

September 5, 2006 Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force Meeting Minutes

September 5, 2006 Meeting Minutes
Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force

Chairman, Andrew Hall at George Washington Middle School auditorium on Mount Vernon Avenue, called the meeting to order at 7:15pm.

The following Task Force Representatives were in attendance:

Andrew Hall, DRCA
John Starcher, WVCA
Jim Schwartz, Arlington Fire Chief and Del Ray resident
Melissa Watson, Lynhaven Civic Association
Kate Rollins, Old Town Greens
M. Patricia Schubert, ICCA
Mariella Posey, NECA
Tom Welsh, PWBA

The following City employees were in attendance:

Bill Euille, Alexandria Mayor
Andrew McDonald, City Council Member
Paul Smedberg, City Council Member
Del Pepper, City Council Member
Rob Krupicka, City Council Member
Jim Hartmann, City Manager
Michelle Evans, Deputy City Manager
Gary Mesaris, Fire Chief
Russell Middleton, Assistant Fire Chief
Vince Whitmore, Assistant Fire Chief
John North, Battalion Chief
Art Dahlberg, Director of Code Enforcement
Jannine Pennell, Deputy Director of Code Enforcement
Al Cox, Architect
Brian Hannigan, Public Information Officer
Jeff Farner, Development Division Chief, Planning and Zoning
Amy Tarce, Planning and Zoning
Colleen Rafferty, Planning and Zoning
Mildrilyn Davis, Office of Housing
Helen McIlvaine, Office of Housing
Sandy Murphy, Office of Management and Budget

The following guests were in attendance:

Duncan Blair	Arthur Johnson	Stephen Mostow
Jim Krustapentus	Andy Duncan	C. McCabe
Kari Falkenborg	Will Greene	K. Fangman
Terry Hill	Daniel Steenstra	Joe Dresen
Jim Snyder	Juliann Tigent	Amy Slack
Stafford Farmer-Lee	David Kleiner	Sarah Haut

September 5, 2006 Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force Meeting Minutes

M. Kleysteuber	Michael Bergin	Mitchell Holbreeht
Brooke Cash	Amanda Lenk	Katy Cannady
Jonathan Cash	Sylvia Sibrover	Sabrina Morelli
Elizabeth Wrightson	Bruce McLeod	Scooter Slade
Ed Walters	Kevin Hayes	Michael Brown
Julie Walters	Mike Platt	Jenny Heimberg
Nicole DelRosario	Kris Gulett	Jay Johnson

Minutes prepared by: Cameron Hall, Alexandria Fire Department

Planning and Zoning

The Potomac Yard concept plan was approved in 1999 and includes 1,927 units and 135,000 square feet of retail over 295 acres. The area has been divided into geographic areas referred to as “landbays.” Landbay G is located next to the existing retail center at Potomac Yard and will contain the Town Center. The developer has proposed adding the fire station and affordable housing component to this landbay.

The proposal to include the fire station is a result of an issue with turning radiuses within the development in Potomac Yard. The streets have been designed at 66 feet, similar to the streets in Old Town. The issue arises in the alley throats and the location of the buildings to the streets. With narrow alley throats and buildings placed close to the street curbs, there could be a problem with the turning radius for large trucks including fire apparatus. The problem is created as trucks try to maneuver from the southern portion of the Yard to the northern side. The fire station has therefore been proposed for the northern most landbay.

Fire Department

The challenge for the Fire Department is to provide better, more modern living conditions for fire personnel as well as to provide storage for equipment that is currently housed outdoors. With the addition of the new, four-bay station in Potomac Yard, the department could house equipment that was purchased with Homeland Security grant funding that is currently stored outside at Station 202, Windsor Avenue.

When the developers proposed the addition of a fire station in Potomac Yard, fire personnel addressed the issues of service delivery and efficiency. The area currently covered by Station 202, Windsor Avenue has redundant coverage, or an excess of what is necessary. Station 203, Cameron Mills, Station 204, Second Street, and Station 205, Cameron Street can all cover the area of Station 202 within the department’s response goal of 4 minutes.

Chief Mesaris reiterated that the EMS capabilities would not be moved out of Station 202 and in fact may be increased with the addition of an EMS Supervisor at that location. The station would not close with this proposal. For reasons of efficiency, the fire

September 5, 2006 Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force Meeting Minutes

suppression and HazMat personnel would move to Station 209, Potomac Yard while the EMS personnel would remain at Windsor Avenue.

Housing

The affordable housing proposal has been planned to include sixty, one, two, and three bedroom units located above the fire station. The proposal includes underground parking (approximately 120 spaces), a community room, business center, fitness center, and access to a rooftop garden.

The developer's voluntary affordable housing contribution for the overall site is estimated at \$10.5 million. They may fulfill that contribution through a monetary payment or through the commitment of specific units of affordable housing. The City and the Developer are working to identify potential sites, in order to achieve the greatest number of units.

Affordable housing is a term used to describe rental or for sale housing where the maximum rent/sales price is set at or below 60% of the area median income. The Washington metropolitan region has a median income of approximately \$90,300 for a household of four.

Proposed Income limits:

- 1 Person: \$37,920
- 2 Persons: \$43,320
- 3 Persons: \$48,780
- 4 Persons: \$54,180

The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program was enacted by the Federal Government, but is administered by the state's housing authority, the Virginia Housing Development Association (VHDA). The program enables private investments in the production of affordable housing. Developers apply for tax credits based on project costs. These credits are sold to entities with tax liabilities, which provide equity for the credits in return. The maximum gross rents per month, including utilities are \$1,015/one bedroom, \$1,219/two bedroom, and \$1,408/three bedroom.

Workforce housing is another option for the space. Workforce housing describes rental or for sale housing where the maximum rent is set at a level that is affordable for local working households with income at or above 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). This project has been modeled at 80% AMI.

Estimated income levels for this project:

- 1 Person: \$41,700
- 2 Persons: \$47,700
- 3 Persons: \$53,650
- 4 Persons: \$59,600

September 5, 2006 Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force Meeting Minutes

An advantage to mixed-use developments, considered “Smart Growth” in urban areas, is they allow for public facilities and maximize the use of land. With the high cost of real estate, the City could save the cost of the land because the developer is donating it. If the fire station is not realized, the developer will still contribute his obligation of \$10.5 million. Another advantage to the mixed-use building is that the city can leverage other funds like tax credits to further stretch the developer contribution.

Q & A

A ladder (aerial) truck has not been proposed to move to Station 209, Potomac Yard. The reason is that there are only three ladder trucks in service currently in Alexandria including one at Station 204, Second Street, Station 203, Cameron Mills, and Station 208, Paxton Street. The first due apparatus on any fire suppression call is the engine. Alexandria has engines in all eight fire stations throughout the city.

An advantage to Station 209 inside Potomac Yard is to decrease the response times throughout the Yard. There could be instances when fire personnel will have to manually pull lines or hose and the proximity of the station would cut those response times.

The next step in the Potomac Yard Fire Station and Affordable Housing proposal, as answered by Task Force Chairman Andy Hall, is for the task force to complete its recommendations and proposals. The task force will forward those to City Council and the Planning Committee. Public hearings will continue to be held before the issue is voted on.

The City proposed to include a fourth bay into the station at Potomac Yard in order to provide storage space for equipment obtained through Homeland Security Grants. The City will cover the cost of adding the fourth bay at a cost of approximately \$750,000. However, this has not yet been presented to council and has not yet been approved.

There is no correlation between the age of a building and the likelihood of a fire. Most fires are caused by human error.

Homeowners’ insurance costs are determined according to a jurisdictions ISO rating. Rates are not calculated according to the proximity to a fire station or hydrant.

The city expects to earn tax revenue from the new development, but that money will need to fund parks, transit systems, sewer lines, schools, etc. not only in Potomac Yard, but throughout the entire city. The fire department does not have neighborhood fire stations. It is a citywide system that even crosses into other jurisdictions through mutual aid agreements.

Some residents in the Del Ray area have expressed an emotional attachment to the fire station on Windsor Avenue and are opposed to the fire suppression moving out of that location. Suggestions for alternatives include adding an engine to Station 209 in Potomac Yard and keeping the personnel staffed at Windsor. City staff counter that this is an

September 5, 2006 Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force Meeting Minutes

inefficient use of taxpayers' dollars and in a time of fiscal responsibility cannot endorse such a solution. Other suggestions included asking the new residents in the Potomac Yard development to pay for their own station. However, according to Chief Mesaris, the fire department does not operate on a neighborhood system, but a citywide system, however the performance of the system is continually evaluated.

The task force has scheduled work session meetings at the Mount Vernon Recreation Center, 2701 Commonwealth Avenue for Thursday, September 7 at 7pm, Sunday, September 10 at 2pm, and Thursday, September 14 at 6pm. While the public is invited to attend, public comment will not be invited.