

Docket Item #15
Planning Commission Meeting
February 7, 2019

Consideration of approval of the Planning Commission minutes of the Public Hearing meeting
of February 7, 2019

ALEXANDRIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – FEBRUARY 7, 2019

*** * * M I N U T E S * * ***

ALEXANDRIA PLANNING COMMISSION

February 7, 2019, 7:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers

Alexandria, Virginia

Members Present:

Nathan Macek, Vice-Chairman

David Brown

Stephen Koenig

Mindy Lyle

Maria Wasowski

Melissa McMahon

John Goebel

Members Absent:

None

Staff Present:

Karl W. Moritz

Department of Planning & Zoning

Christina Brown

Office of the City Attorney

Nancy Williams

Department of Planning & Zoning

Anh Vu

Department of Planning & Zoning

Sara Brandt-Vorel

Department of Planning & Zoning

Nathan Imm

Department of Planning & Zoning

Stephanie Free

Department of Planning & Zoning

Bethany Znidersic

Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Catherine Miliaras

Department of Planning & Zoning

Robert Kerns

Department of Planning & Zoning

Katie North

Transportation and Environmental Services

Brian Dofflemyer

Transportation and Environmental Services

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1. Call to Order.
The Planning Commission Public Hearing was called to order at 7:03 p.m. All members were present at the call to order.

NEW BUSINESS:

2. Discussion Item: Open Space in Private Development Open Space Definitions, Requirements, and Compliance.
Staff: City of Alexandria, Department of Planning & Zoning

Nathan Imm (P&Z), Sara Brandt-Vorel (P&Z), Robert Kerns (P&Z) made a presentation and held a discussion with the Planning Commission on [Open Space in Private Development](#). It is the first of three planned presentations on this subject.

Commissioner Wasowski began the discussion by noting open space as extremely complex; she indicated she finds the 40 percent open space requirement placed uniformly on zones of different densities to be particularly interesting. Furthermore, Commissioner Wasowski suggested it might be helpful to consider other factors, such as sites that are adjacent to parks versus those that are not when evaluating open space in relation to a particular site and she questioned to what degree sites should be held to uniform open space requirements. Commissioner Wasowski then raised questions to staff of whether the City could reconcile flexibility in open space requirements with a metric of what an applicant's goal should be in terms of open space; how the City can emphasize the quality of open space along with the quantity of open space; and the consideration of evaluating ground floor versus rooftop open space.

Commissioner Wasowski also inquired of staff whether they would prefer the discussion to be centered on any specific topic in relation to open space. Staff responded that they would prefer for the discussion to be focused on what the Planning Commission's initial thoughts and expectations are surrounding compliance and if they think the City has been generally compliant or non-compliant with existing open space requirements.

Commissioner Wasowski responded that in the past she thought the City had struggled with the 40 percent requirement, as she thought it was not a figure conducive to an urban environment. Commissioner Wasowski also stated that the City has also struggled in the past with areas that are defined as open space but may not intuitively feel like open space to a lay person, such as planting strips located between a street and a sidewalk. Staff subsequently confirmed planting strips are not counted as open space. Staff also expressed that, in the past, exceptions to open space and crown coverage requirements have been made in situations where, for example, the public realm is enhanced by a project's scope of work. Staff went on to specify that a primary goal of this discussion is

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to determine how the City can recalibrate based on baseline open space trends which have been observed across the City. Staff added that such information can be utilized to better refine requirements and to best reflect the types of performance the City is looking to achieve for public and private open spaces.

Commissioner Lyle stated that she agrees with the comments made by Commissioner Wasowski in regard to the 40 percent benchmark and stated that as Alexandria becomes more urban, she believes the City will find that benchmark to be an impediment to development. In addition, she stated that she believes the quality of open space outweighs the importance of the quantity of open space, as its quality has a more tangible impact on how the space is used, how accessible it is, its types of plantings, and its general form and function.

Commissioner Brown expressed that he is generally in favor of maintaining a fairly-high percentage requirement for open space. Also, Commissioner Brown expressed his agreement with the philosophy that an open space percentage should rise with density. In addition, Commissioner Brown expressed his desire for ground open-level space, as he believes it to be an irreplaceable benefit to residents and the community at large. Commissioner Brown then recommended that staff continue to look at each zone and their associated requirements to see what the standards are producing within a given zone and, based on the findings, recommend modifications if necessary; however, he also expressed his general apprehension about relaxing requirements.

Commissioner McMahon stated that her instinct, after hearing staff's presentation, is to make sure that open space requirements are being tailored individually from site to site. In addition, Commissioner McMahon inquired of situations where a project is unable to meet its open space requirements but is providing some alternate public benefit. In that regard, she inquired as to how the City will ensure that it is receiving a consistent product for the whole community. Furthermore, Commissioner McMahon stated that moving forward, she believes it is important to reconcile the pairing of the public sector's role in creating and shaping public open spaces with that of the private sector's role in providing vibrancy and activities to a place and to also understanding that the trade-off between these two roles is a critical part of consideration by the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Koenig agreed with Commissioner McMahon's comments and stated that a critical factor is determining how open space functions within its general contextual surroundings. As an example, he indicated the degree of use of open space in a public park near a private development with a high percentage of open space would likely differ than if it were located near a private development with a low percentage of open space. He also added that the relationship between private versus public open space is something the City should look at more closely in the future. Commissioner Koenig also addressed the issue of quality of open space versus quantity of open space and

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acknowledged that while there does exist a need to maintain a benchmark on quantity, he also stated it is important to require different open space characteristics which are also quality based and to offer a degree of flexibility in open space requirements. Commissioner Koenig went on to specify the Belle Pre, as an example of a project in which he thought open space was designed in an excellent manner.

Commissioner Wasowski stated that she dislikes the idea of having a hard percentage value attached to an open space requirement for private developments; she indicated that just because a developer is able to meet a benchmark for open space quantity does not mean that the open space will be desirable in any way.

Vice-Chairman Macek stated he would be especially curious to see the geographical break down of open space trends across the City. In addition, Vice-Chairman Macek inquired as to whether the City should conceive of open space targets via overlays or small area plans, as opposed to by zone. Also, Vice-Chairman Macek stated that the City should proceed with caution as to how we define open space to ensure the City obtains its intended goal.

Commissioner Brown stated that market forces will help drive the quality of open space and, in conjunction with staff oversight, he is not terribly worried about the potential absence of quality open space. Commissioner Brown also stated that along with an increase in land values across the City, and the influence of market forces, quality open space will continue to be established, though it may not look the same as it did in decades past such as in the 1940's.

Commissioner Koenig asked staff to confirm that Park Meridian does have some above grade amenity space and staff concurred that it does. He then addressed an observation made by Vice-Chairman Macek regarding functional open space by stating that the City should do all that it can to encourage open space designs that are both visually pleasing and functional as open space as opposed to having characteristics that can be technically defined as open space but are otherwise not seen as inviting or functional open space. He indicated the importance of encouraging quality open space in general as well as open space examples meant to serve technical goals such as stormwater Best Management Practices.

Staff concluded by indicating that notes have been taken on comments and input by the Commissioners and the comments and input will be followed up on. Commissioner Brown then requested that as part of the follow up it would be helpful to have staff's own assessment of how successful some of the projects have been. Staff added that it will do that and will also add an assessment of the amounts of given open space.

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3. Discussion Item: City of Alexandria’s Landscape Guidelines Update of the Landscape Guidelines, last revised in 2007, which establish the minimum standards for landscaping in new developments, as designated in the City of Alexandria’s Zoning Ordinance (Section 11-410 (CC)).
Staff: City of Alexandria, Department of Planning & Zoning and Department of Recreation Parks, & Cultural Activities

Nathan Imm (P&Z) Stephanie Free (P&Z), Bethany Znidersic (RPCA), and Robert Kerns (P&Z) presented the case and answered questions from the Planning Commission.

Speakers:

Jason Radice, RLA, speaking for himself as a practicing landscape architect, spoke in opposition to the approval of the Landscape Guidelines in their current form. Mr. Radice suggested a broader outreach process, including to national professional organizations. Mr. Radice recommended several specific topics for alteration prior to acceptance of the updated Landscape Guidelines, including the specification of native plant species, the acceptable use of “nativars”, the source of nursery stock, the requirement of as-built drawings for landscape installations, and the size of shrubs at planting.

Vice-Chairman Macek closed the Public Hearing.

Discussion:

Vice-Chairman Macek commented that the update makes the document more user friendly with the reordering and prioritizing that it includes. Vice-Chairman Macek directed the comments of Mr. Radice to staff for discussion of the various points raised by the speaker. Staff did clarify that the outreach included industry groups and several boards and commissions. In terms of native plants, staff indicated that both native and exotic species are important, but it is also important to choose species that are most appropriate for a site in terms of survivability and other factors. Staff indicated the City works with applicants accordingly. Staff also added that the minimal size of plants is tied to industry standards and the references in the document are tied to sources such as the State of Virginia and other organizations or governments which specialize in industry standards for work of this kind. In terms of as-builts, staff indicated that as-builts are reviewed during the Final Site Plan process.

Vice-Chairman Macek requested clarity around the as-builts process. Staff indicated that when an applicant receives a Certificate of Occupancy the applicant is required to submit surveys showing exactly what has been done compared to an approved plan. Included in the surveys should be a planting survey that is compared to the approved plan.

Vice-Chairman Macek closed the public hearing.

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Commissioner Lyle indicated that the process for as-builts can be a detriment to the property because in the case of Cameron Station the owners had to continue to plant the same plants approved although those plants did not prosper. The owners then had to come in for an amendment to the as-builts in order to eventually get the plantings changed. Staff indicated that the concern expressed by Commissioner Lyle will be looked at further.

Commissioner Brown indicated that in the case that Commissioner Lyle described the issue may rest in the Code rather than in the guidelines. He suggested that staff consider that as they investigate this issue further. Vice-Chairman Macek agreed that the provision described by Commissioner Lyle needs to be investigated further. He also indicated that the guidelines are well done, and he appreciates the effort that has gone into the update.

Commissioner Brown followed up on a comment by the speaker, Mr. Radice, regarding the source of planting stock. Staff indicated that when a plant that is grown under a given altitude and climate is brought into a new altitude and climate then a problem would likely be experienced. However, if the plant is grown in a somewhat similar climate and altitude the plant will likely survive.

Vice-Chairman Macek asked about those plants that are planted in one area, but they are transplanted to local growers for finishing. He asked wouldn't that provide the plant with enough time to acclimate. Staff indicated that there are cases where the acclimation would not be a concern.

Commissioner McMahon stated that she was happy with the changes that have been made in the update, particularly noting the enhanced tree protections, soil performance, and quality of plant materials. She stated that the document helps clarify and focus on the performance of the plants, giving the developers the right criteria to provide a quality canopy for the City. Commissioner McMahon further stated that she believes the native plant specification is just a piece of the overall requirements and provides sufficient leeway for developers.

Commissioner Wasowski was supportive of the updated Landscape Guidelines and highlighted the importance of quality landscapes. She stated that the staff outreach process was positive and that if it had been lacking local land use attorneys and others to raise their concerns.

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Commissioner Goebel thanked staff for the consideration of the impact of soil depth on on-grade application. He believes reducing that from four feet to three feet will be a good change.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of the 2019 Landscape Guidelines Update, with the following amendments as noted in a staff memorandum:

- Correction of some typographical errors, in-text references and adjustments to sentence structure/phrasing in limited areas;
- Adjustments to two landscape plan preparation checklist items, which are incorrectly listed due to an editing error:
 - Clarify timing for the submission of the Invasive Management Plan (if applicable),
 - Clarify timing for the submission of the tree soil volume diagram plan; and
- Adjustment to the order of the text on page 26 through page 30 for clarity.

The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

Reason: The Planning Commission agreed with the staff analysis.

4. Rezoning #2018-0009

Development Special Use Permit #2018-0014

Transportation Management Plan Special Use Permit #2018-0103

600 North Royal Street - Bus Barn

Public Hearing and consideration of requests for: (A) an amendment to the official zoning map to change the zone from RM to CRMU-X; (B) a Development Special Use Permit and site plan to construct a multifamily residential building including special use permits to increase the floor area ratio to 2.5 and to increase the density in exchange for affordable housing pursuant to Section 7-700 of the Zoning Ordinance; and (C) a Transportation Management Special Use Permit; zoned RM/Townhouse zone.

Applicant: Maple Multi-Family Land SE, L.P. d/b/a Trammel Crow Residential; represented by M. Catharine Puskar, attorney.

Stephanie Free (P&Z), Catherine Miliaras (P&Z), Robert Kerns (P&Z), Katye North (T&ES), and Brian Dofflemyer (T&ES) presented the case and answered questions from the Planning Commission.

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Speakers:

M. Catharine Puskar, representing the applicant, spoke in support of the project. Ms. Puskar provided an overview of the process to achieve the proposed building and open space design. She also spoke to the project's compliance with FAR and open space regulations of the CRMU-X zone. In terms of the Residential Parking Permit Policy, Ms. Puskar further described the difference in the results of the on-street occupancy survey at both a one-block and a two-block study area. She noted that because the applicant is willing to comply with the Policy for Residential Parking Permits for New Development and because the updated survey of a one-block area showed that the requirements were not met for eligibility, she agreed to a condition precluding residents from obtaining residential parking permits (Condition 33A). Ms. Puskar also spoke to the concerns raised by the owner of the Annie B. Rose building regarding lack of notice from the applicant regarding the development and the potential impacts of construction from the development at 600 N. Royal Street. Ms. Puskar noted the lack of notice was not intentional and was an oversight. She formerly thought Annie B. Rose was an Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority (ARHA) property and therefore thought the outreach provided to ARHA also covered Annie B. Rose. She later found that Annie B. Rose building has a ground lease on the property and therefore outreach should have been done earlier to that owner as well. Ms. Puskar also noted the applicant will continue to work with this neighbor regarding construction concerns when construction drawings are complete and a contractor is on board. She described that a pre-construction survey will be completed of the properties around the development which are within the impact zone; and monitoring will be provided of those properties and if any issues occur as a result of the construction the applicant will work with the neighboring properties on those issues.

Lorie Ann McGeehan, representing Pendleton House LDHA/Annie B. Rose House, voiced concern about not receiving appropriate notice from the applicant and concerns of construction impacts to the Annie B. Rose building. She cited issues with foundation cracking and separation issues at Annie B. Rose during the timeframe that the Kingsley development was under construction and noted concerns for potentially similar issues with the dewatering and development of 600 N. Royal Street. She requested that the developer put measures in place to study the issue, monitor the water table closely and take all precautions to ensure no damage to their property and that funds be put aside or a bond be put in place to cover the issues.

Colin McKenzie, a consultant for the Pendleton House LDHA/Annie B. Rose House, spoke in support of Ms. McGeehan's concerns. Mr. McKenzie provided the Planning Commission with documentation of issues at Annie B. Rose that occurred during the construction timeframe of the Kingsley development. Mr. McKenzie further asked that the Planning Commission recommend the applicant be required to provide a study of the water table levels of the area and the expected effects of dewatering for the below-grade parking garage, employ excavation and construction techniques that would minimize the

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overall water table reduction of the site, provide inspections of vibration related damages, and install observation wells on the Annie B. Rose property to document the water table levels before, during, and after construction.

Robert Rowe, a resident at 507 Princess Street, noted concerns with parking and what he indicated as a lack of concern to keep parking on-site for developments based upon the 2017 Residential Parking Permit Policy for New Developments. Mr. Rowe also stated issues with the amount of open space provided, the design of the building, and asked that some consideration be given to the amount of toxic soils on the site.

Carolyn Merck, a resident at 324 North Royal Street, spoke to three issues including parking, density and design. She noted that she and several neighbors of the surrounding area met to review the proposed plans for the development at 600 N. Royal Street and they disapprove of the project. Ms. Merck voiced issues with the lack of incentive for future residents to park in the on-site parking garage and instead park for free on the street without restrictions around the perimeter of the site, which she recommended be regulated. Ms. Merck indicated that the density is unjustified and asked that the 287 units be reduced to no more than 150 apartment units. She also noted that the design of the building is blocky and institutional. She recommended the following revisions to the plan: reinstatement of resident street parking regulations on the public blocks in the area, reduction in the number of units, and improvement to the design.

Cathleen Curtin, a resident at 501 Princess Street, voiced concerns with the reduction of the street width around the perimeter of the site and the potential “canyon affect” that the new development would cause. She questioned if narrowing of the streets in return gives additional land to the developer to meet the site’s open space requirements. Ms. Curtin requested the Planning Commission to deny the application due to these concerns.

Michael Strain, a resident at 330 North Royal, described this development as a threat to the current residents’ ability to park on the street and the residential quality of the neighborhood. He noted the effect of additional density within the City overall and the issue of on-street parking. Mr. Strain also noted dissatisfaction with the existing Residential Parking Permit policy. He noted that this proposal raises broader issues for City Council to consider.

Steve Goodman, a resident of Garrett’s Mill, spoke to his service on the Royal Street Bus Garage Ad Hoc Advisory Committee and the Old Town North Small Area Plan Advisory Group and noted that his concern is not with the design of the building, as the proposal does comply with the design guidelines. Mr. Goodman stated that his concern is with the construction management phase of the project. He noted primary concern with the hours of construction, noise levels, vibration, etc. that would be provided with this project and issues with enforcement of off-street construction worker parking.

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Discussion:

Commissioner Koenig initiated the discussion with questions for staff in regard to the CRMU-X zone open space regulations. Commissioner Koenig's inquiry was addressed by staff with explanation that the CRMU-X zone does not designate a specific percentage of open space that must be provided on-grade (and public) versus above-grade (and private). Other questions about open space were raised by Commissioner Koenig later in the discussion, specifically in reference to the characteristics of "Green Streets" in the Old Town North Small Area Plan. Commissioner Koenig concluded his points about open space by noting correlations between this project's open space and the Docket Item #2 discussion of open space. He noted the need for a continuum of open space with a range of accessibility in the City and highlighted the proximity of this site to public open spaces which warrants his support for the project's open space design which is predominantly reserved for the residents. Commissioner McMahon echoed Commissioner Koenig's comments on open space and also noted her support for the project's open space design. Commissioner Wasowski clarified, in response to a public comment, that the land gained by narrowing the perimeter streets will be used for wider sidewalks and tree wells and remain within the public right of way and the additional width provides the ability to treat stormwater.

Commissioner Brown followed Commissioner Koenig's remarks about the open space design with a question in regard to encouragement of residential developments as rental apartments or as for-sale condominiums to achieve a balance of residential options. Staff responded by noting that the City does not have the legal authority to dictate whether a residential development is rental or for-sale. However, Commissioner Wasowski did state that Old Town North has more ownership units than rentals and this project helps with creating a better balance between the two. She indicated that the Old Town North Small Area Plan supports a balance of tenures.

The remainder of the discussion focused on the speakers' concerns about on-street parking and residential parking permits, building massing, density, height and design, and potential construction impacts to the adjacent Annie B. Rose development. With respect to the parking comments, Commissioner Brown asked staff and the applicant to discuss the circumstances under which the current unrestricted parking around the development site might change. Staff explained the standard process for revisions to parking restrictions includes petition by the residents who live along that block face. Vice-Chairman Macek noted that he does not support the existing resident on-street parking permit policy because he believes parking should be available to everyone living in and visiting the City and that this application shows the weaknesses in the current policy.

All seven Commissioners noted their support for the design, massing, density, and scale of the building and its advancement of the objectives set forth in the Old Town North

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Small Area Plan and Urban Design Guidelines and Standards. Commissioner Wasowski noted extensive community outreach since the project began in 2014 with the Royal Street Bus Garage Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, principles of which were incorporated into the update of the Old Town North Small Area Plan. Commissioner Lyle noted the site is challenging and has been looked at by many developers over the past several years. She also expressed support for the proposed development and the great improvement it will be over the existing vacant industrial use within the heart of an urban area. In response to a public comment, she explained that a “canyon effect” is not anticipated with the proposed height of the building and that a canyon effect is typical only with much taller buildings. Commissioner Brown echoed Commissioner Lyle’s comments and reiterated that the proposed development will fit into the site context well. Commissioner Koenig agreed with the other Commissioners’ comments regarding the design, massing, density, and scale of the building. He noted that the proposal thoughtfully and energetically advances the goals of the Old Town North Small Area Plan and the scope and scale are “just right.” Commissioner Goebel also expressed his support for the scale of the building, noting that the project is not meant to be townhouses and speaks to the context of the site which includes a range of building heights and types. He also noted the positive evolution of the project and believes it is architecturally appropriate. Vice-Chairman Macek noted his agreement with the density and architecture and appreciates seeing fulfillment of the long-term planning process.

In regard to the potential construction impacts raised during the public comment period that may affect the adjacent Annie B. Rose property, Commissioner Brown asked if the Annie B. Rose development would have to monitor and show cause and effect for any damage with a concern for limiting cost impacts to Annie B. Rose. He asked if the City can require the developer to pay and/or be responsible for any damages. Both the applicant and staff reiterated that this is an agreement to be reached between property owners and the City can only legally enforce the applicable construction management conditions and code requirements on the development. Commissioner McMahon said that she appreciates the City’s efforts to make the construction process painless and to minimize the impacts to adjacent properties through its existing enforcement mechanisms.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Wasowski, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of Rezoning #2018-0009, as submitted. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

On a motion by Commissioner Wasowski, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of Development Special Use Permit #2018-0014 and Transportation Management Plan Special Use Permit #2018-0103, subject to the following amendment:

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- The addition of Condition #33A to read, “Residents of the development shall be ineligible to receive residential parking permits issued under Title 5, Chapter 8, Article F of the City Code. (P&Z)(T&ES).”

The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

Reason: The Commission agreed with the staff analysis.

OTHER BUSINESS:

5. Commissioner’s Report, Comments, and Questions.

Vice-Chairman Macek requested P&Z Director Karl Moritz to provide an overview of the recent City Council Retreat highlighting any key outcomes relating to the Long-Range Interdepartmental Work Plan and for planning in general. Mr. Moritz gave a summary of the following and he requested Commissioner Wasowski to offer any comments that she may have as well, since she along with him attended the Retreat.

- Long Range Interdepartmental Work Plan – The Council expressed general support for the Plan with a lot of interest expressed around housing matters, including, but not limited to, housing supply. Another interest was expressed around inclusion, in terms of tools and strategies for obtaining a broad amount of input from various groups within a community and within the City on planning matters.
- Mr. Moritz also indicated the City Council indicated an interest in:
 - (A) Policy issues for discussion during the coming year such as economic development and education.
 - (B) Joint work sessions that the Council would like to hold over the next year – The first one that the Council would like to hold is with ARHA and the Planning Commission to talk about affordable housing.

Commissioner Wasowski added that at the Retreat, the City Council indicated it would like a session on the Landmark Mall Re-planning process. Commissioner Lyle suggested that it be held early since the plan will be docketed shortly.

Vice-Chairman Macek requested Mr. Moritz to provide the Planning Commission with the document generated from the City Council Retreat. Mr. Moritz indicated that he would forward it to the Planning Commission once it is available.

In his report, Commissioner Koenig acknowledged the ribbon cutting of the Patrick Henry School and Recreation Center this morning. He indicated that the facility is fabulous. He said the school opened on January 22.

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Commissioner Koenig indicated the Green Building Policy Task Force held its second meeting and Commissioner McMahon attended as he was unable to do so. He also mentioned an upcoming Green Building community event.

Commissioner Koenig indicated that the Potomac Yard Metro Implementation Work Group met recently and is scheduled to meet again soon and the process is moving forward.

Vice-Chairman Macek indicated that he attended the ribbon cutting of the Patrick Henry School and Recreation Center also and agreed that it is a wonder facility and he was very impressed with it and the tour he was able to take.

Mr. Moritz confirmed that the Green Building Forum will be held on February 28, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. at the AlexRenew building.

Commissioner Lyle indicated the final Landmark Mall meeting will be held on February 27, 9:00 p.m. at the Patrick Henry Recreation Center.

ADJOURNMENT

6. The Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 10:19 p.m.