

*******DRAFT MINUTES*******

Alexandria Board of Architectural Review
Old & Historic Alexandria District
500 and 501 North Union Street
(Formerly Robinson Terminal North)
2nd Concept Review Work Session

Wednesday, July 16, 2014
Council Work Room
301 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Members Present: Oscar Fitzgerald, Chairman
John von Senden, Vice-Chairman
Chip Carlin
Kelly Finnigan
Margaret Miller
Wayne Neale
Christine Roberts

Staff Present: Planning & Zoning
Al Cox, Historic Preservation Manager
Tom Canfield, City Architect, Planning & Zoning
Michele Oaks, Historic Preservation Planner
Amirah Lane, Senior Planning Technician

The work session commenced at approximately 9:30 p.m.

SPEAKERS:

Ken Wire, attorney for the applicant, gave a brief introduction and status of the project to date, noted that the plan has evolved since the Board work session in May, and reminded the Board of its advisory role during the Planning Commission and City Council's review of this project.

Michael Hickok, Hickok Cole Architects, gave a presentation which described the proposed site plan and building designs for the east and west buildings and requested feedback from the BAR. He noted the goals of the project, which included designing distinctively different buildings for each site that relate to each other and have some level of architectural continuity. He also identified some of the site challenges, including the grade change along the Oronoco frontage, its proposed change to the street grid and the potential addition of a rain garden. He noted the buildings' shape and orientation on the lots were intentional in order to open up vistas and views to both parks.

Katy Cannady, 20 East Oak Street, testified that the building design was "motel architecture" – reminiscent of a motel found along the Gulf coast and she believed it was not acceptable for Alexandria.

Van Fleet, President of the Old Town Civic Association, stated that this project reminded him of Urban Renewal 2.0. He testified that OTC will be submitting a letter to the Planning Commission and City Council to urge them not to support the project.

Bert Ely, 200 South Pitt Street, stated that the project does not fit in North Old Town. He was particularly concerned by the height of the West Building. He also noted that the applicant will have to supply more parking than what was currently being allocated.

Ted Pulliam, owner 2506 Sanford Street and member of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission, noted support with the previous citizen comments. He was also concerned that the East Building did not look like Alexandria. He felt that the structure needed to be broken into smaller building masses. He testified that these buildings are going to change history and any interpretation should be at West's Point – and not a rain garden.

Kathryn Papp stated that, although this was the second concept review, she was not feeling any better about the project. She felt that citizens should be able to go up to the buildings and enjoy viewing the architecture, as it will be in the City for a very long time. She also noted that the buildings do not fit into the Olin concept for the shoreline. She felt that the project could be a better looking modern structure than what was currently being proposed. She also inquired about the ratio of the retail, hotel and residential within the project.

Poul Hertel, 1217 Michigan Court, stated that he was concerned about the edges of the west building – noting there was a significant amount of cantilever in and out. He also noted that large amounts of glass were great until the blinds/shades are closed. He said he was not enamored with the angled glass bay windows and the prominent penthouse mass on the west building. Regarding the east building, he found that the concept of the design does not work at all and that it was an unsuccessful attempt at being iconic.

BOARD DISCUSSION

Ms. Finnegan opened the Board discussion by outlining her concerns for the west building. She noted concerns with the elongation of the window openings, the need for more brick on its east elevation, as only the top two floors will be able to take advantage of the water views, and encouraged more curvature in the design. She also did not like all the sharp angles. Regarding the east building, she questioned the use of lighter materials, as the light brick against the other materials conveyed a uniform material and increased the visual mass of the building. She encouraged the architect to break the scale of the building into smaller segments and noted that the overall building did not have unity. She felt that each elevation transplanted her to a different place – a campus, chemistry lab; the tropics etc., but not Alexandria. She strongly advocated maintaining the existing street grid east to the river.

Ms. Miller stated that she was in agreement with the citizen comments and noted that she liked the schematic “E” shaped design that was illustrated in the Waterfront Plan. She expressed that she did not like the east building or the proposed site plan. She also noted that the height of the west building was too high.

Mr. Neale stated he still supported his recommendation from the last meeting where he recommended that the architect transfer the open space plaza to the north end of the site and that a hotel in this location was inappropriate. He stated that he did not object to the building designs, yet would like to see a re-study of the west building to relocate a portion of the two-story mass on the northern end to fill out the grid space at the southern end. He also identified some concerns with the context and the proposed development's relationship to neighboring buildings and its overall height.

Ms. Roberts stated that she appreciated the attempt to relate the east and west buildings but that it appeared "that is where the story ended." She concurred with Mr. Neale's comment regarding the height of the proposed development. In addition, she did not see how the development related to Old Town and she preferred the extension of the traditional street grid to the irregular shape presented. She encouraged the architect not to divorce the design and site plan from the Old Town street grids and building forms, but to approach the design as an interplay of traditional and modern elements.

Mr. Carlin noted that the irregular geometry of the site plan and the introduction of arbitrary angles in the building plan are alien to Alexandria and the Waterfront. He also felt that was not in keeping with the Olin plan. He believed that this design, if constructed, would look like the [DC] Southwest Waterfront of urban renewal.

Mr. von Senden noted that Alexandria is a Cartesian grid and that when a project deviates from this grid – there needs to be a demonstrated need derived from the context. He found that the pier and west building with its canted grid was "better than expected." He thought the wharf and floating dock designs were good, however, the east building was still the architect's biggest challenge. He felt that the building mass was successful, but not the design. Alexandria's building forms are very formal and contextual and he recommended that the applicant refer to existing landmark buildings for inspiration. He also noted that the height of the west building was a concern relative to the adjacent townhouses but not in relationship to the buildings to the north and west. He also felt that the mechanical penthouse needed further development so that it was not just a spine.

Chairman Fitzgerald noted that the Board's comments were pretty consistent, finding general support for the architectural character of the west building, with some design edits, but noting that the Board did not support the design for the east building at all. He added that the Board did not support the proposed changes to the Oronoco street grid. He strongly recommended that the architectural team look to other landmark Alexandria buildings for inspiration and design a contemporary building which is timeless, rather than of its own time.

The work session concluded at approximately 11:00 pm.

Minutes submitted by,

Michele Oaks, Historic Preservation Planner
Board of Architectural Review