

City of Alexandria

Old Town North

Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)

Meeting Notes

[DRAFT]

Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

Hybrid: City Hall, Room 2000 and via Zoom

Recording Link: https://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?clip_id=6561

Committee Members in Attendance

Abey Oklak, Chair (SK)

Tom Soapes, Vice Chair (TS)

Katherine Bingler, Secretary (KB)

Zaira Suarez (ZS)

Susan Oetgen (SO)

City Staff in Attendance

Daniel Welles (DW) P&Z

Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z

Nathan Imm (NI) P&Z

Applicant Members in Attendance

Michelle Chang (MC) HRP Group

Siobhan Steen (SS) HRP Group

Mary Catherine Gibbs (MCG) Wire Gill LLP

Blake Middleton (BM) Handel Architects

Simon Beer (SB) OJB

Devon Patterson (DP) SCB

Jason Klem Gensler

Planning Commissioners in Attendance

Robert Dube (RD)

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

Bill DePuy (BD)

Dave Phillips (DP)

Martha Mertz (MM)

Edward Ingram (EI)

Serge Duss (SD)

Melissa Kuennan (MK)
Mary Beth Hong (MBH)
Chip Smith (CS)
Tanya Klein (TK)

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:02 a.m. as the May 2025 meeting of UDAC.
- Susan Oetgen was introduced as the newest member of the Committee, filling in the role for “Local Business Community Representative”.

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>

Refresher presentation of the proposed development at the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) site

- MCG introduced the project and project team/applicant group, the HRP Group, noting that the presentation is a refresher of the applications coming forward.
- MCG reiterated that the project will be pursuing Design Excellence instead of following the PRGS Urban Design Standards and Guidelines.
- MC provided overview of the proposed master planning efforts for the site and how it connects to the OTN Small Area Plan.
 - The project won an award in 2023 from the Virginia APA for the development year (the Red Clay Award).
 - MC provided a review of the development review process. At this point, they are preparing submissions for Blocks A, B, C and the two open space areas.
- MC noted Block A is a small footprint; it is challenging to make it feasible and they want to continue with the arts and cultural aspect.
- AO asked the applicant team why Block B is proposed at 8% over the total in the CDD?
 - MC responded that the road shifted and they needed to make the rental tower wider for unit layer but still will adhere to the CDD conditions.
- SS provided an overview of the Prerequisites for Design Excellence that were developed as part of the project, introducing the topics:
 - Superior Urban Form;
 - Environmental Innovation (applies to overall development);
 - Quality and durable building materials; and
 - Off-street parking.
- The additional component includes Design Excellence Criteria:
 - Architectural excellence – landmark or contextual character;
 - Variety of open spaces and high quality open spaces;
 - Active Public Realm; and

- Inclusive design.
- DP showed the previous conceptual design of Block B, noting that feedback received included requests for more variation and setback at the upper levels and orientation to the river for the condo building and similar comments were received during the rental tour.
 - The focus for Block B is to introduce iconic character and an active public realm across the site. This will be achieved through increased setbacks, incorporating three main entrances, and iconic corners to create gateway moments.
- JK discussed the plans for the ground plane and the podiums at Block B and C, noting previous feedback for podium included a request for more ingress and egress points and for the towers to set back from the podium.
- A coordinated, well-planned streetscape and ground plane is part of the overall ongoing development review.
- BM provided an overview of the architectural elements and what design challenges have occurred for Block C.
 - The condo building has been rotated off the grid and make it curvilinear, which was inspired by the river and to contrast with the urban face and street edges of the other tower. They also have significant open space above the podium that provides a transition to the towers.
 - The architectural elements for Block C that are still evolving include stronger views through the alley and tying the building to the urban form (i.e. creating a defined street wall).
- JK noted the Block C podium is one story with one-story brick bays that evoke the character of Old Town.
 - Plans are in the works to minimize the roof over the alley to bring more natural light into the space.
- SB provided commentary on the feedback and development of the open space plans, noting the site will expand waterfront access in this area and gave a summary of the Waterfront Open Space and Rail Corridor Open Space.
- AO was appreciative of the refresher and requested to see street sections in future submissions.
- AO inquired about how the contextual/background buildings meet the criteria of iconic building and relate to the context of Old Town North, requesting further discussion with staff about the contextual aspect of Design Excellence
- AO inquired further about the porosity throughout the site and the ability of people to move through it..
- KB asked the applicant team to confirm where transit stops would be located as well as the location of the floating pier.
 - MCG responded there will be two bus shelters and they will be providing a City design and the floating pier will be located at the northern area adjacent to where the existing “cage” on the trail is.
- KB followed up to inquire about the proposed schedule for timing and when abatement/remediation will occur. When will abatement and remediation occur?
 - MC confirmed that the current market challenges make it challenging to anticipate a date for construction and abatement and that they will coordinate with the neighbors as the timeline develops.

- SO asked the applicant team to provide a breakdown of the ground floor spaces, delineating how much ground floor space will be residential lobbies as opposed to retail and dining uses.
 - SS confirmed that less than 20 percent of ground floor space will be dedicated for residential lobbies.
- SO asked the design team to explain how the ground plane references the proportions of Old Town North.
 - JK responded, indicating that the team used the aspect ratio of typical retail frontages in Old Town North and wanted to articulate as bay proportions. They will use detailing to define the bays.
- SO asked if the site's location adjacent to National Park Service (NPS) land gives the proposal any validity to incorporate national park features in the concept.
 - SB responded, noting that it does not feel like it has the character of the GWMP because it is heavily industrialized.
 - MC commented that the applicant team has been meeting with NPS for four years and NPS is supportive of the improvements adjacent to this site and on their property (removing the cage, creating special viewpoints/overlooks, more natural connection).
- ZS expressed excitement to see the design revisions and noted with future reviews she will have a particular focus on:
 - Materiality;
 - Energy efficient solutions;
 - Dynamic facades;
 - Streetscape experience/minimization of shadows;
 - Pedestrian views; and
 - Synergy between open space and building views.
- BD asked the applicant team to clarify what is being conveyed when they use the term "contextual character", noting concerns that the proposed design does not seem to relate to other buildings in Old Town North.

BD followed up to ask when the power plant will be demolished and how that timeline related to commencement of the infrastructure construction.

- MCG responded that there was a long community engagement process as part of the OTNSAP and it was decided that taller structures would work on this site. The FAA has set a maximum height limit in this area as well
- MCG followed up to confirm late 2026/early 2027 would be the earliest the power plant would be demolished.
- RD inquired about the screening of the existing substation and asked the applicant to confirm the haul routes.
- MCG responded that the team will be working with PEPCO to design appropriate screening. There is a construction management plan and both streets will be accessed as haul routes.
- JA expressed concerns about traffic and construction worker parking and if there could be a water taxi stop on or near the site. Can there be a water taxi stop?
- MCG confirmed that they have a construction management plan, traffic studies were completed and submitted, and that the team reviews the transportation strategy with City

staff with each DSUP submission. Additionally, MCG noted the NPS is not interested in supporting a water taxi at this location at this time.

- SD inquired about the number of units for Blocks B and C.
 - SS confirmed that Block B will have 200-300 units and Block C around 500 units. Furthermore, the overall site could have up to 2000 units and the garage will be built under the entire site.
- EI asked about changes being proposed to Block A.
 - MC indicated that the footprint will remain the same but there will be fewer floors and that the arts and cultural intent remains the same.
- MM asked about the sequence of events for entire development.
 - MC noted that while they are working on infrastructure in the southern portion of the site, they will be doing deconstruction of power plant. They have to have spine road constructed before they can get their first CO.
- MK asked if any of the buildings would be “alive” (i.e. green roofs or walls) and if the construction management plan is on the project website.
 - MCG confirmed there would be green roofs but not on exterior walls and that the construction management plan is on the HRP and City websites.
- MK followed up to ask what the podium roof will include.
 - JK confirmed the roof will have green roof and amenity space as well as small areas for mechanical.
- MK discussed the surrounding neighborhood, noting that Old Town North is more industrial based and Old Town is smaller scale. She asked what the intent of the design of the retail storefronts are.
 - MC noted that some inspiration was taken from Old Town but scaling is appropriate based on the surrounding area for new retail uses.
- MK asked if the residents and common areas would be designed for families based on the amount of family activity in the area.
 - MC responded that a significant amount of the open space is for the broader community, not just the future residents.
- MK expressed concern about the neighborhood demand for larger caliper trees to get shade sooner.
 - MC confirmed that the proposal is aligned with the neighborhood’s desire for more shade and larger trees.
- SD asked the applicant team what the plan for the substation is.
 - MCG that PEPCO owns the property and at this time they plan to keep it as is.
- BD asked the applicant team to confirm the split between retail and office at Block C.
 - MCG responded, stating they are planning to be flexible and want to allow the second floor to be commercial or retail.
- TK asked if there is anything residents can do to ensure safety as part of abatement process.
 - MCG confirmed that materials are available online and HRP has in-house environmental staff who will be working on this and working with neighbors.
- An attendee on Zoom who did not disclose their name asked how much open space is on the roof and not open to public and what the schedule for open space construction is. The attendee followed up to ask the applicant team to include the adjacent Muse development in the renderings and if there are any plans in the works for D, E, and F.

- MCG confirmed that there is a phasing requirement for when certain segments of the open space have to be constructed, citing that a portion of the waterfront must be completed by certificate of occupancy of Phase 1. She noted that the renderings did include adjacent buildings and that no plans have been developed for the remaining blocks yet.

Committee Elections

- KB made a motion to nominate AO as the Chair, TS to resume his position as vice chair, and for herself to serve as the secretary for the next term.
 - The motion was seconded by ZS and carried forward with a 5-0 vote.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:44 a.m.