



Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan

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Worksession #1: Open Space, Pedestrian Corridors, Retail Space and the Public Realm Meeting Summary November 12, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Faroll Hamer responded to several questions raised at recent meetings and in email communications.

- A Transportation Question and Answer fact sheet is available tonight which addresses specific questions posed by participants. More information will be available when we discuss transportation later in the process.
- A memorandum was handed out at the last meeting regarding the status of the Parker- Gray National Register nomination and additional copies are available tonight. The City is aggressively pursuing the nomination; the process is not in limbo. The process is taking the consultants longer than originally anticipated mainly because of the documentation required. Each of the 1600 buildings in the district requires a 5-10 page survey form. The City anticipates a community hearing in January and then State hearings later in the spring and/or summer, with approval by late summer or fall.
- The redevelopment of Andrew Adkins is definitely on the table and part of the planning discussion for the neighborhood.
- There is no question that money achieved by the redevelopment of James Bland will help defray the cost of the redevelopment of Glebe Park. When public housing sites are deconcentrated, replacement housing must be found. Some people in the neighborhood are asking that it be found outside of the neighborhood, and that is what is happening, in part, with the Glebe Park/James Bland arrangement. Sixty (60) replacement units for the redevelopment of James Bland will be located within the redeveloped Glebe Park. Glebe Park is proceeding first, on a faster track, because the buildings are in such poor condition.
- Significant money in the form of Affordable Housing Trust Fund contributions are typically part of a new development. For example, the Monarch contributed \$1 million; the Madison will contribute about \$750,000; and the Prescott made a contribution. We do not yet have decisions about where the money is to be spent and we should look at whether it could be used to help redevelop James Bland and other public housing blocks in the Braddock neighborhood.
- Numerous comments have been made to the effect that decisions have already been made about development at the Jaguar and Madison sites. This is not true. The Jaguar site requires rezoning, and nothing has been decided. At the Madison, the zoning is already in place, and the developers have been waiting a long time, but we have heard your comments and ideas over the last weeks, and we will try to incorporate them into the development plan.

- The question of access to the Braddock Metro on the west side of the station has been raised. It is not unusual to have a station with access on two sides. However, directly to the west of the Braddock Metro station and at a lower elevation are the CSX railroad tracks. Therefore, any access to the west would have to be by an escalator down from the west side of the Metro station and then via a tunnel under the CSX tracks. It would be just as easy for someone who lives west of the tracks to walk around the station as to take that difficult route, so a western entrance is not really feasible.

PLAN FRAMEWORK: PEDESTRIAN ROUTES, PARKS AND RETAIL SPACE

David Dixon spoke about the work of the charrette as beginning to build a framework for the eventual plan, and he indicated, later in the meeting, that a draft planning framework will be offered for consideration at the meeting on November 29th so that the community has a context for its discussions. Tonight's agenda concerns pedestrian routes, public parks and retail space, which are the core elements that should be reflected in any plan.

A question was raised about the appropriateness of the group and consultants considering new uses for the houses on North West Street, given that they are privately owned. Mr. Dixon explained that the context for those houses is definitely going to change. They are located between the Metro site and the Andrew Adkins site, both of which are slated to be redeveloped to some extent. The owners of the property do not have to agree; they are not being forced out. Planning for their properties however does create value for them. This is a community planning exercise and everything is owned by someone so it is fair to include those properties.

Each of the plans created by the five charrette groups is on display tonight and included in the hand out materials. Goody Clancy created two composite plans from those five group plans for discussion. They are not alternatives; rather, they show all of the elements from the five groups, but are condensed onto only two maps. David Dixon summarized the areas of agreement among the five maps, including:

- Priority streets for ***pedestrian connections*** should be Fayette, West, Wythe and Madison.
- There is strong support for ***public parks***, although a difference of opinion exists about where parks should be and how many there should be. Some people would like to see the entire 1.5 acre Metro site as a park. A good neighborhood park is one that belongs to and is primarily used by the neighborhood. In this case, the Metro is not the most central site in the neighborhood and is used by neighborhood people as well as others. It is also probably the single most economically valuable site in the neighborhood. Some people at the charrette expressed a preference for many smaller parks scattered throughout the neighborhood instead of a single large one. There are tradeoffs in either case.
- There is also agreement that there should be ***retail uses*** near the Metro to take advantage of foot traffic, but there were differences in the details. If Andrew Adkins redevelops, then there is an idea that there could be retail along both sides of Madison Street. With the development of the Madison site, retail is proposed on both Henry and Madison Streets. Heather Arnold stated her opinion that retail along all of Henry is not wise, but that there is room for some retail near the northern part of Henry Street within the study area. Another approach is

to build on the development of the Madison site by stretching retail along Madison toward the Metro and then on North West Street across from the Metro also. Several people also suggested retail space on the Metro site itself across from and relating to La Piazza and the existing Colecroft retail space. All of these ideas focus on the Metro and Andrew Adkins development sites.

- The **scale of buildings** along the streets was also an area of agreement. On Andrew Adkins, the buildings should be lower to the west and along Wythe Street. And people thought buildings should also step down if there is development on other blocks near the lower scale building within the Parker-Gray historic district.
- Several groups felt that there should be investment in the **Jefferson Houston Elementary School**.
- People were also in favor of retaining and providing assistance to **Queen Street** as a retail place to reinforce its unique character.
- And there was consensus about a **pedestrian bike path** from the Metro running north along the Metro tracks.

The biggest differences of opinion at the charrette were about the Metro site and the future of the Andrew Adkins site, although many people thought both should be considered together. Questions were raised about the houses along North West Street and what would become of them, and about the Andrew Adkins “super” block with several groups supportive of extending Payne Street through the Adkins site. These issues counted for much of the discussion at the charrette. There was also a difference of opinion about the land at 1261 Madison Street and whether the entire site should be retained as a park. There are some strong advocates for the site as open space; others questioned how expensive the land would be and whether this was where the neighborhood’s money should be spent. Finally, there were real differences about massing and how large buildings should be, for example on the Madison and Andrew Adkins sites.

In response to a question about the status of the development proposal for 1261 Madison Street, Engin Artemel, for the developer, explained that there is a proposal to develop part of the site and leave the remainder, the part near Madison Street, for open space. The developer is awaiting the outcome of this planning process.

Ms. Hamer responded to a question about Andrew Adkins and its realistic redevelopment potential. She stated that any redevelopment of the site was at least 10 years away. A planning horizon of 10-15 years is pretty typical, so it is appropriate for us to be considering the Adkins site at this point. She is not certain why EYA is not working on the site, but that fact should not stop our planning. Mr. Dixon explained that the ARHA sites have residents who live there and they should have a voice in the planning decisions about the public housing. The Adkins site is a hugely valuable site and its value will only grow. The money and pressure to redevelop it will be there, and it is important for the City to plan for its future now.

Concern was expressed by a citizen about the need for off- site locations for replacement housing for Adkins and the worry that there may be no land remaining in Alexandria if we wait for 10 or 15 years. Councilman Krupicka responded that staff and ARHA are looking for scattered sites around the City now, because Glebe Park requires

16 off site units, and James Bland will require additional units. While the City is not looking specifically for sites for Andrew Adkins replacement units right now, the City is aware of the need, and the question is definitely on its mind.

Mr. Dixon continued, by discussing those elements that contribute to a great park. One thing that makes a park good is to be surrounded on all four sides by streets, uses or buildings. People in a park designed with boundaries feel safe because there are eyes on the park. It is good if a park brings different types of people together. It also helps for a park to have a focus, something that people come there to see, such as a fountain. There is also a role for pocket, or smaller, parks, which can be hard (paved) or soft (green). It is good to have them located where there is retail of a special sort, such as a cafe, or some other use, with occupants and activity that can spill out into the park.

The Braddock participants value green edges on both sides of a sidewalk, which is not a value in all communities. Mr. Dixon showed slides of good and bad green areas near streets and sidewalks as well as a slide of North Fayette Street planted with street trees.

Mr. Dixon then discussed the use of an “aspect ratio” as a means of expressing the appropriate dimensions of buildings next to streets. If the ratio is 1:3 or 1:2, it means that the height of the building wall is either 1/3 or 1/2 the width of the street. There are great streets with very tall buildings on them and also great streets with one story buildings on them. In this community, people seem to like buildings that are not as tall as the street is wide. Probably a four story building, with lots of street trees, is the maximum height that this community would accept next to the street. On streets with retail, the neighborhood may want to go to the upper levels of the aspect ratio, which would be a 1:1 ratio. In order to achieve mixed use buildings, with residential over commercial uses, there may need to be more height. Good streets also need sidewalks wide enough to let activity actually spill out onto them, whether it is outdoor seating or just people walking. It can be difficult to locate retail uses adjacent to residential because of the service needs, noise and parking needed for the retail, but it can be done. The idea of two floors of residential over one floor of retail/commercial space is a good one that helps create a neighborhood street. A slide showed the potential redevelopment of North West Street with residential over commercial.

There was discussion of the need for at least general urban design guidelines about landscaping, materials, and detailing, and reference to the Potomac Yard design guidelines which focus on a pedestrian, human scale.

Speakers disagreed about the design of the Prescott development which mimics the townhouses in the area. There was a suggestion that any design guidelines for the area require that all new development be compatible with the existing contributing buildings in the neighborhood. There was also dissent on this point. Mr. Dixon explained that it is the context that is typically the most important element in design.

The participants in the worksession then divided into three groups for work at three tables. Discussions in each group focused on four topics: public parks, retail space, streetscape, and “edges,” or the size of buildings at the street. The results of the group work were reported as follows:

Group 1 (by Heath and Stewart)

- Parks: There should be several medium sized parks to create gathering places and identity and they should be diverse like the community.

- Retail: Wythe between the post office and the Metro would be a good place for retail uses. Also, we should create a hub around the intersection by the Metro.
- Streetscape: The priority is Wythe Street for retail and pedestrian corridor. Also, Fayette should have the north/south priority with a walking connection to Jaguar. There should also be gateways created at key locations, such as at Jefferson Houston and on Route 1 to announce that you are entering the neighborhood and a historic district.
- Edges: We really did not get far with this, although we started to talk about the difference between hard and soft, and the importance of hard for retail and soft for residential.

Group 2 (Salena and Bill)

- Parks: No consensus; some people wanted smaller parks linked together, for example along Fayette; others wanted large parks, but there was no decision about where. So, a combination of large and small. There was consensus that enclosed spaces such as at the Monarch are not good. Some did want large parks, but it was difficult for the group to picture where you could put a park.
- Pedestrian corridors: Concurred about walkways on Fayette, West, Madison and Wythe.
- Streetscape: Pedestrian lighting is important, with similar design of fixtures (such as the gas light replicas found elsewhere) along Wythe and Madison. Consistent streetscape design and at least sidewalk materials are important to link together different parts of the neighborhood, even if you cannot widen the sidewalks because there is no new development. It would be good to have transitions between the older developed areas and those where development will occur and you can widen the sidewalks. May need traffic calming to discourage new vehicular traffic and we should have setbacks from the road and crosswalks at intersections to encourage pedestrians.
- Retail: We came to no conclusions, but it should be vital and viable, and we need quality retail at the Metro if there is to be any.
- Metro: No consensus on open space or development or a combination of both. The business about tunneling under or building a tall bridge over the railroad tracks does not seem feasible.
- There should be some special demarcation to distinguish between the Parker-Gray area and the Metro area.

Group 3 (Katy and Herb)

- Parks: The group argued a lot, but did agree that whatever space is given as open space by a developer should be open, visible at street level, so the public feels it is a part of the community. Some people felt that, because the greatest density will be near the Metro, it may be that the open space should be there. Others supported a scattered, smaller open space, approach. Both groups agreed: the more the better.
- Retail: The question for us was how to make it work. Could it work on Henry St? Could it work on North West Street? or on Wythe Street across from Colecroft? What can be done with Braddock Place? Probably nothing because it is so poorly designed, although there is the suggestion of devoting some of that space for performance space or art space.
- Metro: The Metro could include retail and performance space as well. There was the real sense that an open space at the Metro should be unique; it should have a specialness that is different from any place else in the City. Bicycle facilities should be added at the Metro station, and in conjunction with the bike trail. There should be no tunnel at Metro. As to a tunnel effect created by a large

- building at the WMATA site next to another large building, that is a bad idea because it feels dangerous.
- Edges: We did not really get to the edge discussion (hard v. soft).

Participants then made a series of comments in reaction to the group reports:

There needs to be a Parker-Gray “look” that makes it distinctive.

There should be active use of public parks. Even if there is disagreement about whether park space should be large or small, they should all be public.

On pocket parks, the timing is important. When and where you create it will make a difference. It is important for a pocket park to be near retail or a restaurant, with activity so there are people involved and watching the park area. It is bad to have an out of the way pocket park without surveillance.

How much does all this cost? Could there be an Open Space Fund to which developers contribute with the money spent within the Braddock neighborhood?

We need to see the Metro when we are walking toward it, or at least have pedestrian scale signs pointing to it.

Open space sites can also be considered for replacement housing for public housing residents. Each piece of property can be considered for several different uses.

Technically, the affordable housing funding that developers make is voluntary. Without a change in policy at the Council level, the money cannot be diverted to other purposes.

The Eisenhower East plan included an Open Space Fund, which developers have to contribute to, in addition to affordable housing contributions.

Connie Ring, Vice Chair, ARHA, encouraged residents in public housing to participate. It may be appropriate to have a meeting with the residents, who want a good community and a safe one.

David Dixon stated that it is his job to consider all the sites within the neighborhood, isolate all the ones on which it is pretty certain there will be changes, including the public housing sites, and plan what is best for those sites. With the public housing sites, we need to consider the people who live there and make sure there is replacement housing. We need a plan that has balance in it.