

Crystal City Citizen Review Council (CCCRC) Meeting
November 3, 2021
Meeting Summary
7:00-9:00 pm

CCCRC Attendees: Christer Ahl, Rob Mandle, Judy Freshman, Susan English, Pamela Van Hine, Michael Dowell, Darren Buck, Emily Norton, Patrick Philippi (substitute), Shruti Kuppa, Barbara Selfridge, Haley Norris, Harmar Thompson.

Staff: Matt Mattauszek, Margaret Rhodes, Pablo Lopez.

Members of the Public: Stratis Voutsas, Mary Voutsas, Georgia Voutsas, Todd Yeatts, Freddy Lutz.

Location: Virtual Meeting

23rd Street – Restaurant Row

Comments and questions included the following:

- The Chair, Christer Ahl, mentioned that during the Sector Plan process, 22nd Street was to be the boundary, but the County expanded the study area to include Restaurant Row and ended up drawing the boundary way in an odd way, mid-block.
- Rob Mandle of the National Landing BID indicated that 15 years ago the Sector Plan process began and 11 years ago the Sector Plan was adopted. Nothing much happened for 8 years, but now there are numerous projects in the pipeline. New destination centers are emerging and there is new energy in Potomac Yard. But what about the “sole soul” of Crystal City? Should 23rd Street be preserved or protected? We cannot do nothing. 23rd Street was highlighted as an asset and core destination in the Sector Plan. We need to have everyone agree that something needs to happen, because if we do not agree to this, we cannot ask the County to help.
- County staff member Matt Mattauszek provided an update on the Crystal City Building Heights Study.
- The Chair indicated that the group has to agree on the problem to solve. Parking is part of the issue.
- Georgia and Mary Voutsas indicated that the landowners on 23rd Street have felt left out of the process in the past and that they have had no voice. They want to keep the soul of the area without stymieing progress. The area could be expanded and could be more pedestrian friendly. The area needs to be safer with better street lighting. They would like to see a pocket park. Does the community want to preserve the architecture or see new architecture? The new BID mural will help to show the neighborhood that this area

is cared for. There is a need to fill the vacant spaces. Their trust developed an architectural model to show the potential expansion of the area. They own four houses on South Eads Street and 24th Street South. They would like to see a square that is a green, quiet and well-lit gathering area which can bring people together. There needs to be a zoning change and maybe the community can help achieve this instead of them spending the money on lawyers. Some easy improvements would be better lighting and crosswalk improvements.

- Mike Dowell of Aurora Highlands said that the fact that all of the restaurants here survived Covid is a testament to the neighborhood's affection for this area. The variety, human-scale and adjacency to the neighborhood are all appreciated. The neighborhood liked how the restaurants provided outdoor spaces during the pandemic. He would like to see connectivity to the neighborhood and the rest of Crystal City improved. Wayfinding and lighting are issues that need to be addressed. What are the next steps beyond preserve and protect? How is a vision to be developed?
- Stratis Voutsas said that the area should be preserved and protected. The patrons love the terraces. The human-scale should be kept. The crosswalks need to be improved. Restaurant Row needs more depth and infrastructure and should be expanded to 22nd and 24th Streets South. They would like to have a park on 22nd Street South and a small town square towards 24th Street South.
- Restaurateur Freddie Lutz said that the area has always been known as "historic Restaurant Row." He would like to see the area look more historic with perhaps cobblestones and Williamsburg-esque facades. He likes the village square concept that was previously mentioned.
- One member noted that there is tension with the heights study. If heights can go up to 60', then there will be significant development pressure on Restaurant Row.
- Another member said that 23rd Street almost feels like Del Ray. The restaurants are unique, not chain restaurants. It is important to keep the local, commercial feel. There needs to be better lighting, especially west along 23rd Street. The sidewalks are in poor condition. The area could be expanded and connected to and beyond Route 1. The streetscape is awful, not green and hot in summer. There need to be trees, shade, benches, scooter parking and on-street scooter and bicycle facilities. Due to the heavy bus traffic, 23rd Street cannot be closed, as is being done with some streets in Old Town.
- Mr. Voutsas indicated that he would like to see 23rd Street be a theme-park area with buildings that look like they are from Williamsburg with steeples of different heights.
- One member said that there is a mishmash of zoning in this area. There is a lot of speeding on 23rd Street because there are very few stops. The area is also not well lit and there is disparate ownership. Restaurant Row resembles Del Ray, but Del Ray has a corridor. If the area was rezoned from Ives or Hayes Streets to Route 1 there could be a really great corridor here. Del Ray expanded incrementally with churches, retail and resources. If this area was extended and walkability was improved with an integrated streetscape, 23rd Street could become more of a destination and would be strengthened by having a greater critical mass.

- Mr. Lutz said that 12 years ago an economic plan was developed, but unfortunately it is so hard to even get as much as a walkway. The intersection of 23rd Street and Route 1 is one of the worst and most dangerous in the County. Cars travel through this area at 45 mph. Just extending the sidewalks could be a significant improvement. Elected officials need to feel the pressure to make changes and should be invited on a walking tour of the area.
- One member agreed that a longer, low-scale retail corridor could be great.
- Another member said that she would like to see good transitions to the residential area and thinks that small, multifamily, Missing Middle residential development should be a part of this area. What can be done with the zoning?
- Staff member Mattauszek mentioned that the parking lot for Crystal Houses will be redeveloped at some point. What do you want to see protected here? Do you consider the businesses or the architectural features the historic element?
- One member said that there are several houses, perhaps 7 or more, that are owned by churches along 23rd Street.
- Another member asked what are the strengths and weaknesses of Restaurant Row?
- A member responded by saying that it is important not to lose the magic of the area. The area needs both County and community support, as it is one of the best amenities in the entire area. This area is authentic and has a human scale and serves as an amenity and connection to the single-family neighborhoods. The need for a length of retail is a good point and the Del Ray idea is insightful. The area could be up-zoned and then built out over time. It is also important to have a better parking plan. It is also important to preserve the historic elements and to protect the characterful elements.
- Another member said that there is a need to preserve and protect, but how? How can growth be managed? What are we trying to solve?
- One member said that this area has a wonderful, eclectic personality.
- The Chair concluded by saying that there is a need for preservation, protection and progress. He then announced that he will be stepping down as Chair after several years of service.