

## SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

### SP #90 Central District Retail Phase I (Crystal Square).

SPRC Meeting #3, December 14, 2017

Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Elizabeth Gearin (Chair), Jane Siegel

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### MEETING AGENDA

This was the third Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) meeting for a proposed site plan amendment to add a three-story theater building and a one-story grocery store and additional infill retail at the Crystal Square development (SP #90), located in Crystal City along Crystal Drive between 15<sup>th</sup> Street South and 18<sup>th</sup> Street South.

The meeting began with introductions and a refresher on SPRC ground rules and procedure. The applicant then presented follow-up information requested from the second SPRC meeting in November, as well as changes made since then. After clarifying questions, the applicant then made a presentation on Transportation, site plan mitigation conditions, and construction phasing.

### SPRC DISCUSSION

#### Clarifying Questions

- Christer Ahl and Pamela Van Hine stated that some views they had asked for are still not provided—including views from the top of the Water Park, and a representation of what view apartment residents would have of the theater. Also, that the façade of the theater “cube” is still too plain.
- Elizabeth Gearin asked if the applicant had considered green walls for the façade.
  - The applicant stated that they had consulted their landscape architect and that due to the orientation of the facades to the sun and surrounding buildings, and the types of species that could be considered, that a green wall system would not work in this location. The consultant instead recommended trees planted in a 10-foot planting strip in front of the wall which would grow to draw the eye away from the wall. The applicant stated that the soil is deep enough in the plaza to accommodate mature grown trees.
- Arthur Fox likened the cube to the National Gallery, but in this case, there should be some texture or depth.
- Stacy Meyer asked about materials in that area.
  - The applicant stated that they were still examining exact materials. (*Staff Note: at the November SPRC meeting the applicant had stated it would probably be gray brick.*)

- Judy Freshman stated definitely no DryVit should be permitted.
- Jane Siegel stated she understood that the applicant wanted it to be a background structure to emphasize the foregrounds, but it is a very large area.
  - The architect replied that they tried to create two areas, a pedestrian level with greenery that would draw the attention away from the background building.
- Judy Freshman stated that she understood it is a minor building in a setting of more major neighbors, but the applicant should still consider the use and placement of textures on the cube.
- Stacy Meyer asked if the trees could grow in the space in front of the building.
  - The landscape architect stated that the plant bed is ten feet wide and the slab underneath is several feet down (not sure how far) and deep enough that existing trees have grown well.
- Elizabeth Gearin recommended that staff consult with the Urban Forester.
- Jane Siegel asked if the applicant had a detailed preliminary landscape plan? Can this site accommodate canopy trees?
  - The applicant replied that they had shown the detailed landscape plan at the last meeting. They didn't bring it to today's meeting unfortunately. The site probably can accommodate canopy trees. *(Staff note: It is a requirement of Landscape regulations to have a certain amount of canopy on site.)*
- Arthur Fox recommended that the applicant still consider texture and patterning on the cube and the applicant could bring some alternatives to PC.
- Elizabeth Gearin asked about the sidewalk widths.
  - Joanne Gabor state that they are 17.5 feet, and are all within the Sector Plan recommended width range.
- Elizabeth Gearin asked if the mechanical units were visible from the street or above.
  - The applicant replied that the theater's mechanical units were mostly at the roof level, so anyone over 90 feet, such as apartment dwellers above the 9<sup>th</sup> floor, would see the equipment. There is a small amount of equipment on the third floor, 30-foot level. None would be visible from the street. The mechanical equipment is setback from the edges of the building, and grouped over the corridors underneath so that mechanical equipment will not be directly above the auditoria.
- Bill Braswell asked what the office building workers see from their windows.
  - The grocery store's mechanical and green roofs. Apartment residents below 90 feet would see the theater wall.
- Several SPRC members commented the roof plans shown were misleading by all being colored green, and no mechanical units shown.
- Judy Freshman asked to see the slide that showed what the 1770 building would look like in context. Likes the conceptual architecture.
  - The applicant stated that the representation here was more general (a different architect was doing the residential design), but materials and coloring included dark precast on the front façade, glazed green brick on the north façade.

### Transportation

- Questions from several SPRC members on how they would address pedestrian crossings of the wide garage entrances on Crystal Drive. Pedestrian and car traffic to the site would come in bursts, as shows begin and end at various times. Also, a concern that, based on the proposed Crystal City lane configuration, cars turning from Crystal Drive into the garages would wait a long time for pedestrians to clear from the garage entrances and could hold up traffic on Crystal Drive.
  - The applicant spoke of continuing the pedestrian paving across the driveway aprons as a means of slowing exiting traffic.
    - Also, encouraging the maximum amount of queuing inside the garage by placement of the gate at the bottom of the ramp.
    - Encouraging existing drivers to slow through speed bumps and mirrors showing pedestrians.
    - Making it easier for drivers to access the theater from the 18<sup>th</sup> Street garage entrance by removing internal barriers and the garage for wayfinding.
    - A program of external signs that designate which garage entrance leads to designated grocery parking and which to the theater/general retail parking.
    - There will also be elevators straight to the grocery store from the G2 level of the garage, as an incentive to tempt patrons away from illegal parking/double-parking.
- Judy Freshman stated the bicycle facilities on the street seem inadequate.
- Chris Slatt agreed and stated that the applicant's proposed street striping eliminates an existing (inadequate) bike lane. What the applicant proposes is worse than existing. Stated he does not agree with the Sector Plan's recommendations on bike facilities on Crystal Drive, as well.
- Christer Ahl also stated that on-street bike facilities needed to be improved in the area. Right now, majority of bikers use the sidewalks for convenience, especially to access the VRE station and to avoid a difficult intersection at 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The current situation should be improved. He did like the applicant's proposed crosswalk for bikers.
- Joanne Gabor of DES stated that staff and the applicant are still working through the configuration of Crystal Drive.
- Judy Freshman stated that the applicant should be held to a minimum 17-foot sidewalk, and also pointed out that the sidewalk and street configuration here would set the model for the rest of the development on the block.
- Stacy Meyer also stated that the plan should be more bike friendly to get bikers off the sidewalk.
- Jane Siegel asked if these issues could be worked out by the public hearings in February.

- Joanne Gabor stated it was the goal. In answer to the questions, the applicant is moving the curb line east to create the wider sidewalk.
- Bill Braswell asked if the block was being looked at as a whole?
  - Joanne Gabor stated that staff is looking at the block as a whole, so that the phased development the applicant plans will be consistent.
- Chris Slatt and others asked to see the VRE exit on the plans, and pointed out that it is moving closer to 18<sup>th</sup> Street in the future.
- Jane Siegel asked if they were adding garage entrances?
  - One existing entrance is being closed, no new ones are being created.
- Joanne Gabor stated that County staff has a lot of experience with designing the pedestrian realm to minimize conflict with garage entrances.
- Arthur Fox asked what the traffic impact of the theater was, and the size/seating of the theater.
  - The applicant stated that the traffic study showed only 2-3 vehicle trips per hour directly attributable to the theater. There are 900 seats total in the theater, and 8 auditoria of varying sizes. They do not know the final configuration of each individual auditorium.
- Pamela Van Hine said if there is a large density of pedestrians, there could be traffic lights inside the garage for pedestrians and cars like in Washington
- Stacy Meyer asked about street drop-off/pickup and loading. Will the grocery carts leave the premises?
  - The applicant stated that they are maximizing the on street parking, but it will be less than existing. The applicant also stated that the grocer will have ways to prevent carts from leaving a certain distance.
  - Joanne Gabor stated that the County determines how the street spaces are allocated and managed, and can adjust them based on conditions after approval.
- Christer Ahl asked if truck deliveries to the grocer's loading dock on 15<sup>th</sup> Street will cause traffic tie-ups? Does the theater have dedicated elevators from the garage?
  - The applicant responded that their grocer has two types of delivery trucks: several deliveries each day by box trucks which should not cause any issue on the two-southbound lanes, and one delivery by day with a 70-foot tractor trailer. They do not know the times of the tractor-trailer delivery, but they do know that the maximum turning time is 30 seconds backing in, and 30 seconds pulling out. Loading dock employees can help with backing in, and the 70 foot trucks usually have two workers in them.
  - The theater will not have dedicated elevators, but there will be a new elevator leading direct to Crystal Drive from the garage.

- Questions from SPRC if issue has been resolved with the 70-foot truck intruding into the park when backing up.
  - Joanne Gabor stated that the issue has been resolved with a wider street apron at the loading dock, so the proposed park will not be impacted.
- Stacy Meyer asked if the park was being constructed by the developer.
  - The park will be constructed by the County. However, the developer is constructing the curb line. Staff has no issues with the 15<sup>th</sup> Street arrangement now.
- Elizabeth Gearin asked about the grocer's hours.
  - Around 6 am to 10 pm. They do not know when deliveries come, though.
- During a discussion of the applicant's request to exclude new and moved corridors in the Crystal City Underground, SPRC members expressed their desire that the Underground remain and be enhanced.
  - Staff explained that while the underground corridors may have been exempted in the past, they legally cannot be supported by staff now. Staff stated that staff agrees with the sector plan goals to retain and even enhance the Underground, the way to do so is not mentioned in the sector plan, and the sector plan does not address the density issue.
- Arthur Fox asked about community benefits or bonus density.
  - Staff explained that the applicant is not requesting bonus density, and has enough density under the existing "C-O" zoning to not need to negotiate Community Benefits under the "C-O-Crystal City" ordinance.
- Elizabeth Gearin summarized the SPRC comments to date and requests for more information when the applicant comes to the Commissions in February including:
  - Staff or applicant talk to urban forester re trees on site;
  - Some textures or patterns on the theater cube;
  - Expressed SPRC preference for 'seeing' green on the roofs, and therefore a request to Hide mechanical units better from apartment residents, if possible;
  - Address pedestrian crossings of the garage entrances and how pedestrians feel safe in general (with one specific suggestion from a PAC member to consider pedestrian traffic lights); and perhaps relatedly signage and other cues to direct movie theater patrons to the garage entrance off 18<sup>th</sup> St.;
  - Expressed SPRC desire for dedicated bike lanes to avoid pedestrian/cyclist conflicts, widened bike lane to 5 feet, Improve bike facilities;
  - Loading hours;
  - Resolve with staff Crystal Drive cross-section (in particular, TC rep wanted this available for discussion at their January TC meeting).
- Public comments were:

- Barbara Selfridge wanted an update on the 22202 transportation study and make sure that a wider context beyond only this block is being considered by the staff and TC.
- Sheldon Johnson, President of Crystal Park Condominiums, encouraged any way to retain the Underground, as existing residents love it and it is a selling point for new residents.