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4-15-23

April 11, 2023

City Council and City Clerk
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
CouncilComment@alexandria.gov

Subject: Montgomery Center Proposed Development, North Old Town, Alexandria, VA - Initial Comments, Concerns and Questions

Docket Item #9
Montgomery Center
300, 312 & 320 Montgomery St.
805, 807 & 809 N. Royal St.
806 & 816 N. Fairfax St.
MC Property LLC c/o Carr
City Centers Master Plan Amendment #2023-00001
Development Special Use Permit #2022-10021
Transportation Management Plan SUP#2023-00008

I have read the subject proposal by MC Property LLC c/o Carr. I am a resident at the Venue Condominium at 925 N. Fairfax St., #304, Alexandria, VA, 22314, and am providing this letter as a very concerned citizen who will be directly and adversely affected by the proposed development.

The proposed new construction is significantly out of character with the design, aesthetics, and architecture of Old Town North, further degrading this unique, historic community. The proposed development will destroy the very historic character that attracted my wife and I to purchase a condominium at Venue. There are already a number of new, very tall developments and adding the Market Center will move our community past a tipping point, causing adverse effects that cannot be mitigated.

Old Town Alexandria is nationally-recognized for its historic character, brick and frame architecture, and an open skyline mostly unmarred by tall structures. Any new development should be limited to the predominately 1-2 stories in height to match the existing condition in terms of aesthetics, open space, light penetration, and materials. Figures 7, 8, 37, 38 show a very modern looking, unattractive, blocky design completely out of character with the historic fabric of the community. No amount of so-called "softening" can ameliorate the adverse effects of the proposed over-sized buildings and extensive impervious ground cover (sidewalks and pavements). Existing Old Town North height limits should be enforced, with no approvals for higher structures which will degrade the character of the neighborhood.

On page 11 of the Master Plan Amendments and related documents it states, "*Montgomery Center has been an identified redevelopment site in the Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTNSAP) since its adoption in September 2017. The proposed project meets the intent of the plan, which envisions a "pedestrian-focused neighborhood" with a "diverse public realm*

network.” The proposed development is contrary to the OTNSAP because it adds an unsightly, large, modern blocky structure that will overburden the neighborhood with car and foot traffic, and potentially attract large crowds at the culture and arts facility. The proposed Montgomery Center will not bring “vibrancy” to the neighborhood --- rather it will cause overcrowding, diminish “vibrancy”, and add an unsightly mass, eliminating existing small businesses, tipping the character of Old Town from its historic appearance to a much more modern appearance.

The proposal states that retail uses are planned, but does not provide any information regarding what those retailers will be. Neighborhood residents must know exactly what retailers are actually committed to move in so that their desirability and impacts can be determined. Will they replace the excellent restaurants, gift shops, door/window shop, fitness facility, record store, and cleaners that we have come to depend upon. It is critically important that residents know what retailers will be coming to the neighborhood in advance of project approval.

Parking is already very limited and hard to find. Another condo unit, with associated retailers, will make it impossible for residents of existing homes/condos to park. The Developer's proposal is for 327 residential units and about ~600 patrons for retail, restaurants, and the cultural/arts facility. The proposed 358 parking spaces for residents, 26 for retail/restaurant patrons, and 22 spaces for the cultural/arts facility are woefully inadequate. At least 800-1,000 spaces should be provided, and preferably mostly located in an underground or above ground parking garage. The Developer eliminated consideration of a parking garage without a justification --- most likely to save money and increase their profit at the expense of community residents and visitors who will struggle to be able to find parking. The assumptions on page 26 for eliminating the parking garage, assuming existing street parking will suffice is flawed. The Developer's study may conclude that there will be an acceptable level of service, but I strongly disagree. Street parking is already difficult to find.

The serious problem with inadequate parking is called out on page 111 in a the letter from the Urban Design Advisory Committee which states: *“However, the Committee is concerned that the use of the Arts component as a performance space will contribute to OTN parking issues which will be exacerbated by concurrent performances at other nearby projects recently approved for additional density based upon their Arts component performance spaces. Although the applicant is meeting the parking requirement for this project, we implore the city to work out a cost sharing agreement with the applicant to supply additional underground parking in this project. There is a one-time opportunity to provide additional parking and relieve the demand placed upon street parking in the surrounding area. **As Old Town North continues to increase in density, the parking issue will only become more burdensome. The Committee requests that the city secure an agreement and funding before allowing the project to move forward.**”*

Next, the last thing the Old Town North neighborhood needs is another performance venue which will increase traffic, air pollution, noise pollution, over-crowding, vandalism/crime, and create more parking problems. Nearby, the Venue development has Metro Stage, another arts and cultural facility. The proposed performance venue at Montgomery Center must be

eliminated. Why should the town approve a special use permit for a parking reduction for the arts and cultural center? On page 16 the proposal amendment document states: *"Therefore, the DSUP conditions and subsequent MOU will allow for some additional flexibility to work this out once an arts user is selected, and for the arts user to experiment with programming that best fits their mission and the intent of the District."* This is a problem. Not knowing who the arts user will be in advance of approval is ill-advised and risky, as is allowing "experimentation". The same can be said about retailers; they are unidentified on page 21. It is inappropriate for the Developer to be speculating and experimenting with OUR neighborhood. What is a *"desirable tenant"* --- the undefined term is elitist and racist (p. 14).

"While no specific outdoor entertainment use has been identified, it is the applicant's intent to provide a welcoming and robust active open space where there could be, at times, outdoor entertainment and/or recreation. Both "any use with live entertainment" and "recreation and entertainment use/outdoor" require SUPs in the CRMU-X zone (p. 31)." The noise from an outdoor entertainment will be an unacceptable nuisance and should be disapproved. Requiring 20 monthly performances is an odd requirement that will increase crowding and noise.

Proposed setbacks are too narrow. There is nothing wrong with the existing sidewalks. Widening them means more impermeable surface and more heat generation which flies in the face of trying to address climate change. *"Historic Interpretations"* should be described and approved in advance of any approval of this development not left to the good will and interpretations of the Developer (p. 25). Payments to affordable housing, Capital Bikeshare, Urban Forestry in the amounts specified cannot mitigate the adverse effects that this proposed development will cause.

I encourage the City Council to pause further processing of the applications and approvals until more studies, data, and information are made available to property owners and residents in Old Town North. There is no meaningful information on traffic increases, increases of CO2 emissions, impacts to the electrical grid, or the serious health issues associated with the years-long, constant construction that has spewed dust and other pollutants into the air, caused traffic and parking problems, created noise issues, and made the neighborhood visually degraded. The Developer should hold a public workshop at a location in North Old Town so that adjacent property owners can easily attend, be informed, and ask questions.

Respectfully,

/S/

Margaret E. Gaffney-Smith & Charles R. Smith
925 N. Fairfax St., #304
Alexandria, VA 22314
571-286-8799

From: michele lemay <michele.h.lemay@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 05, 2023 4:00 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Cc: michele lemay
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Montgomery Center Redevelopment proposal - comments for Alexandria City Council hearing April 15, 2023

You don't often get email from michele.h.lemay@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Greetings,

I refer to the certified letter sent March 16 by Kenneth Wire announcing the review of the above proposal at public hearings. I am a resident owner at The Venue, 925 N Fairfax St, Alexandria VA 22314. I have reviewed the Planning Department staff summary and attended by Zoom the public hearing of the Planning Commission on March 30.

The following are concerns/questions identified about the proposed development that are relevant to me as a resident living in a location nearly adjacent to the proposed development. In my opinion, these issues are relevant for both construction and post-construction phases.

1. What is the estimated duration of the construction phase at this time?
2. Only a restricted number of parking spaces are planned for the 600-seat capacity live entertainment center. What are the specific implications for off-site parking? Based on the information provided at the Planning Commission hearing, I understand that the proposal foresees arrangements with nearby existing parking facilities for parking for the live entertainment center. By what milestone in the planning process (approval of site plan?) will these arrangements be in place. I note that the Urban Design Advisory Committee also raised the parking concern and recommended additional on-site parking. As residents of the Venue, we rely on street parking for guests and are concerned that there will be insufficient parking.
3. What will be the specific disruptions to vehicular and pedestrian access in the immediate area during construction (Madison, Montgomery, N Fairfax, N Royal)?
4. What will be the implications for vehicular traffic through North Old Town/Old Town (the general area).
5. What will be the noise, dust and air quality impacts generated during construction? Will affected communities will able to contribute ideas for the mitigation measures during the EIA process? Have preliminary impacts on the nearby condo buildings and adjacent tennis courts been considered? As nearby residents we are concerned that noise, dust and declining air quality levels will increase significantly in adjacent areas.
6. The media has reported that the project will have a sewer line connection to the ReNew project to be constructed through Oronoco Park. Is this confirmed? What were alternatives routes considered? What other public open spaces will be affected by public infrastructure expansion required by the proposed development?
7. What is the rationale for the 600-seat capacity live entertainment center and financial and economic feasibility, given the unresolved status of the art facilities at The Venue and The Muse? What are the specific public benefits of the live entertainment center for local residents?

8. What specifically have been the prior community consultations and what will be the future consultations, including with property owners at adjacent condo and townhouse developments (The Venue and 801 North). Both developments are relatively new and residents owners did not necessarily participate in prior community consultations. I am concerned that the consultations with directly affected residents have not been sufficient under the circumstances.

I look forward to receiving additional information about these concerns/questions at the upcoming Council Meeting on April 15.

Kindly acknowledge receipt of these comments.

Thank you

Michele Lemay
925 N Fairfax St Unit #504
Alexandria, VA 22301

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From: Asif Faiz <afaiz29@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 06, 2023 2:19 AM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: Re: Montgomery Center Redevelopment - Concerns/Questions for City Council Hearing 15 April 2023

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Dear Alexandria City Council members.

I am currently overseas and may not be able to attend the hearing on April 15.

The proposed Montgomery Center Redevelopment is likely to give rise to significant environmental and livability concerns, as discussed below.

Increased Traffic Flow and Congestion.

The proposed multiuse redevelopment (with a live entertainment center with a 600-seat capacity) could easily add 1500-2000 vehicles per hour during morning/evening peaks to the traffic flow on the adjacent streets . Has a new traffic circulation plan been developed (for both the construction and post-construction periods) for the four directly impacted streets and the wider North Arlington area?

Environmental Impact

What will be the environmental impact (noise, air pollution, traffic congestion, community disruption) of the proposed redevelopment and has an environmental impact assessment been conducted with community participation? Is this EIA available for public review?

Noise is a major concern already in North Alexandria on account of National Airport operations. What will be the incremental noise impact during and after the construction period? Have any traffic calming /noise mitigation measures been considered?

Parking Demand

Has a parking demand study been carried out? And how will the additional parking demand be accommodated? All the incremental parking requirements, especially for the entertainment center must be met through off-street garage parking preferably provided within the redevelopment area.

Pedestrian and Micromobility Needs

How will pedestrian and other mobility modes (bikes, scooters etc) be accommodated? The existing sidewalks are much too narrow. Will there be dedicated bike lanes.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Asif Faiz, Ph.D, P.E., F. ASCE.
Transport Planner/Engineer

Resident/Owner
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