Hunting Terrace Stakeholder Group Meeting

Monday, October 30, 2006 Room 2000, City Hall 7:00 p.m.

Introduction

Mr. John Komoroske, Vice Chair of the Planning Commission and the Hunting Creek Stakeholders Group Leader, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Komoroske welcomed the attendees and then provided an overview of the meeting's agenda. He then introduced Pat Mann and Lee Webb, Department of Planning and Zoning staff, to provide a presentation on the historic context, guidelines, and standards, applicable to the Hunting Creek area.

Staff Presentation

Pat Mann, the Project Planner on the Hunting Creek Area Plan, provided a brief overview of the history of the Hunting Creek area. According to historical documents, Margaret Brent received a patent for the Alexandria area in 1654, and in 1669 John Alexander purchased 6000 acres. In 1749, Alexandria was founded, and the Old Town street grid was established. In 1794, part of the Hunting Creek site was leased to Robert T. Hooe, Alexandria's first mayor. Hooe constructed a tavern on this site in 1808. In the early 1800s, this site was known as Brommilawn Point, a popular location for picnics and barbeques. This site was also occupied by the Union army in the Civil War and was home to the Alexandria Brick Company. After World War II, the population of Alexandria grew rapidly, and during this population boom, Hunting Terrace was developed. A few years later, in 1950, Hunting Towers was developed.

After providing the historical context, Mr. Mann introduced Lee Webb, Historic Preservation Manager for the Department of Planning and Zoning, to describe the historic guidelines and standards applicable to the site. Mr. Webb began by providing an overview of the guidelines and standards. He explained the City's 1929 agreement with the National Park Service to maintain the memorial character of Washington Street; the creation of the Old and Historic Alexandria District and the Board of Architectural Review; the listing of the Alexandria Historic District and the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway on the National Register of Historic Places; and the dates that the design guidelines, Washington Street Standards, and the Hunting Creek Area Plan were adopted.

Mr. Webb then described the National Register Historic Districts and identified the areas in Alexandria that are included in these Districts, including Old and Historic Alexandria, Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Rosemont, the Town of Potomac, Park-Fairfax, and Fairlington. In addition to the National Register Historic Districts, Mr. Webb also described the two locally regulated historic districts, which include the Old and Historic Alexandria District and the Parker-Gray District. Finally, Mr. Webb described the Washington Street Standards and Guidelines and summarized the regulations with which new development must comply.

A copy of the presentation given by Mr. Mann and Mr. Webb is available on the City's website at the following address:

http://alexandriava.gov/planningandzoning/pdf/huntingcreek_historiccontext_103006.pdf

National Park Service Presentation

David Murphy and Sean McCabe, with the National Park Service, provided a presentation on the history and character of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, also known as the George Washington Memorial Parkway. In order to facilitate tourism at Mount Vernon, the McMillan Commission recommended a road extending from Washington D.C. to Mount Vernon. Congress debated this recommendation in the early 1900s, and then authorized the Memorial Highway in 1928. In 1929, the Federal government and the City of Alexandria signed an agreement concerning the Memorial Highway within the City limits. The agreement is in effect today and sets forth the responsibilities of the City and the National Park Service to maintain the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway. A copy of this agreement was provided for members of the Stakeholder Group. The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway was the first Federal Scenic Highway within multiple state boundaries.

Mr. Murphy and Mr. McCabe provided historical maps and aerial photographs, which illustrated the changing topography and landscape of the Hunting Creek Areas. The aerial photographs were taken in 1937, 1947, 1950, 1959, 1965, and 2006. In addition to these aerial images, Mr. Murphy and Mr. McCabe also provided images of the views currently experienced on the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, and illustrated the way in which construction work, as well as tall structures will be visible from the Highway. Mr. Murphy explained that the National Park Service is concerned about the views to the north as one enters the City on the Parkway from the south. He also described the two mile vista pint and wooded ridge that is currently visible as one approaches the City. The ridge softens the appearance and entry into an urban area, the City of Alexandria. He referred to an overlay zone recently adopted by Fairfax County that limits heights along the Parkway to 35 feet.

Questions and Comments from stakeholders and participants:

Question: Response:

What are the criteria for designating a building or property historic? There are four criteria for designating a building or property to the National Register of Historic Places. Only one of the four criteria must be met. Generally, the National Park Service uses 50 years in age as a general threshold for consideration. Buildings that are less than 50 years in age can be nominated, but they must have significance. For example, many buildings less than 50 years in age have been nominated and included in the Register because of their association with Martin Luther King Jr. It is useful to consider the four criteria using the acronym of A, B, C, D. A is associated with action: a significant event or action at the local, state, or national level is the first criteria. B is associated with

biography: a resource has an association with a person that has impacted history at the local, state, or national level. C is associated with craft: association with architecture or engineering. D is associated with dirt: a building or structure can be nominated on the potential to yield information of archeological significance. A building or property must meet one of these four criteria, and have maintained architectural integrity.

Question:

What amount of historical research was conducted on Hunting Towers prior to the adoption of the 2005 Hunting Creek Area Plan?

Response:

In conjunction with the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project, a report was prepared to review the historical significance of the area near the bridge. The study documented when structures were built, as well as the social history of the structures. The Virginia State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) determined, upon completion of this report, that Hunting Towers and Hunting Terrace were not historically significant and therefore did not warrant listing on the State Register. The study was published and is available through the Potomac Crossing Consultants. Please contact Alex Lee at the Virginia office of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project at 703-329-0300 to obtain a copy.

Question:

Did the SHPO speak with the people at the Towers when determining

whether this property should be nominated for the Register?

Response:

The SHPO conducted its research by reviewing historic documents, and based on its research determined that Hunting Terrace and Hunting Towers did not have many of the features that are common to sites nominated for the Register.

Comment:

At the beginning of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project, a group was formed (106 Group) to request that the Federal and State government complete a full Section 106 review. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act states that any federally funded project must undergo a study to see how the project will impact historic resources and an evaluation to determine whether the building or property is eligible for the National Register. Based on a study conducted by the Department of Transportation, it was determined that neither Hunting Terrace nor the Virginia Ship Building site, the two properties for which the 106 Group advocated, were nominated for the Register.

Question:

Why was the Old and Historic District expanded to include areas south of the Capital Beltway?

Response:

City staff does not know the reasons for which the boundaries were adjusted. Staff does know that the area south of the Capital Beltway was included in the original Old and Historic District designation, was removed in 1965, and included in the Old and Historic in 1984 or 1985.

Question: A member of the stakeholder group requested clarification from the

National Park Service regarding the line of site concern expressed by Mr.

Murphy. Is there a law pertaining to what cannot be visible?

Response: While there is no specific law pertaining to visibility, the legislation

protecting the scenic nature of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway directly pertains to visibility. The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway was the first Federal scenic parkway, meeting very rigid criteria for highway design. It established the standard for scenic parkways, which are characterized by a scenic presence of forests, plants, and a wooded ridge.

Question: How were Porto Vecchio and Hunting Towers developed with the

Washington Street Standards and Guidelines in place?

Response: The buildings pre-dated both the Washington Street Standards and

Guidelines.

Question: Was this site at one time part of the Freedmen's Cemetery?

Response: It is entirely possible that this site was once part of the Freedman

Cemetery. Pam Cressey, the City Archeologist, could provide the history of the cemetery. City staff will obtain further details on the history of the

cemetery.

Question: Why is Park Fairfax a National Register Historic District but Hunting

Terrace and Hunting Towers are not? These properties appear to be

similar in character.

Response: When resources are nominated for the National Register, they are

compared to an established baseline or context. With Park Fairfax, it is possible that the baseline of context against which the property was evaluated was a planned community. Park Fairfax may have exemplified a planned community, and therefore was nominated. It is assumed that Hunting Terrace and Hunting Towers did not exemplify the baseline

against which they were measured, as they were not nominated.

Comment: Park Fairfax mimicked the precedent of a planned community established

in Radburn, New Jersey. Due to its site design, internal shared open space, and curvilinear streets, Park Fairfax met the baseline threshold,

which was compared to the Radburn, New Jersey example.

Comment: There are other components that may prevent resources from gaining a

nomination. For example, all of the background work was completed to submit a nomination for Gunston Hall, located on the 900 block of S. Washington Street, but the nomination was prevented because the property

owner did not want the property placed on the Register.

Comment/

Question: In response to the Park Fairfax discussion, Radburn, New Jersey was not a

factor in the designation of Park Fairfax. Park Fairfax met three of the

four criteria. Is a visual resource analysis required by the National Park Service to evaluate the impact of the buildings built along the Parkway?

Response: A National Register property has criteria associated with their

maintenance. One criteria of a scenic roadway is to remain scenic. There is no requirement for a visual resource analysis; however, there is a mandate pursuant to the 1929 agreement to evaluate the adverse impacts

associated with buildings along the Parkway.

Comment: There is another element which has not yet been raised. There is also a

period of relevance (significance). For example, if you go to Mount Vernon, its period of relevance is when George Washington lived there. This is relevant because the period of relevance for the Parkway is when

the Parkway was constructed.

Comment: The historic character of Alexandria is a significant contributor to the

City's economy. A white paper on the economic benefits of historic preservation supports this statement. This white paper will be provided to

City staff for posting on the website.

Comment: This development will not depart from the standards, as it is under the

purview of the BAR and must comply with the standards.

Comment: The National Park Service initially wanted to include Mount Vernon Ave

as part of the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway, but the City of Alexandria requested that Washington Street be a component of the Parkway for the tourism dollars that it would bring to the City. Documentation of this will be provided by the stakeholder.

Comment: It is unclear if this are was in the City of Alexandria when Hunting Towers

was built. This portion of the City was annexed at a later date.

Comment: The Alexandria newspapers and the City historian may have a better

description of the location of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway.

Comment: Given its location south of the Capital Beltway, this area is very

distinctive from the rest of the City and from Old Town. It is a struggle to maintain the diversity of the population and there is a need for affordable housing. The stakeholder group needs to consider the trade-offs between density, height, affordable housing, and historic preservation to ensure that

the City does not become a city of one class.

Comment: A member of the public provided a model to illustrate the context of the

proposal and the amount of shade that would result from the two, 14 story

buildings.

Comment: The City must be careful in allowing the proposed development due to the

benefits that it provides. It may encourage other developers to approach

the City with similar proposals.

Comment: As a note, the Washington Street Guidelines are important, but the

Washington Street Standards are codified in the City's zoning ordinance. The Standards have been observed and applied to properties along N. Washington Street, and it does not seem desirable to abandon this

precedent along S. Washington Street. Furthermore, it is not necessary to consider a trade off between affordable housing, preservation, and good planning. Gunston Hall, for example, provides affordable housing as well as historic preservation. It is necessary to think not in terms of total loss

or total benefit, but in terms of balance.

Comment: The 1929 agreement applies to the entire Mount Vernon Memorial

Highway, even south of the Capital Beltway.

Comment: It is dangerous to say that the Hunting Creek area is different from Old

Town because then the City will just have King Street and Washington Street as the historic district. The Old and Historic District is a strong component of the tourism in the City. According to a study conducted by the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, 85% of tourists came

to Alexandria because of the historic ambiance.

Question: What is the height of the Carlyle Towers compared to the height of the

proposed structures?

Response: Carlyle Towers is 22 stories, while the development proposal is 14 stories.

Comment: It is necessary to seek solutions that optimize all values, rather than

consider a trade off of affordable housing for increased height or density.

Comment: A member of the Stakeholder Group sent questions to Mr. Komoroske

prior to the meeting.

Response: City staff is working on answering these detailed questions.

Question: Why was the affordable housing section, section 3.4.1, removed from the

Hunting Creek Small Area plan by the Planning Commission?

Response: City staff will review the Planning Commission notes to determine the

rationale for removing this section.

Question: Are the height limits absolute?

Response: The height limit that applies to this area is 50 feet.

Attendees

Stakeholder Group

Members
Lewis Simon
Charles Benagh
Caroline Faiella
Maurice Barboza
Ardith Dentzer

Ardith Dentzer
Van Van Fleet
Maureen Dugan
Charles Trozzo
H. Stewart Dunn, Jr.
Kerry-Ann Powell

Jim Hoben Herb Cooper-Levy Michael Hobbs

Ellen Pickering Ann Glennon David Bush Joan Renner Marguerite Lang David Murphy Sean McCabe John Komoroske

<u>Staff</u>

Mildrilyn Davis Kathleen Beeton Steve Milone Gary Wagner Pat Mann Tom Canfield Helen McIlvaine Lee Webb Jessica Ryan

Shane Cochran Rich Josephson Other Attendees
Howard Middleton
Carlos Cecchi
Guisappa Cecchi

Guiseppe Cecchi John Cecchi Katy Cannady Bruce McLeod Bernie Schulz Linda Couture Maria Wildes Rick Stepp

Douglas Thurman

Ted Vawter John Renner

Julie Crenshaw Van

Fleet

Poul Hertel