


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 15, 2015

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ON SELECTION OF A
LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR THE POTOMAC YARD
METRORAIL STATION

As part of the Environmental Impact Statement process for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station, the public comment period is open until Monday, May 18, 2015. This memo provides a summary of new comments that have been received since staff released its recommendation regarding the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) on April 24, 2015. That document included a summary of the feedback received from the community up to that date.

Since the release of the staff report on April 24, 2015, staff has received additional community feedback through public meetings and written and e-mailed commentary. In addition, staff has presented its recommendation to boards and commissions, including the Board of Architectural Review, the Planning Commission, the Environmental Policy Commission, the Park and Recreation Commission, the Transportation Commission, and the Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Work Group. This memorandum is intended to update City Council on the feedback received from these boards, commissions, and committees, as well as the public. Included attachments are a summary of board, commission, and committee actions (Attachment 1) and a summary of additional community feedback received since April 24 (Attachment 2).

Attachments:

1. Board, Commission, and Committee Actions
2. Additional Community Feedback on Impacts of Alternatives

cc:

Emily A. Baker, P.E., Acting Deputy City Manager
Yon Lambert, AICP, Director, T&ES
Karl W. Moritz, Director, P&Z
James Spengler, Director, RP&CA
Mitchell Bernstein, P.E., Acting Director, DPI
Morgan Routt, Acting Budget Director, OMB
Christopher Spera, Deputy City Attorney, Office of City Attorney

Actions by Boards, Commissions, and Committees

Following the release of the staff recommendation for the preferred alternative for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station, City of Alexandria staff met with the following boards, commissions, and committees to present the staff recommendation and receive feedback:

- Board of Architectural Review (Old and Historic District)
- Environmental Policy Commission
- Planning Commission
- Park and Recreation Commission
- Transportation Commission
- Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Work Group (PYMIG)

The Board of Architectural Review, the Planning Commission, and the Transportation Commission each voted unanimously to support the staff recommendation for Alternative B as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station. The Environmental Policy Commission, the Park and Recreation Commission, and PYMIG did not vote, but agreed by consensus to support the staff recommendation.

In addition to the boards, commissions, and committees mentioned above, the Beautification Commission has expressed support for the staff recommendation.

Attached are the actions from the Board of Architectural Review and Planning Commission meetings, as well as letters of support from the Environmental Policy Commission, the Park and Recreation Commission, and the Beautification Commission. A letter from the Transportation Commission is anticipated and will be forwarded to City Council as soon as it is available.

**BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW (OLD AND HISTORIC DISTRICT)
ACTION, APRIL 29, 2015*:**

Ms. Roberts made a motion to support Alternative B as the preferred station alternative, based on its consistency with the relevant Standards listed in Section 10-105 of the zoning ordinance, with the following conditions:

1. If Alternative B is selected, the BAR recommends that any potential impacts of the station design include, at a minimum, the following mitigation:
 - a. Construction access shall not occur from the GWMP.
 - b. The overall station design should use materials that are appropriate to the local Alexandria building traditions and the original GWMP infrastructure construction.
 - c. Particular attention must be paid to the following elements to insure that they are harmonious with the old and historic aspect of the GWMP:
 - i. Landscape berms and retaining wall materials that minimize the apparent height of the overall structure and blend with the natural landscape, using materials already found on the GWMP, such as stone;
 - ii. The roof design and materials of the station;
 - iii. The form and materials of the platform roof and the pedestrian bridges must be as visually light as possible;
 - iv. Lighting must be minimal, directed away from the Parkway, and should complement the station design; and
 - v. The height of the structures should be minimized to the maximum extent possible.
2. The BAR will be actively involved in the schematic design of the station, through the BAR Concept Review process, and at each appropriate step in the station design review process until a Certificate of Appropriateness is approved.

Ms. Roberts further moved that, although Alternative B is the only location within the Old and Historic Alexandria District, the BAR is concerned that the viewshed from the GWMP and that the memorial character of the GWMP be protected, including aspects of the cultural landscape such as historic grading, historic trees and historic wetlands, regardless of which station alternative is selected.

* The minutes from the April 29, 2015 Board of Architectural Review meeting are still in draft form. Formal approval will take place on May 20, 2015.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION, MAY 5, 2015: On a motion by Vice Chairman Dunn, seconded by Commissioner Wasowski, the Planning Commission voted to recommend Alternative B, with construction access Option 2, for the Potomac Yard Metro Station and determined that it is consistent with the City's Master Plan. The motion carried on a vote of 5 to 0 with Commissioner Lyle absent and Commissioner Macek recusing himself.

Reason: The Planning Commission agreed with the staff analysis that the provision of a Metrorail station, specifically in the location of Alternative B, is most consistent with and represented in the preceding planning processes and documents. Further commentary discussed that the impacts to the George Washington Memorial Parkway can be mitigated through collaboration already outlined through the draft net benefits agreement with the National Park Service, and that the Alternative B location minimizes impacts to the linear park [Potomac Yard Park] in Potomac Yard.

May 15, 2015

Honorable Mayor William D. Euille and Members of City Council
City of Alexandria
Suite 2300, City Hall
301 King St
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Preferred Alternative Endorsement

Dear Mayor Euille and Members of Council:

On behalf of the Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC), I am writing to urge your approval of the City staff's recommendation of "Alternative B" for the location of the future Potomac Yard Metrorail Station.

The EPC believes the proposed Station provides much needed increased access to public transportation along a rapidly growing corridor in the City of Alexandria. The new station supports the overall intent of Alexandria's Environmental Action Plan (EAP), and several key goals within it. With a focus on climate change and sustainability, the EAP calls for substantial reductions in emissions from daily vehicle miles traveled, and increased access to integrated transit.

The EAP sets a target, by 2020, of increasing the number of commuters who use public transportation by 25% over 2000 census data. It also specifically calls for a Potomac Yard Metrorail Station to be operational before the occupancy rate of the Potomac Yard development area reaches 70%. In addition to meeting specific goals of the EAP under transportation, the new station will also support objectives in air quality improvement, energy conservation, and climate change mitigation. Proposed Alternative B, as presented to EPC, supports the goals of the EAP outlined above by maximizing service to residents within the critical half-mile walking radius.

Alternative B will result in a net loss of wetlands. While EPC is reluctant to reduce any wetlands acreage, the mitigation framework drafted with the National Park Service (NPS) will result in higher quality wetlands and improved storm water management along a crucial riparian corridor in Alexandria. We understand there will also be opportunities for improvements to Daingerfield Island and the heavily used Mt Vernon trail. Additionally, we note that high density development at public transit sites has much less aggregate impact on wetlands and other natural resource areas than low density, single-occupancy vehicle oriented development in outer suburbs.

We look forward to working with Council and staff as the City develops designs for the new station, and begins making detailed planning decisions. To cite one important design component, we will advocate for the incorporation of bike share stations, bicycle parking facilities, and pedestrian and bicycle trail access to create a truly multi-modal transportation hub.

For the reasons stated above, we urge your endorsement of preferred Alternative B. Should you have any questions or be in need of our assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address below.

Sincerely,



Jim Kapsis
Chair, Environmental Policy Commission
kapsisje@gmail.com



**DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARKS
AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

1108 Jefferson Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Phone: (703) 746-4343
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James B. Spengler, Director

Park and Recreation Commission

May 15, 2015

Mayor William Euille
Vice Mayor Allison Silberberg
Councilman John Taylor Chapman
Councilman Timothy B. Lovain
Councilwoman Redella S. Pepper
Councilman Paul C. Smedberg
Councilman Justin M. Wilson

Re: Potomac Yard Metro Station

Dear Mayor Euille and City Council Members:

The Park and Recreation Commission supports the staff recommendation of Alternative B as the location for the Potomac Yard Metro Station because it is consistent with park plans and goals.

Throughout the process, the Commission has received reports from staff regarding the various options, including taking a walking tour of the various proposed sites. Alternative A would either destroy or significantly and negatively impact the newly constructed play spaces and water feature in Potomac Yard park and would mean that the largest section of that linear park would not be usable as parkland. Alternative B has a much smaller impact on the existing Potomac Yard Park, as it will land in a plaza area that was initially conceived as a landing point for a pedestrian bridge.

Although the Commission supports the staff recommendation, the Commission does so with the following four pieces of advice related to issues of concern to the Commission.

First, and presence of the Metro station at Potomac Yard will undoubtedly increase use of the Potomac Yard Park and the pedestrian and bicycle trail. The increased use will result in the need for significant additional maintenance including the need for additional trash pick-up, among other things. Council must plan now to make available the appropriate funding to ensure that the increased needs created by increased use related to Metro can be met.

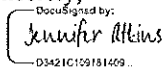
Second, the Potomac Yard bicycle and pedestrian trail is a key element for the success of the Metro station, as residents and visitors will be able to safely walk and bike to and from the station. The Commission urges Council to ensure that the planning and design process includes areas for bicycle share stations and personal bicycle parking. There are many examples of innovative bicycle parking solutions around the world. The planning process should include consideration of creative solutions for bicycle parking. The Commission expects to see bicycle parking and bicycle share stations accounted for in the design phase.

Third, to the extent entrances to the station are in a park, those entrances must be designed as park features so that they are consistent with and seamless with the character and use of the surrounding park. Council should direct staff to ensure that the planning and design process includes the consideration of the station entrances as park elements.

Fourth, Council should direct staff to make every effort to ensure that both Potomac Greens Park and Potomac Yard Park remain safe and accessible throughout the construction phase. Council should ensure that appropriate maintenance of the parks continues throughout the construction phase to keep the parks safe and accessible. If areas of the parks must be made inaccessible for safety reasons, the time of inaccessibility should be as limited as possible and adequate communication regarding alternatives must be made to the public. To the extent that, for example, the Potomac Yard pedestrian and bicycle trail might become unusable at some point during construction, there must be a well-designated detour to ensure appropriate through travel for cyclists and pedestrians. Likewise, any interruption to the safe use of the play space in Potomac Greens Park must be limited and well communicated to the community.

The Commission supports the addition of Metro to Potomac Yard and urges Council to take steps to make clear that the planning, design, and construction process must include careful attention to ensure the existing Potomac Yard Park and Potomac Greens Park are enhanced by the presence of the Metro station.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

DS421C129181409

Jennifer Atkins, Co-Chair
Park and Recreation Commission



City of Alexandria, Virginia

Alexandria Beautification Commission

P.O. Box 178

Alexandria, Virginia 22314



Honorable William D Euille, Mayor
and Members of City Council
City of Alexandria
City Hall Room 2300
301 King St.
Alexandria, VA 22314

May 14, 2015

Dear Mayor Euille and Members of Council,

I am writing on behalf of the City's Beautification Commission to inform you of the Commission's views and concerns regarding the proposed Potomac Yard Metrorail Station. The Beautification Commission supports the City staff endorsement of Build Alternative B, provided suitable efforts are taken to maintain the existing viewshed from the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP), mitigate impacts on existing wetlands and the scenic easement, minimize alterations to Potomac Yard Park, and minimize the increase in impermeable surfaces in the station design.

The Commission strongly recommends that Construction Access Option 2 be selected in order to maintain the existing viewshed from the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The temporary convenience of construction access from the GWMP is far outweighed by the long-lasting degradation of user experience.

The Commission is encouraged by the framework net benefit agreement reached with the National Park Service regarding the Greens Scenic Area easement for mitigating impacts and the loss of parkland within the GWMP. In addition to the terms outlined in Table 2 and Appendix B of the staff recommendation, the Commission requests careful consideration of mitigation efforts to minimize the permanent and temporary impacts to the wetlands. The Commission recommends that the land remaining in this important ecological area after construction of the Metrorail Station be improved by removing non-native trees and vegetation.

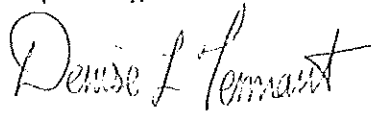
As you may be aware, the Commission recognized Potomac Yard Park in its 2014 annual awards for the park's contribution to the beautification of the City. The park is a tremendous asset to the area and has proven to be very popular with local families. Build Alternative B, though not the most intrusive of the build alternatives, will have temporary and permanent impacts on this park. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement indicates that one station exit will be located at the northern end of Potomac Yard Park. If it is not possible to move the station outside of the park during final station design, we ask that mitigation measures be taken to minimize the impact of this intrusion into the park.

Lastly, the Commission is concerned about the increase in impermeable surfaces in the Potomac Yard area with the addition of the proposed Metrorail Station. Impermeable surfaces contribute to the pollution of surface water and do not permit the water table to be naturally recharged, among other ill

effects. True beautification of the City requires careful consideration of the environmental impact of new development, and we request that the final design of the Metrorail Station incorporate permeable surfaces to the greatest extent possible.

While we recognize that there are many factors that will contribute to the final Metrorail Station build option selection and design, we submit that the goal of beautifying our City remains important and should not be overlooked. We believe that the proposed Metrorail Station will play an important role in the future of Alexandria and hope that it will contribute to the future beautification of Alexandria as well.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Denise L. Tennant". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Denise L. Tennant
Chair, Beautification Commission

New Community Feedback on Impacts of Alternatives

Based on Comments Received April 24 – May 15, 2015

The evaluation of the costs and benefits of each of the alternatives considered in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement included a consideration of comments from the public, including both benefits and issues related to each alternative. The staff recommendation for the preferred alternative included a summary of the most frequent comments heard throughout the process (Appendix C: Feedback on Impacts of Alternatives).

Since the release of the staff report, there has been additional feedback from the public. This feedback was received by email, through public testimony, and heard at board, commissions, and community meetings. Staff has summarized below the new feedback from the public since the release of the staff recommendation on April 24, 2015.

The following concerns are typically being heard from residents and organizations regarding all of the Build Alternatives since the release of the staff recommendation:

- **Pedestrian/Bicycle Access:** Several residents have suggested that the City incorporate planning for safe and well-designed pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Metrorail Station as the project moves forward. Residents have also noted the need for covered and secure bicycle parking and urged that such provisions be included in the station design. Some residents have also noted the need to minimize construction impacts to pedestrian and bicycle facilities, particularly the multi-use path on Potomac Avenue.
- **Traffic on East Glebe Road:** Residents along East Glebe Road have noted that the traffic analysis projects that many of the auto trips from people dropping off or picking up at the station would use East Glebe Road. Residents have asked that consideration be given to traffic calming measures that could lessen the impacts of such traffic.
- **Impact on Metrorail Operations:** Some residents have expressed concern about impacts to existing Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Metrorail operations to the Blue and Yellow Lines and the system as a whole. Each of the Build Alternatives would add additional riders to the Metrorail system.
- **Tier II Special Tax District:** Some residents of Potomac Yard have questioned the rationale behind the Tier II Special Tax District. Under the existing ordinance, the Tier II Special Tax District would apply to single-family and condominium development in the lower part of Potomac Yard and would assess 10 cents per \$100 of valuation. Collections would begin the calendar year after the station opens.