

SITE PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

SP #448 1770 Crystal Drive

SPRC Meeting #2, February 28, 2018

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

MEETING AGENDA

This was the second Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) meeting for a proposed new site plan to convert an existing office building to a residential building (1770 Crystal Drive), and a site plan amendment for a public open space and a proposed two-story retail building.

The meeting began with introductions and a refresher on SPRC ground rules and procedure. The applicant then made a presentation that responded to comments and questions from the first SPRC on January 29, and made a presentation on new items such as transportation and the landscaping plan for the area immediately surrounding the 1770 Crystal Drive building.

Staff then stated that this evening's SPRC meeting would only consider the residential conversion portion of the property (1770 Crystal Drive), and not the public open space nor the two-story retail building, since the LRPC process would need to inform any discussion at SPRC. However, the SPRC could speak generally about the impact the open space and corner building would have on the proposed 1770 conversion, or vice versa.

SPRC DISCUSSION

Clarifying Questions

- Bill Ross asked if there was usable space at the penthouse, and was it partially outdoors?
 - The applicant stated that there was a swimming pool outdoors, on the south side of the penthouse, so the penthouse structure was flush against the north plane of the building.
- Members of the SPRC stated that the perceived blockiness of the penthouse may be a result of it not being centered on the roof, but off to one side to accommodate the pool, so that the mass of the penthouse is in line with the north facade of the building.
- Bill Ross also asked, does LEED give credit for reuse of an existing building?
 - The applicant stated that LEED did have a sort of credit for building reuse, but it isn't well adapted to a project like this that is a reuse and addition, with some partial demolition. The office-style floor plate prevents a sunlight LEED credit for a residential building. They decided that instead of assuming in their LEED scorecard that they submitted with the application they could get a building rehab credit they left it off, but they would try to make the case to get the credit.

- Tom Korn asked if the sunlight to units on the second floor be blocked by the colonnade.
 - The applicant stated that the colonnade is about 30 feet high from the sidewalk to the underside so that the sun should still be able to reach the second story residential unit windows. All the units above the second level have terraces.
- Jane Siegel asked how would a potential retaining wall impact the building.
 - A retaining wall should not affect the ground level of 1770, but steps could be a possibility.
- Jane Siegel also asked if the rear yard of the 1770 building would be publicly accessible.
 - The applicant responded that that area would be accessible to the public, but not with a public access easement. It is not counted towards the public open space the Crystal City Sector Plan requires them to dedicate.
- Pamela Van Hine and others encouraged the applicant not to gate off the area.
 - The applicant stated they wanted to differentiate the public space with the “semi-public” space but they could look at other ways.
- Ted Saks stated that he liked that the penthouse was trying to have form follow function, but would suggest greenery as a must.
- Bill Ross asked the applicant to explain the partitions between the balconies, and if alternative designs were considered.
 - The applicant stated that most likely wouldn’t be seen from the public realm.
- Judy Freshman and Elizabeth Gearin stated that the north elevation looked much less graceful than the South elevation.
 - The applicant’s architect stated that, because of the viewpoint the north elevation took, it looked flatter than it would be, and the north elevation would be stepped and angled like the south elevation. However, the North side would not have the large notch that taken out the Southeast corner of the building.
- John asked why the choice to differentiate the color on the upper levels and penthouse rather than the green grid?
 - Applicant state that they considered that alternative, but in responding to the Sector Plan’s recommendations for differentiation of base, shaft, and top, that a differing color was the way to go.
- Tom Korn asked if the view of the monuments was the reason for placing the penthouse outdoor balcony where it was, and the resulting placement of the mechanical penthouse in line with the north façade.
 - The architect answered that that was indeed the reason, and that accommodating the uses on the rooftop that isn’t enough room to step in the north façade as much as the south.
- SPRC members stated that the presentation didn’t have a good view of the west façade.
 - The applicant replied they would bring one next time.
- Tom Korn encouraged a stronger top, perhaps stepped back a little more.
- Taylor Lawch from JBGSmith stated that they wanted warm colors, and that the green color would not fade.

- Elizabeth Gearin asked if the applicant would treat the undersides of the balconies, as staff suggested?
 - The applicant replied that the undersides would be clean concrete. They thought treating the undersides of the balconies would make the facade too busy and overemphasize horizontality rather than verticality.
- At this point the chair asked if the building met the spirit and intent of the architectural feature recommendations of this site in the Crystal City sector plan.
 - The SPRC unanimously agreed the building indeed provided the architectural feature called for this site.

Transportation

- Jon Hesilsey asked what the path was next to the north facade of the building.
 - The applicant stated that it was a passageway with a staircase from the level above, required for fire egress. They did not really want to encourage use of the space, but thought it was a good location for bike racks.
- There followed a discussion of the bike lanes along Crystal Drive. Bike lanes will be in both directions along Crystal Drive, just like Phase I.
- Pam van Hine asked if there was a café zone under the columns.
 - The applicant stated that would be a preferred location. They will designate café zones on updated plans. The curb line is also being pushed out nine feet to create wider sidewalk.
- Tom Kornis stated that street trees should be denser than normal.
 - The applicant stated they will consult with the urban forester. The trees will be 6.5 feet from trunk to building column.
- Discussion by SPRC that trees should have sufficient space from the columns of the building, and about dog-proofing the street trees.
- The applicant stated that they will have improved parking signage, and would encourage users of the theater and grocer to use the Crystal Drive entrances, while residential tenants would come in on 18th Street.
- Staff told the SPRC that they recommended only one signalized mid-block crosswalk. It could shift a little south from its previous location.
- Natasha Atkins stated that should there be only one, it should be by the bike trail and VRE station.
- SPRC discussion of painting bike lanes due to the amount of traffic.
 - Staff stated that paint is a lot of maintenance and used just for turning movements or areas that otherwise need high visibility to drivers. Also, it would have to be a County project, not a thing we can request of a developer to maintain.
- Can the sidewalk on the east side of Crystal be improved?
 - The applicant stated that in the long term yes, but it is part of a different site plan and other owners involved than JBG Smith.

- Tom Korn asked about the coordinated Crystal City sign program. Also, stated that the jump elevator at the Waterview is hidden so little used, and that the jump elevator here should be visible, with signs.
 - JBGSmith replied that they would be continuing the coordinated signage and will be doing a refresh soon.
- Pam Van Hine asked about parking rates. Currently evening and weekends are free.
 - Taylor Lawch of JBGSmith stated that they do not think they will change in the short term, but may adjust based on demand, especially because of the movie theater.
- Judy Freshmen asked if there was no corner building, would the Metro entrances be adjusted?
 - The applicant stated that the design of the mezzanine meant that the stairs and the elevator would have to stay relative to each other, so they can't be moved independently.
- John Heisely briefly described the County's public art process. Each public art project has its own task force that includes public input.
- Jane Siegel asked if the applicant was considering art?
 - Taylor Lawch explained that it depended, they would like to do something in the plaza.
- Bill Braswell suggested that the residents of the building should be encouraged to integrate into the larger Crystal City community. New developments have so many amenities that residents may never see a need to join organizations or use public facilities.
- It was asked if a polling place could be provided, if needed.
 - The applicants stated they would work with the BID and Civic Associations.
- Van Hine asked if the 18th Street sidewalk would stay open under construction.
 - The applicant is working with staff on this.
- Elizabeth Gearin encouraged native trees and understory that supports habitat.
- Rob Mandle from the BID asked staff if there was unspent public art money for Crystal City, supports an additional crosswalk, and stated that adding street lanes would eat into open space.
- The Chair concluded the meeting with a wrap-up of items for follow-up:
 - Refine backyard design
 - Bring back material samples
 - Elevation of rear of building
 - Public elevators
 - Café zones
 - Consult with Urban Forester
 - Follow up on crosswalk issue and 18th Street
 - Staff to see if there is available public art funds.