



P.O. Box 25571 Alexandria, VA 22313

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May 18, 2017

Mr. Karl Moritz
Director, Office of Planning and Zoning
City of Alexandria
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Karl:

The board of NOTICe (North Old Town Independent Citizens Association) welcomes this opportunity to offer its comments on the draft Old Town North Small Area Plan.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT: We support the major themes of the draft plan. Public support for mixed use development was a major finding of the resident survey NOTICe conducted in 2014, and we are pleased that the draft plan provides for systematic development of a variety of land uses throughout Old Town North. While our residential population has increased in recent decades, we recognize that we need more neighborhood businesses to give definition to this area and that those businesses need enough population to support them. We are pleased to see the emphasis on enhancing walkability and pedestrian safety through streetscape and urban design standards that prioritize pedestrians. Retention and enhancement of the arts community will add to the definition of the community. We are also pleased to see the comprehensive Design Standards and Guidelines emphasizing the need for high-quality design and materials in new development. Quality design is a key provision of the NOTICe Vision Statement that we use in evaluating development proposals. Respect for our wish to keep the beauty and accessibility of our waterfront a key focus of the neighborhood is important both for the neighborhood as a whole and for the future development of the power plant site. Also important are the provisions in the draft small area plan for environmental sensitivity, affordable housing, and historic interpretation.

LAND USE: While these provisions lead us to an overall positive view of the draft plan, we and other members of our community have some significant concerns. These concerns focus on two areas: land use and transportation. These two areas, especially land use, received limited discussion time in the advisory group meetings relative to

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their importance. Specifically, the treatment of the 25-acre power plant site is vague. Extending the street grid into that site and promoting unspecified redevelopment without redesigning the intersection of Slaters Lane and the George Washington Parkway raises serious traffic congestion concerns. Redesign of this intersection should not only provide for a safer pedestrian crossing as noted in the plan but should also provide for better speed control. There is mention of a second Parkway access, but it is not clear whether this is achievable.

We appreciate the staff's effort to vary the heights at the power plant site, and we would like to make sure the resulting street-level experience is pedestrian-friendly and conducive to a feeling of community. Some members of the community have expressed concern that the maximum height limits could open the door to over-development of this core part of Old Town North. While these residents recognize the need to retain reasonable flexibility and developer incentives, they expected greater specificity in this plan than has been provided. That greater specificity should point us toward obtaining not the "highest bid" for this property but the "best value" for the community. To address both the traffic and development concerns at the power plant site we should make explicit the requirement that the level of development and density allowed at that site be linked to transit, street, and sewer improvements provided by the developer.

TRAFFIC: In addition to the Slaters Lane issue noted above, there are two other traffic concerns. While we are pleased to see that Madison Street will continue as a one-way east-bound street, the nomination of that street as an "enhanced bicycle corridor" is troubling. This is a relatively narrow, two-lane street with parking on both sides and bulb-outs at the intersections with St. Asaph and Pitt Streets. Because of its proximity to commercial zones, delivery trucks use this street between Washington and Pitt. We doubt that this is a safe, viable bicycle route.

We are also concerned about the efficacy of making Montgomery Street two-way because of the lack of loading facilities at the businesses in the block between St. Asaph and Washington. While the draft plan makes some reference to this concern, the plan needs to be more explicit in requiring enforceable solutions to resolve this issue before the street is changed to two-way traffic. One or both of Montgomery Street's traffic lanes are frequently blocked by delivery trucks. If it were a two-way street, the combination of parked trucks and the volume of traffic westbound on Montgomery (which will increase with the completion of the Giant/ABC project) and traffic turning from Washington onto Montgomery will create impassable, dangerous bottlenecks. To address this issue in the short term, we would support a proposal to the Traffic and Parking Board creating a loading zone on the south side of Montgomery between St. Asaph and Washington Streets. For the future, we should require that redevelopment of the bloc occupied by Hank's Pasta Bar and TJ Stones be required to have adequate off-street loading facilities.

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IMPLEMENTATION: The Implementation chapter of the draft plan correctly identifies the important role the Planning Commission and market forces will play in guiding future development in Old Town North. The Advisory Group discussed implementation and the role the Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC), which consists of community residents and business owners, and other community members should play in reviewing development proposals and refining those proposals into plans that are beneficial to the community. We appreciate staff's agreement that the role of UDAC and future citizen involvement in reviewing development proposals early in the redevelopment process should be made more explicit in the small area plan.

Knowing that this plan is designed to cover a 25-year period in which many changes may occur that we cannot anticipate, we understand that there are practical limits to the specificity we can expect in the plan. However, we believe these modest revisions would strengthen the plan and enhance its public acceptance.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Soapes
President

Cc: Mayor and City Council
Mark Jinks
Yon Lambert
Jeffrey Farner
Heba El Gawish
Planning Commission

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