
Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) of the Planning Commission
Meeting Summary
February 16, 2021, 7:00pm

This meeting was a virtual public meeting held through electronic communications means.

Planning Commissioners in attendance:

Elizabeth Gearin (Co-chair, LRPC)
James Schroll (Co-chair, LRPC)
Stephen Hughes
Jim Lantelme
Tenley Peterson
Leonardo Sarli
Jane Siegel
Sara Steinberger
Daniel Weir

Planning Commissioners absent:

Denyse "Nia" Bagley
Elizabeth Morton
Devanshi P. Patel

Representatives in attendance:

John Aiken, Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
Lisa Chavez, Clarendon-Courthouse Civic Association
Bill Gearhart, Lyon Village Citizens' Association
David Howell, Park and Recreation Commission (PRC)
Barnes Lawson, Representative of Adjacent Landowner on Block
Chris Slatt, Transportation Commission (TC)

Staff in attendance:

Angie de la Barrera – DES
Kellie Brown – CPHD, Planning
Lorin Farris – CPHD, Historic Preservation
Kris Krider – CPHD, Urban Design
Tim Murphy – CPHD, Planning
Margaret Rhodes – CPHD, Planning
Jennifer Smith – CPHD, Planning
Walter Gonzalez – DPR

Members of the public in attendance:

Brooke Alexander, Bernard Berne, Eddie Coates, John Dameron, Dan Glavin, Nancy Iacomini, Meghan Leahy, Oliver Lee, Benjamin Nichols, Dan Nicolaus, Casey Nolan, Scott Pedowitz, Josiah Stevenson, Kedrick Whitmore, Jeffrey Williams.

Courthouse West Special General Land Use Plan Study

LRPC Co-chair Elizabeth Gearin opened the meeting at 7:01 pm.

Commissioner Gearin recognized the members of several other Arlington County boards and commissions and civic leaders in attendance, as well as staff members. Commissioner Gearin reviewed the role of the Planning Commission and the LRPC and the background of the Special General Land Use Plan (GLUP) Study process.

Commissioner Gearin provided background information regarding the Courthouse West Special GLUP Study. Commissioner Gearin relayed that staff previously presented the initial Tier I Review of the applicant's request for a Special GLUP Study to the LRPC at a meeting in November 2019. Commissioner Gearin relayed that the 2019 meeting had low turnout from both the LRPC and the community, and that staff recommended conducting further study via a full Tier II Review. Commissioner Gearin relayed that the LRPC felt that a Tier II Review was warranted.

Commissioner Gearin provided that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to seek feedback from the LRPC for their thoughts on GLUP designations for future study during a Tier II Review.

Commissioner Gearin introduced Nancy Iacomini, a former Planning Commissioner and the LRPC Chair at the time of the November 2019 LRPC meeting, who provided a recap of the 2019 meeting.

Margaret Rhodes presented an overview of the Special GLUP Study process, the applicant's requested amendment, the subject site, contextual information, and relevant plan guidance. Tim Murphy presented information regarding the "High" Office-Apartment-Hotel (OAH) GLUP designation requested by the applicant, other mixed-use GLUP designations, and building height regulations applicable to properties in the surrounding context of the subject site.

John Dameron of CRC Companies, the applicant, provided an overview of the applicant's request for "High" OAH.

Margaret Rhodes presented staff conclusions, next steps, and discussion topics.

Once the staff presentation concluded, LRPC Co-chair James Schroll solicited comments and feedback from LRPC attendees.

The Commission members offered the following comments and raised several clarifying questions:

Comments related to staff's assessment of the existing plan guidance:

- Clarifying question about whether ground-floor retail is a permitted use in the zoning districts that are consistent with the "High" OAH, "Medium" OAH, "Low" OAH, and "High-Medium Residential Mixed-Use" mixed-use GLUP designations. Ground-floor retail is a permitted use in the consistent zoning districts.
- Comment recommending that staff consider the long-term vision of the site and what the site and the Rosslyn-Ballston (R-B) Corridor will look like in 30 years. The County's

demographic and housing projections envision the R-B Corridor accommodating an increase in population and dwelling units; the future land vision for this site will play a role in supporting this new growth.

- Comment suggesting that the land use vision for this site be considered in the context of a site located in the spine of the R-B Corridor, rather than thinking of the corridor as a series of urban villages centered around the Metro stations.
- Comment suggesting that the “High” OAH designation is located on sites in Rosslyn that are further from the Rosslyn Metro station than this site is from the Courthouse Metro station. If this site were designated “High” OAH, it could support a “bullseye” of “High” OAH around the Courthouse Metro station, provided sites to the east are also designated “High” OAH.
- Comment suggesting that the “peaks and valleys” referenced in Rosslyn Sector Plan process relate more to Rosslyn’s topography, rather than density and height along the R-B Corridor.
- Comment supporting the idea of a spine of development along the R-B Corridor, like Connecticut Avenue NW in Washington, D.C.
- Comment suggesting that the LRPC member has no problem with setting a precedent of considering greater density and height on this site that would support a spine approach vs. peaks and valleys of development along the R-B Corridor.
- Comment from the Clarendon-Courthouse Civic Association that the community is not afraid of redevelopment and greater density on this site, but the site raises questions about implications for the neighborhood and what community benefits (e.g., a second Metro station entrance) might be considered in return for greater density and height on the site.
- Comments commending staff for their presentation and suggesting that there are other sites within the County where greater height has been approved that stands out from the surrounding context.
- Comments commending staff for their presentation and suggesting that the site’s location in the spine of the R-B Corridor, rather than at the edge of the corridor next to low-density residential uses, supports further study of GLUP designations that are consistent with higher density and height. This site is one of the best possible locations for density in the spine; if plan guidance doesn’t support significant density on this site, then the County should seek to update that plan guidance.
- Comments commending staff’s presentation and pointing out that the newest plan guidance for this site, the Courthouse Sector Plan Addendum, was adopted in 1993, and is already several years old.
- Comment suggesting that this site should be viewed as a site that unifies the Courthouse and Clarendon Metro station areas, rather than a site at the edge of the Courthouse Metro station area. This site’s context as a nexus between the two areas is unique, so the site is unlikely to establish a precedent for future requests for greater density and height. Additional density is appropriate given the geographic context.

Comments related to elements that the LRPC would like to see studied:

- Clarifying question about permitted uses in the RA4.8 zoning district. Ground-floor retail and residential are two permitted uses of interest to the applicant; RA4.8 does not provide flexibility for office uses.

- Comment that it might be appropriate to consider a concurrent land use analysis with a site plan application and the Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) process.
- Comment suggesting that a future study incorporate massing studies that also examine the adjacent sites to the east and west of the subject site to help provide a contextual understanding.
- Clarifying question regarding whether the Courthouse Sector Plan and Clarendon Sector Plan included use mix guidance. The Courthouse Sector Plan did not provide detailed guidance related to use mix; the Clarendon Sector Plan, adopted in 2006, did include use mix information but does not address the subject site.
- Clarifying question regarding whether bonus density is permitted in the zoning districts consistent with “High” OAH, “Medium” OAH, “Low” OAH, and “High-Medium Residential Mixed-Use.” Yes, in the zoning districts consistent with these GLUP designations, uncapped bonus density can be requested and approved in return for community benefits.
- Comment suggesting support for further study of higher-density GLUP designations, such as “High” OAH and “High-Medium Residential Mixed-Use.” Interest in seeing a future study address transportation infrastructure, as the subject site is located approximately one-third of a mile from both the Clarendon and Courthouse Metro stations. Comment supporting having the study move forward.
- Comment regarding “Medium” OAH and the consistent C-O-2.5 zoning district. “Medium” OAH calculates residential density on a dwelling units per acre basis, rather than floor area ratio (FAR), which results in larger dwelling units with multiple bedrooms. If bonus density were granted under “Medium” OAH, then affordable dwelling units would be larger, family-sized dwelling units, serving a need for family-sized affordable homes.
- Clarifying question regarding why staff does not support the applicant’s interest of “High” OAH with a maximum height cap. Staff has not evaluated the applicant’s specific ideas for the subject site; staff has presented on the existing plan guidance and is seeking input from the LRPC on how to proceed with further study.
- Comment supporting studying increasing density overall, as well as the amount of residential development, in the neighborhood.
- Comment supporting a study that includes a wide variety of inputs and assumptions.
- Comment from the Lyon Village Citizens’ Association expressing concern about proposed height; in the context of the Clarendon and Courthouse Sector Plans, this site was envisioned to be less dense than areas closer to the Metro stations. Future study of the site should include consideration for transitioning from the neighborhood. A Metro tunnel may run underneath Clarendon Boulevard, which could have implications for underground parking on the subject site.

Public Comment

- The subject site is close to Metro; sees the provision of more housing on the site as a clear community benefit. Additional housing in the R-B Corridor will help support local businesses and Metro’s ridership recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; does not see limiting height on the site as a community benefit.

- The R-B Corridor needs additional open space, especially as more residential development increases the population in the corridor. Considering open space on the site, or the potential for closing an adjacent side street between Clarendon Boulevard and Wilson Boulevard, would be appropriate; this is the missing middle; the Civic Federation sees the need for open space and equity.
- Supportive of moving forward with a study of the subject site. Views housing as an appropriate future use. Don't let the inability of Courthouse Sector Plan documents written in 1981 and 1993 to envision the potential land use future in 2021 be a hindrance.
- Planning precedent has contributed to the housing crisis that faces Arlington today, with residents having to choose whether to grow their families or move out of the County; would like to see a study that results in the densest result possible.
- The question is more about what we should put forward to study. Agreement with need for residential; it is important to note that the density caps for the GLUP designations do not necessarily apply, as the applicant can request uncapped bonus density. Giving the applicant "High" OAH, would give them a huge increase in density without them having to earn it by providing community benefits. Scale is important and so is scaling the base. The applicants need to earn the density. The first step is to determine the right GLUP category, as opposed to jumping to the conclusion that "High" OAH with a height cap is the right approach.
- Agreement that no one envisions this site remaining zoned C-2, but that this was to be one of the lower areas in the R-B Corridor as part of the node concept; Washington, D.C. has the node concept, too; the Lyon Village neighborhood is "Low" Residential and half a block away, as opposed to two to three blocks away, as in other areas of the corridor, and there are townhouses directly adjacent to the site; the best approach is to taper up from the neighborhood; the neighborhood could see some additional density, but it would need to be carefully tapered; buffers are very important, as was the case with the hotel project in Courthouse on Wilson Boulevard.
- A Metro tunnel could limit a discussion about underground parking on the site. There is a need to think about the appropriate land use vision and GLUP designation for the site.

Commissioner Schroll adjourned the meeting close to 9:10 pm.