

**Crystal City Planning Process
County Board / Task Force Work Session Meeting Summary
June 9, 2008**

This is a summary of the meeting.

At this meeting, the Task Force presented their progress to date on the draft plan policy recommendations and the surface transitway alignment in preparation for a discussion of select issues. County Board members engaged the Task Force in discussion on these items, and were asked to provide guidance and/or direction on some key questions for consideration in areas where task force general agreement had not been reached.

Comments:

A. Meeting Opens

- County Board Chairman Tejada and Member Fisette make opening remarks on the overall purpose and objectives of this work session (also as a check-in opportunity), within the broader context of where we are and where we are going in the Crystal City Planning Process.

B. Background/Context

- A. Fusarelli provides background comments on process to date and sets the context for the discussion of the draft policies.

C. Overview of Plan's Draft Policy Recommendations

CCTF chair Marty Almquist provides introductory remarks and walks through the various categories that frame the policy framework. Vice-chair T. Savela adds that the policies begin to add more concrete tools and guides that can be used to achieve the plan.

D. Proposed Transitway Alignment Recommendation

Vice-chair T. Savela introduced the sub-group process employed to select a proposed alignment from six options. Qualifying criteria/assumptions were established by County staff in order to set the expectations for the system operations and performance.

- With assumption of dedicated ROW, sub-group agreed that Clark-Bell/Crystal Drive Couplet was preferred option, with desire for 26th St to be used as the ultimate cross-over street with redevelopment of Block Q.
- S. Del Giudice (DES) provided some context for staff evaluation and analysis, and noted that staff supported the couplet as well (concurred with sub-group). Noted that additional analysis is needed, but the couplet rose to the top as an option.
- It was noted that if shared ROW was an option, the Crystal Dr alignment was preferred by at least one of the sub-group members.
- Member Zimmerman asked why one of the assumptions was to have as much reserved ROW as possible. It was noted that the Couplet fit well because either Clark-Bell or Crystal Dr did not appear to have the capacity for 2 dedicated transit lanes and still serve as a "complete street".

- Member Zimmerman also noted that the transit system needs to be in place in order for redevelopment to occur. Therefore, couplet could only work if it incorporates redevelopment that is needed to achieve the route early on. The transit system cannot follow the redevelopment activity. The question may be a choice between the 2nd best transit alignment from an operational standpoint that can be done immediately, versus the 1st best alignment from operations that is less clear about how soon it may be implemented. How do we make this happen and which is the alignment that we put in place beginning in the next five years.
- Staff noted that in terms of phasing, the most difficult part appears to be Block M, between 23rd and 20th Street. The phasing for this block is anticipated to be completed between 2015-2020. The idea would be to run an interim service in the meantime, which would provide options to run things operationally in order to fit an alignment.
- Member Zimmerman noted that on Columbia Pike, we did not find a substantial difference in operations between shared or dedicated ROW. Has the same comparative analysis been done for Crystal City? We need a better understanding of what's the ideal versus what's the reality, recognizing that the system must connect through Crystal City to Pentagon City and Potomac Yard.
- Member Fisette asked if the Task Force thought about the timing and phasing of redevelopment and its relationship to implementation of the selected alignment.
- T. Savela noted the assumption was we could run rubber tire mode in the short-term (interim), until the fixed way can be implemented with redevelopment.
- It was noted that the analysis of all alignment options was based on the system being run with dedicated transit lanes.
- Member Fisette asked how the selection or Board endorsement of an alignment informs the plan.
- M. Almsquist noted that perhaps the identification of an alignment gets worked into the plan and acknowledges that transit is a priority.
- Member Zimmerman noted that if we think the plan can move forward on a system of busses, we are kidding ourselves, because the capacity and feasibility would not be feasible even for a short-term solution. Busses are not transformative and should not be an option for realization of the plan.
- Chairman Tejada noted that the couplet seems to be the preference, so long as we can find a way to make the technology work.
- Board discussion ensued as to whether a short term plan could evolve into a long-term plan, from rubber tire to light rail. Opinions varied on specifics, but it appeared that all agreed high quality transit is necessary to achieve the plan.

E. Discussion of Major Outstanding Issues

Land Use Policy

- Member Favola noted that she supports the proposed policy, and confirmed that the 60/40 is based on GFA. Noted that hotel inhabitants do contribute to vitality of neighborhood.
- The question was posed on what use mix best uses transit. While no exact mix was identified, it was noted that a balance between residential and commercial would allow for a fuller utilization of transit system.
- The plan provides a better balance than what's there now, with more of a relative increase in residential than office.

- C. Ahl noted that, particularly in light of the consensus to increase the residential population relatively more, the proposal to replace the apartment building at 1801 Crystal Dr with a huge office tower is undesirable, especially as the east side of Crystal Dr is currently the architecturally most pleasing and homogeneous part of Crystal City.
- Member Fisetete asked if more office to residential would improve transit utilization under the plan?
- Member Zimmerman noted that the ratio is an interesting figure, which appears to be 50/50 resident vs. employees. But is the ratio itself a key figure? Perhaps not. There is a certain urban density that is needed to support certain things; a critical mass is needed so the question should be, does the plan provide that critical mass? The nighttime population almost doubles, and it doesn't hurt to have the daytime population increase as well. There is some truth that the numbers themselves are more important than the ratios.
- T. Savela noted she believes more residents to office are critical to improve opportunities for residents to live close to work, which will help achieve greater sustainability goals.
- Board members generally opined they would like to see a slight increase in residential (a little bit more) with a decrease in office and commercial if feasible; perhaps the right ratio is 2/3 residential and hotel and 1/3 office; recognizing that we may be getting close to the maximum feasible amount of residential.

Underground Policy

- C. Ahl noted that early in the process, there was little appreciation for the underground; though with time it appeared that there was growing appreciation. The greatest concern right now is to ensure that there hasn't been a reneging on the previously perceived support for the underground conveyed at the last work session with the County Board.
- Member Fisetete asked if the perception was that there has been reduced emphasis on the underground, because the language does not appear to indicate that.
- M. Almquist noted that resident concerns are recognized. Most of the TF supports flexibility for the underground to adapt, but that it should be maintained in some form.
- Member Zimmerman noted that the language of the policy does not seem to preclude maintenance of the underground, and noted that qualified statements are reasonable.
- Member Hines supports T. Savela comments in the matrix, and believes that policy statements could be expanded upon in the diagram in some way.
- Chairman Tejada noted that flexibility is very important, and is comfortable with the stated level of flexibility.
- Member Fisetete confirmed the sense that the Board is okay with flexibility, so long as there is an acknowledged commitment to the underground; the points of agreement are as follows:
 - Underground should not prevent potential for new development
 - Underground should not diminish street retail
 - Underground priority is to extend reach of transit services
 - Multiple access points to the street should be encouraged
 - Interior retail should be targeted in strategic locations

Public Open Space Policy

- C. Ahl noted that there hasn't been agreement at the Task Force level as to whether the planned access and improvements to public spaces in Crystal City would be sufficiently balanced against impacts on existing parks, such as the Crystal Park Parks east of Crystal Dr. There also has not been agreement on assumptions about the proposed Center Park, how realistic it is, or what good would it do the community; The community objects to the proposed wide median strip in 15th Street and to the notion of having it considered and counted as usable open space.
- N. Sigmon suggested that Center Park is an issue for discussion, and that it has positive attributes in that it would be visible from portions of Jeff Davis Hwy and would have the ability to serve a wide array of the population.
- Member Fisette inquired as to the comment noting a lack of planned green space west of Jeff Davis Hwy. N. Sigmon stood by his comment, but noted his belief that a large center park on the east side would help increase total open space east of Jeff Davis Hwy. Member Mary Hines expressed concern about the open space on the west side of Jefferson Davis Highway, specifically having to go three or more blocks without any relief.
- Member Zimmerman noted that question should be, is this a good tradeoff for that? But in order to respond, information is needed on what happens phase by phase to achieve the planned open spaces. Not enough information is presented to know whether or not we can get better open space out of this plan. The space plan and its attainment are directly tied to what happens in the various phases of redevelopment. The policies need to indicate what happens in the short term, and what are the tradeoffs between various scenarios. The big question is how are we going to tie improvements to open space?
- Member Fisette noted that identifying what the ability is to achieve open space at what point in time is the more important question.
- Member Favola states she believe the plan needs to have sufficient open space, and she's not convinced the plan, its phasing, or location achieves that.
- Member Zimmerman stated he does not believe the plan is insufficient, since there is not enough information on strategy to determine if this is achievable.
- Member Fisette noted that more thought is needed on how does the Crystal Park infill result in a strategy for accomplishing open space elsewhere, by phase. It was noted that this is a financial discussion as much as it is an open space discussion.
- M. Bonanno commented on the context of the stated goals for more open space and more residential building program and how that relates to the overall economic viability of the plan. Additionally, he commented that the proposed Center Park is a \$100 million plus endeavor for the Board and community that would require the removal of an existing office building (with a County assessed value of approx. \$80 million); that would not happen for at least 10-15 years, and asked if this is the best use of such resources? Mr. Bonanno went on to comment that this plan has limited resources and that with items such as increasing residential/office mix and increasing open space we hit the boundary of this plan being financially feasible.
- Member Favola questioned whether perhaps green roofs should count as open space. Other members suggested that's a whole different question.
- Chairman Tejada noted he supports the large Center Park.

- Member Fisette suggested the park needs a strategy for achievement and timing, which needs to be thought through.
- Member Zimmerman opined that it's not the quantity of open space; quality matters too. But what matters most is having a strategy for open space to begin with.
- In terms of Center Park, Member Fisette suggested it should remain, Member Hines had no strong opinion, Member Zimmerman states something like this is needed in the plan, Member Favola would like to see option for how to achieve the open spaces shown in the plan. Chairman Tejada supports the large center park concept.
- M. Bonanno commented that commercial buildings can't have wide parks at their front doors and need road access for pickup, dropoff, taxis, etc., as the 15th Street open space reflects, and that the same must be provided between the 18th St open space and "G" Block buildings. He also noted his prior request for the "G" block buildings to be reconfigured to provide better phasing flexibility.
- A discussion on the 15th Street park ensued, and its dimensions were noted. Member Zimmerman suggested that our experience in Arlington with such space configurations has been negative. Could the park be shifted to the north side of 15th Street rather than being in the middle of the street?
- The Board generally commented that the 15th St Park feels like a median, and would like to see alternatives for locating the park on the north or south side of 15th St as an alternative.
- N. Sigmon noted that the proposed 15th St park is a very large space, compared to the Clarendon Metro park.
- Member Zimmerman commented on the Crystal Park Parks east of Crystal Dr. He noted that he would never support the infill proposals, such as those considered here, unless the community gets equal or better space in another location.
- Discussion ensued about the need to have a good plan for open space, but to have some flexibility built in but at the same time not to lose something on each park. The preferred strategy should be no net loss below the proposed 13.5 acres of parks and plazas in the plan.

Building Heights / Density/ Form Policy

- Early in the conversation it was noted that all of the proposed heights that are greater than what exists or is permitted today would need to be given clearance by the FAA.
- The conversation on flexibility in building heights was directed in a way where the majority of Board members suggested they do not believe the plan's building height recommendations should include built-in flexibility. The plan should state what the max. heights should be, and those should be adhered to. Some discussion questioned whether some heights could/should be reconsidered at a future point, since this is a 40 year plan?
- M. Bonanno noted that the plan may require additional height in select areas to provide an incentive for financially feasible development.
- While the discussion of heights on the east side of Crystal Drive was brought up, no clear direction was determined as part of the conversation. C. Ahl noted the concern that the FAA might not allow some of the plan's proposed building heights, that are critical to achieving the planned overall density.

Considering the probability that claims for ways of offsetting the lost density might then arise, the community requests that the Board on a future occasion provide guiding principles for such a possible situation. It was again noted that the FAA issue is a big unknown, and may require revisiting the heights subject again in the future.

Next-Steps

- Member Zimmerman raised the question about how and when the strategy for the transit alignment decision would be made; how is that going to be done. Would a specific work session with the Board on the transit alignment itself be helpful?
- Member Fisetta raised the question about the possibility of bringing forth an RTA on the draft policies in July. County staff suggested they will look at the calendar and assess the degree of revision necessary to move forward, and determine if an RTA is feasible for July or September instead.