

May 30, 2017

Mr. Karl Moritz
Director, Department of Planning and Zoning
City of Alexandria
301 King Street Alexandria, VA 22314

SUBJECT: **ADVISORY GROUP ENDORSEMENT OF THE NORTH POTOMAC YARD SMALL AREA PLAN UPDATE**

Mr. Moritz:

Having completed our consultations with citizens, the property developer, and city staff, the Advisory Group is pleased to recommend this Master Plan Amendment for consideration by the Planning Commission and City Council.

In addition to supporting the Plan as drafted, we have the following observations:

VISION

We've worked to respect the character and maintain the strengths of the 2010 Plan. This refinement strives to take advantage of the substantial scale and strategic location of Phase One, accommodate the physical constraints of the existing retail center, and integrate the design of the Metrorail Station.

We look forward to the realistic possibility that on opening day for our new Station, riders will arrive at a dynamic Metro Plaza bounded by an office building, hotel, and Potomac Yard Park, and opening into an inviting new neighborhood of residences above a vibrant shopping street.

URBAN DESIGN + LAND USE

In terms of creating a real place that is urban in character, thoroughly transit oriented, and defined by a broad mix of uses at significant density, we believe this is a fundamentally sound evolution of the Plan.

The framework of blocks and streets continues to provide connectivity throughout and beyond the Yard, while optimizing multimodal access to the Metrorail Station.

Individuality of form and space were a hallmark of the 2010 framework plan, which promised intriguing public places. As these streets and squares and buildings are designed, we encourage the strategic incorporation of idiosyncratic spatial forms, as a counterpoint to the regularity of the orthogonal grid.

Vistas from streets oriented east / west provide views beyond the Yard toward the river, save for those which are now purposefully directed toward the north Metrorail entrance and the retail building at the terminus of East Reed Avenue.

The Plan identifies quality of architecture and public space as indispensable, and focuses on design and materials. The designation of signature facades in relation to public spaces and long lines of sight, as well as the developer's intention to use several architects to execute Phase One, will also contribute to this imperative.

In pursuit of civic purposes from childcare and youth centers, to reading rooms, exhibition galleries and performance venues, we support the plan's emphasis on collocation, flexibility and incentives. The required comprehensive Community Facilities proposal can guide the innovative public / private coordination necessary to incorporate these uses extensively throughout the Yard.

A concentration of jobs, services and transit options offers a superb opportunity to achieve public, affordable and workforce housing here. We support the proposed tools, especially creative collocation with civic uses, and vigorous pursuit of public / private / nonprofit project collaborations.

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

The completion of Potomac Yard Park, the creation of Crescent Park, and their intersection with Four Mile Run will comprise an expansive natural and recreational realm along the entire east and north perimeter. Convenient to the entire Yard, they will be a resource for everyone in the city.

Public spaces within Potomac Yard which can contribute to it becoming a memorable place include Metro Square and Market Green.

Metro Square has the potential to become a civic place of generous scale and distinctive public character. We recommend that it have a unique shape and features, with strong lines of sight to and from Metro Plaza and the Station.

Market Green is embedded in the taller architecture and denser population along East Reed Avenue, and is intended to be a place in which a critical mass of retail activity and street life animate and reinforce one another. If it develops as a sequence of spaces on multiple blocks, we recommend that all elements be visually connected and physically contiguous, with one another and with Market Lawn.

WALKABILITY + POTOMAC AVENUE

A compelling sense of place can be achieved here if it is truly walkable. The plan confirms the primacy of pedestrians and cyclists, while simultaneously fulfilling requirements for vehicular movement and parking. Quality of the streetscape design and construction will be critical to achieving a safe, interesting, continuous and comfortable walking environment.

Potomac Avenue is retained in its current alignment due to phasing and cost considerations. We are concerned however that it not become a broad river of traffic which interrupts connectivity east and west across the Yard, to and from the Station and Potomac Yard Park. The Avenue's automobiles, local and rapid transit buses, bicycles and parking should be accommodated at very limited speed, within the minimum practicable number of travel lanes and narrowest possible curb-to-curb width.

SUSTAINABILITY

As development begins, we look forward to the required Environmental Sustainability Master Plan as a comprehensive implementation tool to pursue carbon neutrality, net zero architecture, and district energy solutions across the entire seventy acres, and to achieve the performance goals of the plan.

Addressing our environmental challenges as ambitiously as possible, while respecting the limits of financial and technical feasibility, is a formidable ongoing task. The Advisory Group process proved to be a difficult venue in which to consider the appropriate balance among these complex issues. We recognize and support the Environmental Action Plan, soon to be refined and synchronized with the Green Building Policy, as the primary tool to guide Small Area Plans in pursuit of citywide sustainability goals.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The proposed pumping station in Potomac Yard Park at Four Mile Run is a major opportunity to enrich the range of experience in the park while providing a necessary facility. The Alexandria ReNew Headquarters sets an excellent standard for creative and pragmatic integration of public open space, quality architecture, and cutting edge infrastructure.

The existing storm water pond in Potomac Yard Park near East Glebe Road, while just beyond the Plan boundary, is a concern. Enclosed by chain link and situated directly between the North and South Metrorail entrances, it is devoid of plantings, shade, public art or pedestrian amenity. We recommend that these missing characteristics be acquired in the course of completing the Park.

NEIGHBORHOODS

We consider it imperative to respect the scale of long established neighborhoods to the west, and strongly support the plan's moderate height limits for new buildings on the east side of Route One.

For most of the last century, the Yard was a massive transportation infrastructure facility extending across an enormous site. This Plan prescribes a transformation in the North over coming decades into new neighborhoods, which in conjunction with completion of the community now established in the South, will generate a new Potomac Yard.

We would like to acknowledge the essential contributions of the citizens who offered perceptive observations throughout, and of the development team who shared both the analysis underpinning their concept and an abundance of design material. The interdepartmental team of staff members facilitated our efforts with excellent information, illuminating analysis, and impeccable professionalism as always.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this endeavor to envision the future of our city.

Regards,



Stephen Koenig *PLANNING COMMISSION REPRESENTATIVE, CHAIR*

On behalf of the *NORTH POTOMAC YARD SMALL AREA PLAN ADVISORY GROUP*

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