

Hunting Creek Area Plan Stakeholder Group Meeting

Thursday, November 16, 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 provided a brief overview of the topics covered in previous Stakeholder Group Meetings and then addressed some of the issues raised in the letter sent to City Council by Lewis Simon. Prior to introducing Mr. Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager, Mr. Komoroske indicated that a list was being circulated for those members of the Stakeholder Group wishing to share their contact information.

Update on Virginia Department of Transportation Sale of Hunting Towers

Mr. Komoroske then introduced Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager, to provide an update on the sale of the Hunting Towers property. Mr. Jinks stated that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) offered the property to Mr. Kay in August 2005, but due to vastly different property appraisals, the sale did not occur. Although negotiations were held between VDOT and Mr. Kay, they proved unsuccessful and the two parties entered litigation in the Alexandria Circuit Court. In February 2006, VDOT withdrew the sale offer, indicating that the site was needed for construction activities associated with the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project.

Mr. Jinks stated that Mayor Euille has had conversations with former Governor Warner, Governor Kaine, the Secretary of Transportation, and the Deputy Secretary of Transportation to ensure continued progress on the sale of the property. These discussions, as well as a recent meeting in Richmond attended by Mayor Euille, City Manager Hartmann, and Deputy City Manager Jinks prompted continued negotiations between all parties. The role of the City in negotiations is to talk with both parties to ensure that a good faith effort is being made by both parties. Subsequently, a meeting held between VDOT and the Kay-Cecchi interests was inconclusive, but a second meeting with VDOT principal representatives is being planned.

IDI Presentation

Mr. Carlos Cecchi, of IDI Group Companies, provided a brief history of the company and described IDI's dedication to the provision of affordable housing. He stated that in the late 1970s and early 1980s Mr. Giuseppe Cecchi, the president of IDI Group Companies, worked to preserve affordable and workforce housing in Park Fairfax, Park East, and Belle View, among other locations. Over the last 30 years, IDI has worked to preserve approximately 3,000 affordable housing units.

Upon providing a brief overview of the company, Mr. Cecchi described the location and context of the Hunting Terrace site. He described the Hunting Creek area as being geographically and characteristically separate from Old Town Alexandria. The three communities in the Hunting Creek area, Porto Vecchio, Hunting Towers, and Hunting Terrace, were separated from Old Town by the Capital Beltway and did not include characteristics such as a street grid, substantial

setbacks, and pedestrian accessibility typically found in Old Town. Similarly, both Hunting Towers and Porto Vecchio exceed the 50 foot height limitation established by the height district map included in the Zoning Ordinance.

After discussing the site context, Mr. Cecchi described the character of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway (commonly known as the George Washington Parkway) as it travels through urban environments. He indicated that the parkway is characterized by many tall buildings as it passes through urban nodes such as Rosslyn, Crystal City, and the southern boundary of Alexandria. He stated that these tall structures do not detract from the memorial and scenic character of the parkway.

Prior to describing the proposal for the Hunting Terrace site, Mr. Cecchi reiterated to the Stakeholder Group that the Hunting Creek area has provided decent, affordable housing to numerous members of the metropolitan area's workforce. Mr. Cecchi indicated that IDI Group Companies has a desire to maintain the historic precedent of providing affordable, workforce housing in the Hunting Creek area. As a result, IDI has developed a proposal to provide 116 workforce condominium units subsidized by 300 luxury condominium units.

Mr. Cecchi then provided a detailed description of the proposal for the Hunting Terrace site. The workforce housing units are included in two buildings which front South Washington Street, while the luxury condominium units are located in the rear of the site, approximately 250 feet from South Washington Street. The building facades of the workforce housing units are setback 80 feet from the property line and have been staggered to conform to the character of other buildings found on South Washington Street. Amenities and recreation have been located in the center of the site and parking is provided in a two level underground garage. To achieve pedestrian connectivity, IDI introduced a grid concept to break the building mass and provide views throughout the site. The proposed Hunting Creek Drive intersects the site to re-introduce the grid.

Mr. Cecchi stated that, at the suggestion of staff, they examined the architectural design of existing structures along Washington Street and in doing so, incorporated a variety of rooflines and heights in their proposed design to reduce the mass of the structures fronting South Washington Street. Overall, he stated that IDI believes that the proposed design is compatible in scale and character with existing buildings on Washington Street.

A copy of the presentation given by Mr. Cecchi is available on the City's website at the following address: http://alexandriava.gov/planningandzoning/hunting_creek.php.

City Presentation:

At the completion of Mr. Cecchi's presentation, Mr. Komoroske introduced Rich Josephson, Acting Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning, who provided an overview of the issues included in the City's presentation and indicated that the presentation was an analysis of the proposal previously described by Mr. Cecchi. Mr. Josephson then introduced Jeff Farner, the Division Chief of Development in the Department of Planning and Zoning to commence the presentation.

Mr. Farner began the presentation by describing the language included in the Hunting Creek

Area Plan which permits additional height and density with special use permit approval and a zoning text amendment with the provision of extraordinary affordable housing. He indicated that while this clause may allow additional height and density with the provision of extraordinary affordable housing in the Hunting Creek area, there are specific guidelines, such as the Washington Street Standards and Guidelines, with which the development in this area must comply.

Mr. Farner then described the character of the site. The existing site is currently below Washington Street. While the topography varies, the site is approximately 10 feet below Washington Street, and there is a 14 foot change in grade from the eastern portion of the site to the west. In addition to topography, a floodplain and a resource protection area are also located on the site.

In addition to the aforementioned site characteristics, Mr. Farner noted that a significant portion of the lot extends into the water and cannot legally be used for the purpose of calculating the floor area ratio (FAR). The zoning ordinance defines a lot as a unit of land that is above 3 feet mean sea level at all times. FAR, as defined by the zoning ordinance, is the total aggregate floor area of a building(s) divided by the area of the lot. Therefore, because a significant portion of the site is below 3 feet mean sea level, the entire site cannot be used to calculate FAR. Despite this restriction, the applicant proposes that the entire site be used to calculate FAR.

Mr. Farner then described the applications necessary for the current proposal, including a rezoning, a development special use permit, a special use permit for a parking reduction, a special use permit for a transportation management plan, and Old and Historic Board of Architectural Review (BAR) approval for both demolition and a certificate of appropriateness.

Mr. Farner provided an overview of the current proposal, the existing site, and design principles sought in development projects throughout the City. He described the importance of re-introducing the street grid, pedestrian connectivity, incorporating useable open space, and compliance with the Washington Street Standards and Guidelines. Furthermore, Mr. Farner described the importance of quality building design and accessibility. He then described the character found at the northern and southern portions of the City on the George Washington Parkway. He indicated that these areas generally have significant setbacks, building recesses, and green corridors. Buildings located on South Washington Street, such as Old Town Gardens, Monticello Lee, the Bearings Condominiums, and Gunston Hall exhibit setbacks, substantial building breaks, and usable open space.

Mr. Farner concluded the presentation by indicating that staff continues to have concerns with the current proposal. Affordable housing is an important issue for the City, and a balance must be achieved on the site, but issues such as height, building setbacks and recesses, pedestrian connections, and compliance with the Washington Street Standards continue to be issues of concern.

Mr. Farner introduced Tom Canfield, the City Architect, to show models of the existing site, the current proposal, and a yield study of what could be built under the existing floor area ratio. Mr. Canfield requested that the Stakeholder Group members recognize that the models were constructed from a site plan, and do not include the existing or proposed topography. These

models were developed in order to address many of the questions posed in previous meetings.

A copy of the presentation given by Mr. Farner and Mr. Canfield is available on the City's website at: http://alexandriava.gov/planningandzoning/hunting_creek.php.

Questions and Comments from stakeholders and participants:

Question: Did the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) provide the second right of refusal to the City?

Response: Yes, VDOT initially agreed to provide second right of refusal to the City. Prior to City Council's approval of the Hunting Creek Area Plan, VDOT forwarded a letter from the FHWA stating that they withdrew the second right of refusal as they believed that the City had a conflict of interest (both rezoning the property and planning the future of the property). It was the position of the City that VDOT was attempting to prevent the adoption of the Hunting Creek Area Plan as the Plan rezoned the property, which in the opinion of VDOT, limited the property's value.

Question: Is the City attempting to determine the market price of the property on behalf of IDI or the City?

Response: The price is ultimately the same number, whether IDI or the City purchases the property. The City is not in the position to buy the property at this time, but is attempting to bring the parties together for negotiations.

Question: Is the City making any effort to interact with other parties on the purchase of the Hunting Towers property?

Response: The City has had discussions with the Alexandria Housing Development Corporation.

Comment: It is appropriate for the City to be involved in the negotiations for the sale of the Hunting Towers property because if Hunting Towers were on the market, the proposal that is being discussed would be completely different.

Question: How many units could be built on the site under the current zoning?

Response: Approximately 250 to 300 units could be constructed under the current zoning.

Question: Why would the City support a parking reduction in this area?

Response: The Hunting Terrace project is in the conceptual stage of the process and specifics have not yet been determined. As the project progresses, the parking reduction request will be evaluated.

Question: Will the redevelopment of this site have an impact on flooding?

Response: The project is currently at a conceptual stage, but as the project progresses civil drawings will be required by the City in order to evaluate the possible impacts.

Question: Have other IDI projects funded the preservation of affordable housing with luxury high rise condominiums?

Response: Overall, IDI has found that the best way to preserve workforce housing is through

rehabilitation rather than new construction. Although luxury condominiums do not generally subsidize the affordable housing, approximately 50% of the units at Park Fairfax did subsidize the affordable units.

Question: What is the square footage of the existing and proposed structures?

Response: The existing structures are approximately 145,000 square feet. The square footage proposed for the luxury condominiums is approximately 460,000 square feet and the workforce housing is approximately 130,000 square feet.

Question: What is the square footage that can be developed by-right?

Response: Approximately 350,000 square feet can be developed with a site plan.

Question: What is the below market price for a workforce housing unit?

Response: Specific prices are not available at this time. IDI intends to offer the workforce housing units at approximately \$200,000 – 210,000 for a one bedroom and \$250,000 for a two bedroom condominium. IDI will work with City staff to ensure that these prices are affordable to a majority of the workforce.

Question: The community is overwhelmingly in favor of preserving all of the units at Hunting Towers, and obtaining 116 units. Will Mr. Kay agree to preserve Hunting Towers for the provision of affordable housing?

Response: IDI is not currently considering Hunting Towers, as VDOT withdrew the sale offer. As a result, the proposal is only considering Hunting Terrace.

Comment: It would be valuable for City staff to model how the existing and proposed buildings are viewed as one travels from Mount Vernon. It is important to understand the topography of the site and how the proposal relates to the existing tree line.

Comment: The community is interested in preserving affordable housing in the Hunting Creek area, which includes both Hunting Terrace and Hunting Towers. Planning must commence on both sites in order to preserve affordable housing.

Question: What is the number of one bedroom and two bedroom apartments in the proposed affordable housing buildings?

Response: A final mixture of bedrooms has not been calculated. The proposed buildings will probably include a mixture of units similar to the existing mixture.

Question: Do residents of Hunting Towers have an opportunity to purchase one of the workforce housing units? Is it possible for residents to purchase a unit at the cost of the existing rent?

Response: Units will first be available to the residents of Hunting Terrace and then to City staff and residents of Hunting Towers. It is not possible to offer the new workforce units at the cost of existing rent due to the cost of new construction.

Comment: The construction of high rise buildings at Hunting Creek, regardless of the amount of affordable housing, is a concern. The loss of affordable housing throughout the City is also a concern. The preliminary design proposed by IDI

offers a compromise, as it respects the Washington Street Guidelines, embraces the history of the site, and provides one affordable unit for every 2.6 luxury units. Prior to approving this proposal, the City Council and IDI should sign a Memorandum of Agreement which offers current residents of Hunting Terrace and Hunting Towers first priority in purchasing the affordable units, ensures that each current resident wishing to purchase a unit is able to do so, ensures that the affordable units remain affordable, and defines “extraordinary affordable housing.” This comment has been summarized for the meeting notes. The comments of this Stakeholder in their entirety are available on the City’s website at: http://alexandriava.gov/planningandzoning/hunting_creek.php.

Comment: The historic character of Alexandria must be maintained, but affordable housing is needed. The proposal presented by IDI offers a compromise.

Question: If both Hunting Terrace and Hunting Towers were available, how would the proposal presented by IDI differ?

Response: IDI would return to the original proposal. The proposal for the Hunting Terrace site would look similar, but all 416 units on the site would be luxury units.

Question: Did City staff make economic assumptions when preparing the models? For example, is it possible to determine the number of luxury units needed to subsidize the 116 affordable units?

Response: City staff did not make economic assumptions. The Office of Housing is currently examining this issue with the applicant. It is presumed that City staff can provide a more detailed answer at a later date.

Comment: The topography on the site must be incorporated in the modeling to demonstrate how the 14 story structure will be perceived on the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway.

Question: This site is adjacent to a floodplain and is located in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. What are the environmental impacts of this proposal on the Chesapeake Bay Watershed?

Response: The environmental impacts will be discussed at a subsequent meeting.

Comment: A compromise on this site is necessary, but has not yet been achieved. An example of compromise is locating the affordable housing units in attractive buildings that do not breach the height of Hunting Towers and Porto Vecchio.

Next Steps: December 6, 2006 Meeting

At the December 6, 2006 meeting, City staff plans a workshop format in which the Stakeholder Group members will have an opportunity to draft a list of issues, ideas, and options to be shared with the Planning Commission and City Council. The tentative location for the meeting is the Lyles Crouch School.

Attendees

Stakeholder Group

Members

Holly Hemphill
Caroline Faiella
Ann Glennon
Ellen Pickering
Maurice Barboza
Jim Mercury
Lewis Simon
David Murphy
Phillip Bradbury
Ardith Campbell-Dentzer
Herb Cooper-Levy
Boyd Walker
Charles Benagh
Michael Hobbs
Marguerite Lang
Lee Weber
Maureen Dugan
Stewart Dunn
John Komoroske

City Staff

Mark Jinks
Rich Josephson
Mildrilyn Davis
Helen McIlvaine
Pat Mann
Jeff Farner
Tom Canfield
Jessica Ryan
Lee Webb
Kathleen Beeton
Steve Milone
Shane Cochran
Ralph Rosebaum

Other Attendees

Carlos Cecchi
John Cecchi
Guiseppe Cecchi
Howard Middleton
Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet
Maria Wildes