

07.13.20

Cecily Crandall
815 Green St.
Alexandria, VA 22314

City of Alexandria B.A.R. (Board of Architectural Review)
Division of Planning & Zoning
City Hall
Alexandria, VA 22314
c/o: Lia Niebauer at lia.niebauer@alexandriava.gov

Dear Board of Architectural Review Members (BAR):

I am a writing regarding Docket item #16- BAR #2020-00197 OHAD and Docket item #17- BAR #2020-00196 OHAD. My letter today is brief due to time constraints resulting from a lack of timely notification. This letter will be followed with a more detailed addendum in the coming days.

My reason for writing is to OPPOSE the proposed S. Patrick St. Re-Development project that is the subject of the aforementioned two docket items for the following reasons:

I. LACK of MEETING NOTIFICATION

- A. City Planning Dept. sent the email meeting notification on Friday, July 10, 2020 at 4:00pm for a July 15, 7pm BAR Hearing. Not sufficient time for all members of the community to be notified.
- B. City Planning Dept. posted 2 outdoor BAR Hearing notification signs on Wilkes St. This is a massive project on multiple city blocks. There were no signs on Gibbon St., S. Columbus St. the south end of The Heritage building on S. Alfred & S. Patrick, etc.
- C. The developer & his attorney had promised neighbors at their January 30, 2020 meeting that the next step would be a meeting with them in February to review plans. That meeting never materialized (though the plan moved forward w/meetings with the City). The attorney for the developer has used the COVID-19 as the reason that no meeting was held. However, the attorney

decided to hold a virtual meeting on July 14 at 6 pm, one day for the scheduled BAR Hearing. A virtual meeting could have been held in March, April, May, June or early July if transparency and inclusion were desired. My understanding is that the July meeting came about after a neighbor saw the posted City signs and complained. Not fair to residents. This lack of notification disallows many much needed information and involvement in the process.

D. BONUS HEIGHT & DENSITY

A. I ask that the BAR deny the requested bonus height & density for the following reasons:

1. Throughout the City Community meetings/charrettes held in and around 2018, participating neighbors were repeatedly told that the height of the new buildings (in particular the Heritage buildings on S. Alfred St.) would be 3 to 4 stories tall—possibly 5 on S. Patrick St. Now the developer is asking for 7 stories on S. Patrick St. and 5/6 stories on S. Alfred/Wilkes St. adding a significant number of units. We feel like this is not only a bait and switch, but that we were lied to repeatedly.
2. The height and density of these massive buildings are unprecedented in this area of Old Town. These neighborhoods, in many cases, have been carefully preserved for a long time. The monstrosities proposed will diminish the previous preservation efforts thus rendering the historical element of the neighborhood dead. To allow buildings of this size, which will significantly dwarf the surrounding residential homes--many historical, will change the neighborhoods forever.
3. What is the need for the Bonus Density? New apartment buildings are being built every day. Alexandria and particularly Old Town, has added a staggering number of apartment buildings new and converted in the last five years. Of particular interests is the fact that for the past 1-1/2 years, it has been apparent that almost every apartment building in OT and Eisenhower and even PY has constant Vacancy signs. Advertising reduced rental rates, rental

months free, etc. There don't seem to be any takers for those apartments, why do we need more?

4. COVID-19: Believe this trend started prior to the COVID-19, but the virus, spread most easily in more densely populated areas, is causing many people to flee high density cities in record numbers. I know many people leaving OT/Alex. and they will not be back. Work at home, virtual schooling, etc. leads to the desire for less density and more space. There has also been a reverse of the prior desire for city life by young families. Many have been leaving the city when they have children and moving to areas where they can have a yard. Hence the lack of need for the Bonus Height & Density.

E. ARCHITECTURAL STYLE OF PROJECT/BUILDINGS

- A. The buildings in Block 1, 2 and 4 of the proposed plan by the developer is not in keeping with the architectural styles of the Old and Historic District in these buildings are in part and in whole located. The proposed design by the developer is a very modern, stark, severe, and institutional. Not at all like the surrounding historical style homes and not at all residential looking. With its massive size and modern design it negates the historical element of the existing neighborhood—forever. The developer's reason for not providing a more historical design was that it would be too "Awkward" to build. That it is too hard to do with such a "big", "massive" building (I guess they were admitting these buildings are massive). This reasoning is laughable. (Perhaps making them less "massive" would help?) More likely that they don't want to build in a traditional (or as Ms. Puskar has previously stated to the BAR: "Phony Colonies") or even a transitional style (such as the Hotel Indigo, the new Strand condos, The Clayborne Apts. or even the new Sunrise Assisted Living bldg. on S. Washington St.) because these styles incorporate more architectural details which cost more money. We were told that this developer was responsible for the Gables and the in-process Bus Barn buildings which use mostly black/smoke grey color schemes/materials which are not at all in keeping with the colors and styles of the existing architecture. In a historical,

residential area where these properties are located, it is desirable, even important to keep the residential feel and to not overwhelm the area with a massive, industrial style that will be dated in a few short years (these are not enduring styles).

- B. Additionally, I don't think these buildings make the "Welcome to Old Town" statements that the staff in the Community meetings stated they were trying to achieve. They look like every other generic, modern style building and could be from anywhere. One of the things that makes Old Town so special is the historic nature of our architecture. Without it, we might as well be Ballston (and we are so close to that now!). Why would anyone come here to live or visit versus Arlington or Tysons Corner? Buildings that emphasize the historic nature of our town seem like a better statement.
- C. This area of town is filled with existing affordable housing-a true middle-class neighborhood. I have yet to see new development, including apartments, cost less than the existing properties here in the SWQ. As matter of fact, every new development seems to advertise as being "Luxury" and is new, with many amenities and, therefore, is able to command higher and higher rents. Why destroy the last affordable area in town? Sadly, the gentrification of Old Town continues with this project.

I ask that the BAR board deny the Bonus Height & Density for this project and that they consider the impact of a massive, modern style proposed building on the surrounding historic (Old and Historic District) neighborhood. To allow such size, scale and modern design in this area would indicate that the City Council, City staff as well as the members of the BAR are not committed to the preservation of our historic treasures. There can not be two standards of application of the rules—some having to adhere to the OHAD rules governed by the City and the BAR and some, those with deep pockets and big developments, do not. This seems most unfair.

Sincerely,
Cecily Crandall

Lia Niebauer

From: Chris Morell <morellchris@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 14, 2020 8:03 PM
To: Michael Swidrak
Cc: Lia Niebauer; Catherine Miliaras
Subject: [EXTERNAL]BAR Public Hearing on Heritage at Old Town Project
Attachments: Heritage at Old Town BAR.doc

Dear Mr Swidrak,

I sent the attached to Ms Niebauer and Ms Miliaras earlier today before I watched the Heritage at Old Town's presentation this evening. I got you name and contact information from one of the slides from that presentation. The concerns I expressed in the attachment were in some instances overcome in tonight's presentation, specifically the Applicant is now asking for 3 blocks rather than the two we were allowed to review and which was the basis for my comments. I am disturbed that, in addition to the change in the number of buildings, much of the information in the elevations and site plans I was allowed to review had changed dramatically. I am submitting the attachment to you for your review. I would be interested to know when this project will be presented to other City departments and what the proposed design will be at that point and where I may submit my concerns and comments. Finally, I believe that Ms Puskar is mistaken when she refers to this area of Alexandria as an "Urban Environment."

Best regards,

Chris Morell
421 South Columbus Street
Alexandria 22314
Mobile at 703-350-1571

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Heritage at Old Town Proposed Project Demolition – Concerns
BAR #2020-00196 OHAD

- In the initial project meeting on January 30, 2020, the Applicant's representatives revealed that Blocks 1 & 2 were the first phase of a total of 9 blocks. Although only two of the blocks have been submitted for consideration at this time, it does not seem reasonable to make decisions and long-term commitments without considering the impact of the full scale, scope and density of the Applicant's plan. An incremental approval process or one that sets the precedent for the entire development based on only part of the overall plan and ignores its total impact is not responsible and would be a "detriment to the public interest."
- It appears that the scope and density of the buildings, proposed in this first stage of the planned development, will severely reduce the amount of open space far below what is permitted in residential development. Thirty-six percent of the area included in the open space calculation is actually on the fourth floor roof. By limiting the open space, the viewer is moved closer to the building, which makes the mass and scale much more imposing. In a residential neighborhood, where the scale is much more intimate than in an area of multistory apartment blocks, the proposed blocks will overwhelm their site and surroundings. Blocks of the proposed mass and scale are inconsistent with the scale of the neighborhood, particularly when viewed in the context of a historic district.
- The existing building's mass is screened by established willow oak trees that are 60 feet and taller. The trees visually reduce the mass and scale of the existing buildings to something more intimate. The plans indicate that the street trees and those close to the existing building, some of which are more than 30 inches in circumference, will be demolished and no tree protection measures that would save the trees are planned. Although no landscape plan was submitted, the site plans and elevation drawings indicate that there will be few trees to obscure the block's mass or screen the surrounding properties from oversight because the existing mature trees will be demolished and any new trees will take thirty or forty years to effectively screen the blocks.
- The mass and density of the two large, multistory blocks is inconsistent with the historic neighborhood scale and will permanently change the character of the area to one that is comparable to the density of urban high-rise areas. In that

Heritage at Old Town Proposed Project Demolition – Concerns
BAR #2020-00196 OHAD

case, the character and ambience of this part of the old and historic district and its remaining historic buildings will be lost. If all nine blocks identified in the overall development plan are allowed to proceed the residential nature of this part of south Alexandria will be changed, which will not make “the city a more attractive place in which to live.”

- Many buildings close to the project have history and value. Since much of its desirability is because of its location, the project blocks should be required to contribute to rather than detract from the character of the district and it should be subjected to the same scrutiny and limitations that are imposed on all projects “to maintain the historic integrity of the area.” The landscape design of Wilkes Street Park on both sides of the bike path seems to be the only recognition of the project’s location in a historic neighborhood. The project elevations and perspectives show brick will be used as a part of the materials palette, however, their pattern of use and details are inconsistent with the historic architecture of the area. The fenestration plan uses large paned windows rather than the divided light windows typically required. City Hall and many of the buildings in downtown Alexandria have successfully maintained an architectural style typical of the OHAD, so it should not be difficult to employ the same style elements here. It should be noted that the proposed design is not likely to “stimulate interest and study in architecture and design” because the solution has no architectural elements that would be considered unique or innovative.
- The city’s desire “to enrich the quality of life for city residents by protecting the unique resource that is the historic district” is in direct conflict with the proposed project. The project’s goal, to maximize the number of units without making any accommodation for its location in a historic district of intimately scaled houses and mature trees, will have lasting impact on this area of the historic district.
- At the first public meeting the audience was promised a written response to the questions and concerns raised, however, there has been nothing to date. So it is not possible to determine whether the neighborhood’s concerns were ever considered in the current concept plans but it appears they were not.

Lia Niebauer

From: JE Kupiec <jkupiec@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 14, 2020 6:02 PM
To: Lia Niebauer
Subject: [EXTERNAL]July 15 virtual hearing: Docket item #17

Good evening Ms. Niebauer,

Due to an existing conflict with Lyles Crouch Traditional Academy, I will not be able to participate in tomorrow evening's scheduled virtual hearing. I wanted to express my thoughts regarding docket item #17, the request for concept review at 450 S. Patrick Street, 900 Wolfe Street and 431 S. Columbus Street by the Old Town PropCo LLC, in advance of tomorrow's virtual meeting.

The size and scope of this project is unprecedented for this section of Alexandria, specifically Old Town. I question the appropriateness of the height and density of the project within the boundaries of the historic district. I am extremely concerned that approving the request for bonus density will set a precedent within Old Town for further development that erodes the historic preservation requirements that the Board of Architectural review is tasked with maintaining. I strongly oppose the request for bonus density by Old Town PropCo LLC for this project.

While I understand that the Board is tasked with reviewing the concept and does not involve itself in other project details, I wanted to express my disappointment in the process. The last meeting the developer held with community members regarding this project was on January 30. Until I saw a sign posted last weekend while I was out, nothing had been posted. Then a notice was posted regarding a virtual community meeting with the developer for July 14, with the notice of the July 15 BAR virtual hearing (which was on the City website). We have all been dealing with the effects of a global pandemic and many residents have been negatively impacted. The short notice with only a virtual option does not truly reflect an inclusive process and this project has the potential to truly impact the lives of residents within this section of the historical district and Old Town.

I urge the BAR to table the concept review for this project until the neighboring community can be fully engaged.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts,

Janice Kupiec

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

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Lia Niebauer

From: m r <mwrs2010@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 14, 2020 7:40 PM
To: Lia Niebauer
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Bar meeting for The Heritage project

Hi,

Tonight the zoom meeting for The Heritage Project mentioned that a traffic study was completed in Jan. but the results were not shared. I live behind the West Marine store on S. Fayette St. and need to go West on Gibbon to cross S. Patrick to get into my neighborhood. The traffic, pre covid 19, was bumper to bumper on all the streets leading into Gibbon going west, and of course on Gibbon, from 3:30pm-6:30ish. Please explain the traffic study results in relation to what the city would consider the "right amount of traffic" with the impact of these 700+ units.

Thank you,

Mimi Foley

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Lia Niebauer

From: Tobin & Andrea Tracey <glenecho08@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 8:49 AM
To: Lia Niebauer
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Comment for July 15 BAR Meeting

> Hello,

>

> I saw the presentation on the Heritage at Old Town development and I have concerns about the massing of buildings 1 and 2 and their effect on the historic district. I live in the historic district in the 700 block of Wolfe Street. A few years ago a row of townhouses was allowed to be constructed at 422 - 432 S Columbus Street. These townhouses are 3 stories tall and TOWER above the 2-story townhouses to the north of them. When I look out my back windows, or stand in my backyard, I see a massive brick wall. From my backyard I can look over and see Odd Fellows Hall on S Columbus Street and the tops of the 2-story townhouses to the south of that building. Their scale is in proportion with our houses in the historic district.

>

> Building 2, which will front S Columbus and will be just to the south of the Odd Fellows Hall and the 2-story townhouses, is proposed to be 4-stories at the street. The scale of this building will be massive compared to the neighboring buildings and I will be able to see that building facade from my backyard and looking out my windows. It will be taller than the 3-story townhouses at 422-432 S Columbus. I see the top of the 6-story Heritage building now, but it is set back on its site and not invasive. I appreciate that the developer is stepping the new building back from S Columbus, but the scale as shown is still too big for the surrounding buildings.

>

> The south side of the 700 block of Wolfe and the west side of the 400 block of S Washington are the last extant buildings from the historic Bottoms neighborhood. Unfortunately Urban Renewal wiped out most of the other buildings. This neighborhood was historically low density, low rise dwellings. The majority of the buildings constructed as part of the Urban Renewal in the 1970s, and now being proposed for demolition, maintained this scale. Encroachment on this setting and sense of scale began with the townhouses at 422-432 S Columbus being allowed to be 3-stories. The 4-story structure of building 2 will encroach even further and start to turn the setting and feel of a low density historic neighborhood into a high density neighborhood.

>

> The developer mentioned The Gables in North Old Town and when I looked at that project I noticed that the portion of the buildings at the street are only 2-stories tall and then it steps to a high-rise building. This is more in line with what should happen with building 2 at the Heritage at Old Town, so that it doesn't encroach on the scale and setting of the surrounding houses and the extant buildings of the historic Bottoms neighborhood. I support this development, and the developer has been sensitive to the neighbors comment. I think the project still needs some tweaking with the scale of the buildings abutting the 2-story townhouses on S Columbus and Wolfe Street.

>

> Regards,
> Tobin Tracey
> 712 Wolfe Street

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Lia Niebauer

From: Yvonne Callahan <yvonneweightcallahan@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 12:09 PM
To: Lia Niebauer
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Heritage Concept Review

Dear Madam Chairman and members of the BAR

I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with some observations concerning the Heritage project as it is being presented to you.

I watched the virtual meeting that took place last evening. My overall impression is that the magnitude of this project is truly impossible to be appropriately conveyed in such a setting. Even though I am reasonably knowledgeable with this area of Alexandria, I found it virtually impossible to both absorb what was being said with regards to the proposed structures and their placement within the neighborhood as a whole.

I would therefore strongly urge that the applicant take photographs of the entire surrounding existing structures and present them together with the proposed new structures. This is, I believe, what staff alluded to on Page 9 of the report where only two photographs of existing structures were shown. Including more photos is essential, I believe, and will be of enormous usefulness to all.

I also question the inclusion of the interior courtyards, which are clearly not open to the public. Therefore they do not benefit the public as a whole. Open spaces should, by and large, be open to all. Any development can then make a contribution to all the citizens, and not just those who buy or rent there. Much is being made of the fact that tiny indentations in the mass fronts of these buildings will let the public have a peek. That is inadequate, I believe.

The current planned development is hardly compatible with Old Town. Any argument that it is compatible with a few of the other buildings in this area only confirms that architectural mistakes were made in many of the developments of the 1970's onward. To build another architectural overweight elephant because it is compatible with them is to beg the question. Are these proposed structures with the traditional architecture of the rest of Old Town? Absolutely not. One needs to look only at the historic property at the corner of Wolfe and S. Alfred Street to see an architectural gem that should be honored with more compatible neighboring structures.

I wholeheartedly concur with the conclusion of staff on Page 8 that this project needs refinement. More must be done to make this an attractive gateway project which announces with a strong architectural statement that one is entering Old Town Alexandria. The proposed development says nothing of the sort; indeed it could be placed in the north Route One canyon of buildings that have been built there in recent years, all of which make no statement at all except for bulk and architectural sameness.

New structures can make a strong, and good statement. The new IDI building on S. Union Street certainly does, and the somewhat older Rust building does as well. There are even a few tall structures on Glebe Road in Arlington which are, in my opinion, very handsome--and taller than what is proposed here.

The depiction of one of the buildings in Figure 4 hardly shows any redeeming quality. How can this be considered appropriate in mass and scale with Old Town? Even if one can provide an argument that the structure shown in Figure 3 has some merit, it is difficult to see how that is the case for the other structure or the other side of the same structure. Again, staff has correctly identified this as problematic, as indeed it is.

I fully concur with staff (page 11) that ground floors which are below sidewalk level are not generally appropriate in Old Town, notwithstanding charming English basement townhouses.

The BAR and historic preservation staff have long been concerned about--and have pressed for--more porosity in developments in Old Town. Therefore, I strongly urge the BAR to look carefully at the inclusions of open space such as proposed by staff on PP 13-14 of the report. That has been a successful feature (to a partial degree) of new buildings on the Alexandria waterfront, and they should be strongly encouraged here. I would urge the BAR to recommend the inclusion of "alley" open spaces that traverse the entire length of these structures to provide a more appropriate cityscape of streets and alleys. This would be far more beneficial than indoor, private courtyards.

Staff has also called attention to the overall fenestration of the buildings, which definitely needs improvement. Ironically, the abundance of overly large windows in this project seems to promote a feeling of massiveness rather than of lightness.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. I hope that by the next time this is before the BAR we will have the opportunity to meet in person.

Sincerely
Yvonne Weight Calahan

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From: Brian S <brianmscholl@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 12:44 PM
To: Lia Niebauer
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Comments on BAR review for 7/15

Dear Board of Architectural Review,

I am writing to express concerns with the project proposed for BAR review on 7/15, docket item #17, the request for concept review at 450 S. Patrick Street, 900 Wolfe Street and 431 S. Columbus Street by the Old Town PropCo LLC

The bonus density applied to the project represents a major redevelopment that will radically reshape the structure and character of our community, as well as drastically impact the lives and safety of residents of the community and current affordable housing tenants. It deserves true community participation and input, which has not been possible. **I request postponement of this item for further study and community input, and until the current pandemic settles down so that we can all assess how this project fills into the community going forward.**

Some concerns:

1. **The community has not been adequately noticed or brought into the process** - I was part of the city's Charrette group organized in 2018, and have been keeping my eye out since then, but did not become aware of the BAR meeting until the other day. Few, if any, members of our community have had the opportunity to review the material to provide detailed comments. Very few people were aware of this meeting, including members of relevant civic organizations. The very fact that more outreach has not been conducted with the community to provide input and participation, is extremely troublesome. The project differs considerably from what the community was told and promised in 2018, and the community has not been allowed to truly review and consider those changes or provide input. The pandemic has created additional challenges for local residents struggling with the day-to-day life of work-childcare-homeschool. **On this basis, I request you postpone consideration of community-altering item for a different time.** The community was promised further dialogue on this project and the city and developers have not lived up to that promise.
2. **The city AND developers previously promised a variety of studies of the site that have not been conducted.** For the past several years, we have pressed the city and developers to take adequate steps so that project goals and community needs could be integrated. **In particular, in reference to bonus density, the community was promised independent studies** on sunlight, traffic and other areas of concern **which have not materialized.** Some of these, like traffic studies, cannot be reliably completed during a pandemic. Concerns about traffic, safety, sunlight and other issues have been raised by residents. These concerns have neither been studied nor addressed (c.f. the emails attached to the project proposal, as well as extensive discussion during the Route 1 Affordable housing process).
3. **Traffic and traffic safety are already a concern. This project will greatly exacerbate that problem without a plan or adequate measures for addressing the problem. In our community, pedestrians are constantly at risk, including children walking to and from school or their school bus.** Several of our residents have lost their livelihoods due to reckless drivers. I myself was hit by motorists twice during the Charrette week! Motorists regularly disregard speed limits, lights, posted signage and so forth. Reckless driving and vehicular lawlessness is the routine. **Traffic congestion during peak hours is unbearable and takes hours to clear.** Residents calling Alexandria Police have been repeatedly told that: the police do not have adequate staffing to deal with the issue; and, alternative approaches such as red light cameras cannot be installed in the area due to state provisions. Modest improvements proposed by the community during the Route 1 Affordable housing project process were largely ignored, whereas the minimalist suggestions of the city have either not been implemented, or have already proven to be ineffective in just the way that community residents had predicted. I

am not generally opposed to development projects, **I am opposed to this project's increased population density because adequate provisions for safety and infrastructure that would help to integrate the project into the community, have not been undertaken** by the developer or the city. Given the pandemic and the associated changes in driving/transit preferences that are sure to last for some time, the project will assuredly result in a considerable exacerbation of traffic and traffic safety issues in our community. **I ask for a serious address of these issues before this project receives BAR review.**

4. The associated population increase will greatly impact the fiber of the community. Using the city's own statistics and methodology, the project will result in an approximately 50% increase in population of the Southwest Quadrant. Obviously that alone not only changes the dynamics of the community, but it also threatens to overwhelm local services. **The community has not been given ample time and voice to consider these issues.**

5. This project may not suit a post-pandemic world. Preferences have already changed dramatically during the pandemic. In particular, preferences for public transportation, driving, apartment living, and green space have undergone a major upheaval, and much of this seems to be a secular change. In many cities, residents are beginning to rethink their views of urban living.^[1] A project of this scale and magnitude - one that changes life for our community and so many residents - should be considered at a time when the pandemic has quieted and we can assess the state of affairs more adequately. Speaking as a professional policy economist, we are in the midst of an unprecedented shock to the economy and personal preferences. It may seem unbelievable, but much of the economic shock has yet to hit because of the extraordinary policy measures that have been taken at the federal level are only now starting to wind down (unemployment benefits, eviction holidays, small business assistance, etc.). **Before creating a dramatic upheaval to the character of Old Town, we need to asses if the project makes sense in a post-pandemic world.**

Finally, the project is extremely ill-timed and ill-conceived, and frankly tone-deaf in light of the global pandemic and the current racial justice movement. Even planning the displacement of the most vulnerable residents of our community during a global health crisis exposes them, our community and even the developers to unnecessary risks. Vulnerable families will face considerable stresses that may subject them to additional risks.

I respectfully implore you to consider these points and postpone this issue.

Best,

Brian Scholl

^[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05/nyregion/coronavirus-leaving-nyc.html>

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Lia Niebauer

From: Gail Rothrock <gcrothrock@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 5:15 PM
To: Lia Niebauer
Cc: Steve Milone; yvonneweightcallahan@gmail.com
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Heritage Concept Review

Dear Madam Chairman and BAR Members,

This Heritage project is being rushed forward without community meetings and dialogue. It is difficult to understand what is being proposed on each block face, and how each block face relates to the neighborhood. Please require the developer to produce photographs of each block face in relation to the neighboring existing block faces and to hold community meetings before returning to you to address the staff recommendations.

Thank you.

Gail C. Rothrock
209 Duke Street
Alexandria VA 22314

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Lia Niebauer

From: Albert/Pierce <pierce824@comcast.net>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 5:10 PM
To: Lia Niebauer
Subject: FW: Heritage project

Importance: High

From: Albert/Pierce <pierce824@comcast.net>
Date: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 at 5:03 PM
To: <lia.neibauer@alexandriava.gov>
Cc: Albert/Pierce <pierce824@comcast.net>
Subject: Heritage project

Dear Ms. Niebauer,

I have lived on the 300 block of S. Alfred St. since December 1986. What attracted me to this house was that it was in a residential neighborhood of single-family homes, and yet was within easy walking distance of the restaurants, shops, and historical resources of Old Town.

I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed Heritage project. These are my initial points. I plan to submit a more developed statement later.

The Heritage project presented in last evening's session is grossly out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood, which consists primarily of single-family homes. Here are the blocks in the neighborhood of the Heritage project that consist exclusively, and in a few cases primarily, of single-family homes. (W identifies the West side of the block, E the East side):

- **S. Columbus St.**
 - 200 W
 - 300 E & W
 - 400 E & W (except for one Heritage building on W)
 - 500 E & W
 - 600 W
 - 700 W
 - 800 E & W

S. Alfred St.

200 E & W
300 E & W (below ASBC on W)
500 E (southern half)
600 E & W
700 E & W
800 E & W

Green

800 N & S
900 N & S

Jefferson

800 N & S
900 N & S

Franklin

800 N
900 N & S

Gibbon

800 N
900 N & S

Wolfe

800 N & S
900 N

Duke

800 N & S
900 N

Prince

800 N & S
900 N & S

Most of the residences in this neighborhood are 2 or 3 stories high. Due to their heights, the proposed Heritage buildings would loom large over the surrounding neighborhood, eliminating the views we residents have come to enjoy and treasure. A project on this scale would fundamentally destroy the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Heritage proposes to triple the density on their sites, another way in which it is way out of scale with the existing neighborhood.

Staff properly indicated that Heritage has more work to do. One suggestion I have is that a revised proposal include multiple photographs that depict the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood, which can then be portrayed against the sketches of the proposed buildings. The contrast would be striking.

Architecturally, the project sticks out in this neighborhood like a sore thumb. It looks more like buildings in the North Fayette St. area, and like those in the development south of Potomac Yards. This “style” has no place in the Old and Historic District.

Too much of the project description submitted and of the staff report dwelt on small details, such as fenestration, lintels, and balconies. The elephant in the room is the massive size of the buildings proposed, no matter their small architectural features. The BAR is charged with addressing and assessing *scale*. It should not be diverted into exploring small details.

Please include this email in the official record for the Heritage project. I would appreciate an email acknowledging your receipt of this email.

As I indicated above, I plan to submit a more thorough statement for the record later.

Thank you.

Albert C. Pierce

Lia Niebauer

From: Lisa Kempe <kempe.lisa@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 8:39 PM
To: Lia Niebauer
Subject: [EXTERNAL]July 15 BAR meeting Docket #17

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Good evening Ms. Niebauer,

I intended to virtually attend tonight's meeting, unfortunately I was unable to stay logged into the meeting until the docket item was reached. I wanted to express my thoughts regarding docket item #17, the request for concept review at [450 S. Patrick Street](#), [900 Wolfe Street](#) and [431 S. Columbus Street](#) by the Old Town PropCo LLC.

Dear members of the Board of Architecture Review,

I am writing to express concerns with items 16 and 17 listed on your meeting docket. The proposed development request for concept review at [450 S. Patrick Street](#), [900 Wolfe Street](#) and [431 S. Columbus Street](#) by the Old Town PropCo LLC (CDSP2020-0003) does not follow the Adopted South Patrick Street Housing Strategy (Strategy), an Overlay Plan of the Southwest Quadrant Small Area Plan, and would required amendments to said plan in order to move forward.

I, along with many community members, have participated in the process of the Strategy's inception since the South Patrick Street Housing Strategy Charrette in 2018.

It was my understanding that the purpose of the Charrette and resulting Strategy was to have the city finalize a plan that was a productive plan for developers, community members and the city regarding future development of the area. Making amendments to the Strategy or using piecemeal approvals to override the Strategy deserves true community participation and input, which has not been possible.

Few members of our community have had the opportunity to review the material to provide detailed comments. This is deeply troubling as the proposed development differs considerably from what the community was told would be permissible under the finalized Strategy.

During the development of the Strategy the community stressed concern of heights higher than the current structures on the development site, due to the height of the surrounding properties as well as the maximum height of 60' of other newer developments located in the Southwest Quadrant Small Area Plan and the adjacent Old Town Small Area Plan.

Developments in these areas such as Old Town Village and The Thorton have heights, mass, scale and general architectural character that better represents how new development transitions to existing development. The finalized Strategy plan lists heights of 62' for development, the proposal for docket #17 illustrates heights of 100'. While it was understood that the Strategy's intent was to preserve affordable housing, the bonus density applied to the project creates a major redevelopment with a disproportionate increase in height that will radically reshape the structure and character of the community.

I am extremely concerned that approving the request for bonus density will set a precedent within Old Town for further development that erodes the historic preservation requirements that the Board of Architectural review is tasked with maintaining.

During the Strategy's development the community also stressed the need for building designs to include breaks in blocks for pedestrian traffic, and setbacks to maintain an open community connection. The Southwest Quadrant is already fractured by the heavy traffic on South Patrick Street leading to Hwy 1, and the termination of Wolfe Street at South Patrick Street.

Allowing the development of buildings without breaks along South Patrick Street disconnects the community. This paired with the proposed building heights, grossly higher than the surrounding existing buildings, creates a looming wall, physically and visually segmenting the community.

The design standards for the Strategy came from a painstaking back and forth during the Charrette. The community pushed for any future developments to be cohesive and in the spirit of the existing structures in the Southwest Quadrant similar to the design of the recent development The Claybourne.

It was often remarked by the city that the Strategy was to create a Gateway to Oldtown. I fail to understand how the proposed development has design elements that blend, compliment, or transition to the existing structures along South Patrick street moving northbound, signaling an entrance to Old Town.

The finalized Strategy as well as the record of community concerns can be found on the city website dedicate to the Strategy at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/planning/info/default.aspx?id=100785>

In light of the many deviations from the finalized Strategy that this proposal is requesting, I urge the BAR to table the concept review for this project until the neighboring community can be fully engaged.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lisa Kempe
401 Old Town Ct
SW Quadrant Alexandria

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Old Town Civic Association
P.O. Box 1213
Alexandria Virginia 22313

July 15, 2020

Subject: OTCA Comments in opposition to BAR Docket Item #16 and 17, BAR#2020-00197 and BAR#2020-00196 for Heritage apartments demolition and Concept Plan proposal

Dear Chairman Roberts and Members of the Board of Architectural Review:

The Old Town Civic Association most vehemently opposes and requests that the Board deny or, at the very least, defer any decision on both the demolition and Certificate of Appropriateness for the Heritage redevelopment proposal and advise staff and the developer to meet (virtually until face to face is possible) with the surrounding neighboring residents and Civic and Homeowners Associations to work in a collaborative manner on any proposal.

The Heritage redevelopment proposal to construct nearly full block apartment/condominium buildings on these sites, seven stories tall, is drastically out of scale with the surrounding Old Town neighborhood on South Alfred, South Columbus, Gibbon, Wolfe, and South Patrick Street that consist entirely of 2 and 3 story townhouses. In addition to the wholly inappropriate height, mass and scale of the proposed development, this development is not ripe for public hearing review given the City's approved and touted public engagement process, and the near lack of public engagement and input on this proposal.

- Inadequate (to nonexistent) Public Engagement Process –

This project is not ripe for BAR public hearing, with unacceptably little public engagement and input. Several dozen of us residents of the project and surrounding blocks attended the initial developers presentation on January 30, 2020, that itself was scheduled with short notice to us. At the end that meeting, nearly all of us in attendance spoke, raising numerous, legitimate concerns, issues and questions, and were cut short and told to hold our thoughts, that the January presentation was only the initial step of engagement, and that there would be numerous opportunities for engagement. OTCA had intended to host the developer at our April or May OTCA members meetings, which we could not hold due to restrictions related to COVID-19. While there are COVID-19 challenges we are all dealing with, that doesn't mean the city can skip the public engagement process and move major development directly to public hearing. Neither the applicant nor City staff contacted any of the neighbors, including OTCA members, who signed up to receive email updates and invitations to all meetings and discussions. We heard nothing until on the evening of Wednesday July 7 we received, almost as an afterthought after residents complained and raised question, an invitation to attend an informational meeting that the developer hosted only last night, July 14, to present updates.

The lack of public engagement on this project violates Alexandria's adopted Principles of Civic Engagement - <https://www.alexandriava.gov/whatsnext/default.aspx?id=70926> that requires:

- **EARLY INVOLVEMENT** - of community members, with ongoing communication through each phase of the process.
- **EASY PARTICIPATION** - with open communications and timely information.
- **MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT** - that "provides opportunity for all community members to participate in an open and unbiased process, free of predetermined outcomes, to consider and deliberate feasible options."
- **MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY** - "the City and community are mutually accountable for a fair process, honest and respectful participation, informed and fact-based discussion, outcomes that reflect citizen input, and acceptance of the result..." and for
- **TRANSPARENCY** - "City government will act with integrity in an open process, and will provide timely access to clear, trustworthy information..."

Under normal conditions, the City government for decades has avoided scheduling major development cases for review during the summer, when many residents are out of town and cannot participate. The City scheduled this project for review not only in the middle of the summer, but in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic when most of us are dealing with many other stressors and are forced to focus on the 'new normal' of challenging telework, online schooling for our children, worried about and supporting local businesses so they survive, trying to keep ourselves, and our families and friends safe from the virus, while also dealing with societal strains, and local protests for racial justice. We in the community are more than willing to engage in discussions with staff and the developer, but this is not the time to have a public BAR hearing without the public engagement process that should precede any hearing.

Proposed Heritage Development

The developers and designers fail to recognize the special character of Alexandria and the Old and Historic Alexandria District.

Request for Demolition

Staff report BAR#2020-00197 for demolition of the existing apartment buildings on Blocks 1 and 2 states the following on page 13 of 41:

"Description of the alternatives to demolition/encapsulation and why such alternatives are not considered feasible. - There are no feasible alternatives to the proposed demolition."

However, with less than a 30% average building coverage footprint for existing Blocks 1 and 2, the existing apartment buildings could be maintained as affordable housing, with the parking lots at 416 S. Columbus Street and along South Patrick Street redeveloped, relocating the parking below grade and constructing appropriately scaled townhouses along South Patrick and South Alfred, while also maintaining the significant open space and large native tree canopy on site that exceeds requirements.

Height

The project does not meet basic zoning, including the recently approved South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy update to the small area plan that still holds the height

limit in the historic district to 50 feet, without the staff report specifically and adequately addressing these issues.

The proposed 18-25+ foot height increase is buried in the back of the staff report BAR#2020-00196 as a Development staff Finding comment.

- Development Comment F-4, on page 16 of 55 states obtusely that "A City-initiated amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Height District Map will be necessary to allow for building height above 50 feet on block 2 and the portion of block 1 currently located within the Old and Historic Alexandria District."
- Development staff Finding comment F-3 points out that this project exceeds the heights established in South Patrick Street small area plan updates just adopted by City Council less than two years ago and will "require amendments to the height map in the South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy to allow for *flexibility in the placement of building height above 50 feet...*" (Emphasis added.)

The approved height is clear. The approved South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy update calls for heights of 45 feet in the historic district, and 55 feet outside the district, except for the existing 62 foot building on the south side of Block 2 that can remain or be replaced, but, as a non-complying structure in terms of height, cannot be expanded in its degree of non-compliance. Page 27 of the approved plan states - "This Strategy recommends an increase to 55 feet on a limited number of blocks primarily along South Patrick Street." The 80 feet heights proposed are extremely out of line with the height parameters developed in concert with the community through the South Patrick Street Affordable Housing Strategy process and approved by Ordinance by the City Council to update to the Small Area Plan and would result in massive buildings that dwarf the existing and exclusively 2-3 story townhouse.

Mass and Scale

The Heritage proposal is completely out of scale with any project constructed within the Historic District, as well as even those buildings and projects constructed within the King Street Metro and Braddock Road Metro areas. This project is surrounded by 2-3 story townhouses and single family residences. In the Staff report, Figure 4 depicting the western elevation of Block 1 illustrates how significantly out of scale these buildings, at 7 stories tall, are with the 2 and 3 story townhouses immediately across Patrick Street, and the 3-5 story buildings depicted and anticipated in the South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy.

The proposal is also completely out of scale with any project constructed within the Southwest Quadrant including:

- The Clayborne at 800 S. Columbus Street is four stories tall with significant front setbacks, courtyards, open space, and landscaping; and includes a full mid-block alley break with alley access to underground parking and loading.
- The former Fannon Petroleum site at 1300 Duke Street was redeveloped with four story townhouses in the area of the site located within the historic district, along the Duke Street frontage, and an appropriately scaled, four story, multifamily building toward the interior of the site, setback from the street with a landscaped courtyards, and underground parking and loading

pulled 100 feet off of the street, down a private brick paved alley provided as part of the development.

Numerous other development projects in the Old and Historic District and in the vicinity, such even the Robinson Terminal South, the Prescott, 900 N. Washington Street and many others demonstrate how to construct new buildings that are more compatible with their surroundings.

Typology - the addition of townhouses in the project would help the project be more compatible with the adjacent townhomes as reflected in the approved South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy which states on page 29 that the "Land use will be multi-family, townhouse, and neighborhood serving ground floor commercial uses that are compatible with the adjacent residential uses."

Reduce Mass and Scale and Remove Parking and Loading access from the public street

- **Introduce Full Building breaks from street level to the sky** - mid-block on Block 1 (and Block 4), as depicted in Figure 8 on page 13 of 55 of the staff report, to break up this massive structure, and with an alley to relocate the proposed entrances to underground parking and the loading bays from the public street frontages on South Alfred and Wolfe Street so that new residents access underground parking and loading spaces from these mid-block alleys, as is common throughout the historic district.

- Relocate the Block 2 underground parking access and loading proposed mid-block at 416 South Alfred Street on the public streetface, into the existing alley proposed to be retained from South Columbus Street.

All drawings and perspectives need to be updated to show present conditions in the surrounding neighborhood for proper comparison. Specifically:

-Eliminate the proposed Alfred Street Baptist Church that has only been proposed by the church and has not been approved by BAR, Planning Commission, or City Council.

-Show the Old Town West properties and townhouses as currently constructed, not as a large amorphous block of what might happen if those sites are eventually redeveloped.

Until new development(s) are approved for execution, present conditions should be shown in context drawings.

Sincerely,

Stephen Milone
President, Old Town Civic Association