
Zoning Committee of the Planning Commission (ZOCO)

Meeting Summary

May 14, 2024, 7:00pm

Bozman Government Center

2100 Clarendon Boulevard

Conference Room 216

Arlington, VA 22201

Hybrid Meeting ([Click here for meeting recording](#))

Planning Commissioners in attendance (in-person):

- Karen Guevara
- James Lantelme
- Peter Robertson
- Leonardo Sarli (Chair, ZOCO)

Planning Commissioners absent:

- Denyse “Nia” Bagley
- Eric Berkey
- Devanshi P. Patel
- Tenley Peterson
- Tony Striner
- Sara Steinberger
- Daniel Weir

Staff in attendance:

- Anthony Fusarelli, Jr., AICP, Director, CPHD - Planning
 - Nick Rogers, AICP, CZA, Principal Planner, CPHD – Planning
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C-O Rosslyn: Provisions for Additional Density

ZOCO Chair Leonardo Sarli opened the meeting at 7:03pm.

Mr. Nick Rogers provided a presentation on the agenda item. Staff had been working on an analysis of the C-O Rosslyn zoning district’s maximum density provisions with a goal of developing recommendations for updates to the provisions that allow the County Board to approve additional density beyond the district’s maximum threshold of 10.0 floor area ratio (FAR).

Mr. Rogers shared a series of definitions for key terms that were used in the [staff memo](#) that accompanied the agenda item. He provided a summary of the history of the C-O Rosslyn zoning district, mentioning that it had been originally incorporated into the [Arlington County Zoning Ordinance \(ACZO\)](#) in 1996 to implement the [1992 Rosslyn Station Area Plan Addendum](#). To enable the 1992 Addendum’s vision for Rosslyn to become a first-class urban center, a new

zoning district was created to provide increased development opportunities similar to those available in the downtown District of Columbia office market at the time. The additional density of up to 10.0 FAR enabled with the C-O Rosslyn District was intended to facilitate the provision of community benefits by developers identified in the 1992 Addendum.

Mr. Rogers discussed amendments to the C-O Rosslyn district since its 1996 adoption. The first was in 2007 to permit an increase in maximum height from up to 300' to 490' above average site elevation for buildings within the area identified as the "Central Place" in the 1992 Addendum. The second amendment occurred in 2016 following the adoption of the [2015 Rosslyn Sector Plan](#). This amendment incorporated two options for the County Board to approve additional density beyond 10.0 FAR when the following public improvements were integrated into a development proposal:

- Significant capacity increases to the Metrorail system; and/or,
- New segments of 18th Street North

Mr. Rogers gave a general overview of how density is addressed and administered for Arlington's site plan review and approval processes. He explained that an individual project's maximum density is approved as a condition of the overall site plan project's approval by the County Board. Increases above this density are permitted through the developer's provision of community benefits meant to address adverse impacts and adopted planning policies.

Section 15.5.9 of the ACZO contains the regulations which permit additional density in site plan projects for most zoning districts. However, the additional density provisions for the C-O Rosslyn district are located within the district's own standards, superseding §15.5.9. Mr. Rogers clarified that C-O Rosslyn's additional density provisions were more narrowly tailored than those for other types of site plans as specified in §15.5.9, prohibiting any density above 10.0 FAR unless the applicant provided 1) new segments of 18th Street North, 2) infrastructure to significantly increase Metrorail capacity, or 3) a transfer of density from an alternative location.

Mr. Rogers discussed the forthcoming relocation of CoStar Group's headquarters from the District of Columbia to Rosslyn's Central Place Tower building. He mentioned the announcement made in February 2024 specifying that CoStar would request a site plan amendment to obtain sole use of the building's public observation deck and provide approximately \$13.9 million to be allocated to Gateway Park's reconstruction. He explained that the public observation deck was previously excluded from Central Place Tower's approved maximum density because it was provided as a community benefit in accordance with the 2015 Sector Plan. The conversion of public space to private space would add the gross floor area (GFA) of the public observation deck to Central Place Tower's maximum density that was approved by the County Board with the development's site plan approval.

Mr. Rogers discussed the objectives of staff's work on this zoning study, focusing both on the near-term implications of the CoStar economic development deal as well as the prospect of enabling smaller-scale adaptations of GFA in C-O Rosslyn-zoned buildings that would otherwise be prevented because of the 10.0 FAR density cap. He explained that staff has been approached by property owners in the past with proposals to make small-scale reconfigurations of ancillary spaces such as below-ground storage rooms, but that staff would advise the property owner to not pursue the application because it would result in the project's GFA exceeding the maximum 10.0 FAR cap.

Mr. Rogers discussed the study's considerations for gross parking area, which by ACZO definition is not calculated in a site plan's approved density for determining the project's maximum density. He mentioned that the conversion of parking spaces in the future that are unused due to changes in travel and transportation trends would be an opportunity for maximizing more of an existing building's GFA even if the addition to the building's approved density would result in an increase above 10.0 FAR. He noted that in any instance where density is being added to a project in C-O Rosslyn, such increases above 3.8 or 4.8 FAR, depending on use, would require the applicant to provide community benefits in accordance with the 2015 Rosslyn Sector Plan.

Mr. Rogers further explained that staff's scope for this study accounted for C-O Rosslyn site plans that had been previously approved and either fully completed, under construction, or approved but not yet started. He stated that new projects and redevelopment projects could continue to adhere to the C-O Rosslyn district's 10.0 FAR density maximum while incorporating segments of 18th Street North or significant Metrorail capacity improvements to earn density beyond 10.0 FAR in accordance with existing density provisions. Mr. Rogers mentioned that the study's scope did not consider amendments to the 2015 Rosslyn Sector Plan nor to the 10.0 FAR density cap itself, stating that these established policies and regulations would adequately continue to implement the adopted vision for the Sector Plan.

Mr. Rogers shared staff's engagement with community stakeholders to date, noting that stakeholders including property owners, resident groups, business improvement districts (BIDs), and appointed commissions had received email status updates on anticipated County Board actions to take place in July 2024 associated with the CoStar economic development deal. He mentioned that the study was tentatively scheduled to be presented to both the Planning Commission and the County Board with public hearings in July 2024.

Commissioner Sarli then facilitated ZOCO's discussion on the following topics:

- The application of provisions for increased density not just for Central Place Tower, but for other locations in Rosslyn such as the Ames Center redevelopment which, according to the Commissioner's recollections of the Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) process for that project, included structured parking that could potentially be converted at a later date to an alternative use;
- The Commissioners' general support for future conversions of surplus parking to alternative uses;
- The Commissioners' general support for excluding new site plans from the proposed density provisions, highlighting the need for future applicants to adhere to the Rosslyn Sector Plan's recommendations for new development to provide new segments of 18th Street North
- Understanding whether site plan amendments to utilize the proposed density provisions would be consider minor site plan amendments or major site plan amendments:
 - Mr. Rogers surmised that most, if not all, of future density increase requests would be administered as minor site plan amendments;
- Understanding that requests for additional density above 10.0 FAR would, under the proposed zoning language in the staff memo, need to be accommodated within the already established building envelope for an approved project, adding density but not mass;
- Clarifying that parking spaces in a subterranean garage would be considered *gross parking area* for purposes of zoning the same as parking spaces in an above-ground structure, with

Commissioners indicating a strong preference that property owners should prioritize above-ground parking first if they are considering a site plan amendment;

- The prospect of development applicants “gaming the system” by providing a surplus of parking spaces as part of an initial site plan approval, and then filing a site plan amendment at a later date to integrate the gross parking area into the building’s approved density:
 - Mr. Rogers explained that applicants have made similar approaches in the past, and that staff strongly discouraged such arrangements within a proposal’s building floorplates. He reiterated that the Rosslyn Sector Plan would continue to guide the form, use, and character of development in Rosslyn, and that Rosslyn has had more projects with above-ground parking approved compared to other areas of Arlington due to the higher elevation of bedrock near the ground plane which complicates the feasibility of excavation for below-grade parking; and,
- Understanding that community benefits are not specifically defined in the ACZO nor were they specified in the draft zoning text, instead clarifying that they applicant’s commitments are determined on a case-by-case basis through negotiations between staff and the applicant utilizing the Rosslyn Sector Plan as the guide.

Public Comments.

Commissioner Sarli invited members of the public in attendance to provide feedback and comment:

- *(virtual)* Mr. Nick Cumings, attorney with Walsh Colucci Lubeley & Walsh, predicted that above-grade parking would be the first area targeted for converting surplus parking spaces into residential or commercial uses if the Board were to adopt the amendment discussed during the meeting, and that below-grade parking would not be as attractive given that it was underground and not as accessible to light and air.
- *(virtual)* Mr. Joseph Ventrone, board member with the North Rosslyn Civic Association, (NRCA) appreciated CoStar’s \$13.9 million contribution to the redevelopment of Gateway Park that was mentioned in the presentation but expressed concerns with the loss of public access to Central Place Tower’s public observation deck for his neighborhood and for Arlington’s residents. He indicated that NRCA plans to propose a condition for the County Board to adopt that would require CoStar to provide public access for meeting space within the building for any nonprofit organization to use.
- *(in-person)* Ms. Alli Henry, Senior Community Planning Director with the Rosslyn Business Improvement District (BID) expressed appreciation for attending to observe ZOCO’s discussion and supported staff’s efforts to educate the broader public with the complex information surrounding the overall site plan process.

The ZOCO meeting was adjourned at 7:48pm.