

Meeting Summary

LHA Planning Committee at LHA

March 29, 2018 - 6-8 pm

Member Attendees: Fatima Argun, Peter Bota, Bill Braswell, Ginger Brown, Sandi Chesrown, Michele Cornwell, Chris Gordon, Ralph Johnson, Scott Matties (Chair), Don Partlan, Richard Price, Robert Swennes (Lucia deCordre, Executive Director)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Attendees provided brief introductions.

2. Committee Structure Discussion

Comments from the Chair - Now is an opportune time for LHA to formalize a Planning Committee (PC). LHA anticipates the start of the Lee Highway Planning Initiative (LHPI) and is already encountering some redevelopment projects in the corridor. The Committee brings a more formalized structure as advisory to the LHA Board and the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) on planning issues and projects. Per the LHA Bylaws, the PC will rely on the expertise of its members to advise the LHA Board and work with all stakeholders on matters related to planning, zoning, development and public improvements that will help to achieve a more walkable, sustainable and attractive mixed-use corridor in accordance with the Lee Highway Alliance's Guiding Principles. The committee's credibility is vital, and members will need to consider conflict of interest issues that may come up and act accordingly.

Richard Price noted that integration of the PC with other LHA committees (such as the Transportation Committee) will be important as projects come in and as the LHPI gets underway.

Meetings & Frequency

The committee agreed to meet bimonthly, ahead of LHA Board meetings. (The LHA Board meets 5 times per annum.) Meetings were preferred on Wednesdays and will alternate between morning and evening meetings to accommodate members' availability. A calendar of proposed dates will be sent out by the Executive Director. It was agreed that, although regular meetings would be set, the meetings would be cancelled if there was no need to meet.

The next meeting will be in May.

3. Planning Updates & Discussion

a. Lee Highway Planning Initiative (LHPI)

A Request for Proposals from consultants was released by the County Community Planning Housing and Development Department (CPHD) in February. The deadline has recently been extended until April 12th due to the project's budget uncertainty. There is no further update on the budget for the LHPI or LHA. There will be a hearing on April 3 and the budget will be approved by the County Board on April 21.

If the LHPI budget is cut the County may suggest alternatives including planning of only two or three commercial nodes or expanding the planning effort into phases over a three-year period. Additionally, the Lee Highway corridor has gained the complexity of the Housing Conservation District policy - which was not part of the original scoping exercise.

It was noted that Columbia Pike's planning efforts separated planning of commercial nodes from residential areas, to lessen controversy.

b. Courembis Property

A large, nearly vacant, 2.7-acre residential parcel on Lee Highway, owned mostly by the late Mr. Courembis, has been passed to his heirs, who now need to sell the property. The property – half of it located in Waverly Hills and the other half in Cherrydale - is one of the largest developable sites in the corridor and currently has 5 vacant and dilapidated buildings (3 houses/2 sheds). The other owner and the heirs, represented by Barnes Lawson, have solicited proposals for the purchase. The most marketable and predominant use coming forward has been townhouse development of up to 50-60 units.

The Waverly Hills Civic Association has previously reviewed the parcel as part of their Neighborhood Conservation Plan, which includes an Aging in Place strategy and a need for community meeting space. In support of the LHA's Guiding Principles, LHA's President and Vice President have encouraged the property owner to consider senior housing rather than townhouse development to help meet LHA's Guiding Principles, and to reduce traffic and the need for more school space. They have met with Goodwin House, an upscale senior housing developer, who considered the parcel.

Artis Senior Living, which is a senior living provider with care ranging from independent to memory, is interested in purchasing the site. Jay Hicks is the lead for Artis and he lives in Cherrydale. The applicant has met with Ginger, Sandi and Lucia to discuss their initial ideas. It was agreed that before plans are solidified a community meeting will be held at LHA with the Cherrydale and Waverly Hills CAs to hear stakeholders' concerns and interests regarding land uses and density. LHA awaits confirmation of a community meeting on April 26 at 6:30 pm. The PC members will receive an invitation. LHA also suggested that the senior living facility be moved back on the site (density in the rear) and that Artis consider adding missing middle affordable units, perhaps dedicated to senior housing, at the front of the site along Old Lee Highway across from existing residential townhouses. Artis said they would consider it.

c. Virginial Hospital Center

The committee briefly discussed the Virginia Hospital expansion and the on-going debate with the surrounding neighborhoods about impacts from the new structures. Bill Braswell noted the importance of the hospital to the broader community and the concessions that they are currently making to change the design. Edith Gravely requested support for better design of the parking garage at the last LHA Board meeting.

A final SPRC meeting will be held in April, Chaired by Planning Commission member Nancy Iacomini. Ginger Brown will reach out to Nancy to better understand the issues being debated. After Ginger's report back, the PC will decide whether or not to express concern or support for the project.

d. Housing Conservation Districts (HCD)

The County has approved the designation of 6 HCD's in the Lee Highway corridor as part of Phase 1 of the study. Phase 2 is currently under-way and a Housing Conservation Districts Advisory Group (HCDAG) made up of various stakeholders, has been tasked to

work with staff on developing financial incentives to help preserve and add needed affordable units in the HCDs. Planning Committee members present, Ralph Johnson and Michele Horwitz Cornwell are part of that advisory group, as well as Michelle Winters. Ralph and Michele noted that County staff feels that the incentives they have currently identified will help benefit the property owners and will encourage additional units. Many property owners are concerned that the incentives are not sufficient.

As the LHPI goes forward, it will supersede the HCD. LHA has been gathering information on the hundreds of properties that comprise the 6 HCD clusters along Lee Highway in order to notify and provide information to the property owners.

e. 5009 Lee Highway Permits (adjacent to Federated Bakery)

The owner of 5009 Lee Highway is applying for County approval to convey two additional parking spaces from the parcel to the adjacent parcel at 5015 Lee Highway. A portion of the current building on 5009 will be demolished to make way for additional parking on that parcel. Federated Bakery has attempted to lease or sell their space for years without success due to inadequate parking. The Yorktown Civic Association sent an email to the staff with no objections to the application. The staff has not yet heard from the John M. Langston CA.

The committee agreed to recommend to the LHA CAC and Board that the Board send a response to the staff, similar to Yorktown's, with no objections to the application.

f. The Children's School (TCS)

This private day care facility, which provides day care for Arlington school teachers' children subsidized by Arlington Public Schools, has had to leave the Reed School at Westover due to school expansion. They have searched for a new and permanent site over the past two years. Brian Normile has agreed to lease them the Alpine Restaurant site on Lee Highway. TCS is proposing a by-right redevelopment and requesting a use permit for a 3-story day care facility with underground parking. The architects, Cox, Graae and Spack, an excellent firm in Georgetown, also designed their Westover facility. LHA held a community meeting with the GlebeWood Civic Association on March 1 to give stakeholders an opportunity to discuss issues. The primary issues identified at that meeting were traffic/backup on Lee Highway, especially during the morning peak period, the distance of the building from the street resulting in a narrow 9.5' sidewalk and no trees, the blank building wall adjacent to Bill's Garden Center, and the solid fence/wall at the rear of the site facing the GlebeWood neighborhood.

The PC discussed all of the above issues. One consideration was drop off in the underground garage rather than on the street level. However, this would be difficult since the drive-aisles are narrow, and parking is also for school staff. There is additional staff parking off site near McDonalds.

The committee discussed the proposed building setback of 9.5 feet, and the importance of increasing the building setback to at least 12 or 13 feet. It was noted that the standard is 14 feet in Cherrydale. Discussion ensued about the need for committee and LHA to consider a minimum setback on projects – and send a message to developers of upfront guidance.

The LHA Guiding Principles should be the standard by which proposals are evaluated. An open question was raised regarding how to apply the Principles. If a proposal fails on one of the principles but meets all the others, what should the recommendation be? This will be an important issue to manage going forward, especially in the context of setting precedents as a Committee.

The school project may not be able to sustain any loss of building space for larger setback due to the narrowness of the site and the required program. The ground floor is mostly driveway, bus, and car parking. Lighting at the ground floor should be closely analyzed by the architects since the site will be vacant in evenings and on weekends. The space would be quite dark to pedestrians. The opportunity for off hours use as a community space was also voiced. There was discussion of the critical need for day care and the merits of such contemporary, fresh design on Lee Highway.

The school is looking for LHA support for their Use Permit application. LHA and GlebeWood have arranged for another community meeting at LHA on May 1 at 6:30 pm. A list of community concerns went to BKK, the applicant's land use attorney, to address at the May 1 meeting. They include:

1. traffic - access and curb cuts
2. building set back and design - location, materials, solid wall to Bill's & opportunity for murals, and alley/openings (split zoned R&C determination by Zoning Administrator)
3. sidewalk width & streetscaping
4. utilities undergrounding of two poles
5. trash location and collection
6. lighting and signage design
7. community pedestrian access through site to Lee (bus stop & shops)
8. use of facilities for community meetings or events, perhaps three to four times annually,
9. schedule of public approvals and construction

Additional items include details on the green /planter space and stormwater area - will there be room for permanent trees?

The PC will participate in the May 1 meeting and afterwards put forward recommendation to the LHA Board and CAC.

g. Other Sites

The Little Ambassadors project was mentioned regarding traffic concerns related to McKinley street residents and the 7-11 development on the Lee Lex site.

4. Placemaker of Year Award Idea

As a preliminary idea, Sandi recommended that the LHA PC, CAC, and Board consider awarding a Placemaker of the Year Award to future visionary developers. This will be further developed and discussed at future meetings

Adjournment 7:57