

CRYSTAL CITY ON THE DRAWING BOARD

Arlington County, the Crystal City Planning Task Force, and their Planning Consultants for the Crystal City Planning Process, Torti Gallas and Partners, Inc., lead the Crystal City Charrette the week of Sunday December 3 through Thursday December 7 at the Crystal City Holiday Inn Main Conference Room. Over that week the Ballroom was transformed into a studio with architects, landscape architects and traffic planners all bent over reams of tracing paper, sketch after sketch pinned up on the walls showing alternative layouts for the redevelopment and revitalization of Crystal City over the next 20-40 years.

The goal of this open, weeklong “Charrette,” or collaborative design session was to develop conceptual Master Plan alternatives for Crystal City to be reviewed and critiqued by the public, County Staff and the Crystal City Planning Task Force in order to later develop a preferred Concept Plan and Policy Framework for the future of Crystal City.

feedback to the designers. Over the course of the week as many as 50 people in a day joined the Charrette team to look at and comment on design ideas and concepts as they progressed. The group of designers from various design disciplines worked in a complementary fashion to produce a set of drawings and diagrams that addressed all aspects of the urban design for Crystal City and a better set of alternatives was produced more efficiently because of this collaborative process with the Task Force, County, Stakeholders and community.

A primary feature of the Charrette is that it was specifically organized to encourage the participation of everyone who is interested in the making of a development, whether they represent the interests of the client, the regulators, or the general public.

The Torti Gallas Team, with the Landscape Architectural



Presentation of Preliminary Plans

A Charrette is the method of planning which has been adopted and developed by design teams to support inclusive planning. The term is derived from the French term for “little cart” and refers to the final intense work effort expended by architects to meet a project deadline. At the “Ecole de Beaux Arts” in Paris during the 19th century, proctors circulated with little carts to collect final drawings, and students would jump on the “charrette” to put finishing touches on their presentations minutes before the deadline.

For Crystal City, the Charrette provided a forum for ideas and it offered the unique advantage of giving immediate

The Torti Gallas Team, with the Landscape Architectural firm EDAW, and with help from DMJM Harris transit consultants, Kimley-Horn transportation consultants and Nelson Nygaard traffic consultants, lead the community through the Charrette process. Mostly working 12 to 17 hours a day, the team listened, discussed, drew and revised the alternative plans as they tried to zero in on a comprehensive vision for Crystal City. With County Staff, stakeholders and area residents often walking through the “studio” providing comments and insight. Many aspects of the plans often fell to the

wayside with the best parts kept for further discussion in the evening public presentations.

There were three formal public presentations over the course of the week. These presentations involved the use of PowerPoint slide presentations, three dimensional modeling, hand-drawn and computer rendered perspectives and plans, photographs of similar types of spaces and developments, and representative graphics from other project developments.

The first public meeting of the Charrette occurred Monday evening from 7:00pm to 9:00pm and consisted of a

presentation that discussed precedents and community making in general and introduced stakeholders and the public to the study area and the team. The time was also used to present “The Principles” that were generated by the Crystal City Task Force. (See “Design Principles”) Wants and needs of the community were discussed and debated and findings from preliminary research and analysis of Crystal City were presented. The open house occurred on Monday, December 4 and went from 7:00pm to 9:30pm at the Holiday Inn.

On Wednesday, December 6, 4 preliminary design schemes were presented to the community and stakeholders at 6:00pm, which exhibited alternative conceptual ideas for Crystal City. This second public meeting consisted of an open house with alternative concepts on the walls that lasted approximately 1 hour. This was followed by a formal brief presentation of the alternatives and then the team listened to feedback for approximately 2 1/2 more hours until 10:00pm. The input from the various stakeholders and community members was extremely helpful and enlightening. These comments were used to establish a refined set of alternative concepts.

The Charrette concluded at the end of the week on Thursday, December 7 at 7:00pm with a closing presentation of the Team’s findings and the four alternative concepts. (See “Design Alternatives). Detailed illustrations and 3-D modeling were used to illustrate concepts included in the alternatives. This presentation also included time for feedback from the more than 80 participants in the audience. (See “What We Heard”)

The Conceptual Plan for Crystal City will only be as good as the public participation in this process. Following the Charrette, the design team will work with the County Staff, the Task Force, and the public to refine the alternative schemes from 4 to 2. There will be additional community meetings for public input before the final concept is determined in the interim. Task Force meetings are also open for the public to observe. Please check the project website for more details at: <http://www.plancrystalcity.org>. The team will then work to develop the Preferred Concept Plan and Policy Framework guidelines.



Possible view down Crystal Drive with new retail to the right



Possible view up 23rd Street from Crystal Drive



Possible view of Metro Plaza



Possible view of park at the intersection of 20th and Clark



What We Have Heard

Good Things About Crystal City:

- *Is green*
- *Is transit oriented*
- *Has passive gardens*
- *Has good underground retail and passages*
- *Is a good place to live*
- *Is safe*
- *Has great diversity*
- *Will have North Tract Park and proposed connections to Roaches Run*

Concerns:

- *Respect needs of existing residents*
- *Preserve single family neighborhoods*
- *Traffic and congestion*
- *Preserve capacity of Route 1*
- *Plan for future transit capacity, integration, and density*
- *Save Water Park*
- *Save north Crystal Drive parks*
- *Save condo views and access to sunlight*
- *No retail in front of 1805 Crystal Drive*
- *Understand short term implementation (three years)*
- *Understand likelihood of Route 1 changes*

- *Understand incremental phasing*
- *Preserve underground and understand adjustments*
- *23rd Street first phase*
- *23rd Street and Route 1 – fix intersection and provide traffic calming on 23rd*
- *Flexible future footprints for buildings*
- *Tall building locations and height transitions*
- *Preserve green spaces*
- *No streets through to Aurora Highlands*
- *Parks for people of all ages*
- *Open space near Metro should be beautiful to be in and look at*
- *Bus transfer space is not public space*
- *Bus transfer space not on Crystal Drive*
- *Enhance bike and pedestrian trails*
- *Separate cars and people on Route 1*
- *Access to parking and shops from outside and from other neighborhoods*
- *Need better signage and way-finding, and short-term parking*
- *Too much connection across Route 1*
- *Protecting quality and character of small business owners and shops in underground*

What is Driving the Study:

- 1) *BRAC*
- 2) *Age of buildings*
- 3) *Few property owners*
- 4) *Community opportunity*

Crystal City Planning Process Design Principles

A. Making a Great Place For the People

1. *Create a High Quality Public Realm that Strengthens the Sense of Place with contained streets and public spaces that establish links and foster a sense of community.*
2. *Provide a Mix of Uses by balancing office, residential, retail, and civic uses; providing all elements of daily life and activity at all times of the day.*
3. *Relate Architecture to the Human Scale*
4. *Increase Connectivity*
5. *Incorporate Sustainability into all Urban and Architectural Design.*
6. *Define Several Neighborhoods with Identifiable Centers.*

7. *Create a Special Place at Metro and VRE.*
 8. *Preserve the Integrity of the Surrounding Single-Family Home Neighborhoods.*
 9. *Create a Universal Parking System that is Pro Short-Term and Easily Identifiable.*
- ### **B. Making the Economics Viable and Sustainable to Allow Getting it Done. For the Landowners, County, State, Gov.**
10. *Make Crystal City a Primary Economic Engine of Arlington County.*
 11. *Create an Implementation Strategy that Enables the Private Sector to Fund Public Improvements when Necessary.*
 12. *Help County Develop Expedited Approval Process.*



**Alternative 1:
“Minimal Scheme”**

This scheme proposes the least amount of change to Route 1 and provides a new 2 acre central park in the middle of Crystal City. Today there exists 12.1 acres of privately owned “public” open space in Crystal City. This alternative proposes 11.5 acres of new public open space. The key urban design elements represented in this scheme include:

1. Route 1 remains as is except that the off-ramps to Route 1 are tucked in tight to the freeway. The Clark/Bell overpass ramp is also removed.
2. The on and off-ramps to the Airport overpass are removed from the east side of Route 1 and a new on/off ramp is created along the eastern side of the Crystal City boundary facing the existing train tracks. This ramp is connected to a new 25th Street that links northbound Route 1 traffic to the airport. It also allows for more development opportunities along the east side of Route 1 and between the new ramp and Crystal Drive at the east side of Crystal City.
3. 23rd Street has the existing wide median removed so that the street becomes a retail street with new development on the north side of the street. A new retail plaza is also created on the north side of this street. To the west of Route 1, appropriate infill development at the gas station site and bank site help to bring a mixed-use character to the west side of Route 1. A garage is also suggested at the vacant parking lot site at Fern Street and 22 Street that can be lined with 4 stories of housing over retail facing 23rd Street.
4. Clark/Bell Street becomes a continuous street from the North Tract south to the Airport overpass and becomes the primary new Transit link through Crystal City.
5. A new 2+ acre park is created off of 20th Street providing a new green central space for Crystal City.
6. A public plaza is created at the corner of Crystal Drive and 18th Street surrounded by retail uses, a new civic auditorium and a new second entrance to the existing Metro stop.
7. Crystal Drive becomes a retail corridor



with infill retail development generated on the east side within the office building courtyards.

8. A new office complex is created at the eastern end of 18th Street which helps to frame the new Metro Plaza, frame the existing Water Park and provides a higher concentration of uses near Metro and the VRE stop.

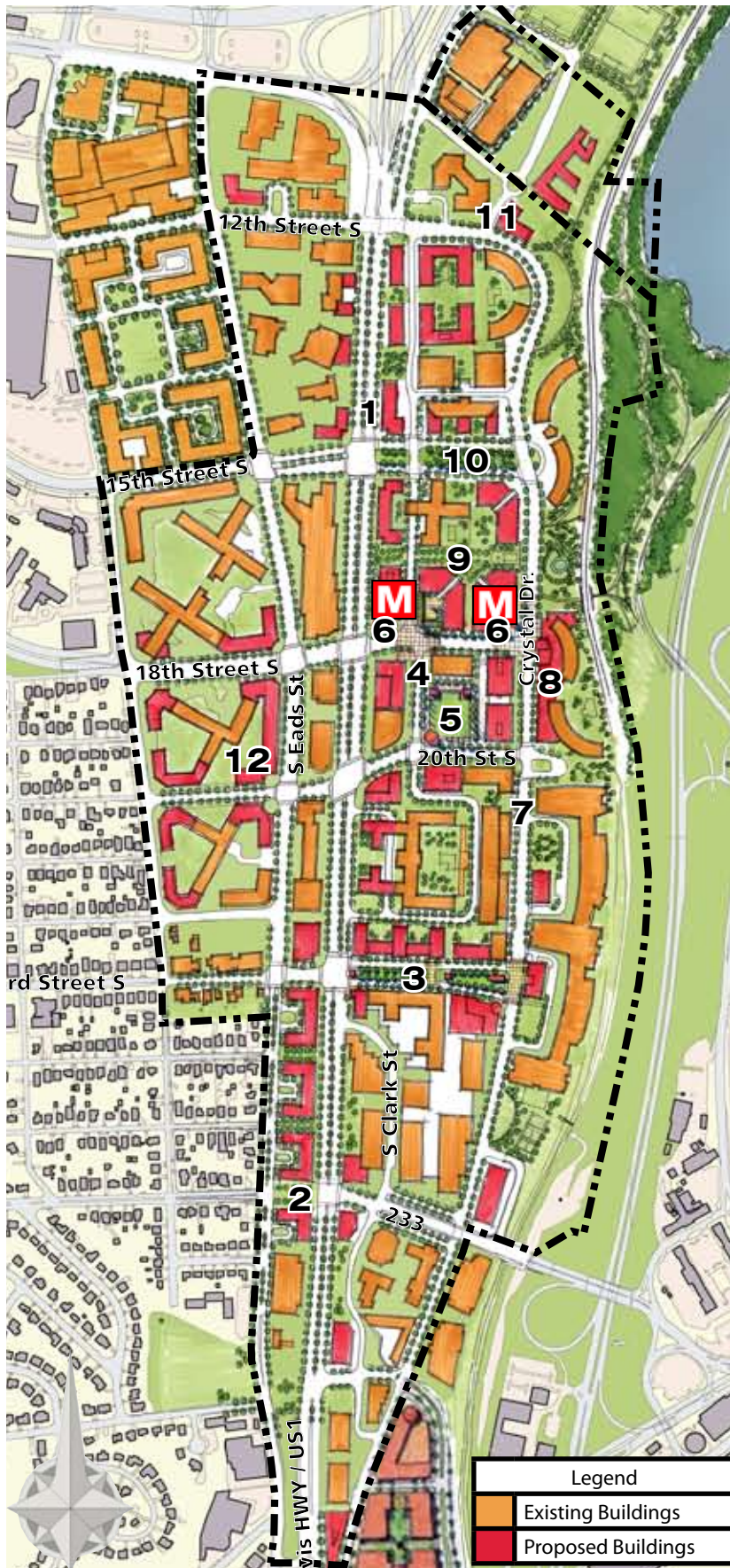
9. A connection between 10th Street and Crystal Drive is created to help link North Tract and Crystal City. A new low-rise residential building is also added at the corner of this new intersection to help frame the park entrance to the north.

10. New low-rise housing is created to the east of Crystal Drive between 15th and 12th Streets.

11. New housing with smaller blocks is suggested west of Route 1 between 23rd Street and 15th Street which will taper down from Eads Street to Fern Street. 20th Street also is extended through the block from Eads to Fern.



Possible new park the heart of downtown Crystal City



**Alternative 2:
“The Boulevard Scheme”**

This scheme provides the largest amount of new public open space of all the schemes. Today there exists 12.1 acres of privately owned “public” open space in Crystal City. This alternative proposes 16.9 acres of new public open space. The key urban design elements represented in this scheme include:

1. Route 1 is transformed into an at grade boulevard that has a physical separation from the east/west streets only at 12th Street. The new alignment allows for the local traffic and pedestrians to cross at grade along most of the boulevard and allows for new development to occur along the eastern side of Route 1 where all the former ramps were located. In this alternative, Route 1 becomes the center of Crystal City rather than a divider.
2. All airport ramps are removed, and the airport overpass is then linked directly at grade to Route 1. (Further review by the traffic consultants has determined that this alternative would fail.)
3. 23rd Street east of Route 1 is enhanced with the median widening towards Crystal Drive allowing for kiosk retail uses on the median and allowing the eastward traffic to face directly towards the entrance to the office tower to the east. A new civic auditorium building is placed at the corner of 23rd and Crystal Drive with a residential tower above.
4. In this alternative Clark/Bell becomes a continuous north/south street and new transit corridor from 12th Street to 20th Street. At 20th, transit would then shift to Crystal Drive going south.
5. A new 2+ acre park is created off of 20th Street providing a new green central space for Crystal City. This park also allows for a direct visual connection to the Route 1 at-grade Boulevard.
6. Public plazas are created at the corners of Crystal Drive and 18th Street, and at 18th and Clark/Bell, surrounded by retail uses and they provide new major entrances to the existing Metro stop.
7. Crystal Drive becomes a retail corridor with infill retail development generated on the

east side of Crystal within the office building courtyards.

8. New single story lobbies and retail uses are added onto the fronts of the residential buildings off of 20th Street at Crystal Drive in order to establish a better retail environment on this street.

9. A great park/passageway is created west of the Water Park that links this park to Route 1 to the west.

10. 15th Street is converted into a Parkway with a heavily landscaped, pedestrian oriented linear park in the middle of this street creating a transition to the residential uses to the north.

11. A direct link is established between 10th Street and Crystal Drive with a 4 story residential building built on the corner to help frame the street and create an edge to the landscaped park entrance.

12. To the west of Route 1, 20th Street is connected from Eads Street over to Fern Street and new residential infill is added to and around the existing residential structures.



View of possible park at 15th Street



View of Urban Park

**Alternative 3:
“The Partial Trench Scheme”**

This scheme is unique in that it offers a greater range of housing types into Crystal City and it proposes a great deal of development at the highest point of Crystal City at the northwest end. Today there exists 12.1 acres of privately owned “public” open space in Crystal City. This alternative proposes 11.1 acres of new public open space. The key urban design elements represented in this alternative include:

1. Route 1 is modified dramatically through the elimination of on and off-ramps at the airport overpass and the removal of the Clark/Bell overpass and frontage road along the freeway. Route 1 is at-grade from 18th Street going to the north with a landscaped median and extensive streetscape for an improved pedestrian experience. It then is trenched further north under 15th Street before linking back to Route 1 going over 12th Street. The new Route 1 would be designed as a boulevard. This trenching allows for a separation between the pedestrian and local traffic above with new buildings facing this local traffic, and the through traffic below.
2. The on and off ramps at the Airport connection are removed and replaced with a direct connection from the overpass to Route 1. As stated in Scheme 2, this alternative has been determined to be inadequate.
3. 23rd Street basically remains that same as it is today except the median is upgraded to allow for kiosk retail. New buildings with retail at the base are added to the north side of the street and the existing residential building to the south is replaced with buildings on each side of a new Clark/Bell cross street. West of Route 1 a small median is added to the retail street in order to help calm traffic.
4. Clark/Bell Street becomes a continuous street from the North Tract south to the Airport overpass. This street becomes the primary new transit link through the City.
5. A new 1.5 acre central park is added at mid-block between 20th and 18th Streets which opens out to the east and to the views of the airport and DC.
6. A new Metro/VRE “Grand Central



Station” with residential uses above is created at the former Water Park location with a large formal plaza and reflecting pools facing onto Crystal Drive. This becomes the urban focal point of Crystal City and will be the hub of all transit use and access by the different transit users. Across from the Station is an east/west pedestrian mews flanked on either side by low-rise residential development with higher density residential and office uses above.

7. South of the new mews is a new Galleria building with a large central atrium that becomes the retail focus of the area and has a direct link to the Metro Station.

8. The new slightly realigned 15th Street Boulevard would terminate into a traffic circle that is cradled within the curve of the adjacent residential building. This new circle creates a physical separation between the more office oriented area to the south and the residential area to the north. This break is heightened more by the parkway section used at Crystal Drive north of the circle.

9. Lining 15th Street a new residential building is proposed at the north side on land previously used for the Clark Street connection.

10. Crystal Drive is made into more of a retail street by adding single story retail liner buildings to the residential buildings on the east side. The courtyards of the office buildings are also filled with low-rise residential over retail buildings.

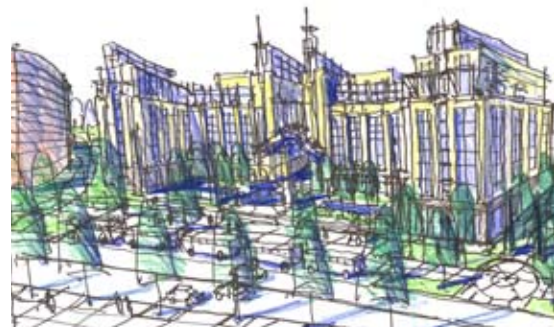
11. At the northern end of Crystal City, 10th Street is connected to Crystal Drive and low-rise residential development is added along Crystal Drive to help frame the street and to provide a very formal landscaped entrance to the North Tract Park.

12. At the northwest corner of Crystal City, west of Route 1, a group of high-rise office buildings are proposed Crystal City in order to establish a gateway entrance into Crystal City from Washington, DC and the north. These could be icon buildings seen from across the river from Washington, DC and beyond.

13. West of Route 1, 20th Street terminates into a new Park/Great lawn that is framed by residential development stepping down from Eads Street to Fern Street.

14. Along Fern Street between 22nd and 18th Streets are 4 small blocks with low-rise residential development on 3 of the blocks creating a buffer between the larger scale housing towards Eads and the single family houses west of Fern. One of these new small blocks becomes a new neighborhood park.

15. A garage is suggested at the vacant parking lot site at Fern Street and 22nd Street that can be lined with low-rise residential development over retail facing 23rd Street.



Possible VRE/ Metro station on Crystal Drive



**Alternative 4:
“The Crystal Circle Scheme”**

This scheme provides the most redevelopment of any of the alternatives and it creates a dramatic circular park at the center of Crystal City. Today there exists 12.1 acres of privately owned “public” open space in Crystal City. This alternative proposes 10 acres of new public open space. The key urban design elements suggested in this scheme include:

1. Through traffic for Route 1 is put into a continuous trench from just north of 15th Street all the way south past the airport ramp connections. The goal is to completely separate fast moving through traffic from local traffic and pedestrian activity. The 12th Street underpass would remain, but all other east/west streets would have continuous and uninterrupted bridge crossings above the new Route 1.
2. At 18th Street a new grand 1.5 acre circular park is proposed over the new Route 1. This new “Crystal Circle” park would be similar to DuPont Circle in Washington, DC. The uses adjacent to the circle would be intensified to allow for high-rise development to frame the circle. This park becomes the central focal point to Crystal City and truly tries to marry the east side to the west side with a spectacular park.
3. At the airport overpass location, the on and off-ramps would all be replaced with another smaller circle over the new Route 1 which provides an honorific gateway into Crystal City from the south and acknowledges the airport relationship to Crystal City.
4. In this alternative segments of Clark/Bell remain but most of the local traffic would be located on local frontage roads facing the new Route 1. The new transitway would be located on Crystal Drive where most of the retail and office uses are concentrated.
5. 23rd Street, east of Route 1, would remain the boulevard that it is today with additional office development over retail on the northern side of the street.
6. A public plaza is created at the corner of Crystal Drive and 18th Street surrounded by retail uses, a new civic auditorium and a new second entrance to the existing Metro stop.

7. South of 23rd Street a new 25th east/west street is created with a formal park at the terminus of the underground retail path.

8. Crystal Drive becomes a retail corridor with infill retail development generated on the east side of Crystal Drive within the office building courtyards. Single story retail uses and lobbies are also added to the residential buildings to allow for a better retail street frontage.

9. A new office complex is created at the eastern end of 18th Street, which helps to frame the new Metro Plaza, frame the existing Water Park and provides a higher concentration of uses near Metro and the VRE.

10. At the northern end of Crystal Drive a connection is made over to 10th Street which ties the new development into the existing fabric of the City. New low-rise residential buildings are added along Crystal Drive to frame the entrance into the North Tract.

11. New housing with smaller blocks is suggested west of Route 1 between 23rd Street and 15th Street which will taper down from Eads Street to Fern Street. 20th Street also is extended through the block from Eads to Fern.



View of possible new Crystal Circle