



Park and Recreation Commission
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 414
Arlington, Virginia 22201



December 12, 2022

Honorable Katie Cristol
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Parks and Recreation Commission Comments on Crystal Plaza 5

Dear Chair Cristol,

At its November meeting, the Park and Recreation Commission received a presentation on the park planning aspects of the Crystal Plaza 5 site located at 223 23rd Street and 2250 Crystal Drive. This project is now in the final stages of the public engagement process. Members of the PRC have participated in this process from the beginning of the engagement, including online surveys, the site walking tour, Site Plan Review Committee meetings, and commission presentations. This advisory letter presents our overall views and observations about the project, particularly about open/green spaces 10 & 11.

As a direct result of the impact Amazon HQ2 has had in South Arlington, the Crystal Plaza 5 project is a small but important part of our community's significant development. Situated at the center of the Crystal City neighborhood, the proposed green space that will come as part of the plan will provide immediate benefit to both residents of the area and individuals working within the many office buildings along Crystal Drive. Creating open, green space that is distinct and well-integrated into the surrounding environment is critical, as is the need to ensure these spaces are welcoming to all members of the community. Overall, the Members of the PRC believe that the Crystal Plaza 5 site design and its development team have risen to the occasion and accomplished such a goal.

Support for the design concept, engagement process & resulting site plan

Over the past six months, members of the PRC have participated in and taken note of the development team's willingness to listen to and integrate community member feedback and inputs into their overall design concept and plan. Members of the PRC note that the team's willingness to integrate community feedback as well as the number of features and characteristics of this project has contributed to our positive view of the current plan. The PRC highlights the following attributes that we believe contribute tremendous value to the site plan and proposed open/green space:

- Placing a high priority on the creation of flexible spaces and the interaction of spaces, as opposed to a design in which spaces are entirely dependent on, and consist of what is left over, after structures are built. This emphasis on how to best utilize negative space and flexibility components contributed to the creative opportunities for the entire site and provided a basis for architectural adjustments during the process.
- Incorporating biophilic design principles into the initial conceptualization of the project overall. This includes the arrangement and interconnection of spaces, the use of local ecological and historical references, the use of building materials, and the use of appropriate plants for the general locality but also the specific location in the landscape design.
- Giving attention to the content of the Public Spaces Master Plan and the Pentagon City Sector Plan and ensuring compatibility with key elements of those plans.
- Listening to and reception of public comments/ through online surveys, commission briefings, review committee meetings, and through other meetings and comments. Changes and adjustments were made to open/green space size and design, landscape features, and pedestrian pathways. These changes have improved the design and demonstrated the credibility of the team's receptivity to user perspectives on the project.

Request for additional engagement post-approval

Given the complexities of this project, and the anticipated changes that could affect these public/open spaces with the proposed future development of the WeWork Building that borders Site 10, the members of the PRC request additional engagement opportunities post-approval.

Overall, the attributes mentioned above are complemented by plans for sustainable infrastructure, and a flexible yet integrated environment. The development teams' proposals have high promise, and we believe the precedents they set through their engagement efforts show they share our expectations for achieving the desired results. Many critical components of development projects are not fully decided until after the Board decides to allow them to be approved. It is not unusual that some of these are not at all small details but have wide-reaching implications for the appearance and use of the projects as constructed. This is not a question of motives, but an acknowledgment that the level of detail commitment in plans as approved is not sufficient to construct most projects. For the PRC, this includes substantial landscaping elements and other features highly relevant to community members. The commission believes that this is an opportunity to continue in the spirit of full engagement to inspire ongoing confidence among public stakeholders and to allow additional, focused input while the team is finalizing the formal site plans.

Public space and population projections are not aligned

The Parks and Recreation Commission believes the current design plans for Crystal Plaza 5 provide commendable public/open space on site. However, as we stated during our letter to the County Board on March 29, 2022, the Commission maintains a strong interest in the overall availability of public spaces for Arlington residents. The County already has concerns regarding the availability and location of public spaces and parks throughout the community. These concerns and interests are expressed via the Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) enacted in 2019. It is important to note that while this project does provide the community with an additional 12,000 square feet of public/open space it would remain privately owned space. Therefore, would not be included in the PSMP's call for an average of 3 new acres per year of park space

over the ten years following enactment. However, it does provide great value for the neighborhood and will complement that goal. Parkland is our most endangered commodity. Soon after the PSMP was adopted, the County Board also adopted a resolution on Equity and a resolution on Biophilic Arlington. This triad of policy guidance represents an update to the concept of Smart Growth, which historically focused on transportation and development. For PRC, the availability of public spaces and public amenities is, more than ever, a top-tier issue for the county.

The ongoing redevelopment of Crystal City and the future of Arlington County are linked and can be mutually beneficial so long as all costs, challenges, and opportunities are included in our community's vision of that future. With that, as projects such as Crystal Plaza 5 move forward we must ensure the county's guiding plans and principles as mentioned above provide the direction forward. Our Commission looks forward to our ongoing partnership as the site plan's public green spaces are further developed and we take yet another step forward in realizing that vision.

Sincerely,



Shruti Kупpa
Chair – Park and Recreation Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation