

URBAN DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TO: **Old Town North Urban Design Advisory Committee**

SUBJECT: Minutes of October 7, 2015 Meeting

DATE: 16 October 2015

FINAL - revised

The Urban Design Advisory Committee met on Wednesday, October 7 at 9:00am at City Hall. The following members were in attendance at the meeting:

Stephen Kulinski
Marie McKenney Tavernini
Roger Waud
Bruce Machanic, co-chair
Daniel Straub, co-chair.

The following Staff, representatives for the Applicants, and citizen representatives were also in attendance:

Dirk Geratz	P&Z
Maya Contreras	P&Z
Michael Swidrak	P&Z
Stephanie Lundrum	AEDP
Cathy Puskar	Attorney at Law
Amy Friedlander	Attorney at Law
Krista Di Iaconi	Edens Development Group
Chris Harvey	Architect, Hord Coplan Macht
Mary Catherine Gibbs	Attorney at Law
John Rust	Architect, Rust Orling
Scott Fleming	Architect, Rust Orling
John Gosling	Art League

other community members and representatives were recognized but not registered

INTRODUCTION

- The meeting was called to order at 9:00am as a special meeting of UDAC. The purpose of the meeting was 1) to review the proposed conceptual design for the redevelopment of 530 First Street (the ABC/Giant property site), and 2) to review the proposed conceptual design for the redevelopment of the 800 North Washington Street (the Towne Motel property site).

NEW BUSINESS: PROJECT PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

- **530 First Street (The Giant/ABC block).** This site has been discussed as a potential opportunity for redevelopment in OTN for many years, and previous concept plans have been submitted for review. The current development team has obtained the rights for both the ABC liquor store and the Giant grocery store. The Applicant explained that they have conducted many outreach meetings with the community to solicit input and to explain how the current team works to develop a unified mixed use project that benefits the neighborhood and the community. No explanation of the zoning amendments or modifications to the planning regulations that are being requested with this submission was reported (or presented) to the committee; however, the Applicant's Project Narrative was very informative and explained the major intent and design goals of the project, i.e. to develop a mixed use project with a pedestrian-friendly streetscape and a "thoughtfully-designed, economically viable mixed use project ... that creates the neighborhood retail anchor" called for in the Small Area Plan. The design elements of the project that were presented include:
 - generous proposed streetscapes as defined by 16feet (12foot sidewalk and 4foot tree area) along both Montgomery Street and St Asaph Street (along with an additional proposed urban/pedestrian plaza at the corner of these streets), and by 12 feet (8foot sidewalk and 4foot tree area) along First Street and Pitt Street;
 - variations in the building elevations as defined by the proposed plaza along Montgomery Street and the passive green/open space streetscape strip along Pitt Street;

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- variations in the height (and rooflines) of the various portions of the proposed building as defined by the proposed higher building heights for the proposed retail corner along the corner of Montgomery and St Asaph Streets and the shorter building heights for the proposed townhouse units on Pitt Street;
- internalized vehicular access and truck loading with the main entry fronting on First Street and the main exit fronting on Pitt Street combined with underground vehicular parking;
- a building design that creates an efficient uniform building base/podium that houses the underground parking and ground floor uses, and that has three separate building blocks and private open space areas above the podium;
- an architectural style that emphasizes the mercantile character of Alexandria.

The chair requested to know whether this project is being submitted as a “by-right” project, or a DSUP with special requests. The Applicant indicated that they are requesting a master plan amendment (to CDD) and the following appears to be a partial summary of the proposed project:

	Existing	Proposed Concept Design
• Zoning	C-2 or CG	Master Plan amendment & re-zoning to CDD
• FAR		3.5 (includes the covered loading dock)
• Max Height	50 feet	77feet
• Retail		51,000sf (5,000sf for ABC))
• Residential		232 units above the retail base
• Parking: residential		483 spaces (underground)
• Parking: retail		0 dedicated (shared parking & provided off-site)
• Open Space		32,500sf+/- (including upper level terraces, or approximately 37% overall)

The chair opened the discussion for community comments:

- a community representative inquired how this project is compatible with the vision for OTN; whether the designers of this project are coordinating with the current efforts to update the Small Area Plan for OTN; and whether this project will provide for quality streetscapes.
- the chair followed-up on this question to reflect on the importance of quality streetscapes in OTN and the difficulty of implementing this goal (especially with respect to the recent results of other large scale projects that have uniform building elevations that face the street and that could be considered as being failed opportunities). Staff commented that the project review process is not complete at this time and is on-goin. The chair recused himself from the meeting at this point.

The rest of the committee made the following suggestions:

- the proposed FAR of 3.5 appears to be aggressive for this site;
- the building setback along St Asaph Street does not appear to be sufficient, especially with respect to the recent results of the Harris Teeter project; additional building setback, or other design solutions should be considered;
- the possibility of additional setbacks for the retail corners was brought up and the Applicant indicated that they are investigating this suggestion;
- the uniform building base/podium for the underground parking, ground floor uses, covered service area with three separate building blocks and private open space areas above is commendable;
- the variation of the height of the three building blocks is commendable;
- the modern design of the major building elevations with new materials and colors is commendable;
- the overall architectural style and rendering is attractive, but the project needs more articulation of the building façade at the pedestrian level and needs to make a stronger statement as it relates to the pedestrian level streetscape (respecting the need for the coordination of utilities and storm-water management);
- the design of the townhouse units along Pitt Street appears to be different from the package mailed to the committee; the design of the TH units needs more attention/refinement, i.e. the building volume and the scale, articulation and elevation needs to relate to the Watergate complex;
- there may be a potential trade-off of additional density on the southern portion of the building for better building articulation and refinement.
- the size of tenant spaces needs to be identified as the project proceeds.

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- **800 North Washington Street (The Towne Motel site).** This project proposes to replace the existing motel and surface parking lot with a new hotel served by underground parking. Since the project is on North Washington Street and is also subject to the Washington Street Standards, it has been reviewed by the BAR for conceptual mass and scale and for architectural design over the summer, and has been revised to reflect the BAR comments - the architectural design merits of the projects appear to be praiseworthy. However, since this project has not been reviewed by UDAC there are some unanswered questions about the scale and mass of the building; and more importantly, about the urban planning and site planning aspects of the project, i.e. the provision and adequacy of parking, the provision of service and loading (vehicular and service), and the character and quality of the proposed streetscape design along Washington Street. The Applicant's provision of elevation studies of the project with respect to Washington Street addresses the urban design scale issues of the project, but also indicates the need for the City to address the remaining northern portion of the streetscape on this block of Washington Street.

This project is being submitted as a "by-right" zoning project with the following criteria:

	Existing / Proposed
• Zoning	CDX
• FAR	not reported
• Max Height	50 feet
• Rooms	98
• Parking	69 required; reduction to 50 requested
• Open Space	not reported

The committee had the following comments:

- the proposed design of the northern hyphen of the original design was more in keeping and compatible with the revised concept design of the building;
- the right side of this hyphen seems to be too horizontal in its present form and needs restudy/refinement;
- the layout and design of the 5 foot wide side yard with respect to the balcony/courtyard on the south elevation needs to be clarified and refined;
- the addition of street trees and a more refined pedestrian streetscape on Washington Street is appropriate and commendable; the curb cut for one-way vehicular access is good;
- the articulation of the building façade is very good, especially as it has progressed through BAR reviews, and the use of the glass hyphen between the existing residence and the proposed new hotel is commendable. However, there are concerns with the potential program use of the space behind the glass hyphen that may affect the overall appearance of the building when it is constructed.

ADJOURNMENT

- The Committee adjourned at approximately 10:45am.