

City of Alexandria

## ***Old Town North***

# ***Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)***

**July 2023 Meeting Notes**

**[FINAL]**

Wednesday, June 26 at 9:00 a.m.

Hybrid: City Hall, Room 2000 and via Zoom

Recording Link:

[https://alexandria.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view\\_id=29&coa\\_view\\_id=29&coa\\_clip\\_id=5963](https://alexandria.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=29&coa_view_id=29&coa_clip_id=5963)

### **Committee Members in Attendance**

Thomas Soapes, Vice Chair (TS)

Katherine Bingler (KB)

Zaira Suarez (ZS)

Abbey Oklak (AO) *via Zoom*

### **City Staff in Attendance**

Stephanie Sample (SS) P&Z

Daniel Welles (DW) P&Z

Catherine Miliaras (CM) P&Z

Brandi Collins (BC) Housing

### **Applicant Members in Attendance**

Chase Eatherly (CE) Architect/HCM

Gregg Eberly (GE) Bowman Consulting

Jack Kerry (JK) Winn Development

Steven Mikulic (SM) McGuire Woods

Aimee McHale (AM) Winn Development

Melanie Ray (MR) Architect/HCM

Christopher Jones (CJ) Winn Development

Agnes Artemel (AA) Artemel & Associates

Quynn Nguyen (QN) Winn Development

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

Ann Shack (AS)

Mary Harris (MH)

## **INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS**

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:01 a.m. as the July 26, 2023 meeting of UDAC.
- TS motioned to approve the June 72023 Meeting Notes; KB provided a second. **The motion passed for the approval of the Meeting Notes, 4-0.**

## 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>*

### **First Presentation of the proposed redevelopment at Ladrey Apartments**

- SM introduced the project as well as the applicant and design team, mentioning the existing Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) Ladrey building has 170 affordable units for the elderly and disabled. The new redevelopment would have 271 total affordable units, retaining all of the existing 0%-30% AMI units, with the remainder of the units being affordable up to 80% AMI. SM confirmed that all existing tenants will be relocated during construction and be returned to the new building upon completion.
- MR and CJ presented the details of the proposal to the Committee after the introduction by SM, noting that the proposed building would consist of three building massings/volumes with a large setback containing an art mural and additional bay language to break down the façade along North Fairfax Street, while GE presented the streetscape and landscape improvements.
- KB inquired what a pocket park is, to which MR clarified it is a small at-grade park to provide seating. KB asked if the two proposed pocket parks would be publicly accessible and asked the applicant to provide dimensions, to which MR confirmed it would be open to the public and confirmed that one was approximately 50 feet in length and 15 feet in depth, while the other smaller pocket park would be approximately 22 feet wide by 20 feet deep.
- AS, nearby resident, asked the applicant to show a photo of the proposed pocket parks and asked if the existing trees would be replaced. MR confirmed that they are removing trees which impede the proposed building footprint and the underground parking garage.
- KB asked the applicant to provide more details on the proposed amenity space. MR presented where the amenity space would be located within the project site. CJ provided examples that the proposed amenity space could consist of, such as resident gathering spaces, a fitness center, library, clinic space, or a small kitchen. Programming for the fit-out of the amenity space has not yet been finalized. CJ noted the amount of amenity space would be an increase in comparison to what currently exists there today. KB replied mentioning her main concern is how the massing of the building appears to focus on itself rather than increasing neighborhood involvement with much of the open space being only usable to residents. SM mentioned that although the building appears larger in mass, the building height is being reduced by five stories from the existing building and clarified that further streetscape improvements to increase pedestrian activity would be incorporated.

- AO mentioned that a previous request was to have an 8-foot landscape amenity panel on North Fairfax and Wythe streets and asked the applicant to clarify the dimensions to confirm if this is being achieved, noting that the sidewalk width should increase if the landscape amenity panel is narrower than 8 feet. MR responded that the applicant team would take a closer look at these features, given that the proposed landscape amenity panel is currently only 4 feet wide.
- AO asked for confirmation of what street trees would be retained. GE confirmed that they are retaining as many street trees as possible and reminded the Committee that the applicant is proposing 8 more street trees than currently exist on site. GE followed up that the project will have 26% of tree canopy coverage, which is slightly more than what is required per the City's 2019 Landscape Guidelines.
- KB asked if the willow oak trees would remain. GE responded indicating that they needed to be removed because they impede over the location of the underground garage.
- AO asked if there was an opportunity to replace trees that were removed with larger, more mature trees. GE noted they would take that into consideration.
- AS asked the applicant team to provide a comparison of the trees that are on Fairfax Street currently vs. how many overall trees will be provided upon project completion. GE responded restating that all eight additional street trees provided would be on North Fairfax Street in addition to bioretention planters.
- MR noted that a layby would be removed due to being obstructive to the sidewalk. A new drop-off location with dedicated parking spaces would be added where the existing layby is. AO asked where the existing layby is located on the plan, which MR noted was near the main building entrance,
- AS asked the applicant why the project was proposing a rezoning if the current zone was compliant. SM responded noting that the existing building is legally nonconforming as it was built before the current zone was established. AS followed up expressing concerns about the overall building massing, mentioning that the integrity of Old Town North was being destroyed. JK responded suggesting that the proposal enhances the design characteristics of Old Town North. CJ noted that the building is not historic, and that the priority is to provide more affordable housing in the neighborhood.
- AS expressed additional concerns about the volume of construction in the area taking place at once, referencing three other nearby buildings which would be demolished and redeveloped at the same time and cause potential internet and cellular service disruptions. CKM responded that each project would have a Construction Management Plan which would address the timeline issue. AS followed up with more concerns about how the building would be maintained over time. AM responded that building management and the developer are working together to provide more staff and a maintenance and operations plan. AS expressed further concerns about the AMI levels not being sufficiently affordable, to which AM responded clarifying that although all units were reserved for <80% AMI, the majority of units were dedicated to tenants with an income of <30% AMI.
- MH mentioned that she participated in the Resolution 830 process with BH and that they developed a goal for Old Town North neighbors to stay as neighbors. MH followed up mentioning that she is happy that all existing residents are staying in addition to new neighbors coming, noting that the existing building was functional, although could have been better maintained. MH followed up to note that she is satisfied with the existing building height and mentioned that she would trade height for more trees due to Old

Town North being a heat island which impacts elderly the most. MH asked the applicant team to consider maintaining more existing trees by considering removing some parking spaces to keep the willow oak trees and noted this would also benefit the elderly tenants at the nearby Annie B. Rose House site. MH complimented the building design but mentioned that there would no longer be an ability to walk through the site with the development as currently proposed and recommended considering design trade-offs to retain trees for the health of the residents.

- TS mentioned porosity was an issue at the Alexan site, and that it appeared to be an issue at this site. CJ responded noting that this has also been raised by City staff and reminded the Committee that Ladrey being an all-affordable project presents fewer opportunities for these types of design trade-offs in comparison to a market-rate project like the Alexan. CJ noted that the building cannot exceed seven stories without changing the building construction type and noted that they are achieving the bulk of benefits through enhancing the pedestrian experience, widening sidewalks, and providing additional amenity spaces. CJ also noted an earlier comment about massing and pedestrian activation, confirming that there would be significant impacts to the cost and number of units if they were to provide a direct cut-through in the building to provide more pedestrian access. CJ followed up stating that Winn Development is partnering with ARHA to ensure the maximum number of affordable units will be achieved.
- SM mentioned that the Ladrey residents have been a part of the process and expressed wanting privacy and safety for their project, further noting that a building break would be difficult for the elderly and disabled tenants to access the property. MR followed up by saying that since the site is not on a full site block poses additional challenges with providing a full building break without losing units, confirming that all income-levels at the site would have the same access to the same services.
- AO asked the applicant to clarify if all new units would be reserved for elderly and disabled people. CJ confirmed that the 170 replacement units are for the existing elderly and disabled residents. The remaining 101 units would be reserved for the “general public”, but the team was exploring if they should reserve any additional units for elderly. AO followed up asking the applicant to reconfigure the drop-off area due to the high concentration of elderly and disabled tenants due to the amounts of service providers that would have to use the drop-off, noting that removing the existing layby is a great amenity that should not be removed. TS agreed with AO’s comment about reconsidering the removal of the layby for traffic and drop off circulation. CJ responded that they were open to reconsidering the layby removal. AO recommended the applicant use creative design techniques to make the drop off compatible in an urban environment but remain functional for medical and safety emergencies. MH provided additional support by noting that there are two to three 911 calls on average per week to that building and it is not unusual for multiple emergency vehicles to respond.
- ZS asked the applicant what was being proposed above the underground transformers. MR clarified that a cap with brick was required to be removed per Dominion Energy standards that could be easily removed for service purposes. ZS noted that the pathway between the buildings introduced a rigid corner where the transformers and crosswalks are. She suggested looking for opportunities to add more greenery for a better pedestrian connection to Oronoco Bay Park, acknowledging that this seems to be the corner of the building receiving the most concern. ZS also acknowledged the utilities in this location may make

additional greenery infeasible and further complimented the design and style, suggesting softening the architecture up by changing the brick color. ZS also suggested locating the lounge area at this corner to further satisfy the comments that have been expressed thus far.

- KB noted that the proposed redevelopment is a vast improvement of what exists on the site today, while TS closed to quorum noting that the Committee looks forward to the next presentation.

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