

City of Alexandria

Old Town North

Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)

March 2022 Meeting Notes

[DRAFT-PRELIMINARY]

Wednesday, May 11, 2022 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=5492

Date of Draft: July 7, 2022

Committee Members in Attendance:

- Stephen Kulinski, Chair (SK)
- Thomas Soapes, Vice Chair (TS)
- Abbey Oklak, Secretary (AO)
- Katherine Bingler (KB)
- Theresa del Ninno (TN)

City Staff in Attendance:

- Michael Swidrak (MS) P&Z
- Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z
- Stephanie Sample (SS) P&Z
- Daniel Welles (DW) P&Z
- Richard Lawrence (RL) P&Z (Virtual)

Applicant Members in Attendance:

- Mary Catherine Gibbs (MG) Wire Gill (Representing PRGS)
- Michelle Chang (MC) HRP (PRGS Applicant)
- Simon Beer (SB) OJB (PRGS)
- Melissa Schrock (MS1) HRP (PRGS Applicant)
- Julianna Valle Velez (JV) Gensler (PRGS)
- Ken Wire (KW) Wire Gill (Representing Montgomery Center)
- Megan Rappolt (MR) Wire Gill (Representing Montgomery Center)
- Austin Flajser (AF) Carr (Montgomery Center) (virtual)
- Wish Carr (WC) Carr (Montgomery Center)
- Trini Rodriguez (TR) Parker Rodriguez (Montgomery Center)
- Rob Uhrin (RU) Cooper Carry (Montgomery Center)
- Jason Albers (JA) Cooper Carry (Montgomery Center)

PRGS SITE TOUR

- UDAC members, City staff and members of the PRGS applicant team noted above and members of the community met at 1300 N. Royal Street at 8:30 a.m. for a site tour of the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) site. The site tour ended at 9:30 a.m.

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order after the site tour at approximately 10:01 a.m. as the May 2022 meeting of UDAC.
- The Committee considered a draft of the notes for the March 2022 meeting. KB moved to adopt the meeting notes with the amendment, and AO seconded the motion. **The meeting notes were approved 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>

Second Informational Update on the upcoming Development Standards and Guidelines and Design Excellence Standards for the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) Coordinated Development District (CDD)

- RL presented an update presentation to the Committee, noting that the Old Town North Urban Design Standards & Guidelines (OTNUDSG) addendum for PRGS was envisioned as part of the small area plan (OTNSAP) process and that the Design Excellence Pre-Requisites and Criteria (“Design Excellence Standards”) are envisioned as an alternate path for design review. Similar Design Excellence Standards were created for North Potomac Yard. These documents are being reviewed and approved by City Council at the July public hearing as part of the PRGS CDD application.
- RL notes that the OTNUDSG addendum distills what is applicable to the PRGS site and that City staff is focused on amending existing OTNUDSG standards and guidelines instead of rewriting the entire document.
- AO asked for a redlined version of the OTNUDSG addendum in order to provide additional comments, which other Committee members also supported. Staff provided a redlined version of the OTNUDSG addendum to the Committee after the meeting (the redlined version can be found on the UDAC webpage).
- RL discussed the Design Excellence Standards approach. As part of this path, the applicant submits a response to the pre-requisite requirements at the concept stage of review. UDAC will review the design excellence criteria as part of design review for buildings if the applicant meets the pre-requisites as determined by City staff.

- RL outlined the pre-requisites: Superior Urban Form, Environmental Innovation Leader, Quality + Durable Materials, Off-street parking located below grade and Exceptional Site Response.
- RL outlined the Design Excellence Criteria to be reviewed by UDAC for a given building – 1. Architectural Excellence (split into 1a. Landmark/Iconic Structure and 1b. Contextual Character), 2. Variety/high-quality open spaces, 3. An active public realm, 4. Inclusive design of building & open space.
- RL stated that UDAC will first be reviewing streetscape and ground-plane treatments for the PRGS with the upcoming infrastructure DSP prior to the review of any buildings.
- KB asked staff if they had reviewed and incorporated NOTICe’s (North Old Town Civic Association) comments from December 2021. Staff acknowledged review of the NOTICe comments.¹
- KB asked if any buildings in North Potomac Yard were innovative in design enough to warrant use of design excellence standards. RL responded one of Virginia Tech’s buildings would not comply under the general design standards for North Potomac Yard and benefitted from review with the design excellence standards.
- KB asked if the PRGS development blocks will be sold to other property owners for development. MS1 responded that HRP’s intent is to develop the entire site. SK asked if more than one architectural firm would be considered. MS1 responded that HRP is looking at a cohesive design whole but envisions different architectural styles with different architects.
- TN asked why the City would draft both Design Excellence Standards and the OTNUDSG addendum and not just require the use of the former. Staff responded that the OTNUDSG also serves as the standard option if a proposed building does not meet (or cannot meet) the pre-requisites for the Design Excellence Standards.
- AO asked if administrative review was sufficient in determining compliance with the Design Excellence pre-requisites. Staff responded that in reviewing the Design Excellence criteria, UDAC is also essentially reviewing compliance with the pre-requisites which are needed for the criteria to be successfully met.
- AO asked about the sustainability requirements in the Design Excellence pre-requisites. RL responded that the Design Excellence Standards will require the applicant achieve at a minimum the City requirements (i.e. Green Building Policy) but also requires the applicant to demonstrate innovative practices in meeting or exceeding these standards.
- TS asked why the applicant should be able to choose which design review to seek. Staff responded that both the Design Excellence Standards and OTNUDSG addendum will

¹ The comments are added as an attachment to the May 2022 UDAC meeting materials on the City’s UDAC webpage.

ensure high quality design but that different projects would benefit with review with either review path.

- TN asked for more time to be able to review the documents, which TS seconded. TN and TS asked for another formal conversation in June.²

Presentation of development proposal at Montgomery Center (first applicant presentation)

- KW introduced the applicant team, noting that the applicant will present initial building massing and landscape. AF added to the introduction.
- KW noted that the site will be rezoned to CRMU-X (per the Old Town North Small Area Plan) and the applicant is seeking density bonuses for affordable housing and arts and cultural anchors, adding that all loading is proposed internal to the site.
- RU provided a presentation of the building and site design, highlighting the variety of massing, site porosity, and activation of the street level. The applicant created a plaza adjacent to Montgomery Park and added retail at the corners and along N. Fairfax Street. RU introduced the “paseo” connection that serves as a connection to the arts and cultural anchor and also serves vehicular loading and parking access and includes some separation of transportation modes through paving and other ground-level treatments. The paseo will include a pedestrian connection through the entirety of the paseo (based on a question from TN). RU outlined that ground level residential units at the Madison Street corner is proposed and the parking garage ramp will be located on N. Royal Street.
- RU outlined the variety in building heights, noting that the taller portions of the building are located to the south and step down toward Montgomery Park. The arts anchor is considered a lower-height connector piece connecting the midrise tower portions of the site.
- KW and AF noted that the applicant is talking with a music-oriented group and a multimedia arts organization for the arts anchor space and that the applicant is exploring the potential of an additional level of parking for public functions. AF mentioned that the applicant is still in discussion with the Art League on returning to the site based on a question from KB.
- KB asked if the project would be for sale or rental and if any affordable units are to be included. AF responded that the project will likely have rental units and that the project will have on-site affordable units due to the use of the affordable housing density bonus (Section 7-700 of the Zoning Ordinance).
- TR presented the proposed landscape and hardscape. She noted that the paseo recreates the passageways of Old Town and that the paseo and ground-level open spaces will be more activated with retail and outdoor activities.

² Staff provided the redlined version of the OTNUDSG addendum to UDAC members and asked for comment to be provided prior to the June 23 Planning Commission and July 5 City Council public hearings.

- TR discussed the publicly accessible open spaces around the site, including the Machanic Courtyard fronting N. Fairfax Street and the Montgomery Plaza fronting Montgomery Street and across from Montgomery Park. TR stated that Montgomery Plaza will be programmed with flexible seasonal events. The Machanic Courtyard will have a mix of green with paved areas
- KB stated that the redevelopment is an exciting project, specifically highlighting the paseo and Montgomery Plaza.
- AO noted the importance of ensuring enough safe pedestrian space within the paseo.
- TN noted her support of the pedestrian circulation and connections to the plaza spaces. She asked for further study of the southern elevation studied as it helps to provide a vista to the waterfront. TN asked if N. Fairfax Street could be used for loading purposes. RU responded that the applicant notes the importance of N. Fairfax Street for retail and as the main portion of the arts corridor and would prefer to minimize curb cuts on N. Fairfax Street.
- TR added that the applicant wants to explore providing special paving treatments into public sidewalk areas.
- TN asked if the loading area will be screened. RU and TR responded that the area of the site near the internal loading docks will be designed to be screened behind active uses and paving treatments in the vicinity will delineate the extension of the plaza
- SK noted that the design concept is well developed, especially for a prominent redevelopment site and highlighted the placement of arts anchor at the center of the block as an example supporting his comments.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:42 a.m.