



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

ARLINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

2100 CLARENDON BOULEVARD, SUITE 700
ARLINGTON, VA 22201
(703)228-3525 • www.arlingtonva.us



ARLINGTON
VIRGINIA

DANIEL WEIR
CHAIR

DEVANSHI PATEL
VICE-CHAIR

GIZELE C JOHNSON
CLERK

MATTHEW PFEIFFER
SPR SUPERVISOR

February 3, 2022

Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Suite 300
Arlington, Virginia 22201

SUBJECTS: Marbella Apartments

- A. SP #463 SITE PLAN for a 555-unit multifamily residential development consisting of two building towers; with modifications of use regulations to include: additional building height, additional density, density exclusions, required parking, and other modifications as necessary to achieve the proposed development plan. Located at 1300 and 1305 N. Pierce Street (RPC# 17-033-006, -009, -016, -017).
- B. Ordinance of Vacation to Vacate a Public Purposes Easement on Outlot B, Block 24, Ft. Myer Heights, RPC #17-033-009, with Conditions

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINDING:

1. The Planning Commission recommends that the County Board adopt the attached ordinance for SP #463 to construct a 555-unit multifamily residential development consisting of two building towers; with modifications of use regulations to include: additional building height, additional density, density exclusions, required parking, and other modifications as necessary to achieve the proposed development plan. Located at 1300 and 1305 N. Pierce Street (RPC# 17-033-006, -009, -016, -017); subject to the conditions of the attached ordinance.
2. The Planning Commission recommends that Arlington County require 4.1 applicants to post illustrated informational signs advertising pending development projects while they are still in the conceptual stages.
3. The Planning Commission finds that the Ordinance of Vacation to Vacate a Public Purposes Easement on Outlot B, Block 24, Ft. Myer Heights, RPC #17-033-009, with Conditions is in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan of Arlington County or applicable portion thereof.

PC. 28.A.B.

BACKGROUND

The Planning Commission heard this item at its February 3, 2022, public hearing. Michael Cullen, Community Planning Housing and Development Department, Planning Division gave a presentation on the proposal. Additional staff present included:

- Jane S. Kim, Department of Environmental Services, Development Services Bureau
- Kris Krider, Community Planning Housing and Development Department, Planning Division
- Matthew Pfeiffer, Community Planning Housing and Development Department, Planning Division

Matt Allman, counsel for Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH), the applicant, gave a presentation that gave an overview of the project and highlighted the architecture and evolution of the project. Also available was Charles Sims from APAH and Karen White from Walter Philips, the project's civil engineer.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS

There were eight public speakers on this item.

1. **Adam Theo, Housing Advocate and Candidate for County Board** – Pleased to see that many of the units are senior residents. Those who are 65+ are ten percent of our population, a figure expected to double in the next decade. Disappointed in the reduction of units but would like to give APAH thanks for including senior housing. Please recommend approval.
2. **Corinne Parker, Arlington resident** – Left an abusive relationship in DC to come to Arlington. Housing was not a worry. Others fleeing domestic abuse can use affordable housing. Please recommend approval.
3. **Stuart Stein, RAFOM resident** – This project illustrates the reason staff had concerns about reinstating bonus height. They were right to be concerned. The dismissal of Lisa Courts by some in the process was outrageous. A site plan is site specific and doesn't just do something because it can be done. The impact of a development on existing residents is important. This project will have a major impact on existing residents. Scale and massing of this project should be much smaller. These are established communities.
4. **David Broyles, Lisa Court resident** – First experience with Arlington planning process. Support need for affordable housing. However, some participants have denigrated the townhouse residents. The townhouse residents have been here for many years. Interested in the success of Marbella.
5. **Sanae Kubota, Lisa Court resident** – SPRC process is for public engagement, however disappointed with the SPRC process for this site. Lisa Courts have actively engaged since the beginning of the process. Enthusiastically supportive of diversity in the neighborhood, in particular affordable housing. Do not understand why the involvement of Lisa Courts has been so vilified throughout this process. We have been accused of a NIMBY approach.

6. **Stan Karson, RAFOM President** – RAFOM supports those in the area most impacted like Lisa Courts. Also support the developer for providing affordable housing, including the commitment to no displacement of existing residents. Commend the staff for working with adjacent neighbors. Proposed height and density is inappropriate and out of scale for the area. The caps on density should not have been removed. The project is also under-parked. Context and impact on the community is important. Every accommodation should be made to Lisa Courts.
7. **Celia Carpentier, Lisa Court HOA president** – Lisa Court learned of the Zoning Ordinance Amendment to allow bonus height shortly before adoption. Lisa Court residents have spent innumerable hours working with staff and the developer to address their concerns. Appreciative of the changes the applicant has made. However, the changes do not fully address resident concerns. Staff analyzed effective transitions elsewhere in the County and found that what is proposed here is much less than other examples in the County. While the Lisa Courts residents are supportive of additional affordable housing in the neighborhood, unfortunately cannot support this specific development. The transition should be consistent with the transitions identified by the staff elsewhere in the County. Please defer this item so that it can be revised to provide a more effective transition.

COMMISSION REPORTS

1. Alice Hogan, Housing Commission (HC) representative to SPRC provided a report on this project. The HC is delighted with the project and the Committed Affordable Housing (CAF) and senior housing being provided, from a trusted developer. HC is supportive of the zoning tool to allow bonus height and density, as it has delivered a unique and important addition to the County's CAF portfolio. This is an effective infill development and is providing needed CAF units within walking distance of transit. The project is also providing sustainable design commitments. The staff examples provided all showed transitions with structures that had maxed out zoning potential; in this case the six townhouse units are zoned RA6-15 and could be redeveloped. The applicant dropped off a number of bedrooms from the project; some think this was too much of a sacrifice, others find it appropriate.
2. Commissioner James Lantelme provided a report from the Transportation Commission. It was heard at the last Transportation meeting, the Commission discussed parking, bike network and whether the bike room should be on a lower level. Overall, the commission felt that the project was overparked given this was in the walkshed of two metro stations. The Commission voted to support the project unanimously.
3. Commissioner Morton provided a report about the SPRC process. There was an online engagement opportunity, two virtual SPRC meetings, and an in-person site tour. The project was praised for the delivery of CAF units. Some SPRC members felt that the reduction in density and thus CAF units and bedrooms was not an acceptable outcome, feeling that a reduction in the units indicated in the project's NOFA application represented a loss. To others, some evolution was necessary to meet the transition

requirements of the zoning ordinance. The massing and transitions to abutting properties was the main topic of discussion throughout the process. Staff worked to develop an assessment framework, developed guiding principles and provided precedent examples. The applicant made several design modifications on the priority transition frontages. The Priority Transition Frontage adjacent to the Lisa Court development was the most debated at the end of SPRC. Tree canopy and landscaping were also discussed, with concerns expressed about the loss of mature trees and hoped for replacement on site; the viability of the planting and trees, particularly in the buffer area containing a relocated storm sewer line, was a concern. Parking and loading was another topic discussed; some community members felt the ratio was too low, while other SPRC members felt that, given the proximity to Metro, the ratio was too high. Concerns were expressed about the impacts of the proposed turnaround and about the impacts of the parking and loading entrances on N. Queen and N. Ode Streets to the pedestrian experience and streetscape. Pedestrian network and accessibility was a further topic of discussion; there are steep topographical changes, and access across the site will be difficult for those who are not able to use steps. Public access was another topic, with the applicant stating that there would be public access to pocket plazas adjacent to their courtyards. SPRC members praised several biophilic and sustainable design features, with some remaining concerns.

PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSION

The Planning Commission discussed the following topics with County Staff and the applicant:

- **Affordable Housing**
- **Building form and Transition to lower density**
- **Tree Canopy and Landscaping**
- **Parking and Loading**
- **Pedestrian Network and Accessibility**
- **Open Space and Public Access**
- **Biophilic and Sustainability**
- **Additional Neighbor Concerns**

Affordable Housing:

- Commissioner Morton was interested that the staff report had included reflection about what is the appropriate treatment for properties who had submitted for AHIF funds and wanted to flag it as an issue.
- Commissioner Hughes asked what the starting point of bedroom counts was, and what it ended up as.
 - Charles Sims with APAH mentioned that there was a loss of 44 bedrooms as a result of the changes to the project. Mr. Sims also provided information about the original number of each category of unit versus the current proposed number.
- Commissioner Hughes asked whether families are allowed to live in one-bedroom units?
 - Mr. Sims answered that no, families cannot live in one-bedroom units, and rooms must be separated by gender
- Commissioner Steinberger expressed concerns with the loss of the mix of multibedroom units at the site, as there is a drastic need for family-sized affordable units. Struggling with that fact on this project.

- Commissioner Lantelme asked whether there was a waitlist for apartments in APAH buildings? Can families be placed in differing size units other than what they applied for?
 - Mr. Sims answered that there is a specific list for each building. There are waitlists for other APAH buildings. It's possible that families could be placed where units are available.
- Commissioner Lantelme asked whether there is any data about the right mix of bedroom type? Is there a huge demand for the larger units?
 - Mr. Sims impressed upon the commission that affordable housing is a crisis, and APAH cannot build enough to satisfy demand. There's demand for all unit types.
- Commissioner Hughes added that the Housing Division has comprehensive information about the demand for different types of housing units.
- Commissioner Hughes reinforced that the Federal Government has strict standards for occupancy; families cannot just be placed in any unit.
- Commissioner Peterson spoke to the crisis of affordable housing in Arlington. Every single year when served on the Budget Commission, affordable housing targets were never met.

Building Form and Transitions:

- Chairman Weir asked Commissioner Morton to opine on the previously mentioned topic of the dynamic between NOFA applications and SPRC review.
 - Commissioner Morton noted that since this was the first use of this zoning there were some growing pains in the tension between maximizing CAFs and reviewing building form and asked staff to weigh in on lessons learned.
 - Commissioner Bagley asked whether private developers can use this zoning tool to increase height and density.
 - Chair Weir asked what staff thinks may be the next several sites to use this zoning tool?
 - Mr. Cullen mentions that staff spent a lot of time weighing the zoning provisions including a robust urban design analysis.
 - Mr. Pfeiffer mentioned that there are other sites in the County that may seek to utilize this tool.
- Commissioner Sarli mentioned that no process is perfect, but that we have to avoid absolutes. We need affordable housing but we can't damage the urban fabric. The corner of the project on Queen Street went away, and that's unfortunate because it added a lot to the project. We have to balance many different topic areas of review. Not comfortable with the excessive prioritization of affordable housing to the detriment of other issues. Thanks to staff for managing this process effectively.
- Commissioner Hughes asked staff to elaborate on whether they were aware of any other sites similar to Marbella, where the site is eligible for bonus height under the RA district tool, is neighboring only a single zoning district and located adjacent to a major arterial. Commissioner Hughes expressed that what makes this site different is the fact that it is located within an area zoned for higher density uses and that the surrounding uses can be redeveloped.
 - Mr. Pfeiffer responded that staff does not have that information at this time but can research and provide a response.

- Commissioner Lantelme expressed that he was personally weighing the tension between housing vs. transitions. The entire neighborhood is zoned RA6-15. While our practice has been to not require transitions within zoning districts, good planning practice argues for a transition here. Lisa Court was right to ask for accommodations. However, remain concerned about the loss of units.
- Commissioner Steinberger mentioned that the perfect should not be the enemy of the good. The setbacks and transitions are essential. There are still some concerns about whether the transition is appropriate. The scale of the building is significant.
- Commissioner Morton stated that we tend to think of urban design as aesthetics; however, it's really more about how to create a positive relationship with your neighbors, regardless of what zoning district you are in. The staff analysis was laudable; in unplanned areas that don't get the benefit of great design guidelines like we see in Pentagon City we need to communicate to the community that we're taking this seriously. She endorses this kind of analysis in projects moving forward. In this case, a transition was really needed given the vastly different scales of the development.

Parking and Loading:

- Commissioner Lantelme asked if the applicant had looked into whether the turnaround space should be permeable pavement.
 - Karen White with Walter Philips responded that APAH had looked into it but is not proposing permeable pavers because there is likely to be heavy truck traffic that would present maintenance issues. This may not be the best place for that material.

Open Space and Public Access

- Commissioner Morton asked the applicant what kind of public access will be allowed at the pocket plaza?
 - Mr. Allman mentioned that this is a mostly hardscape area with benches and will be indistinguishable from the streetscape. It's privately owned but will be held open to the public.
- Chair Weir asked staff whether there is any easement over this space? There have been other places in the County with green space that were later fenced off. We should seek to preserve this green space as a public space.
 - Mr. Cullen answered that there is no proposed access easement over this space; however, given its adjacency it's not going to be closed off to the public. It's not addressed in the conditions.
- Commissioner Peterson mentioned that there was talk of a playground at the private courtyard; is this still true or has it been removed? And is this a public asset?
 - Dan Avit with Parker Rodriguez mentioned that there is a playground proposed, specifically a swing set and a play wall in the Building A courtyard. The Building B courtyard will have a smaller play wall. The playgrounds will be for residents only.
- Commissioner Hughes mentioned that within the buildings APAH provides residents with wraparound services that include the use of the playground.

Additional Neighbor Concerns

- Commissioner Steinberger reiterated that the neighbor concerns were valid and would like to understand a little more how we handle these tradeoffs in the future.

PLANNING COMMISSION MOTIONS

Commissioner Morton moved that the Planning Commission recommend that the County Board adopt the attached ordinance for SP #463 to construct a 555-unit multifamily residential development consisting of two building towers; with modifications of use regulations to include: additional building height, additional density, density exclusions, required parking, and other modifications as necessary to achieve the proposed development plan. Located at 1300 and 1305 N. Pierce Street (RPC# 17-033-006, -009, -016, -017); subject to the conditions of the attached ordinance

Commissioner Lantelme seconded the motion.

Speaking to her motion, Commissioner Morton relayed her concerns that the effective transition has not been met and that she hoped additional guidance from the Multifamily Reinvestment Study would come sooner rather than later. She shared her view that because the buffer zone is the only way the northern façade addresses the effective transition requirement, careful attention and monitoring of the trees, landscaping, and the garage door is critical; since this area evolved until recently these areas were not fully explored in SPRC.

The Planning Commission supported the motion 8-0.

Commissioner Morton moved that the Planning Commission recommend that Arlington County require 4.1 applicants to post illustrated informational signs advertising pending development projects while they are still in the conceptual stages.

Commissioner Hughes seconded the motion.

The Planning Commission unanimously supported the motion 8-0.

Commissioner Morton moved that the Planning Commission finds that the Ordinance of Vacation to Vacate a Public Purposes Easement on Outlot B, Block 24, Ft. Myer Heights, RPC #17-033-009, with Conditions is in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan of Arlington County or applicable portion thereof.

Commissioner Hughes seconded the motion.

The Planning Commission supported the motion 8-0.

Commissioners Gearin, Patel, and Schroll were absent.

Respectfully Submitted,
Arlington County Planning Commission

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a 'W' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Daniel Weir, Chair