

City of Alexandria

Old Town North

Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)

October 2023 Meeting Notes

[FINAL]

Wednesday, October 11 at 9:00 a.m.

Hybrid: City Hall, Room 1101 and via Zoom

Recording Link:

https://alexandria.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=29&coa_view_id=29&coa_clip_id=6038

Committee Members in Attendance

Steve Kulinski, Chair (SK)

Tom Soapes (TS)

Katherine Bingler (KB)

Zaira Suarez (ZS)

Abbey Oklak (AO)

City Staff in Attendance

Nathan Imm (NI) P&Z

Daniel Welles (DW) P&Z

Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z

Tom Canfield (TC) P&Z

Applicant Members in Attendance

Michelle Chang (MC) HRP

Siobhan Stein (SS) HRP

Mary Catherine Gibbs (MG) Wire-Gill

Carolyn Sponza (CS) Gensler

Blake Middleton (BM) Handel Architects

Fausto Nunez (FN) Handel Architects

Jason Klem (JK) Gensler

Kelly Somers (KS) SCB

Devin Patterson (DP) SCB

Rob Richardson (RR) IBF Development

Steve Mikulic (SM) McGuire Woods

Christopher Jones (CJ) Winn Development

Community Members in Attendance (in Person or Virtual only if a Question was asked)

Bill DePuy (BD)

Jan Macidull (JM)
Mary Harris (MH)
Martina Mertz (MM)
Edward Ingrab (EI)
Nancy Rybiolli (NR)
Jody Manor (JM) *via Zoom*
Robert Jackel (RJ) *via Zoom*
Peggy Rhoades (PR) *via Zoom*
Susan Amber Gordon (SG) *via Zoom*

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:00 a.m. as the October 11, 2023 meeting of UDAC.
- KB motioned to approve the September 6, 2023 Meeting Notes; ZS provided a second.
The motion passed for the approval of the Meeting Notes, 5-0.

NEW BUSINESS

Note: Presentation materials on the below items are located at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/boards-and-commissions/urban-design-advisory-committee-serving-old-town-north>

Third Presentation of the proposed redevelopment at Ladrey Apartments

- SM and CJ, representing the applicant, provided an overview of the changes made since the previous UDAC review. Specifically, they discussed the refinements to the south building, bridge on North Fairfax Street, and accessibility on Wythe Street and in the garage.
- TS noted that the revisions started to address the issue of accessibility for residents which was his major concern.
- KB asked how the short-term parking would be regulated. It was noted by the applicant and Chair that it is common in front of apartment buildings, hotels and the like to have short-term parking and it is generally respected.
- SK noted that the bridge/hyphen refinements were a great improvement and it appeared that the windows will be nearly full height, which the applicant confirmed.
- AO stated that the architectural refinements look great and North Fairfax Street now reads as three separate buildings. She noted that she found the fiber cement to be generally acceptable but that it should be limited at the street level, particularly on North Royal Street. She also advised that the design team look more closely at the location of the short-term parking and ramp and the BMPs.
- AO recommended the applicant consider locating the BMPs in bulb outs to allow better access to the sloping sidewalk. She also suggested painting the parking area a different

color to differentiate it from regular street parking as well as to extend the short-term parking all the way to the bulb-out at the northeast corner.

- ZS noted that the refinements were an improvement and supported the project.
- On a motion by AO, seconded by KB, the Ladrey project was endorsed by UDAC, 5-0. AO will draft a letter of endorsement incorporating further suggestions outlined in her comments regarding the use of fiber cement on the street elevations. SK concluded that the materials of some individual building portion did not seem to relate to one another.
- SK brought up the neighbor noise and traffic concerns expressed earlier by EI and noted that there is a traffic study which should address any mitigation measures. CJ noted that the corner bump outs proposed as part of the project would be traffic calming, further indicating that the noise associated with demolition and construction would comply with the City's noise requirements.

First Presentation of the proposed redevelopment of Blocks A, B, and C at the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS)

Introduction of Development Blocks

- MC introduced herself as project lead for the applicant (Hilco Redevelopment Partners, or HRP) and gave an overview of team and the progress of the initial PRGS development blocks.
- MC mentioned Gensler as executive architect and main architect of Block A, and SCB architects for Block B and Handel Architects for Block C.
- MC gave overall vision for block development including connection to OTN and open space network and sustainable development.
- MG the attorney representing the applicant, outlined the public approval process to date, including the Coordinated Development District (CDD) zoning and infrastructure site plan approvals for the PRGS site.
- MG mentioned that development blocks A and B are phase 1 of development, and Block C is the first half of phase 2. The concept plans for the major site open spaces will come to UDAC for review in the coming months.
- MG confirmed that the applicant is seeking endorsement from UDAC under the Design Excellence Prerequisites and Criteria (DEPC) instead of the Design Standards and Guidelines for the PRGS site.
- CS, project architect for Gensler, gave an overview of the design and massing approaches for each of the blocks, and focus on identifying gateways and view corridors to the riverfront and Old Town, in addition to planning parameters required from the CDD approval.
- CS outlined that the design excellence “prerequisites” are reviewed by City staff while the design excellence “criteria” are reviewed by UDAC.

Block A

- JK of Gensler provided the design overview of Block A, located at the southeast corner of the PRGS site. He noted that the design inspiration are sails from ships and their reveals.

- The glass panels are oriented in a dynamic way and reveal the inner structure of the building, while the northern balconies act as a ‘prow’ to the building, according to JK.
- JK talked about the active public realm. AO asked about the detail of the southern façade and how it relates to public realm. JK mentioned the wood enclosure for the arts anchor and mentioned the open space plan upcoming that will detail the interaction more clearly and that tenant selection will help to develop that relationship. MC reiterated that flexibility is needed and that the first-floor acts as a “base” and that is made to be a solid.
- ZS asked about bus routing and how that affects the plan. MG mentioned that the buses are currently planned to enter PRGS at N. Royal Street
- JK mentioned curtain wall/vision glass and opaque materials internally (charcoal metal) that will be seen from the outside, and the wood-paneled ground floor. He also discussed the vertical spandrel metal along the south façade. He also focused on the west façade noting the entrance and the reveal of the building behind and between the window “sails.”
- ZS questioned the vision glass on the waterfront and that protection of birds/wildlife should be confirmed. ZS also mentioned that the wood-paneled section of the first-floor exterior is a nice material but too opaque. MG and MC stated that the design of the first floor is to facilitate flexibility in a future arts user and for back of house.
- SK says the first-floor solid-wood wall is the biggest design challenge, stating that the upper floors are nicely designed and transparent. He stated that otherwise the design fits the iconic structure design excellence criteria.
- AO stated that lack of height variance is the biggest issue, and that windows could come up at different angles and heights, and that the design can be pushed a little bit farther. AO also stated that windows like the ones proposed do not age well with weathering. AO was also concerned with the entrance to the arts space at middle of the block that is not a pedestrian node (and potentially tight as a gathering area), and that the sidewalk should be able to accommodate patrons outside of the entry area.
- SK asked if the block will have a public roof deck. MG stated that the future office tenant (main building user) will decide if the rooftop will have any public access.
- AO mentioned the Coordinated Sustainability Strategy (CSS) and the design excellence prerequisite related to sustainability. MG and JK stated that information on sustainability is forthcoming, mentioning rooftop areas for renewables and studying the window/wall ratio. AO mentioned looking at shading and energy loads.
- JM, calling in from the virtual meeting, asked about wildlife protection, noting he has seen foxes on the PRGS site. MC mentioned a wildlife consultant has been hired by the applicant to prepare a plan for wildlife protection/relocation.
- MH, a resident of Marina Towers, applauded the seaport theme of the design. MH asked how much space is allocated for the arts anchor, and can a boat be fit inside. MG said the first floor is 20’ high and first floor is 12,000 square-foot floorplate. MH mentioned the seaport archaeology foundation as a potential arts/cultural tenant of the building.
- BD asked if more office space is needed based on the ongoing challenges with the office market and issues with arts anchors opening their new spaces in Old Town North. MC

mentioned that Block A is the logical place for an arts anchor based on the orientation of the Arts District along N. Fairfax Street.

- BD also asked about building height. MG mentioned that the building can go 20 feet above the 70-foot maximum height for penthouses for mechanical and building amenities. MC mentioned that there is a commercial requirement in the PRGS Coordinated Development District (CDD) approval and small area plan.
- JM of Marina Towers mentioned there is not a lot of variation in façade planes also the color feels monochromatic. JK mentioned that the break in the middle of the buildings between the sails helps and that the building should be designed to be usable by office tenants.
- BD asked if the sails can be moved based on sunlight. MC stated that market realities help to push design. BD stated that this the design should be an “iconic structure” per the DEPC.
- KB mentioned that the open space program shown with the renderings will help provide context.

Block B

- JK introduced blocks B and C by talking about the two-story building podiums and the programs for the retail spaces.
- DP of SCB Architects provided the design walkthrough of Block B. DP talked about the rental tower (south) and condo tower (north, facing waterfront). He mentioned the design inspiration, including flatiron building dynamic form for the condo tower and unique glassy expressions for the corners of the rental tower.
- DP mentioned the two towers are designed to look separate but are tied together with some materials selections. DP talks about the condo tower ‘prow’ that extends a few feet over the parcel line at the top floors and talked about height variation between two towers.
- DP mentioned the rental tower has a curved expression that pulls the building away from the street at upper levels to give visual relief from the south. He talked about the brown material skin on portions of the south elevation and the glass tower at the southeast corner and integrated penthouse.
- DP mentioned the implementation of the Landmark/Iconic Structure (Design Excellence Criterium) at the condo tower prow and the contextual character (also a Criterium) of the other facades of the towers. DP also mentioned the height variety between the towers and within each tower expression.
- DP went over materiality of each building and future material selection, orientation of materials and play between windows and materials (shadowplay, etc).
- ZS stated that the renderings do not adequately show adjacent open space, and the buildings look a bit too urban and need to create a neighborhood feel. Block B looks massive next to Block A at N. Fairfax Street. ZS stated that the podium facades need to go in and out more and the towers should be set back more from the front building plane. DP said the landscaping left out generally to better understand the buildings in renderings and thinks there will be play between landscape and building.

- DP showed setback of the southern rental façade. AO said this was more successful but this setback or something similar needs to be recreated on the condo tower and to have more variation on the façade and that setbacks of the tallest parts of building should be more to the center of the block and not at the edges. MC said that there was more focus on the towers than the ground plane in the presentation and that the next presentation will be more focused on landscape integration and urban design.
- AO also mentioned that the applicant should seek more terrace opportunities overlooking the Potomac River.
- SK noted that the large buildings are going to require more review from UDAC based on the context to the south in Old Town North. MG mentioned that there are similar scaled buildings existing in Old Town North.
- SK mentioned the rental tower is the more successful form, and that the condo tower needs more “delicacy” in the prevailing forms.
- KB states that community members want to see ground-level urban design renderings.
- BD states that the renderings need to have more area context, noting that there are density concerns.
- RJ, an area resident calling in from the virtual meeting seconded that the density vision needs to be mitigated.
- PR, an area resident calling in from the virtual meeting asked if the prow can be expanded to other buildings.

Block C

- BM of Handel Architects gave the Block C design walkthrough, noting it’s the largest of the three blocks discussed.
- BM stated the main tower design scheme was to provide visual space, views and open space between the condo tower at the northeast and rental tower at the south and west.
- BM mentioned that the Potomac River and the “oyster and the pearl” metaphor helped guide the design program.
- The condo building is an ovoid curved smooth form with breaks defined by the balconies, and the rental building (viewed from the waterfront) has a curved form but with a more extruded grid pattern.
- BM highlighted the rental tower spine form that looks south straight down N. Royal Street.
- BM noted the condo building will have glass has a tint at upper levels but will be transparent at ground level.
- BM talked about the breakdown of the rental building and the three main forms that come together (the darker material forms at the south and west and the white grided form at the center).
- BM discussed the alley accessed from Road B, including the width of the alley (up to 27 feet) and connection/break between two of the rental tower forms.
- KB noted that she likes the curves that can be seen from the waterfront view on both towers.
- AO also likes the view from the waterfront, but has concerns about the Road B façade, and how there will be adequate pedestrian access through the alley and pulling the rental tower

forms/expressions apart. AO also wants the applicant to look at 45-degree loading docks for ease of use. AO thinks there is too much roof over the covered alley and that more renderings are needed to show how it won't be a dark alley.

- SK said the alley needs to be more functional for pedestrians.
- BD said that the blocks B and C designs 'cut off' the rest of Old Town North from the river, concerned it will be the "Rosslyn on the River." MC said the applicant will show more renderings that show how the buildings will fit in the open space network and neighborhood context. KB added that the development will open up this section of waterfront to Old Town North.
- SG, a caller on the virtual meeting, asked where the "Woonerf" is. MC showed that Block C is adjacent to the Woonerf toward the future Waterfront Park.
- MC mentioned that up to 200 feet of open space will lead from the rest of Old Town North to the PRGS site and lead pedestrians in with open space, which buffers the proposed buildings from the rest of Old Town North to the south.
- MC showed a rendering that shows the Muse condo building (1201 N. Royal Street) in the background related to Blocks B and C. MC also showed renderings that showed retail base continuity between blocks.
- SK stated that overall the blocks are moving in the right direction.
- SK mentioned the written comments from Martha Harris, a Muse resident, that are on the UDAC webpage.

Finalization of the November 8, 2023 UDAC Walking Tour route

- DW reviewed the proposed walking tour route that would take place at the next UDAC meeting at 9:00 am on November 8, 2023.
- The tour will include several development sites in Old Town North including the Alexan Florence, the Gables, 901 North Pitt Street, Tidelock/Transpotomac Plaza, 500 Montgomery Street, The Muse, and the Venue.
- DW confirmed that the tour would take place in lieu of the regular UDAC meeting and members of the public would be invited to join. Further details on the tour will be provided at a later date.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:18 a.m.