

SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

Red Cross/Trenton Street Residential (SP #446)

SPRC Meeting #2

November 20, 2017

Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Stephen Hughes (Chair), Nancy Iacomini, Jim Lantelme, James Schroll, Elizabeth Gearin

MEETING AGENDA

- 1) Building Architecture
 - a) Design Issues
 - i) Building form (height, massing, tapering, setbacks)
 - ii) Facade treatments, materials, fenestration
 - iii) Roof line/penthouse form and materials
 - iv) Street level activism/entrances & exits
 - v) Accessibility
 - b) Commercial/Retail Spaces
 - i) Location, size, ceiling heights
 - ii) Storefront designs and transparency
 - c) Service Issues
 - i) Utility equipment
 - ii) Venting location and type
 - iii) Location and visibility of loading and trash service
 - iv) Exterior/rooftop lighting

SPRC DISCUSSION

Presentations

- The applicant presented slides covering building architecture.

Clarifying Questions and Comments

- A member asked about the SPRC process for “approval” of the project, requesting clarification.
- The Committee Chair pointed out that there are some unanswered questions from the first meeting and suggested the applicant and staff should respond to all questions for the next meeting, including having Housing staff available.

- Bernie Berne with Buckingham Community Civic Association asserted that there is too much proposed density on site and the project should create more open space, the “massive structure” doesn’t fit, townhouses do not fit the neighborhood, and more green space is needed on the Arlington Boulevard Frontage.
- Commissioner Gearin asked why not have fewer townhouses and ask for more AHIF money?
- A member wants to see answers from Housing staff to questions on affordability split.
- Commissioner Gearin asked why there is more parking for townhouses than what is required? Why is there more parking for the new building at 0.91 spaces/unit than what is often approved for affordable housing? What is staff’s position on requested 30% compact parking (over 15%)?
- Doris with the Disability Advisory Commission noted the sidewalk is a minimal 3’ sidewalk now by the bus stop, and would like to see improvements. Are townhouses purchased or rental? The developer confirmed that the townhouses would be for sale.
- Chris Slatt of the Transportation Commission noted the area is a gap in the Arlington Boulevard Trail, and would love thoughts on if the trail could be improved and implemented through the block at least as a temporary link.
- A member asked for drawings with sidewalk dimensions to be provided, and for clarification on a paragraph of the staff report discussing streetscape conditions and dimensions.
- Wesley Housing confirmed that amenity spaces in the building are available to both Whitefield Commons and new building residents.
- Mr. Berne asked how many trees are being removed vs. planted?

Building Architecture

- Commissioner Iacomini asked how is the design consistent with existing garden apartments? The architect responded that the design is “contextual” with existing development, but is reflective of current design principles.
- The developer should place building design into existing context, existing setting and surroundings with new drawings/renderings.
- How do windows achieve consistency with existing development? The architect noted that the windows are “punched”, not double hung.
- The architect suggested the townhouses are directly across the street from the adjacent Arlington Oaks buildings, and thus more important in context. Commissioner Iacomini suggested the design, with window fenestration, is more “industrial” in character than consistent and reiterated that she wants to see more contextual views from street.

- Doris: what is the accessibility around the site? (Consider roll-in showers). What is the number of accessible units? The architect confirmed that the building will meet all accessibility requirements, with experience having worked on The Jordan affordable housing building in Ballston that implemented sliding doors per former Commissioner Rosemary Ciotti's suggestion. What is the number of accessible units? Wesley Housing noted they will be meeting state financing requirement, which would include a requirement for roll-in showers.
- A member suggested the building massing is not contextual. Residents have to walk along a blank façade on Trenton Street.
- Commissioner Iacomini asked if funding was VHDA? Wesley Housing confirmed yes. Is there a percentage requirement for brick? The applicant confirmed yes, a 30% minimum, and the building meets that.
- Commissioner Schroll asked to explore ways to liven up blank wall around the corner, suggesting we don't want "boring to boring", with Commissioner Iacomini following up by suggesting more units in projects within the County are fronting onto the street. The architect suggested there are grade changes impacting the design and garage grade elevation which is true at other projects as well.
- A committee member asked if the courtyard is raised and not accessible to the exterior, and for residents only? The architect confirmed yes, the courtyard is an amenity space and also serves as SWM facility.

Committee Member Closing Thoughts

- Nancy Iacomini: where are we going with the project? The townhouses bear no relationship to the existing garden apartments on and around the site. Impervious surface is maximized, so what is lot coverage? What is the plan for future use of Whitefield Commons, would it be redeveloped in the same way so that open space is minimized? The townhouses "do nothing for me."
- James Schroll: encourage the applicant to do less in attempt to blend old and new, think about how it's designing all sides of the building.
- Bernie Berne: could wildflowers be used in the existing open yard at the SE corner to encourage bees, natural space? Look for all opportunities to add green space.
- Doris Ray: a fully accessible playground for children would be a great amenity for the neighborhood. Lighting should consider adjacent context for the site.
- Brian Tucker with Arlington Oaks: list of concerns can be solved with less density in terms of open space, parking, traffic and character compatibility.
- Peter Rich with Bethel United Church of Christ: agree with the Arlington Oaks concerns.
- A Pedestrian Advisory Committee member also would like the architect to address the blank walls (at the corner and on Trenton Street) with doors/windows on street level.

- Chris Slatt: would like to see more interest on walls, agree that units shouldn't be directly on grade. Penrose has units below grade as well as slightly above grade, with interfacing on the street by owners. Back of the building looks unfinished.

Public Comment

- A resident on Trenton Street said the design is incongruent with the neighborhood, and the project will reduce open space by about 25% in the area, would take neighborhood backwards in terms of tree canopy and storm water control improvements.
- An Arlington Forest resident echoed concerns over density, scale, design consistency along Arlington Boulevard, and parking issues, and asked about school impacts like student generation?
- An Arlington Oaks resident stated concern about density and wish for a walking tour to see streetscape issues in person.
- An Arlington Oaks resident said the multi-family building housed too many people in too small an area.
- A resident noted concern about density, as well as comment that there is plenty of parking in the project.

NEXT STEPS

- SPRC meeting #3 has not been scheduled at this time.