

City of Alexandria

Old Town North

Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)

June 2024 Meeting Notes

[DRAFT]

Wednesday, June 12 at 9:00 a.m.

Hybrid: City Hall, Room 2000 and via Zoom

Recording Link:

https://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=29&clip_id=6287

Committee Members in Attendance

Steve Kulinski, Chair (SK)

Tom Soapes (TS)

Katherine Binger (KB)

Zaira Suarez (ZS)

Abbey Oklak (AO)

City Staff in Attendance

Daniel Welles (DW) P&Z

Michael Swidrak (MS) P&Z

Applicant Members in Attendance

Andrea Crossett (AC) LandDesign

Ken Wire (KW) Wire-Gill

Megan Rappolt (MR) Wire-Gill

Greg Hoffman (GH) Rooney Properties

Christian Baylor (CB) MA/Architects

Community Members in Attendance (in Person or Virtual only if a Question was asked)

Melissa Kuennen (MK)

Amy Smithson (AS)

INTRODUCTION & OLD BUSINESS

- The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:00 a.m. as the June 12, 2024 meeting of UDAC.
- The March 2024 UDAC Meeting Notes were approved with one amendment to revise a spelling error of a community member's last name.

NEW BUSINESS

Note: Presentation materials on the below items are located at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/boards-and-commissions/urban-design-advisory-committee-serving-old-town-north>

Second Presentation of the proposed open space areas at the Robin Terminal North site

- KW introduced the applicant team and the proposal in front of the Committee.
- The representing landscape architect, AC, outlined the overall open space design, including goals and constraints, including a 10-11' grade change from the RiverRenew Plaza to the north and Oronoco Street to the south.
- KW added that grade changes also have to be considered for areas of the open space above the parking garage to the north and south of the circular restaurant structure.
- AC went over changes and updates to open space on the eastern block, the Oronoco Street end, and North Union Street.
- KW noted that the applicant wants to make the open space and Oronoco Street end flexible enough to accommodate occasional food trucks and other temporary event infrastructure.
- SK and KB asked if the applicant has coordinated with AlexRenew regarding programming for the RiverRenew Plaza which contains portions of the northern edge of the applicant property. KW and GH responded that the applicant has been in close contact with AlexRenew but that programming on the RiverRenew plaza has to be limited based on its primary function as an access point to the stormwater tunnel system.
- KW noted that the pavers proposed for the plaza will match what the applicant will implement on its open space.
- AO noted the potential impacts of redevelopment on bus parking on North Union Street and free parking utilized by Old Town employees on North Union Street and the Oronoco Street end that will be removed with redevelopment.
- AO was generally not supportive of the use of Oronoco Street as a drop-off area as proposed, preferring on-street drop-off.
- KW and GH noted that staff wants to remove Oronoco Street end drop-off turnaround. They stated that the applicant was aiming to relieve impacts on North Union Street from pick-up and drop-off.
- KW tried to summarize by hearing that some vehicular access is fine in the street end as long as it is not a dominant use of space.

- AO said she does not have issue with sole access to the restaurant structure on the east block from the adjacent open space, citing Barca on the pier by Robinson Landing as a comparison.
- AO noted her support of the west building setback to the north which allows a more open view around the curve as Pendleton turns into North Union Street.
- TS noted his concern that cars and bikes don't have enough space to manage this curve, citing issues at a similar street junction in Old Town North (North Royal Street and Bashford Lane).
- GH asked the Committee if the railroad tracks should be removed from the northern edge of the west block and the adjacent portion of North Union Street. AO responded with support for removal, though that the tracks could be reused as art/interpretive elements embedded in pedestrian/open space areas.
- GH also asked the Committee for their opinion on the proposed location for the Capital Bikeshare station that will be installed based on contributions with the DSUP approval. Pendleton Street to the northwest of the site was suggested. General bike parking at the Oronoco Street end was also suggested.
- Per a question from MK, the paths in the open space are not for bicycles, just pedestrians.
- KB asked if there are safety measures implemented to protect children who try to access the water via the rock areas at the water's edge. GH said that the water is shallow (2-3 feet deep) 20 feet out into this portion of the Potomac River with minimal current.
- TS asked how the applicant is addressing flood mitigation. KW said that the applicant is raising the average grade of the east building to 1 foot above base flood elevation while the open space is designed acknowledging its risk of flooding.
- AO inquired about how the eastern open space will flood. KW said it will flood and flow out, especially at the south end by the Oronoco Street End based on the existing lower grade at that point.
- SK said that the open space design is moving in the right direction with a good balance of uses.
- MK asked the applicant if an elevation from the river westward can be provided.
- MK asked that the applicant not plant taller prairie grasses that are not traversable in open spaces.

- CB presented updates to the architecture of the two proposed buildings.
- ZS asked how the applicant is connecting the circular restaurant building on the east block to the open space. She noted the precedent image for the restaurant included in the submission which demonstrates how the design can be more open and integrated into the open space design (taking “aquatic” and “green” cues instead of industrial).
- ZS asked that the external column placement be less of a barrier and more of a welcoming feature to the open space.
- ZS asked the applicant if the rooftop open space above the restaurant on the east block will be visible from North Union Street, noting that would enhance the perception of activity on the open space area below.
- AS advocated to the applicant and Committee that large rocks as part of the open space design would be a solution for children’s play and a replacement for bollards.
- SK said that the glass connector on the east building should read as a residential building element from North Union Street, which could be achieved through signage or architectural enhancements. SK advocated the glass hyphen remain transparent.
- AO noted her support of the punched window openings on the buildings but noted that larger window openings at lower levels can make the buildings appear empty/stark when there are no residents or activity in the units (she noted The Venue corner townhouses in Old Town North as an example).
- KB asked if the development will be built in one or multiple phases. GH responded that the applicant is planning on constructing the west block first then the east block in a second phase.
- CB noted that the applicant will work with locally sourced architectural materials.
- The applicant noted that the west building will extend farther south toward Oronoco Street than the current warehouse on the block exists, based on a question from AO.
- SK noted his support for the progress of the project as a whole.
- KW will discuss the submitted matrix for the Urban Design Standards & Guidelines next meeting, including a discussion of what standards and guidelines the proposal does not meet and why.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:24 a.m.