
Rosslyn Process Panel (RPP) Subcommittee on Building Height + Massing Meeting Summary

December 15, 2014; 7:00-9:30 pm

2100 Clarendon Blvd., Room 311

Subcommittee Members in Attendance: B. Harner (Chair), S. Cole, K. Elmore, M. Novotny, S. Stein, S. Karson, A. VanHorn, T. Helmig

Staff in Attendance: A. Fusarelli, E. Kays, K. Brown (B. Carlson)

1. Welcome

2. Design Guidelines

General

- 1E used to be Street Hierarchy and is called Service and Parking Access (*R: This was a typo in the last presentation, and should be called Service and Parking Access.*)
- Are there other changes from the last presentation? (*R: None.*)
- How does what's emerging for Rosslyn compare with design guidelines and regulations for Crystal City? How will these guidelines be incorporated into the sector plan and/or Zoning Ordinance? (*R: The sector plan, as a guide, will include strategies to manage future building form and massing. After Plan adoption, we will engage in another process to update CO-Rosslyn with pertinent elements from the Sector Plan guidance.*)
- Is there language for the sector plan that can reinforce certain elements are just guidelines? (*R: We can consider; for example in Crystal City, the plan says that all of the guidelines are just guidance except for those items that become codified through the Zoning Ordinance.*)
- One perspective would be to include the few, really important items in the Zoning Ordinance, and have everything else serve as guidelines.
- Those items that really matter are things like heights, density. Even guidelines should only be waived if there is a really good reason. Some are more important than others.
- The plan should be clear about purpose of each guideline (e.g. buildable area is important to achieve a consistent streetscape, etc. (*R: Draft written materials include clearly stated intent for each guideline, driven by the policy directives.*))
- Will this be a form based code? It sounds like we are regulating everything but FAR, but all of the guidelines feed into FAR. (*R: No. We haven't made any decisions yet, but the direction emerging may be a zoning approach with form-based guidelines. We also don't want to be too prescriptive and regulate exactly to the model because we know that final (re)development will not look exactly like the model.*)
- Design guidelines can be a very specific description of a certain form. The alternative is something more performance based, which can be harder to implement because it can be harder to define if a certain form meets the guidelines.
- Crystal City Plan may not be the best approach. We are in our fourth site plan now and learning some of the weaknesses. At this point don't want to take a FAR cap off the table.
- We also don't want to make guidelines that don't achieve goals for desired height and densities; need to ensure they are consistent with proposed scenario.

- Material here looks like a lot of thought has gone into it. It seems if we are expanding the buildable envelope then we need requirements, such as for height.
- There is a fear that this is becoming too prescriptive, if we prescribe height and envelope, then you have a form based code, and you end up limiting creativity.
- We need to remember we are fine tuning “CO-Rosslyn”; not starting fresh.
- One of the crucial questions is: what are the essential elements that binds Rosslyn together? New Urbanism has certain principles to it that we need to strive for to get a sense of place, such as a cohesive street wall. A lot of places are great not because they had flexibility but the opposite (e.g. Paris, NYC) What are the binding elements that can give Rosslyn a sense of place?
- Paris is a great historic asset; not a 21st century city. Bath is a relic. And Paris has many examples that deviate significantly.
- It is hard to argue that some sort of height constraint does not makes sense, as well as some sort of build to lines and ground plane framework. What’s left? Tower separation – hard to argue that this doesn’t provide a public good in terms of letting in light. There’s also the question about how high the ground plane should go and the desire for unique building tops. The alternative is to give a height and density cap and say “go to it.”
- We need to prescribe something that achieves a desirable ground plane. That said, our architectural team is currently modeling the guidelines. We need time to model the impacts and the impact on value. We don’t have an answer yet. Four major sites impacted by this.
- Agree there need to be some basic rules, but architects can come up with something really creative. Land use, FAR are basic, but building orientation, step backs may be going too far.
- The SPRC process already protects from not violating things like service and loading locations identified in a plan.
- There is a potential conflict between 1E and 2F. We need clarity on things like 1:1 slope. May not make sense on every site because not every site transitions to single family neighborhood? (R: the slope is to the maximum allowed in that zoning category, regardless of what is built there now. This is not clear and we can work on that. The heights are all within the 1:1 slope, so perhaps the 1:1 is not needed.)
- Even though we are calling some of these guidelines, by the time you get to site plan review they are likely to be interpreted as more than just guidelines. Example, building height and tower dimensions (120 feet in some locations) would result in buildings that just go straight up, as the elevator bank will take up most of the floor. We need to understand what these buildings look like when tested.
- We need to articulate in this plan what we are trying to achieve and then let creative people go out and figure it out.
- The problem is that developers will individualize their site. And design that is best for an individual site may not be best for the district as a whole.
- I am impressed with the dialogue. I agree that testing is needed. Would like some discussion on how practical that is. Agree that performance goals can be a creative incentive.
- 1C and 1B – making Ground Level uses a guideline makes sense for flexibility and given that the draft Retail Action Plan is not consistent. (*R: the intent is to sync the Retail Action Plan with the Rosslyn Plan.*)
- Ground level design as a requirement could make sense so a space is physically built in a way that can easily adapt to accommodate retail over time;

- It sounds like there is consensus that some things should be required.
- It is not always right to have developers pay for everything. Sometimes community benefits are formulaic and do not mitigate impact.
- The Rosslyn community doesn't have a lot of faith in community benefit process;
- Agreement that the fewer guidelines the better, but there are a few things that should be regulated. SPRC process allows for good review.
- There is concern that if the site gives something to achieve goals of the plan, there will still be expectations of a contribution for other things. Maybe a deal can be made that a site only has to concede on a certain number of elements. Like if a building is a valley, should it still be asked to sacrifice on other elements?
- Would like to have more discussion about the value of being a "valley" as a credit, for a scenario like with an entitlement is 4.8 and I am limited to building a 9FAR instead of a 10FAR.
- Developers cannot argue that they are giving up something that was not theirs to give.
- To the degree that the entitlement process can be facilitated and community benefit packages can be lessened to achieve desired redevelopment - why wouldn't we consider this?
- An important premise is that if we don't believe that the plan will achieve a better place, then it isn't a good plan. WE all need to be in agreement that the plan will achieve collective goals.
- There is worry about the presumption that we don't want 10 FAR. To me, the more 10 FAR buildings, the better. Taller buildings, denser areas, are better.
- Tall buildings are not bad, but short buildings are not bad either, particularly when they are adjacent to less dense communities
- We need to agree on the goals and then negotiate trade offs.
- Much less than 10FAR generally doesn't work on sites that already have assets.

Buildable Areas

- In most cases the buildable areas respect existing easement areas.
- It looks like the buildable areas define a consistent street wall. What about the hatched areas? (R: The hatched areas are where we want the 18th Street corridor to be, with exact details on edges addressed through future engineering w/ redevelopment.)
- The slide says that new streets must meet Sector Plan Update cross sections. What are they?
- What is the calculation of current densities based on? (R: as sites redevelop, their achievable FAR would be calculated on entitlement/lot area; post site-plan approval, the portion of lot within public street/space would be deducted from site area for future).
- The western new street may not line up with where the participants in WRAPS believe that the new street should go.
- There was a lot of feedback from Parks Committee on topic of street cross sections.
- This seems like a fundamental map. Development community needs to look at this closely.
- To clarify, this map would be incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance?

Street Façade Placement

- Perhaps this should be a requirement, but with possibility for modification.
- Suggest change façade length to only on primary and secondary streets; get rid of min. 3 story requirement.

- What is the parks framework? What if someone has an idea for a really great pocket park. This reads that plan would not allow that and I would not want to discourage that.
- This is a fundamental issue. Almost all properties touch on a part of the parks network; the notion is that since there is so much parks space defined in the plan, we really just need to build on what is already there rather than try to create new. Do we value the idea of creating enough street continuity at the expense of cool pocket parks? If the parks are meant to be great places, then they really need to have the right built form surrounding them.
- The community needs to be in agreement that adding new parks is appropriate. This decision should not be left up to property owners exclusively.
- I don't think proposed guideline is a problem. I think that we should rely on the park framework that we have spent time to develop.
- Perhaps there are certain parameters we could put in place to allow for additional open space as appropriate, such as interior plazas/courtyards connecting two buildings.
- Developers may want open space on the property because it justifies the proposal for taller buildings. These new open spaces may deteriorate the current fabric.

Ground Level Use

- Wilson should not be blue; it should be yellow or red. *(R: just to clarify, blue does not mean you can't have retail.)*
- We need to be very careful about calling this a requirement because retail is very dynamic. Also wants to support notion of allowing for flexibility and relying on the SRPC process.
- The importance of this map as a regulation is that it limits the market's desire to build large lobbies. Would the development community be interested/willing to include a guideline that limits lobbies to a certain percentage of the frontage?
- Square footage of ground floor plane is a lot more valuable as retail. Maybe require just in the red zones and leave everything else as a guideline.
- Consider 30 feet deep for 1D retail spaces.
- I support having this as a requirement. Willing to be flexible on the type of commerce, just as long as it activates the street.
- Support making it a requirement that buildings be built to support retail eventually but not that it be leased to retail at the beginning.
- Note previous suggestion to flip 1c and 1d; make 1C a guideline and 1D a requirement.
- The physical design needs to require ventilation as well to allow for restaurants.
- We should update use category for Starbucks Park.
- What would happen to approved site plans if the CO-Rosslyn district is amended? If the plans comes in for an amendment would it be held to the new Zoning Ordinance? *(R: Yes.)*

3. Next Steps

- Staff will provide updated schedule online. Request for action may go a little further into the spring.

4. Adjourn