

## **SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY**

### **SP #90 Crystal Square Retail**

#### **SPRC Meeting #2, November 20, 2017**

**Planning Commissioners in Attendance: Elizabeth Gearin (Chair), Steven Hughes, Nancy Iacomini, James Lantelme, James Schroll.**

---

### **MEETING AGENDA**

This was the second 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 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 first SPRC meeting in October, as well as changes made since then. After clarifying questions, the applicant then made a presentation on Architecture.

### **SPRC DISCUSSION**

#### **Clarifying Questions**

- Bill Ross of the Parks and Recreation Commission asked if there were public easements through the property, and the total square footage of open space on the property.
  - The developer responded that there are no public easements on the plaza level (the surface level above the Underground, but the public is permitted to walk through).
  - There is a total of 89,000 square feet of publicly accessible spaces/
- Nancy Iacomini asked if any green roofs were accessible to the public, and is there access to the street from the plaza level?
  - There will be a new path from the plaza level directly into to the Theater and to Crystal Drive next to the theater.
  - Green roofs are not publicly accessible. The green roof over the theater will not be visible to the street due to the height of the building. All others will be.
- Doris Ray of the Disability Advisory Commission asked about accessibility features. The current Underground has some non-accessible areas.
  - The applicant stated that they're removing an impassable area from the Underground during renovation. The plaza level north-south path cannot be made accessible at its northern end, but the new connection through the plaza

level to Crystal Drive will be accessible., There will also be new elevator from the garage to the grocery.

- Elizabeth Gearin asked if staff has an opinion on the widened apron at the loading bay on 15<sup>th</sup> street. Also, asked if potted trees can survive?
  - Staff only received revised drawings just before the meeting, and will be able to answer when transportation is discussed at the next SPRC.
  - Applicant answered that the potted trees are about 4 feet in diameter., which is enough. The pots are necessary because the garage is directly underneath.
- James Schroll asked to walk through the arcades in the Underground and how the public moves through.
  - The applicant stated that there is a north/south service corridor that will be also be publicly accessible.
- Steven Hughes recommended that all the underground circulation not lead to dead-ends.

### **Architecture**

- James Lantelme recommended green walls on blank areas of the theater.
- Elizabeth Gearin requested the developer to explain the large blank area of the theater.
  - Taylor Lawch of JBG explained that the movie theater needs back of house areas that necessitated blank walls, which the applicant tried to set this area well back to not be visible from the street, but could be visible from upper elevations across the street or by tenants of the Crystal Square Apartments. The goal was to make this area as invisible as possible and draw they eye to the street façade, but they were open to suggestions for improvements.
- Nancy asked the applicant to explain the panels on the second story of the theater, and the nature of the vertical glass.
  - The material is metal, a brass/bronze color with some dimensions to have depth and cast shadows. The glass is glass block. The applicant passed around material samples.
- A statement that the theater back of house doesn't seem to relate to the front.
  - The applicant stated that was deliberate, but they could improve the transition on where they meet. The slide doesn't really show what the material samples can.
- James Schroll asked about the brick.
  - The brick is dark gray on the theater wall, a sample was passed around.
- Nancy Iacomini asked if the grocer was okay with the proposed muted color scheme for the grocery.
  - Yes, the grocer is okay with it.
- James Schroll asked if the theater wall was public art opportunity? Was interested in hearing what the neighborhood residents had to say.
- Steven Hughes stated that the blank wall would be visible from the water park, and suggested that the applicant look at Arlington's surviving prewar theaters for ideas.
- Pamela Van Hine of the Pedestrian Advisory Committee suggested murals.

- Christer Ahl of Crystal City Civic Association stated that he initially thought of it as bunker-like, but didn't want it to be too busy. A mural or artwork may be too much the other way.
- Judy Freshman of Crystal City stated that public art might be more appropriate for the latter phases of the project, such as in the Metro Plaza on 18<sup>th</sup> street, where they would like something to be a landmark or focal point. Perhaps the wall could be improved not by murals or art but more interesting texturing.
- Natasha Atkins of Aurora Highland Civic Association stated that she liked the Art Deco inspired design, and the blank gray all need not necessarily be boring (IM Pei's design for the National Gallery east wing).
- Nancy Iacomini stated that the era the architect was referencing was more colorful than what is presented, right now the design is more restrained than the actual historical style. It would be good to give Crystal City some color and some areas that really stand out. Since the applicant owns much of Crystal City they can be strategic about making areas that really stand out, and this one should be. You can push the envelope a little further.
- Stacy \_\_\_ asked the applicant what made them go for this style? And what happens on the ground floor of the theater along the street.
  - The applicant replied that they wanted a touch of "elegance" to Crystal City for the theater and that the other retail be more muted and "comfortable". The Art Deco time period for the theater was a vision of JBGSmith. The theater will have a small entry lobby on the street level, the main lobby will be upstairs. The rest of the street level will be other retail tenants and will meet the transparency requirements.
- Bill Ross agreed with Nancy Iacomini's comments and asked what the building would look like from the south? The only side the applicant didn't provide a very good view of.
  - Applicant state the 1770 building and parking garage entrance will be between, but there will not be much opportunity from the person or driver on the street to see the south side.
- James Schroll suggested adding a darker colored brick to the color palette for contrast.
- Doris Ray stated that use Shakespeare Theater in DC as an example where the public street and the lobby seem seamless.
- The County's Urban design staff were asked their opinion.
  - Brett Wallace stated that he felt they could go a little further as well; the landscape design looks good; wanted to see how phase 2 of the project (the renovation of 1770 Crystal Drive and plaza) would fit in.
  - Kris Krider stated that the grocery store doesn't relate to the existing building. Wanted the north/south path at plaza level to be softened, and the blank wall facing that improved as well.
- Evelio Rubiella of the Urban Forestry Commission asked if the new plants were native?
  - Applicant replied they would be native and low-water and animal tolerant.
- Judy Freshman asked if the office building behind the grocer (1550 Crystal Drive) was being renovated?

- Applicant stated there are existing tenants which prevent renovation/reskinning at this time, but it is a long-term goal of JBGSmith.
- Stacy Myer asked for more renderings from the South and what the view would be from the Water Park.
- Pamela Van Hine also reiterated the grocer seems to clash with the beige office building.
- James Lantelme urged the applicant to ensure and to agree to transparency in the street frontage of the grocery store.
- Sheldon Johnson, a resident of Crystal City, urged the applicant to not have flashing lights on the theater. When would lights go off?
  - Applicant replied lights could go off after theater closes, but there are midnight showings at times.