request for the Planning Commission to adopt a resolution to set its FY2025 meeting schedule and establish continuation dates for meetings. Staff indicated that the City Council voted on its FY 2025 Calendar on Tuesday, April 2 and that information will be helpful to set the FY 2025 Planning Commission schedule.

CONSENT CALENDAR: The following item was pulled from the Consent Calendar

3. Special Use Permit #2023-00106
406 East Glebe Road
Public Hearing and consideration of a Special Use Permit for an automobile sales area; zoned: CDD#24/Coordinated Development District #24.
Applicant: Petru Stratan
Staff: Patrick Silva, Department of Planning & Zoning

Staff provided a presentation.

Speakers:

Steve Walz, on behalf of the Lynhaven Civic Association (LCA), spoke in favor of the request and expressed the Lynhaven Civic Association's vote of support, but detailed that they would like to see additional conditions of approval added to the Special Use Permit to act as a backstop to mitigate issues relating to noise which may stem from the use a vehicle idling.

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

Discussion:

Commissioner Lyle expressed her concern at the difficulty of enforcing a condition intending to mitigate automobile related noise like honking and revving in an urban environment as it can be difficult to attribute to a specific commercial use and successfully enforce.

Commissioner Ramirez mentioned that the proposed hours of operation for the use are in line with when a louder baseline noise ambiance could be expected in the City and that the use would therefore be unlikely to induce undue noise during quieter hours. Commissioner Manor inquired of staff as to which City Department regulates noise. Staff responded that it is the Department of Transportation & Environmental Services. Chair Macek expressed support for the proposal and expressed his opinion that additional conditions to mitigate noise were not necessary in this case.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Vice Chair McMahon, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of Special

Use Permit #2023-00106, as amended by the April 3 2024, staff memorandum. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

REASON: The Planning Commission agreed with the staff analysis.

4. **Deferral Requested**

Public Hearing and consideration of a request for the Planning Commission to adopt a resolution to set its FY2025 meeting schedule and establish continuation dates for meetings. Staff: City of Alexandria, Department of Planning & Zoning

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Vice Chair McMahon, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to defer Item #4. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

5. Advisory recommendations to the City Manager, under Section 6.14 of the City Charter, regarding the Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Improvement Program. Staff: City of Alexandria, Office of Management & Budget (OMB)

The Planning Commission opted not to receive a presentation based on the information provided to-date.

Discussion:

Commissioner Koenig indicated he has a couple specific questions. He asked when the Landmark Fire Station is contemplated under the 2025 – 2034 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Staff indicated the design portion is funded in FY 2024 and the timing is such that construction can move forward, after the design process gets started and is completed. Construction would move forward with the rest of the development in Block J. Commissioner Koenig also asked for an update on the status of Block J at the appropriate time. Department of Planning & Zoning Director Karl Moritz indicated that the design work has not yet started but staff can provide an update on Block J in writing in the short term and then, at a later time, staff can provide an in-person update when things have progressed more.

Commissioner Koenig inquired about the status of the design plans for the section of the Route I Transitway between East Glebe and the Arlington County border. He indicated the CIP contemplates it occurring in 2024-2025 timeframe. Staff indicated they will follow-up and get back to the Planning Commission on the status.

Chair Macek indicated that in reviewing the CIP, he sees, for Transit Corridors B and C, there seems to be regional and local money, but he does not see federal money. He inquired as to whether there are plans to pursue federal funds. Staff indicated that the CIP reflects grant funding that is secured and grant funds for which the City is currently applying. Chair Macek indicated that the City should pursue every opportunity for federal funding. He used congestion concerns regarding Van Dorn Street as an example of need; he said the Planning Commission will likely hear about Van Dorn Street congestion when the next case, Vulcan, is discussed. Chair Macek believes that federal funding would be an asset in helping to alleviate congestion in that area. Chair Macek also congratulated staff on securing a federal grant for the Duke Street Corridor Study and indicated such funding can help achieve the goals of our Small Area Plans.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Vice Chair McMahon, and seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of an advisory recommendation to the City Manager under Section 6.14 regarding the FY2025 Capital Improvement Program. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

6. Master Plan Amendment #2023-00007

Text Amendment #2023-00006

Rezoning #2023-00005

Coordinated Development District Concept Plan #2023-00004

Development Special Use Permit #2023-10007 - Condo Flats

Development Special Use Permit #2023-10013 - Hotel

Development Special Use Permit #2023-10014 - Townhouses/Stacked Townhouses

Development Site Plan #2023-00013 - Infrastructure and public streets

Development Site Plan #2023-00014 - Public park

Coordinated Sign Special Use Permit #2023-00100

Subdivision #2023-00006

Vacation #2023-00005

Vulcan Site Redevelopment - 701 South Van Dorn Street and 698 Burnside Place

Initiation of and Public Hearing and consideration of requests for: (A) an amendment to the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan to amend the building heights diagram to change the height limit for the southern portion of the property from Medium-High to Medium to allow for lower minimum building heights; (B) a Text Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to amend provisions of Section 5-602 to include hotel and townhouses within CDD#26 with a CDD Special Use Permit; (C) an amendment to the official zoning map to change the zoning of 701 South Van Dorn Street and 698 Burnside Place from I/Industrial to CDD #26/Coordinated Development District #26; (D) a Coordinated Development District Concept Plan Conceptual Design Plan Amendment to include the project site in CDD #26; (E) a Development Special Use Permit with Site Plan to construct six multi-unit residential buildings with 208 total units with a Special Use Permit to reduce the off-street parking requirement; (F) a Development Special Use Permit with Site Plan and modifications to construct a 256 room hotel with ground floor retail; (G) a Development Special Use Permit with Site Plan to construct 31 townhouse and 88 stacked townhouse (multi-unit residential) units with a Special Use Permit to reduce the off-street parking requirement for the stacked townhouses; (H) a Development Site Plan to construct three new streets and associated infrastructure; (I) a Development Site Plan to construct a public park; (J) a Coordinated Sign Special Use Permit for the hotel signage; (K) a Subdivision to create the new internal blocks and dedicate right-of-way; and (L) a vacation of a portion of the public right of way located at Courtney Ave and South Van Dorn Street, zoned: I/Industrial. Applicants: City of Alexandria (Text Amendment); Lennar Corporation and Potomac Land Group II, LLC, represented by Kenneth Wire, attorney.

Staff: Jared Alves, Department of Planning & Zoning

Chair Macek asked staff to explain the rationale for including the subject site in Consolidated Development District #26, despite the parcels being separated by Backlick Run. Staff answered that the Small Area Plan (SAP) envisioned using the Consolidated Development District (CDD) rezoning to encompass the immediate area, called the Innovation District. Staff indicated including the parcels on either side of Backlick Run enables coordination of the restoration and revitalization of the Resource Protection Area on both banks and transportation improvements, such as the pedestrian/cyclist bridge provided with the application, to further connect the parcels.

Speakers:

Sash Impastato, on behalf of the Cameron Station Civic Association, said that the Association generally supports the project, but that their members are concerned about current and future traffic. Mr. Impastato indicated the applicant's traffic study uses pandemic era data, and it even showed that all intersections are currently impacted significantly. The Association is concerned that the pandemic data doesn't demonstrate the true magnitude of the issue. In addition, they are concerned that the City's budget does not recommend the multimodal bridge envisioned by the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan. The Association requested an updated traffic study using current data or an explanation to ensure that the current study is suitable. Further, the Association asked the City to recommit to the multimodal bridge, particularly considering the growth anticipated in the area, including the redevelopment of Landmark Mall.

Ken Wire, Wire Gill, LLP, project attorney, described the project and noted the importance of connecting the parks on both banks of Backlick Run. The project provides less density than shown in the SAPs, but the same amount of open space. They set the hotel building back from the bridge and pulled back infrastructure to accommodate any future widening of S. Van Dorn Street. He acknowledged that Courtney Avenue is a complicated intersection. He discussed the history of the project, the variety of open space and the design of the hotel to be able to attract national brands with long- and short-stay components. He noted that City staff confirmed the traffic study locations and open space design, particularly the pedestrian bridge. He highlighted the contributions to affordable housing, open space, and other amenities for the area and the City.

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

Discussion:

Vice Chair McMahon noted the concern from the Cameron Station Civic Association about regional traffic. She asked to hear about the appropriateness of the traffic study, given pandemic activity, and why the sidelining of the multimodal bridge option has occurred, given the current experience of area residents. She asked for the current and future vision for the area. She also highlighted the benefits of the project, including the variety of housing types, the bridge connection, the hotel, the connectivity, and the park. She indicated the project is using the aspects of the site and turning them into assets and laying the groundwork for future improvements to the neighborhood. She noted that this project can't solve the regional traffic problems, and that the City should continue to look for opportunities for investments and improvements. Staff noted that they are confident in the

traffic study. The applicant adjusted the pandemic era counts to approximate pre-pandemic travel behavior. Since then, the City has conducted traffic counts in the area and has determined that the applicant estimated more traffic than has returned post-pandemic, likely due to different commuting habits and work-from home. Staff noted that an analysis of the benefits of the multimodal bridge to traffic would not be outweighed by the considerable projected costs, especially when compared to the costs and benefits associated with widening the existing S. Van Dorn Street bridge. Staff are focused on this area with a VDOT study to evaluate the intersection of Eisenhower Avenue with S. Van Dorn Street, using several measures: (1) introducing adaptive traffic signals on S. Van Dorn Street, (2) a recent grant to study high crash intersections, (3) the coming West End Transitway bus rapid transit, and (4) additional initiatives. Commissioner Lyle expressed great concern about the current state of traffic congestion in the area. She noted that there are three high crash intersections along S. Van Dorn Street. People are doing U-turns along S. Pickett Street. She noted the poor design at S. Pickett completed when Modera Tempo was built, which was revised but traffic still backs up to Home Depot. She discussed the approved and pending development projects along the corridor, as well as in Fairfax County. Residents are living with the problem today and need relief. She indicated the Vulcan project is great, but the existing conditions are a problem, and no one is listening. She said help is needed to get the traffic right. Bus rapid transit will not be a solution for everyone, and it won't be implemented for 5-10 years. Multiple 311 requests have been put in for traffic signals along the corridor and they are closed without improvement. Staff acknowledged the Commissioner's and residents' frustration with the traffic along the corridor and reiterated that staff are focused on identifying and implementing improvements. Commissioner Lyle said that she appreciates the \$112 thousand Capital bikeshare contribution but noted that most will go into a Citywide fund that may not be used in the West End. She would like an additional station at Ben Brenman or Boothe Park, or elsewhere in the area. She would like to see the money stay within the West End. To build a network, investments need to be made in the West End. In addition, she noted that she had discussed a possible CDD Condition #21.I to collect current traffic counts following project completion. She acknowledged staff's recommended revisions to Condition #433 to change the mulch park paths to porous pavement. Making the park American Disabilities Act compliant will ensure equal access. She noted the increases in anticipated taxes from about \$180 thousand today to \$2.7 million at full buildout in today's dollars and rates. She has heard a lot of vitriol about developers, but this project has been a good experience and meets the long-anticipated vision for this site.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS:

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of MPA #2023-00007. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to initiate Text Amendment #2023-00006. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

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

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of REZ #2023-00005. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of CDD #2023-00004. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of DSUP #2023-10007, DSUP #2023-10013, and DSUP #2023-10014. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to approve of DSP #2023-00013. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to approve of DSP #2023-00014. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of SUP #2023-00100. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to approve of SUB #2023-00006. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Vice Chair McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of VAC #2023-00005. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

433. CONDITION AMENDED BY PLANNING COMMISSION: Provide these modifications to the landscape plan and supporting drawings with the Final Site Plan to the satisfaction of the Director of RP&CA: (RP&CA) * a. Locate trash and recycling bins within five feet of the curb line at public park entrances.

REPORTS

7. Chair Macek reminded everyone of the April 13, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., AlexRenew Tunnel Open House.

Chair Macek also mentioned the possibility of a Planning Commission Retreat this year.

Commissioner Koenig inquired about the status of Potomac Yard, now that the Entertainment District proposal is not moving forward. Department of Planning & Zoning Director Karl Moritz mentioned that staff is receptive to discussions on Potomac Yard and that it could be a subject of a Planning Commission Retreat if that is something in which the Planning Commission is interested. Commissioner Koenig expressed an interest in such a discussion.

MINUTES

8. Consideration of the minutes from the March 5, 2024 Planning Commission meeting.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a motion by Vice Chair McMahon, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to approve the minutes of March 5, 2024. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

ADJOURNMENT

9. The Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:34 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a Motion by Vice Chair McMahon, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to adjourn. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.