

---

**Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) of the Planning Commission**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**March 24, 2021, 7:00pm**

---

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

---

**Planning Commissioners in attendance:**

Elizabeth Gearin  
James Schroll (Chair, LRPC)  
Jim Lantelme  
Elizabeth Morton  
Leonardo Sarli  
Jane Siegel  
Sara Steinberger

**Planning Commissioners absent:**

Denyse "Nia" Bagley  
Stephen Hughes  
Devanshi P. Patel  
Tenley Peterson  
Daniel Weir

**Representatives in attendance:**

Christer Ahl, Crystal City Citizen Review Council (CCCRC)  
Arthur Fox, Arlington Ridge Civic Association  
Judy Freshman, Crystal City Civic Association  
Scott Miles, Aurora Highlands Civic Association  
Chris Slatt, Transportation Commission  
Pamela Van Hine, Pedestrian Advisory Committee

**Staff in attendance:**

Matt Mattauszek, CPHD – Planning  
Tim Murphy, CPHD – Planning  
Bridget Obikoya, DES  
Pablo Penades Lopez, CPHD – Planning  
Jennifer Smith, CPHD – Planning

**Crystal City Building Heights Study**

LRPC Chair James Schroll opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Commissioner Schroll recognized the members of several other Arlington County boards and commissions and civic leaders in attendance.

Commissioner Schroll provided that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to seek feedback from the LRPC on adopted Crystal City Sector Plan skyline guidance and five initial height scenarios

that conceptualize different approaches to how additional height might be considered in Crystal City.

Tim Murphy presented an overview of the Crystal City Building Heights Study's goals, process, and schedule; and an overview of the adopted Sector Plan guidance related to building height and the skyline. Tim Murphy presented an overview of the methodology used to develop five initial height scenarios, and Pablo Lopez presented staff's work to develop the five scenarios and three-dimensional modeling to illustrate how additional height might be potentially achieved through each scenario. Tim Murphy then presented discussion topics and next steps.

Once the staff presentation concluded, Commissioner Schroll solicited comments and feedback from LRPC attendees.

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

Clarifying Questions:

- Why is the study focusing on achieving a varied skyline; will the study examine how additional height could be a benefit to the community? Also, how did the County decide where additional height would be potentially allowed in each scenario? Building off the LRPC discussion at the February LRPC meeting regarding skyline guidance and the Sector Plan's form-driven approach to redevelopment, staff developed five conceptual height scenarios that illustrate how additional height could be allowed and influence the skyline in different ways.
- How will staff account for the use mix guidance in the Sector Plan? Staff intends to carry forward the assumptions about redevelopment that led to the development of the Sector Plan's Illustrative Concept Plan.

Comments related to Skyline Guidance:

- The creation of a regulation that reduces floor area ratio (FAR) above a certain height could help sculpt the building mass and influence the skyline. Instead of proscribing where "building setbacks" (commonly referred to as "step-backs") appear on the façade of the building, this requirement could help establish variation in FAR above a certain height, allowing for flexibility on the massing, while still leading to tapering of the massing.
- Comment that reducing the massing above a certain height is an interesting concept that could address the skyline; still finds it strange that staff is not starting the study with density.
- The adopted Sector Plan guidance focused on observing skyline and building height from the perspective of outside Crystal City; however, variation in height and massing is also something that can be felt within Crystal City. It would be appropriate to think about experiencing the skyline, building height, and massing from within Crystal City.
- Consider how the height scenarios can continue to support the existing Sector Plan guidance related to height tapering down toward the lower-density residential areas to the west of Crystal City. Consider whether decorative architectural features or spires might be exempt from the maximum building height calculation. Staff will consider

updates to the existing architectural features guidance, but there should be caution that the updates do not create overly-prescriptive requirements.

- Comment that the Sector Plan doesn't speak much to the skyline, and the architectural features are another area where additional guidance would be helpful.
- The Sector Plan considered the appropriate amount of density when it was drafted; this study should focus on considering only additional height.
- Consider what is meant by a varied skyline; generally, skylines are viewed from the outside, so consider views from inside Crystal City, views looking out of Crystal City, and views from the west. The London skyline and configuration near St. Paul's could help define a narrative for the study. Staff should consider developing prescriptive standards that then challenges architects to be more creative with their building designs.

#### Comments related to Scenario 1 – 25% Increase:

- Unsure what the goal is and how to compare the scenarios with one another.
- Staff's initial assessment of equity to property owners is interesting; the use of the term could be refined.
- There is some appeal to this scenario, as it provides property owners an equal opportunity for accessing additional height. Staff should consider adding specificity to the height scenarios, such as providing additional guidance regarding architectural features. If the desired outcome is enhanced community benefits, the scenarios may need to consider allowing additional density along with additional height.
- Unsure that a consideration should be whether a height scenario is equitable to property owners.
- A scenario that allows additional height of a certain percentage is appealing; otherwise, the study is spending a lot of time on which sites are eligible for additional height. Other types of guidance, such as building width or architectural features, could be more specific. In the end, it would be more desirable to have more neighbors than a slightly shorter building.
- Considering whether a height scenario is equitable to property owners may go against other elements of the Sector Plan.
- Moving forward, it could be helpful to understand which sites are not being included in the height scenarios and which of those sites might be ready for redevelopment.
- All the scenarios are generally similar, so it makes sense to go with Scenario 1, which is the simplest scenario. Unsure that the complexity of the other four scenarios provide more benefit than this scenario.

#### Comments related to Scenario 2 – Corridors:

- This scenario is a runner-up to Scenario 1 because the concept for additional height is simple; Scenarios 3 and 4 seem more complex.
- Livability 22202 has expressed a desire for more east-west connectivity, notably across Richmond Highway, and this scenario could enhance connectivity and potentially allow for increased transportation improvements along the corridors.

#### Comments related to Scenario 3 – Parks & Towers:

- It seems like this scenario would create additional open space, which has been a goal of Crystal City.

- Clarifying question whether the scenario is displaying enhanced open space or anticipated new open space that could be created via the scenario. The scenario explores adding new open space adjacent to planned open space envisioned in the Sector Plan.
- Consider opportunities to illustrate views within Crystal City by modeling views from new open spaces.
- This scenario could increase opportunities to have additional architectural features near open space; an issue with this scenario could be shade on these open spaces.
- Comments expressing support for the scenario and a desire for the creation of green open space through the scenario.

Comments related to Scenario 4 – Peaks & Valleys:

- This scenario has some potential due to the concept’s centrality and the potential impact that this scenario could have from the street level.

Comments related to Scenario 5 – Undulating Blocks:

- Adding the additional height within a block may result in a less dramatic change in height than other scenarios.
- This scenario could be a candidate to be combined with one of the other four scenarios.

Comments regarding whether any scenarios should be eliminated:

- Support for eliminating or modifying Scenario 1 – 25% Increase.

**Public Comment**

- There are opportunities for additional height on the Crystal Towers block. This block is adjacent to Metropolitan Park and the Regency block and is within walking distance to public transit.
- Comment expressing appreciation for using the plan view maps to illustrate the different height scenarios for discussion purposes, but during implementation, the maps should not be a final output of the study. Instead of maps, a more appropriate output would be a zoning text amendment that identifies a set of criteria for seeking additional height.
- Comment supporting Scenario 2 – Corridors and the concept of enhancing the pedestrian experience walking from Aurora Highlands or Pentagon City toward Crystal City. Comment that Scenario 3 – Parks & Towers, is attractive because of the potential for additional open space. Desire to see additional views from the ground and how people would experience them.
- The owner/representative of two properties west of Eads Street highlighted the existing height transitions in the western edge areas. The proposal for these sites is small, but the proposal probably would not be realized without some additional height.

-----

Commissioner Schroll adjourned the meeting close to 9:05 pm.