

Docket Item #18
Planning Commission Meeting
December 3, 2019

Consideration of approval of the Planning Commission minutes of the Public Hearing meeting
of December 3, 2019

ALEXANDRIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – DECEMBER 3, 2019

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

ALEXANDRIA PLANNING COMMISSION

December 3, 2019, 7:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers

Alexandria, Virginia

Members Present:

Nathan Macek, Chair

Maria Wasowski, Vice-Chair

David Brown

John Goebel

Stephen Koenig

Mindy Lyle

Melissa McMahon

Members Absent:

N/A

Staff Present:

Karl W. Moritz

Nancy Williams

Anh Vu

Christina Zechman-Brown

Ann Horowitz

Max Ewart

Tony LaColla

Robert Kerns

Jeffery Farner

Jose Ayala

Carrie Beach

Eric Keeler

Department of Planning & Zoning

Department of Planning & Zoning

Department of Planning & Zoning

Office of the City Attorney

Department of Planning & Zoning

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Office of Housing

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1. **Call to Order.**

NOTATION: Items are listed in the order discussed by the Planning Commission, which differs from the docket order, due to a deferral, a withdraw, and the pulling of an item from the Consent Calendar.

The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. All members were present at the call to order except Commissioner Brown, who arrived at 7:04 p.m., and Commissioner Koenig, who arrived at 7:08 p.m.

Chair Macek inquired as to whether there were any changes to the docket. The Planning Commission Clerk responded indicating that a request for deferral had been received for Item #3, a Special Use Permit, and a withdraw request was submitted for the City Charter Section 9.06 case listed under Item #12. The Chair noted the deferral and withdraw requests.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

As described immediately below, the Planning Commission voted to accept a deferral request for Item #3 a Special Use Permit, and a withdraw request for Item #4, and City Charter Section 9.06 Case. Item #2 was removed from the Consent Calendar.

2. Special Use Permit #2019-0080
1417 Princess Street - Parking Reduction and Lot Modifications
Public Hearing and consideration of a request for a Special Use Permit for a parking reduction with lot modifications for the construction of a single-family dwelling; zoned: RB/Townhouse.
Applicant: Ala Awadallah

Max Ewart (P&Z), Ann Horowitz (P&Z), and Tony LaColla (P&Z) presented the case and answered questions from the Planning Commission.

Speakers:

Michael Stauber, 1401 Princess Street, expressed concern with the preliminary setback depicted in the application, stating that it could set a precedent for future development of the two adjacent lots.

Jared Russell, Takoma Park, Maryland, the real estate agent for the adjacent undeveloped lots, shared concerns regarding the width of the alley and associated difficulty in maneuvering a vehicle at the proposed site for a single-family home.

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Allen Russell, 1403 Princess Street, stated his belief that the siting of the proposed dwelling would set the precedent for development of the two undeveloped lots adjacent to the subject site, reducing the quantity of light entering his windows.

Emily Lapp, 415 North Peyton Street, stated that her property abuts the alley and she finds it difficult to park in the rear of her property.

Chair Macek closed the Public Hearing.

Discussion:

Chair Macek confirmed with staff that the turning radius for a vehicle entering and leaving the proposed parking space was adequate with the addition of an apron and that the design elements, including front setback, would be reviewed for compatibility with the historic district at a future Board of Architectural Review (BAR) Public Hearing. He added that many historic residential properties in Old Town were not constructed with parking spaces and parking reductions were reasonable to accommodate new construction in the historic districts.

Commissioner Lyle inquired and staff established that the Department of Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES) staff member who evaluated the turning radius is a civil engineer.

Commissioner Brown confirmed that the front setback would be evaluated at a future BAR Public Hearing and was not part of a Special Use Permit (SUP) review for a parking reduction and lot modification. In addition, he affirmed that the RB Zone does not require side yard setbacks.

Vice-Chair Wasowski identified that the landscape areas that do not formally count toward open space flank both sides of the proposed parking space and could be used to augment the turning radius if necessary.

Commissioner McMahon expressed support for the request. Although it was not part of the SUP request, she and Chair Macek concurred that they would support a two-space parking reduction in this area if it had been proposed.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: This item was removed from consent. On a motion by Commissioner McMahon, seconded by Commissioner Lyle, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of Special Use Permit #2019-0080, as submitted. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

Reason: The Planning Commission agreed with the staff analysis.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND ITEMS PREVIOUSLY DEFERRED:

3. **The applicant has requested a deferral for this item.**

Special Use Permit #2019-0039

Riparian area adjacent to 0 Prince Street (used and owned by 200 Strand Street) - Old Dominion Boat Club Pier Expansion

Public Hearing and consideration of a request for a Special Use Permit to replace and expand a facility used for the docking or berthing of boats or ships; zoned: W-1/ Waterfront mixed use.

Applicant: Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC), represented by Duncan W. Blair, attorney

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Commissioner McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to defer Special Use Permit #2019-0039 and withdraw City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2019-0003. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0, with Commissioner Koenig absent.

NEW BUSINESS:

4. **The applicant has requested withdrawal for this item.**

City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2019-0003

4001 Wheeler Avenue

Public Hearing and consideration of a request for Planning Commission to review whether the proposed purchase of property by the City of Alexandria for use as a City impound lot and the resulting change in use of that property is consistent with the City of Alexandria Master Plan pursuant to Section 9.06 of the City Charter.

Applicant: City of Alexandria

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Commissioner McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to defer Special Use Permit #2019-0039 and withdraw City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2019-0003. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0, with Commissioner Koenig absent.

OTHER BUSINESS:

5. Planning Commission Briefing on the Draft Eisenhower East Small Area Plan

Jose Carlos Ayala (P&Z), Jeffery Farner (P&Z), Eric Keeler (Housing), Carrie Beach (P&Z), and Robert Kerns (P&Z) gave the Planning Commission a briefing on the Draft Eisenhower East Small Area Plan (SAP).

Commissioner Lyle commented that she believes the City will not achieve its housing

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affordability goals until it accepts a wider variety of housing typologies such as townhouses. Chair Macek noted that townhouse development is not anticipated for Eisenhower East, with Commissioner Lyle responding that there is potential in the western portion of the SAP plan area. Karl Moritz, Director of the Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z), emphasized that, in the future, P&Z staff will be looking at how the City can embrace different housing types as part of its housing affordability initiatives and that both the Planning Commission and City Council would be involved in those discussions.

Chair Macek asked for clarification as to whether developers are required to include onsite affordable units within their projects or if monetary contributions would be acceptable. Staff confirmed that the units would be located onsite within a given development.

Vice-Chair Wasowski asked for clarification as to what the affordable housing requirement was in the 2003 Eisenhower East Small Area Plan (2003 SAP). Staff responded that the 2003 SAP only referenced voluntary contributions to the Housing Trust Fund. Vice-Chair Wasowski inquired whether parking requirements for affordable units would be included in the overall requirements for the given development or if they would be evaluated separately. Staff responded that parking will be evaluated based on the parking maximum, including reductions for proximity to the Metrorail Station and affordable housing. Vice-Chair Wasowski inquired whether the 10 percent affordable requirement will be based on a number of units or square footage, and staff responded that the estimated unit number provided in slide 5 is based on anticipated square footage and average unit size. The 10 percent requirement is based on 10 percent of the additional square footage that would be allowed under the SAP, and the number of units will be determined through the development review process.

Commissioner Koenig requested clarification on anticipated additional density compared to the 2003 Plan. Staff responded that the potential total density is 19.1 million square feet, which is about 7 million square feet above what was allowed in the 2003 SAP. Staff responded that the total square footage is a projection -- developers may choose to use all of the density permitted or some fraction. Commissioner Koenig asked how the projected number of units in the SAP fits in with the overall Housing Master Plan. Staff answered that it's one part of the overall strategy, which includes other tools like leveraging partnerships with nonprofits.

Commissioner Brown requested that Bonus Density, as referenced in the Recommendations Section on page 67 of the SAP, also be referenced in the text for transparency. He then requested clarification within the text and on the maps that Bonus Density and height allowed by Section 7-700 of the Zoning Ordinance may be applied in the SAP plan area and that the additions are over and above what is called out on the

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height map, for example. Chair Macek concurred with Commissioner Brown that more clarification in the SAP would be helpful. Staff agreed to make the change.

Chair Macek requested clarification from staff on why building heights near the Alexandria Detention Center are unchanged from the 2003 SAP and Commissioner McMahon questioned why the SAP would have differing levels of specificity for different blocks. Staff answered that Blocks 1, 21A and 21B, were not part of this planning process as the property owners have not expressed an interest in redevelopment, but that the Blocks can come in at any time to be reevaluated in the future.

Staff explained that the maximum height limits are what determines density, which was calculated to analyze infrastructure capacity (traffic and sewer). Staff explained that the goal of the analysis was to ensure that the SAP has infrastructure capacity for those projects anticipated to proceed.

Staff also clarified that Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and square footage are not included in the SAP; instead, the SAP includes a modified form-based code that proposes a footprint, building requirements and height, which allow greater flexibility.

Commissioner McMahon suggested adding more information in the SAP to explain the infrastructure considerations. Commissioner Koenig agreed that the infrastructure and height considerations should be better laid out in the SAP, and that height minimums will need to be enforced to ensure recommended density. Staff agreed to add this information. Vice-Chair Wasowski and Commissioner Koenig requested clarification on the maximum square footage that can be developed based on existing infrastructure capacity. Commissioner Koenig asked three questions: (1) whether the 19.1 million is the maximum square footage that can be developed with the existing infrastructure, (2) if it is a controlling maximum number that affects the density of future sites, or, (3) if it is a “floating” number as the SAP is developed. Staff answered that the number is a controlling number, but it essentially takes the maximum height and multiplies the volume of the form, then converts that number into the square footage. Staff clarified that these numbers reflect a 20-25 year development horizon.

Commissioner Brown suggested a clarification to the Land Use Section of the SAP because the text and map are somewhat inconsistent with regard to the strategy for commercial land use near the Metrorail Station. Staff agreed to make the revision. Commissioner Koenig requested clarification regarding an additional proposed entrance on the north side of Eisenhower Avenue at the National Science Foundation. Staff answered that while it is a recommendation in the SAP, analysis will need to be done to determine whether the additional entrance is feasible from a financial and construction standpoint. In addition to the feasibility study, the SAP recommends both an interim improvement and long-term solution for an at-grade pedestrian crossing at the Metrorail Station across Eisenhower Avenue.

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Commissioner McMahon noted that the pedestrian network map should be updated to reflect locations where the existing pedestrian network (sidewalks) are subpar and should be improved with redevelopment. Staff agreed to make the revision.

Commissioner Koenig asked whether below-grade parking is a requirement in the SAP update; staff answered that the recommendation of the SAP is for one level of underground parking. He then asked for clarification on the definition of “Indistinguishable from Occupied Space” as it pertains to parking garage screening. Staff explained that the screening needs to look like a window or occupied space. Staff also mentioned that Alexandria might be the first jurisdiction regionally to recommend parking garages be convertible to allow other future uses, such as housing. Commissioner Koenig requested examples of screening that looks indistinguishable from occupied space. He then noted that the active use requirements for at-grade frontages may be difficult to achieve 100 percent active use. Staff noted that the SAP requires 90 percent for “A” Streets, 80 percent for “B” Streets, and 80 percent for “C” Streets to account for entryways, service functions, loading areas and other uses that might detract from 100 percent active use. Commissioner Koenig asked if there is a recommendation in the SAP for a limit on the podium height. Staff answered that there is a 65-foot maximum podium height with a maximum of 75 feet on “A” Streets.

Commissioner Lyle recommended providing examples of other jurisdictions where architectural screening or active use is required, sharing concern that the recommendations are too stringent and might dissuade development.

Vice-Chair Wasowski asked about the energy cost of maintaining the screening that is indistinguishable from occupied space and suggested comparing that recommendation to traditional parking structures. Staff answered that underground parking needs to be mechanically ventilated and lit and that above-grade could also be mechanically ventilated and lit as well. Vice-Chair Wasowski asked about smaller parcels and whether those will be required to provide active use screening, and requested that staff provide graphics and examples. Staff mentioned that there are several projects in Alexandria in different Small Area Plans applying more stringent requirements. Vice-Chair Wasowski mentioned that perhaps not every street needs to be activated, and highlighted Philadelphia as an example where service streets and alleys aren’t activated. Staff mentioned that each development case proposed will be looked at contextually. Staff noted that the SAP includes a relief valve (page 45) that provides flexibility for alternative approaches for projects with unusual or specific circumstances where the recommendations can’t be met.

Commissioner Goebel stated that the architectural screening will be a huge challenge for developers, as he has been involved in similar projects and developments. He mentioned that the ventilation of above-grade structures will need to be mechanical due to the

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screening.

Commissioner McMahon mentioned that it will be helpful for staff to bring two types of examples: 1) development that has succeeded with the design solutions outlined in the SAP; and 2) policy approaches that communities have taken that are similar to the policy approaches in the SAP. She then mentioned that underground parking should be prioritized over above-grade and that the development community should screen if underground parking absolutely cannot be developed.

Vice-Chair Wasowski recommended an analysis five years from SAP adoption to answer questions on the feasibility of convertible parking. Staff answered that a good amount of testing has been done, but that examples will be provided. Commissioner Lyle asked what type of testing has been done and what developers have said about the testing. Staff answered that they looked at future blocks, proposals and yields, and that developers have brought up various questions regarding screening, ramp locations and environmental concerns. Staff mentioned that some developers are concerned that they will not be able to achieve the standards recommended in the SAP, but that other developers potentially could which would influence development to be held to the same standard. Commissioner Lyle asked staff to consider construction costs. Staff reminded the Planning Commission that there is a Development Special Use Permit process to review developments.

Vice-Chair Wasowski mentioned that Blocks 4 and 5 have had projects approved that should not be considered as precedents for future developments. Staff mentioned Block 20 as an example of a project that complies with the SAP recommendations and which includes screened parking with all active use at-grade. Staff added that several regional examples were studied during the drafting process for the SAP for at-grade and above-grade screening requirements.

Chair Macek raised the concern that future development may be hampered because of already-approved developments in the area and because of screening requirements. He also mentioned that the cost to screen the parking will take funding away from other potential community benefits. He suggested that the SAP could incorporate a “catalyst phase” or alternative scenarios to ease projects into the draft SAP recommendations. He requested that staff bring potential alternative (relaxed standard) language to the January meeting. Vice-Chair Wasowski posed concern about the “catalyst phase” suggestion due to density goals near the Metrorail Station. Chair Macek mentioned that having some concrete suggestions for alternatives will be important for having a meaningful conversation in January. Vice-Chair Wasowski agreed. Chair Macek reiterated that the SAP has been well-developed yet needs some refinement.

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6. Commissioners' Reports, Comments, and Questions.

Commissioner Lyle reported that the Douglas MacArthur Advisory Board will be having a meeting on December 16 at Douglas MacArthur School from 6-8:00 p.m. where concepts for the new school will be presented and discussed.

Chair Macek noted that staff recently conducted a successful information meeting with the Arlandria community to kick off the Mount Vernon Avenue planning process and commended them on this meeting.

Commissioner Koenig reported that the conversion and redevelopment of Transpotomac Plaza in Old Town North will be on the agenda for the December 11 Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC) meeting.

MINUTES:

7. Consideration of the minutes from the November 7, 2019 Planning Commission meeting.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Commissioner McMahon, the Planning Commission voted to approve the minutes of November 7, 2019, as amended. The motion carried on a vote of 7-0.

ADJOURNMENT

8. The Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 9:46 p.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS

9. Special Use Permit #2019-0019

4946-B Eisenhower Avenue

Request for a change of ownership for a light automobile repair establishment

Applicant: Rafeal Laguna

Approved: 11/15/2019

Special Use Permit #2019-0085

200 Commerce Street

Request for a new use for a restaurant

Applicant: Brandon Byrd

Approved: 11/6/2019