

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: KARL MORITZ, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ZONING

DATE: DECEMBER 4, 2015

SUBJECT: DRAFT PLAN FRAMEWORK FOR THE OLD TOWN NORTH SMALL AREA PLAN UPDATE

ISSUE: Should the City Council receive the draft Plan Framework for the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update and direct staff to continue with the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update planning process?

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend receipt by the City Council of the draft Old Town North Plan Framework with direction to staff to proceed, in continued coordination with the Advisory Group and community, to the next phases of the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update planning process entailing studies and testing of draft Plan Framework elements.

BACKGROUND

Summary

City staff, along with members of the Old Town North Small Area Plan Advisory Group, held a week long Charrette (Charrette Week) from November 16 through 20, 2015, to kick off the Old Town North Small Area Plan Update (OTN SAP Update) planning process. On your December docket is a public discussion of the results of Charrette Week as well as next steps in the planning process for Old Town North (OTN). This memorandum briefly describes the background of the project as well as the events which occurred during Charrette Week. It highlights plan “framework elements” including: (1) plan principles/goals/objectives and themes for further exploration, (2) plan categories for further development, and (3) plan design concepts for further analysis. The plan framework elements were developed with input and discussion by the community during Charrette Week and are intended to be studied, with continued community input, in upcoming phases of the OTN SAP Update planning process.

Staff has scheduled this docket item as a public hearing, so that the public dialogue that has occurred throughout Charrette Week can continue and so that the City Council can hear directly

from participants. Following the staff presentation and hearing, the City Council will be requested to provide any thoughts, suggestions, and guidance you have regarding the draft Plan Framework elements and your direction regarding continuation of the planning process.

The OTN SAP Update Work Program and Charrette Week

In September 2015, the City Manager appointed a 21 member Old Town North Small Area Plan Advisory Group, led by Planning Commissioner Maria Wasowski. The Advisory Group, working with an interdepartmental City Project Team, kicked off the planning process for the OTN SAP Update with Charrette Week. Charrettes are intended to be a focused planning and design process held over a multi-day period. In this case, the Charrette was utilized to facilitate Phase I (Framework Development) of the OTN SAP Update planning process. The five phases of the anticipated 18-month OTN SAP Update planning process are noted below, with the full planning process expected to extend from September 2015 through January 2017:

- **Phase I** – Framework Development Phase: To establish draft principles/goals/objectives, plan categories, and conceptual design elements to guide the planning process for the OTN SAP Update. This phase begins identifying issues and design concepts that will require further evaluation.
- **Phase II** – Study Phase: To study potential impacts of the plan framework elements.
- **Phase III** – Testing/Refinements Phase: To test the feasibility of the plan framework elements based on study findings and to determine refinements as appropriate.
- **Phase IV** – Recommendations: To develop plan recommendations based on the preceding three phases.
- **Phase V** – Plan Development: To prepare the OTN SAP Update in plan format and to submit it for consideration and implementation.

All phases of the planning process will entail ongoing community outreach and opportunities for active community participation.

Charrette Week

The location of Charrette Week was a vacant suite in neighborhood-based Canal Center, allowing a self-sufficient environment with adequate space for public meetings, Charrette team meetings, studio work, and the display of information for public review. The hours of the Charrette were 8:00 am to 9:00 pm, over the 5 day period. Charrette Week was preceded by a Community Open House onsite at the venue on Thursday, November 12, 2015. Special events for the public during Charrette Week included a Community Tour, three Open Houses, three Public Meetings, and an Old Town North History presentation. In addition, the public was invited to stop in anytime to view the process, and the progress, and to ask questions and to continue to share ideas. There was, and continues to be, online engagement through the OTN

SAP Update webpage and through Alex Engage. Public meetings and other portions of the process were videotaped.

Charrette Team and Advisory Group Subcommittee

Coordination of the design process was accomplished through a partnership between City staff; the Advisory Group, including an Advisory Group Charrette Subcommittee; and members of the public who dropped by the venue during morning hours of Charrette Week. Together they worked as the Charrette Team, meeting each morning to discuss community input received in a Public Meeting or Open House from the day before. That community input was then translated into narrative format reflecting key themes for plan principles/goals and objectives with some of those themes also converted into concept designs.

DISCUSSION

Information generated from the three Charrette Week Public Meetings

- **Public Meeting #1 (November 16)** – The community generated key themes from its review, input and discussion of draft plan principles/goals/objectives.
- **Public Meeting #2 (November 18)** – The community reviewed, discussed and provided input on: (1) the themes relating to plan principles/goals/objectives which emanated from Public Meeting #1; (2) the initial community thoughts expressed during Public Meeting #1 which related to plan categories for land use, street networks and streetscapes, housing affordability, and more; and (3) plan design concepts for open space, connectivity, and an arts/entertainment area which stemmed from several theme areas heard during Public Meeting #1.
- **Public Meeting #3 (November 20)** – The community reviewed, discussed and provided input on a compilation of community ideas and input from Public Meetings #1 and #2, and from community input in general from the full week, that together formed a synthesis of plan framework elements.

Phase I Framework Development

The planning area is bounded by Oronoco Street to the south, the southern end of Daingerfield Island to the north, the Potomac River to the east and Washington Street generally on the west. It is located directly north of the Old Town plan area, west of the Braddock Metro plan area and southeast of the Potomac Yard plan area. Additionally, it has close proximity to the airport, the Pentagon and Washington, DC.

The City's 1974 Master Plan included a vision for Old Town North to help its transition from an aging industrial center to a balanced mixed use neighborhood, capitalizing on its great location. The current Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTN SAP), adopted in 1992 with strong community involvement, added zoning and urban design tools to further advance the 1974 vision

for the area. Over the last 40 years, Old Town North has evolved into a distinct community offering places to live, work, recreate, shop and to enjoy other amenities such as the arts. Still, several private sites from the area's earlier industrial days remain as potential candidates for development or redevelopment, or, they may be currently in an active stage of the redevelopment process. Given the status of these sites, and other factors influencing current or future growth for the area and the City, **this OTN SAP Update is being undertaken in concert with the Advisory Group, the community and public at large. Its purpose is to further guide and strengthen Old Town North's future as a balanced mixed use neighborhood, for the next 15-20 years, building on the early planning efforts.**

Old Town North Small Area Plan Update Project Assessment (Visioning Tool)

To begin the process, staff generated a draft list of potential planning categories to address during the OTN SAP Update planning process. The potential categories are outlined in the section immediately below titled *Information Generated from the three Charrette Week Public Meetings*.

The selection of potential planning categories is based on information gathered and reviewed by staff during the pre-planning stage from existing conditions, plans and policies applicable to the OTN. Guided by a typical Charrette process, a Project Assessment/Visioning Tool was then drafted which is a matrix with columns for each potential planning category and also with columns for principles/goals and objectives relative to each of the planning categories. Staff then filled in its thoughts relative to principles/goals and objectives for each draft planning category and shared the draft Project Assessment/Visioning Tool with the Advisory Group to kick off a visioning discussion with members. The Advisory Group went through the matrix individually, and together, further developing the principles/goals and objectives for each category, as the members deemed appropriate, and adding some edits.

The next step was to share the draft planning categories and the draft principles/goals and objectives in the draft Project Matrix with the community. That was done in Public Meeting #1 of Charrette Week in order to kick off the visioning process with the public and to receive its assessment of the information generated to-date and to solicit any additional ideas and input the public might have in terms of the vision for OTN's future. Attached to this memorandum is a copy of the draft Project Assessment/Visioning Tool with staff input reflected in black text, Advisory Group input reflected in green text, and the community's input reflected in orange text. More review and input is now being requested of the Planning Commission and the City Council.

Charrette Public Meeting #1 – Key Themes

As noted above, the draft Project Assessment/Visioning Tool, consisting of draft principles/goals and objectives under several draft planning categories, was developed with the Advisory Group. Its purpose is to facilitate the visioning process and it was utilized during Charrette Week. The draft planning categories in the Project Assessment/Visioning Tool include the following, with the implementation category added by the Advisory Group.

- Planning, Land Use, Design
- Transportation
- Housing
- Infrastructure and Environmental Sustainability
- Open Space, Recreation and Cultural Activities
- Historic Preservation
- Economic Development
- Implementation

Through a key pad polling exercise of the Advisory Group and community there was general consensus around the draft principles/goals/objectives. Key theme areas were identified out of the ideas and thoughts heard from the community throughout their discussion of the principles/goals/objectives during Public Meeting #1 and, also, from individual comments received during Charrette Week. The key themes, organized by planning category, are included as follows and were presented in Public Meeting #2 where they received additional community review and discussion:

1. Planning and Land Use:
 - a. Enrich community viability
 - b. Cultivate urban village character
 - c. Manage development scale and context
 - d. Promote a viable balance of uses
2. Transportation
 - a. Foster neighborhood viability
 - b. Improve connectivity between Marina Towers, the Parkway, and Old Town
 - c. Strengthen transit/bicycle/pedestrian links to the Metro
 - d. Use of tracks/trail
 - e. Promote connectivity
 - f. Make streetscape improvements
3. Housing
 - a. Increase housing opportunities for a range of incomes and abilities
 - b. Incorporate community facilities
 - c. Explore rental/ownership/specifics
4. Infrastructure/Environment
 - a. Establish an eco-district
 - b. Employ neighborhood energy efficiency and stormwater recovery solutions
 - c. Identify specifics for redevelopment sites
5. Open Space/Recreation/Cultural Activities

- a. Preserve and support cultural spaces and the arts
 - b. Enhance and connect existing parks and public spaces
 - c. Add community open spaces
 - d. Add community meeting spaces
 - e. Identify Montgomery Park as heart of the community
 - f. Explore waterfront activities
- 6. Historic Preservation
 - a. Memorialize and celebrate industrial and transportation heritage
 - b. Make history an integral part of the Plan
- 7. Economic Development
 - a. Support and increase small businesses and retail establishments
 - b. Encourage broadband
 - c. Focus/target retail areas
- 8. Implementation
 - a. Include implementation
 - b. Include measures to gauge implementation success

The community theme areas can be utilized as the basis to develop components under each of the eight planning categories that can be explored and studied as the OTN SAP Update planning process continues.

Charrette Week Public Meeting #2 – Conceptual Design Options

For Public Meeting #2, the following was discussed: the above thematic areas identified in Public Meeting #1 relating to plan principles/goals/objectives; the initial ideas heard in Public Meeting #1 relating to plan categories; and plan concept designs and options for the theme areas of open space, connectivity, and the arts.

For the thematic areas, discussion in Public Meeting #2 centered around community input as outlined above in the *Charrette Public Meeting #1* section of this memorandum.

For the plan categories, discussion in Public Meeting #2 focused on several initial ideas relating to land use; street networks, streetscapes and view sheds; housing affordability; historic preservation; retail mix; environmental sustainability, and more. Several of these ideas were graphically expanded on in Public Meeting #3. Plan categories, tied to the theme areas, will be further developed and studied, as the OTN SAP Update planning process continues.

For the plan concept designs, discussion in Public Meeting #2 was a presentation with community input on:

- Open Space – The concept proposes a linear park extending from Tidlock Park along the rail tracks to the Parkway. This could include an option of a green trail with environmental

features; include an option of a green trail with recreational uses; or include an option of a green trail with the study of transportation uses.

- Connectivity – This concept explores extensions of the grid into the NRG site along Fairfax Street and possibly Royal and Pitt Streets or from Fairfax Street around the eastern perimeter of the NRG site to Slaters Lane.
- Arts/Entertainment Area – This concept explores an arts/entertainment area to preserve and support existing and new art institutions. One option looked at use of the Alexandria House Park for a sculpture garden that could be curated by the Art League. It also discussed exploring in the general vicinity other potential properties where art related uses could be incorporated. Another option reviewed extending an arts/entertainment area along the northern end of Fairfax Street from Montgomery Street, creating additional space for visual and performance arts. These two options could also be looked at as one possible area.

While there was general community consensus around these plan design concepts, they and all framework elements will need to be discussed and studied further in future phases of the OTN SAP Update planning process. Also, the plan design concepts will need to be looked at once planning for the NRG site gets underway.

Charrette Week Public Meeting #3 – Framework Elements

Public Meeting #3 took the community input and ideas from Public Meetings #1 and #2, and throughout Charrette Week, and combined them into a synthesis of draft plan framework elements that are identified in this memorandum and more fully described in the accompanying powerpoint. Additionally, a Charrette Week Report will follow.

PLANNING COMMISSION REVIEW

On December 1, 2015, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on the framework elements and on the themes and concept ideas generated through extensive public input during Charrette Week.

At the public hearing, the Planning Commission provided feedback on the Charrette process, indicating that several commissioners participated at different times during Charrette Week and observed the process as a positive one. Also, during the public hearing, commissioners provided comments as summarized below on the draft principles/goals and objectives, theme areas and the concept designs. Their input generally is reflective of input from the Advisory Group and from the community, but any new comments that are not already reflected in the Project Assessment/Visioning Tool from the Planning Commission will be added as will any comments from the City Council.

Planning Commission Comments

Land use, Planning and Design

- Reflect OTN in context of surrounding areas (Braddock and Slaters) and highlight connections between areas.
- For NRG, recognize the flexibility stressed in letter from property owner representative. Explore options for NRG. Do not be too prescriptive.
- Identify what must remain on NRG to understand useable areas.

Housing

- Look at opportunities for affordable housing. . . need for creative solutions.
- Incorporate market rate affordable housing.

Transportation (Streets)

- Likes Madison and Montgomery as two way streets.
- Incorporate the Washington Street Standards.

Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities

- Arts district is a positive feature; important to enhance and expand anchors in an arts district concept.
- Leverage the Waterfront Plan
- Likes Royal Street greenway . . . it is supportive of the Waterfront Plan.
- Explore creative opportunities for the Parkway to provide more effective use of the rotary green space in the center.
- Include all of Daingerfield in the contextual aerial; connect to Daingerfield Island with opportunities to see the water.
- Address need for Community Meeting Space.

Historic Preservation

- Identify and preserve buildings and structures beyond historic plaques.

Economic Development

- Highlight niches which will bring people to OTN (retail and other amenities).
- Emphasize Washington Street as another retail/ commercial corridor and highlight it.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

City Council is now being requested to receive the draft OTN Plan Framework and to direct staff to continue to work with the Advisory Group and community to conduct the next phases of the planning process.

The next phases entail studying and testing the draft Plan Framework elements for feasibility. Phase II of the OTN SAP Update planning process is the Study Phase and Phase III of the OTN SAP Update planning process is the Testing Phase, with refinements to the draft Plan Framework elements as appropriate. Those phases are anticipated to extend into spring of 2016 before moving to Phase IV which is the Plan Recommendation Phase and Phase V which is the Plan Development Phase (followed by Plan Approval and Implementation). All phases of the OTN SAP Update planning process will include continued public outreach, with a range of opportunities for public involvement and participation.

ATTACHMENT – OTN SAP Update Project Assessment (Visioning Tool)

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