

City of Alexandria

## ***Old Town North***

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

**March 2024 Meeting Notes**

**[FINAL]**

Wednesday, March 6 at 9:00 a.m.

Hybrid: City Hall, Room 2000 and via Zoom

Recording Link: [https://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?clip\\_id=6183](https://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?clip_id=6183)

### **Committee Members in Attendance**

Steve Kulinski, Chair (SK)

Tom Soapes (TS)

Katherine Bingler (KB)

Zaira Suarez (ZS)

Abbey Oklak (AO)

### **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

Mary Catherine Gibbs (MG)    Wire-Gill

Ryan Ort (RO)                    OJB Architects

Melissa Schrock (MS)           HRP

Siobhan Steen (SS)              HRP

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

Bill DePew (BD)

Melissa Kuennan (MK)

Mary Harris (MH)

## **INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS**

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:00 a.m. as the March 6, 2024 meeting of UDAC.

## **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 open space areas at the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) site**

Based on their Concept II submission to the City for the Development Special Use Permit for the Open Space at the PRGS/Hilco Site, the Applicant team provided a presentation of the current status of the design.

- MG gave an introduction to the project and the applicant team, highlighting what applications have been approved, what applications were still going forward, when they anticipate the public hearings will be, and highlighted the difference between the open space on site and the Linear Park.
- MG noted the Pepco Liner landscape is shown as part of the open space system, however the linear section of this space does not have sufficient width to be counted toward open space, because portions of it are less than eight feet in width. MG further noted the Linear Park as this area is owned by Norfolk Southern and there is not a transfer of ownership or letter of consent which would allow this section to proceed to hearing. The design will currently be limited to lands under the ownership of PRGS, however the intent is that once the Norfolk Southern lands are transferred that the park design and operation will be seamless.
- MG also noted the current design and programmatic labels for the Rail Corridor Park are intended to convey potential program elements, not to indicate specific designs.
- MG confirmed the timeframe for the transfer of the Norfolk Southern land is unknown.
- RO continued the presentation, providing an overview of the public engagement process, including the results of an open space survey included in the presentation.
- RO presented on elements of the proposed design and programming of the open space plan, highlighting which design excellence matrix criteria were met.
- RO showed exhibits of all areas of open space for the site, highlighting what improvements will be made and introducing all elements that will activate any recreational areas.
  
- The public asked several questions for clarification and provided comments, as follows:
  - MH asked clarifying questions on the location of various features along the waterfront, including the kayak launch and the pump house.
  - MH provided further commentary noting that Alexandria does a good job with historic information plaques, etc. and that the applicant should consider incorporating such elements here. She offered that NOTICE does historic tours and could interpret history prior to powerplant. She encouraged the applicant to consider that history may not be solely the power plant to interpret.
  - MC responded, confirming that historic interpretation is a part of the plan for the open space.
  - MK questioned whether the kayak launch would be usable considering the length of the approach, accessibility, and other concerns.

- RO responded, indicating that PRGS has been working with the NPS on the location and configuration of the launch.
- BD raised a concern regarding the Mount Vernon Trail, which will go through area where people will be eating adjacent to the pump house and may be dangerous proximate to high speed bike traffic.
- MC confirmed that redesigns such as straightening and improving sight lines, improving a separate route for commuter bikers (including the woonerf), signage will be incorporated to indicate calmer bike traffic zones. Bike paths and speed are part of the ongoing discussions with the NPS.
- BD asked about the stability of the kayak gangway and platform during a storm and if it will be a magnet for debris.
- MC confirmed that they are working with the team’s marine engineer and the NPS to address these issues, further stating that PRGS is comfortable with the stability of the proposed structures, and cognizant of need to address operations of removing debris. They have hired Moffatt and Nichol, experts in marine engineering and familiar with the Potomac waterfront in Alexandria.
- BD asked where public restrooms were located.
- MC responded, noting that the CDD has conditions require public restrooms be provided. The guardhouse is currently planned to have bathrooms, and PRGS may consider including a retail/public restroom further north in one of the future buildings.
- BD inquired about when the ownership transfer of Norfolk Southern may occur.
- MG confirmed that while they do not have a timeframe, they are optimistic.
- UDAC members provided comments and questions as follows:
  - KB asked the applicant to consider providing fishing opportunities for residents who utilize the waterfront for fishing purposes.
  - RO noted that fishing could occur at the ends of widened “cage replacement” pathway. Further removal of invasives could help access to the river.
  - KB asked the applicant to confirm whether there are tree markers for the Applicant’s work or for the NPS.
  - MC confirmed that it is likely a mix of both PRGS and NPS.
  - KB followed up to inquire about will be responsible for the actual management and operations of the park spaces.
  - MG responded, noting that there will be a Public Access Easement with maintenance agreements with the City, and maintenance agreement(s) with NPS. The land that is currently owned by PRGS stays under PRGS ownership.
  - ZS indicated that she is in support of the idea of the kayak launch and that she looks forward to seeing more about the identifying features and how their incorporation will be placed into the design.
  - ZS provided additional feedback to note that a diversity of seating is great, encouraging this without too much reliance on movable seating, use of trees (salvaged logs) as seating could add positively.

- ZS stated that she also looks forward to the design development of the grand staircase to encourage seating at the stairs.
- AO complimented on the greenery of the park based on the trees and plantings, particularly as a contrast to the lawn common to parks in this area of the city.
- AO raised concerns that the design doesn't feel industrial enough, noting the only mention of reused materials was the use of rail ties. AO indicated a desire to see more reused along the waterfront in particular, shade structures should tie to industrial past, turn the industrial aesthetic into the park and encouraged the applicant to consider reuse of items for the shade canopies as the current canopy design seems to use common design elements with other parks. AO concluded that the reuse of historic materials offers opportunities to be significantly different from a design perspective.
- AO advised the applicant to ensure that the open space is designed to integrate the future Linear Park once it is acquired.
- MG confirmed the CDD conditions include language to guarantee this is met.
- AO promoted the design/planning of the open space should include of more activity space, particularly along the linear park, as the city already has many active and passive spaces along the water front. AO also noted that opportunities for small active elements should be considered.
- SK raised concerns with conflicts with the private café use encroaching into public spaces.
- MC noted that PRGS is formulating an agreement with City on where public space is.
- SK raised additional concerns regarding bikes and speed adjacent to the seating at the pumphouse.
- MC confirmed that the use of a change of surface, signage, and provision of alternate paths for the bikes should discourage use by through-bikers.
- SK expressed that while the overall diversity of spaces is positive, the design should tie into the history more clearly.
- MC confirmed that PRGS is starting a salvage list to see what can be reutilized, further stating that there is a diversity of opinion on design and industrial aesthetic.

### **Committee Elections**

- On a motion by TS, seconded by KB, SK was re-elected as the Chair of UDAC for the next year, with a vote of 5 in favor and 0 in opposition. All other members reprised their current position for the next year as well, including TS as Vice Chair and AO as Secretary.

***The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:25 a.m.***