

Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan
Work session #2
November 29, 2007

Introduction

Faroll Hamer began the evening by responding to a few recent questions and sharing some upcoming dates:

- The question of the route for the BRT between the Monroe Bridge and the Braddock Station has been discussed and there is a clear preference for the alternative that runs from Route 1 west on First Street and then south along the service road next to the Metro tracks. We are examining it and others in more detail to ensure that they work technically.
- The next meeting of this group will be on December 13, and the topic will be the redevelopment of public housing in the neighborhood.
- On December 4th, there is a work session at 6pm with the Planning Commission to update them on the work on the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan.
- The Madison development application will be heard at the Planning Commission hearing on December 4, and the staff report is now on the Web. Staff included in its recommendation several development conditions which respond to concerns voiced by the community. For example, there are conditions requiring that the developer contribute money for the purchase of open space in the neighborhood and for streetscape improvements. The money will be held in reserve in special funds for expenditures on improvements in the Braddock area. The developer is asking to discuss these conditions with us, and we will sit down and listen and potentially negotiate some changes with them. We would have done that before the report went out, but we ran out of time before Thanksgiving. If there is new language, we will let the community know.

Presentation of Draft Planning Framework by David Dixon and Sarah Woodworth

David Dixon explained that the evening would focus on two significant points involved in the planning for the Braddock Metro neighborhood. First, as originally talked about in September, the economics and demographics are changing and unlocking opportunities. The challenge is to manage those changes. Second, he will present an urban design framework for the community and, with the community's comments and reactions, work to refine the framework.

Changing Demographics

Mr. Dixon presented slides showing the change from 1950-2000 when 40% of the total housing dollars were spent on single family homes to the current and future interest by baby boomers and younger buyers in neighborhoods like Braddock. These two groups have converged to create the beginning of what is predicted to be a sustained demand, despite the current recession. Causes of this trend include traffic congestion and the value of shorter commutes and transit, and the purchasing power of single men and women and non-traditional households. Green technology, walking and alternative modes of transportation are additional factors that add to the desirability of living close to cities. Washington D.C. is gaining jobs faster than anywhere in the country because its population is educated, there is Metro, and it is a good city for walkers. All of these factors set the stage for a fundamental realignment of real estate values: there is now

as much as a 40% premium on rents for office, residential and retail uses, in mixed use walkable areas – in both suburbs, such as Reston, and in downtown Washington, D.C.

Plan Framework

The charrette and the meetings to date have generated a pretty clear mission for the consultants, as the community has voiced a common sense of aspirations.

Community Principles

The community's principles, once more:

- Sense of place and unique neighborhood identity;
- community-serving open space;
- community-serving retail;
- a walkable and safe neighborhood;
- public housing transformed into mixed income housing;
- a community that celebrates its history and diversity;
- managed traffic and parking; and
- buildings that enhance the community character.

Using these principles, key things that the plan should accomplish, or strategies to achieve, the principles can be articulated as :

- A more visible sense of neighborhood identity;
- Transformation of public housing into mixed income housing;
- A great neighborhood park
- ..and a network of inviting walkable streets;
- One or more neighborhood lively, walkable, "neighborhood squares;"
- Celebration of the neighborhood's history and contemporary diversity;
- ...and the presence of Metro.

The neighborhood *character* that is so important seems to be a community distinguished by:

- Walkable streets that are green – framed by trees and landscaped edges to buildings;
- Buildings scaled to respect historic character, sense of community, and walkable streets;
- A lively sense of diversity including race, incomes, ages, and lifestyles;
- Places that draw people together – retail "squares," parks, cultural activities; and
- Inviting access to Metro.

All of the above formulations are meaningless, however, unless there is a real strategy for achieving the principles, mission and character of the neighborhood. For example, a new major neighborhood park is very expensive (probably \$12-18 million), but worth doing.

With the above as a guide, Mr. Dixon showed the group a series of slides, demonstrating the elements of a plan framework for the neighborhood:

Gateways, Transitions and View Corridors

There is a series of gateways to the neighborhood, including the north end of Fayette and Route 1 which marks its northern entrance and another at the Metro at the

neighborhood's western edge. There is another type of gateway which is softer that occurs, for example, when you cross Washington Street from the east or Queen Street from the south. At these points, it is clear that you are entering a different and a special place. There are also view corridors, both up Fayette Street to the Washington Monument, and west on Madison and Wythe, allowing a view of the Metro. Each of these "gateway" locations needs to be marked with buildings, plantings, or whatever is doable and appropriate to the location.

Character Areas

The neighborhood is also composed of different "character" areas within it. There is the Parker-Gray historic district, with its smaller scale residential character. In addition, there is a Mid Neighborhood, or transitional, area that is L-shaped in the center of the neighborhood that separates Parker-Gray from the West Neighborhood Area, which surrounds the Metro and includes Colecroft, Andrew Adkins, Braddock Place, and the Paradigm developments and runs north to First Street and east to Fayette Street. To the north, the area above First Street is different again, and could be referred to as the Gateway Neighborhood Area. In deciding on uses, heights and building scale, the special character of each sub-neighborhood should be considered

Enhancing a Walkable Public Realm

There is a fair amount of agreement about what constitutes a walkable street and that Fayette is clearly one of the most important in the neighborhood. The plan will include design characteristics of good, walkable streets.

A Major New Neighborhood Park

The question is where the best place is in the neighborhood for a major new park that is one to two acres in size. There can be more than one in a neighborhood. For example, the Jaguar development includes a park for that area. The remainder of the neighborhood needs a significant park as well. There are four sites to consider, each with different positive and negative aspects. The community will be asked to discuss the tradeoffs tonight and report on its preference.

- Post Office site. This is the favorite of the consultants. It is over an acre in size. It is inviting and accessible. It has a central neighborhood location. It is surrounded by public streets, with a mix of housing and other uses facing the park. It would be best if the post office, or some active use, such as a cafe, stayed on the site, but without the distribution function. This is likely the most expensive of the options because of its high development potential. It is not easy to find a new location for mail distribution, but if it were achievable, it would provide the greatest benefit to the neighborhood.
- 1261 Madison Street. There are strong advocates for this site, but it is rather isolated, at a corner and behind other buildings. It is large, over an acre. It could be enhanced significantly if the city takes over the ground floor space in the Braddock Place office building. While expensive, it is probably the least expensive site of the four. And the timing is better than any of the other three sites. If the owner is willing to sell the property, this site is likely the most achievable of the four. Even if this site is developed, there should be part of the open space retained as a pocket park.

- Andrew Adkins (part of it). This property shares many of the attributes that the post office block does: it is more public, more centrally located. It would benefit from a small cafe. In relative terms it could be more expensive than the post office. Because the public housing redevelopment requires market units to make it economically feasible, it becomes less feasible with less land. Another factor here is that this site probably has the longest time frame. In summary, this is the most difficult and most challenging site.
- Metro site. Many people in the community are excited about the WMATA land as a public park and it is potentially larger than the other sites. It could be made open and inviting, and could be surrounded by public streets. But, it includes bus bays and significant number of people walking through it all the time. It is busy and more of a transit node than a gathering place for the neighborhood. It is not central at all; it is on the edge of the neighborhood. It is least like a neighborhood park of all of the candidates. Whatever happens here, there should be part of it retained as a park.

Retail and community culture.

The framework shows neighborhood (not regional) retail opportunities at the Metro and at the Madison development. The block across from the Madison, between Henry and Patrick, could be used for a larger retail or other use, such as a grocery store. The retail at the Monarch with the possibility of retail across the street from it on Henry would be considered secondary. In addition, Queen Street is a real opportunity for the neighborhood to retain retail space and at the same time celebrate the community's unique and diverse culture.

Height

A draft framework with the height of buildings along the major streets in the area has been put together. The approach was to determine first what the best height for the context is and, second, to ask whether that height provides a benefit economically. For context, the character of each street should determine the appropriate height. Where there are historic buildings and areas with lower heights, we need to respect that history and step down along both sides of the street. People seem to like the Prescott development, but not the Paradigm. Along most streets, the building "shoulders," or building face along the street, should be a maximum of four stories and often three stories. There are some places where 4-5 stories along the street make sense, especially where it is now industrial and the area lacks context.

Mr. Dixon presented maps with details of height along each of the major streets, and for each of the blocks where development is anticipated. Heights shown are higher going west and north in the neighborhood, and stay lower south and east, in the areas closer to Parker-Gray. In general, appropriate heights include:

- Parker-Gray: match predominant heights, primarily 2-3 stories.
- Braddock East: primarily mix of 3-4 stories.
- Mid neighborhood: primarily 3 stories along streets, and higher elements (up to 70-90' set back)
- Triangle: primarily 3-4 stories along Fayette Street, higher elements set back and within the site (70-120').
- West Neighborhood: primarily 3 stories along streets, higher elements (up to 70-90') set back, greater height on Metro site to achieve value.

There are two places in the neighborhood where greater heights are recommended in order to take advantage of unique opportunities to create value: along the Metro tracks at Jaguar and Metro sites, and at Andrew Adkins to support redevelopment. There are only three places where our recommended heights would require a change in the zoning: at the Jaguar, Metro and Adkins sites.

Mr. Dixon asked that Sarah Woodworth, W-ZHA, talk about the possibility of the proposed development program supporting the plan framework's new park, enhanced streetscape, and support of retail and historic. Assuming those elements cost in the range of \$25-40 million, will the building plan proposed support it? Ms. Woodworth responded that it is possible. She analyzed the development proposal and assumed two development resources: 1. 20% of the increment in new tax dollars would be invested back into the neighborhood; and 2. that under the proffer system, some money, after the developer provides underground parking and utilities and other typical requirements, would be paid to support community benefits. She estimates that ultimate build-out as planned will represent \$1 billion in real estate value; that it will create approximately \$19 million in City taxes. If the neighborhood can capture 20% of the City's net new taxes for reinvestment into the neighborhood, new development could leverage \$40 million.

She also looked more locally at the block that contains both the Madison and Tony's Auto development potential sites as an example. She translated the heights and densities shown and determined that they represent together roughly \$200-250 million in value. In terms of proffers, she noted that the Madison project probably has little additional dollars available. She estimated that together the Madison and Tony's may be able to leverage \$1.5 million in proffers net of underground parking and utilities. (The Madison has already committed over \$700,000 towards affordable housing – which would come out of the \$1.5 million proffer potential.) If 20% of the increase in City tax revenue as a result of these two redevelopment projects could be captured in the study area, these taxes could leverage \$5 million. The total would be between \$5 and 6 million in community benefits.

Mr. Dixon pointed out that given the extremely high cost of underground parking, any spaces a developer does not have to build becomes money that could go into a park or other community fund. This should be looked at, for example, when Tony's property is considered.

At Jaguar and the neighboring sites on Route 1, there may be as much as \$10-15 million in community benefits. The proffers are hard to estimate because the site is so large and will get developed over such a long time period.

At Andrew Adkins, Ms. Woodworth explained that land value can be converted to support public housing and she estimates that \$13-16 million could be used for public housing redevelopment and that parking ratios could be lowered in this case. In the case of Adkins, the tradeoffs are easy to demonstrate. For example, what is being shown are row house scale edges with taller buildings in the center (up to 90') and, assuming a good design, these heights should work well for the neighborhood, especially if the block is broken up by an extension of Payne Street. If you did want a park on the eastern end of the site, then it could be done economically, but you would have to put a very tall tower on the remainder of Adkins as well as on the Metro site.

With this introduction to the issues of a major new park for the neighborhood and of heights of buildings, Mr. Dixon asked the three groups of citizens to consider two questions:

1. Which of the four park opportunities is your preference? There are good points regarding all of them. For example, the post office site works best for a community gathering site. The 1261 site may be the cheapest. Each group should decide on its first and second choice for a park site.
2. After discussing the proposed urban design framework, indicate the group's preferences regarding heights, using red dots to mark the places where it is concerned about height, and blue dots to indicate that the group likes the heights shown.

After working through these two exercises, each group reported on its decisions and rationale.

Group Discussions and Reports

Group 1 (Mark Freeman and Agnes Artemel reporting)

Park:

	First Choice	Second
1261 Madison	4	2
Metro	1	3
Post Office	11	4
Andrew Adkins		7

This group discussed both the opportunity and the feasibility of each park site, including its immediate and future potential. It was counseled to focus on its ideal, and not to be so concerned about what might not work. Based on this approach, its first choice for a new major park is the Post Office block. It is most central, especially to the new residents who will be populating this neighborhood. The second choice is the 1261 Madison Street site because it is the most immediately feasible. The group thought that there were benefits to the Andrew Adkins site also, in that it is central to the neighborhood, but did not choose it because it will take the longest time to achieve, 10-15 years. Other sites, such as Metro were interesting with buildings and a public plaza element. But the Post Office site had the most overwhelming support for a park. There should be some public space at the other sites also, because they provide benefit as public urban spaces and should be programmed.

Height:

The group had some difficulty separating out height as an urban design issue from the traffic they believe increased height will bring to this as well as other neighborhoods. They discussed the height at the Triangle/Gateway/Jaguar site as appropriate. They have some concern about traffic from the increased density there, but the traffic may not be as bad there as it may be elsewhere. Considerations included connectivity to the new bridge and Potomac Yard, the need for a street grid to disperse the traffic, and the reasonable walking distance to Metro. Density and height here may not affect other neighborhoods.

There was strong support for density at certain locations. Jaguar and Metro are good locations for height and density. There are community benefits to be gained from density and height at the Metro and Jaguar sites. There is a need for density to get community benefits, but the question is putting it where it belongs. Listen to the advice of the consultants...density supports tax dollars and allows retail market.

There was concern expressed about other parts of the residential community as a result of new development. Will increased population lead to more competition for parking in existing neighborhoods? What will happen to churchgoers in that case? Where will they park if there is more parking competition? These concerns lead to seeing the large sites away from existing residential areas, such as Jaguar and Metro, as appropriate for height.

There was a recognition by some in the group that height alone may not be the only consideration. Sidewalk widths and building faces are important to how a building appears from the street. In the end, it is design and architecture that are the real determiners of how appropriate a building is. Good architects can work wonders with heights. There was general agreement on the idea of the shoulder effect, for example along Henry and Fayette Streets. No one spoke against it.

Map dots:

A few red dots appear on Adkins. There are also red dots on Whitestone because site is too narrow to redevelop with varying heights. There are many blue dots on Metro and only one or two red ones. Blue dots are also in the center of the Madison (90') and Jaguar is all blue. There are two notes on the map about Jaguar: while there is no objection to density there, the group does not want a canyon effect; shoulders may solve this problem. Also because the Jaguar site creates a virtual cul de sac, it may have too much density.

Group 2 (Leslie Zupan and Patricia Schubert reporting)

Park:

	First Choice	Second
1261 Madison	0	0
Metro	0	9
Post Office	13	1
Andrew Adkins	5	7

The Park preference of the group was for the post office site. It is the largest and most centrally located. It would enhance Fayette Street and does not negatively impact other sites. There is the potential for better timing (available sooner) than at Adkins or the Metro. The group recognized the benefit with the other sites too. The Metro and Andrew Adkins sites were basically tied for second place. The Adkins site would help beautify the area, and there is a greater concentration of people there. The Metro has visibility and access to the station, but it is not a great place to sit down and relax. There are buses, the kiss and ride and all the people going to and from the Metro create too much activity. In addition, the site is less central and might encourage loitering. But Metro is a better gateway than 1261 Madison, and open space there could relate to future retail. Andrew Adkins has some value, but the post office site could likely be achieved sooner than Adkins.

In terms of design and uses, the future park should include significant green area, and include quiet uses for adults, not just for kids with play equipment. It should interface with retail.

Height:

The group agreed pretty much with the thoughts expressed by Group #1. The Jaguar property and Metro are gateway locations where height can be good. From both projects, height should transition down into our neighborhood, providing a softening and welcoming to the Parker Gray (PG) Historic District.

The map shows height on the post office site, but the group thinks it should not have tall buildings; it should be kept as a park. And there should not be height at the Whitestone garage block; it is too close to the PG neighborhood. Lowering heights from 60 to 30 feet is too steep on that narrow block. The red dots (see below) on the map at Metro mean that some people thought 120' was too high, but others thought 120' is okay, but the drop from 120 to 40 feet is too quick, too drastic. The group also supports lower heights at 1261 Madison.

The Jaguar height is fine and the heights in the mid blocks between Henry and Patrick Streets are fine.

Map Dots:

Jaguar: all blue. Also between Henry and Patrick: all blue. At Metro, mostly blue, with a few red. At Adkins: about half and half. On 1261: many red dots, with one blue. Then red dots on the Whitestone block at Fayette between Pendleton and Oronoco.

David Dixon commented at this point that he is struck by the variety of attitudes about the height on the Andrew Adkins site. This needs to be explored further because it is a really important issue both from a design standpoint, and because the redevelopment will need density to make it work economically.

Group 3 (Heath Wells and Lisa _____ reporting)

Park

	First Choice	Second	
1261 Madison:	4	2	=6
Metro	0	3	=3
Post Office	6	3	=9
Andrew Adkins	5	6	=11

(Note that this group tallied its votes differently from the others, combining first and second choices for a total for each site, instead of considering first and second choices each separately.)

The group's preference is for the Andrew Adkins site, although it recognized that 1261 Madison is the most readily available, if the owner will sell, and that the post office site is the largest with the best location. The group sees all of the sites as goals, and recommends that we need to work on all of them because one or another may not work. In addition, the group would like to see all of the park sites, or at least part of them, become public.

Height:

The group spent most of the time on questions and clarifications. It thought the height concentrated in Jaguar site is okay. There were mixed opinions about the height at the Metro site. At Adkins, the group thought the heights are just too high, and that the drop from 120 to 40 feet is too drastic. There was concern that the proposed heights will "encapsulate" or "enclose" the neighborhood, and one person expressed the concern that anything over 90' was out of scale with the neighborhood. The heights shown for Bland are okay.

At the Madison development site, there are red dots (see below) because the map shows 90'. But the developer is saying the proposed building heights are 77'. The smaller heights on the edges are great, but if you live close by, you will see the taller parts of the building.

Map Dots:

There are red dots at Adkins; mainly red at middle of Metro; blue on the 40' edge of Metro. Red dots were placed at the center of the Madison site and mixed red and blue on mid block of Tony's. Blue dots are at the Jaguar site and on the Whitestone block. Red dots are shown at 1261 Madison.