

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

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## MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 4, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *ps*

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF THE ALTERNATIVE CONCEPT PLAN FOR THE POTOMAC YARD/POTOMAC GREENS COORDINATED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT AND THE STRAIGHTENING OF THE MONROE AVENUE BRIDGE

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of the "Alternative Concept Plan" for the Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens CDD, which calls for the replacement of the Monroe Avenue Bridge with a straightened bridge.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

- (1) Receive this report and schedule it for public hearing January 25, 2003, at Council's Saturday public hearing meeting; and
- (2) At the conclusion of the public hearing, adopt the following staff recommendations:
  - (A) select the Alternative Concept Plan as the operative concept plan for the Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens CDD;
  - (B) accept responsibility, on behalf of the City, for the cost difference between the Concept Plan and the Alternative Concept Plan; and
  - (C) authorize the City Manager to provide written confirmation of this selection and acceptance to Crescent Resources.

**BACKGROUND:** In 1999, City Council approved a Concept Plan for the Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens Coordinated Development District (CDD). The approved Concept Plan incorporated two possible alternatives for development on the southern portion of the site. The first alternative, called the "Concept Plan," keeps the existing Monroe Avenue Bridge in its present configuration, and adds a connection (by means of a bridge) between the proposed spine

road (Potomac Avenue) and Route One at the eastern end of the Monroe Avenue Bridge immediately north of Slaters Lane (Attachment 1). The second alternative, called the "Alternative Concept Plan," replaces the existing Monroe Avenue Bridge with a new bridge on a straightened Route One alignment (Attachment 2).

In 1999, Transportation & Environmental Services staff, as well as Planning & Zoning staff, supported and recommended the "Alternative Concept Plan" approach, with its straightened bridge, citing substantial land use and transportation benefits to the City. However, because the "Alternative Concept Plan" also raised complex cost issues which could not be resolved without significant delay to the Concept Plan approval process for Potomac Yard, the Concept Plan was approved incorporating both options and a time-frame and process for the City to utilize in selecting one of the two options. This process requires the developer of Potomac Yard, Crescent Resources, Ltd., to provide the City with cost estimates for implementing each of the two plan options. The process then provides for the City to select between the two options after determining whether the cost difference between the two concept plans is reasonable given the City's goals. The Alternative Concept Plan, with the straightened bridge, becomes the operative plan only if the City agrees to assume responsibility for paying the difference in construction costs between the Alternative Concept Plan and the lower-cost Concept Plan. If the City decides not to assume the cost difference, then the Concept Plan automatically becomes the operative plan, and Crescent Resources, Ltd. is responsible for the entire cost of the Concept Plan.

Significant public participation occurred in the approval of the Potomac Yard Concept Plan. The Concept Plan was the culmination of almost ten years of planning processes. The Planning Commission, along with its recommendation of approval for the Potomac Yard Concept Plan, specifically noted its support for the straightened bridge concept.

Since City Council's approval of the Potomac Yard Concept Plan in September 1999, staff has worked with the Potomac Yard team to undertake the analysis necessary for the City's decision. In May 2000, the City held a community meeting with Commonwealth Atlantic Properties (the previous owner of Potomac Yard) to review alternative designs for the Monroe Avenue Bridge under the Concept Plan and Alternative Concept Plan. About 200 people attended this meeting, providing valuable comments that were considered during the design process.

Crescent Resources, the current landowner, has prepared cost estimates for the two alternatives, as required under the Concept Plan. City staff have reviewed (with outside professional assistance) and accepted the cost estimates provided by Crescent Resources. The estimates show the cost difference between the Concept Plan and the Alternative Concept Plan to be approximately \$15 million in year 2006 dollars. The cost to the City is the difference in the total cost of the demolition and replacement of the existing bridge and the cost of building the Potomac Avenue ramp to the existing bridge.

In 2000, the City requested that the Virginia Department of Transportation program money into its six-year budget for the City's share of the replacement of the Monroe Avenue Bridge, and

VDOT included \$15 million for this project in its six year plan. Since then, City staff have been working with VDOT staff to facilitate the process, in the event City Council approves the Alternative Concept Plan. In November 2001, Council passed a resolution requesting VDOT to establish an Urban Highway project for the replacement of the Route One bridge at Monroe Avenue. This resolution was then forwarded to VDOT, and VDOT has begun the State environmental review process.

**DISCUSSION:** Staff recommends that the Alternative Concept Plan be selected and they have begun the State Environmental Review Process. The Alternative Concept Plan provides a better vision for Potomac Yard and better meets the current and future needs of the City in the areas of land use, recreation, transportation and aesthetics. Each of these areas is discussed below.

### Land Use Benefits

The elevated bends in the roadway at each end of the present Monroe Avenue Bridge, once necessary to span the shortest distance across the original rail tracks, today serve no useful purpose and leave a dangerous and disorienting section of roadway which psychologically separates Old Town from the Del Ray area and the historic Town of Potomac. The Alternative Concept Plan, with its straightened Route One bridge and reconfigured local street system (particularly Monroe Avenue), transforms the southern portion of the Potomac Yard site from a series of isolated land uses located at a “dead end” of the Yard, with distant connections to the area west of Route One, into a more cohesive development with a natural connection to the surrounding neighborhoods.

The straightened bridge plan creates a greater amount of land for development south of the new bridge, results in less severe grades around this area because the length of the bridge span is reduced and the embankment for Monroe Avenue is eliminated, and allows Monroe Avenue to be at-grade. The reconfigured Monroe Avenue would go under the straightened bridge (Route One), connecting directly with the new main street of Potomac Yard, becoming part of a more neighborhood-oriented network of streets from which Route One would then be accessed. While today Monroe Avenue ramps to an unattractive terminus at the bridge, the straightened bridge allows Monroe Avenue to be lowered to grade with Simpson Field Park and bordered by new street trees, sidewalks and pedestrian scale decorative street lights, connecting to the future Main Street within Potomac Yard. The straightened roadway also allows the new City athletic fields to be located immediately adjacent to and combined with Simpson Field, rather than on a disconnected parcel beneath the existing bridge.

The straightened bridge design allows the entire portion of Potomac Yard south of Howell Avenue to be developed as an extension of the existing neighborhoods, knitting the new with the old through extension of the street grid and providing access to Potomac Yard and its green space to the existing neighborhoods. Under the Alternative Concept Plan, new development on the portion of the tract south of the bridge will relate better to the existing neighborhoods to the west. The heights and scale of the new development at Potomac Yard will have a much better

relationship to the small town homes of the existing neighborhood because the new blocks within Potomac Yard are smaller, in scale with existing neighborhoods, and the street vistas of the existing neighborhood will continue through Potomac Yard.

### Recreational Benefits

The reconfiguration of land around the bridge under the Alternative Concept Plan allows the two required athletic fields to be located on the west side of Route One in an expanded Simpson Field. Without the straightened bridge, these fields are directly across Route One from Simpson Field, and are neither visible nor accessible from Simpson Field.

### Transportation Benefits

The Alternative Concept Plan provides transportation benefits that are not afforded by the Concept Plan. Among these are increased safety, improved access, circulation and connectivity, less delay, increased transit service options, and reduced potential for neighborhood cut-through traffic.

The straightened bridge alternative effectively eliminates one of the highest accident intersections in the City, Route One at Monroe Avenue. Since January 2000, 63 collisions have occurred at this intersection, resulting in 45 injuries. Many of these were related to the reduced intersection sight distance created by the pronounced horizontal curvature of northbound Route One. Reconfiguration of Monroe Avenue to intersect with South Main Street eliminates this situation. The straightened bridge alternative is also expected to enhance safety at the intersection of Route One and Slaters Lane. Under the Concept Plan this intersection, which would be geometrically similar to the King/Quaker/Braddock intersection, will be more difficult for drivers to understand and navigate safely, pedestrian movements will be less safe and there will be more traffic conflict points, thereby increasing the potential for collisions. Improved sight distance, simplified intersection operation and reduced traffic conflicts under the straightened bridge alternative offers improved safety for both motorists and pedestrians.

Vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle movements are all enhanced by the straightened bridge alternative. Although neither alternative is expected to increase vehicular traffic demand, the straightened bridge alternative serves projected demands with less delay, thus reducing congestion levels in the area. Elimination of the pronounced horizontal curvature of Route One, combined with simplification of the Route One/Slaters Lane intersection, serves to smooth traffic flow along Route One. More pedestrian and bicycle paths and greater connectivity among these paths enhances these movements throughout the area. The pedestrian/bike path provided on the east side of the straightened bridge improves continuity for travel along northbound Route One. Pedestrian/bike route connectivity will be further improved by a proposed ADA-compliant spiral ramp connecting the bridge pedestrian/bike path directly to Monroe Avenue/South Main Street. Improved grid-type connections in land bays J and K, which are allowed by the straightened bridge, increase connectivity within the area, thereby reducing the need for larger internal

roadways, provide more routing alternatives for local and regional transit service and offer better access to individual parcels.

The Alternative Concept Plan typical roadway section includes four twelve-foot through lanes and two auxiliary lanes. The auxiliary lanes were added after meetings with the community and civic associations. One such lane is a northbound right-turn lane which will accommodate traffic turning right from Slater's Lane and on to Route One. The lane continues the length of the bridge to Potomac Avenue and avoids the weaving and merging of local and through Route One traffic. The second auxiliary lane is a Route One southbound left-turn lane onto Slater's Lane. This is carried the length of the bridge to avoid the current Monroe Avenue left-turn lane constraint, where there is an existing left-turn lane which cannot be lengthened to accommodate the left turn volume. In addition, the bridge contains an eleven-foot, multi-purpose recreational trail on the east side and a seven-foot pedestrian sidewalk on the west side. All together, the bridge is approximately 106 feet in width. The existing bridge is approximately 81 feet wide with sidewalk on one side only and deficient turn-lane lengths.

Existing and future neighborhoods are better connected and protected from cut-through traffic with the straightened bridge alternative. The increased number of street-level roadways and pedestrian/bike facilities increase opportunities for neighborhood interaction. Reconfiguration of the Monroe Avenue connection to Route One eliminates the physical barrier created by the existing Monroe Avenue ramp. The less-direct connection between Monroe Avenue and Route One, combined with improved flow along Route One, is also expected to reduce the potential for cut-through traffic on Monroe Avenue.

### Aesthetic Benefits

Straightening the bridge on Route One has positive functional and aesthetic impacts, replacing a bridge that now serves as a physical barrier with a boulevard that can connect, rather than divide, the community. The eastern terminus of the new Monroe Avenue is at Main Street and is on a visual axis with the graceful arches of the straightened bridge. The pond and landscaping surrounding the northern bridge abutment will physically tie the streetscape and open space in the new Potomac Yard to the existing neighborhoods.

The proposed bridge has been consciously designed to reflect the simple early 20<sup>th</sup> century Art Deco detailing prevalent on buildings along Mount Vernon Avenue, and particularly at the landmark George Washington Middle school nearby, while utilizing an economical means of construction. The structure supporting the bridge girders is a series of formed concrete arches, recalling historic Washington area bridges, capped by highly articulated cast, textured concrete Art Deco style piers at each end. The abutments are cast with a masonry pattern to soften the surfaces and reduce their visual mass. A custom metal handrail and decorative light fixtures along wide sidewalks will make crossing the proposed bridge a much more pleasant experience for pedestrians and bicyclists. The intent is to create a bridge which will be a focal point of urban design, yet is composed of elements which are of human scale.

## Community Feedback

A community meeting was recently held on the bridge alternatives on October 24, 2002. Approximately 100 people attended. The majority of those who attended expressed verbally to staff their support of the straightened bridge alternative. Comment forms were provided to all attendees, and 18 forms were returned to staff either at the meeting or subsequently mailed in. Of those 18 comments, 14 expressed support for the straightened bridge alternative; four expressed support for keeping the existing bridge with the spine road connection.

Five of the attendees expressed concern about the lack of direct pedestrian access from the sidewalk on the bridge to Monroe Avenue in Del Ray. Because the straightened bridge alternative no longer has direct access from Monroe Avenue to Route One, the connection for pedestrians is slightly longer. Staff is also concerned about this access and the connectivity between the Del Ray and Northeast neighborhoods. To that end, staff is currently working with Crescent's design team to ensure that this connection is accommodated. Staff is examining methods to provide a pedestrian connection in a way that also allows access for persons with disabilities.

The Del Ray Citizens Association has ranked this bridge replacement project as its number one priority (see attached letter from the Association President) and the NorthEast Civic Association has chosen the Alternative Concept Plan as its preferred alternate over the Concept Plan.

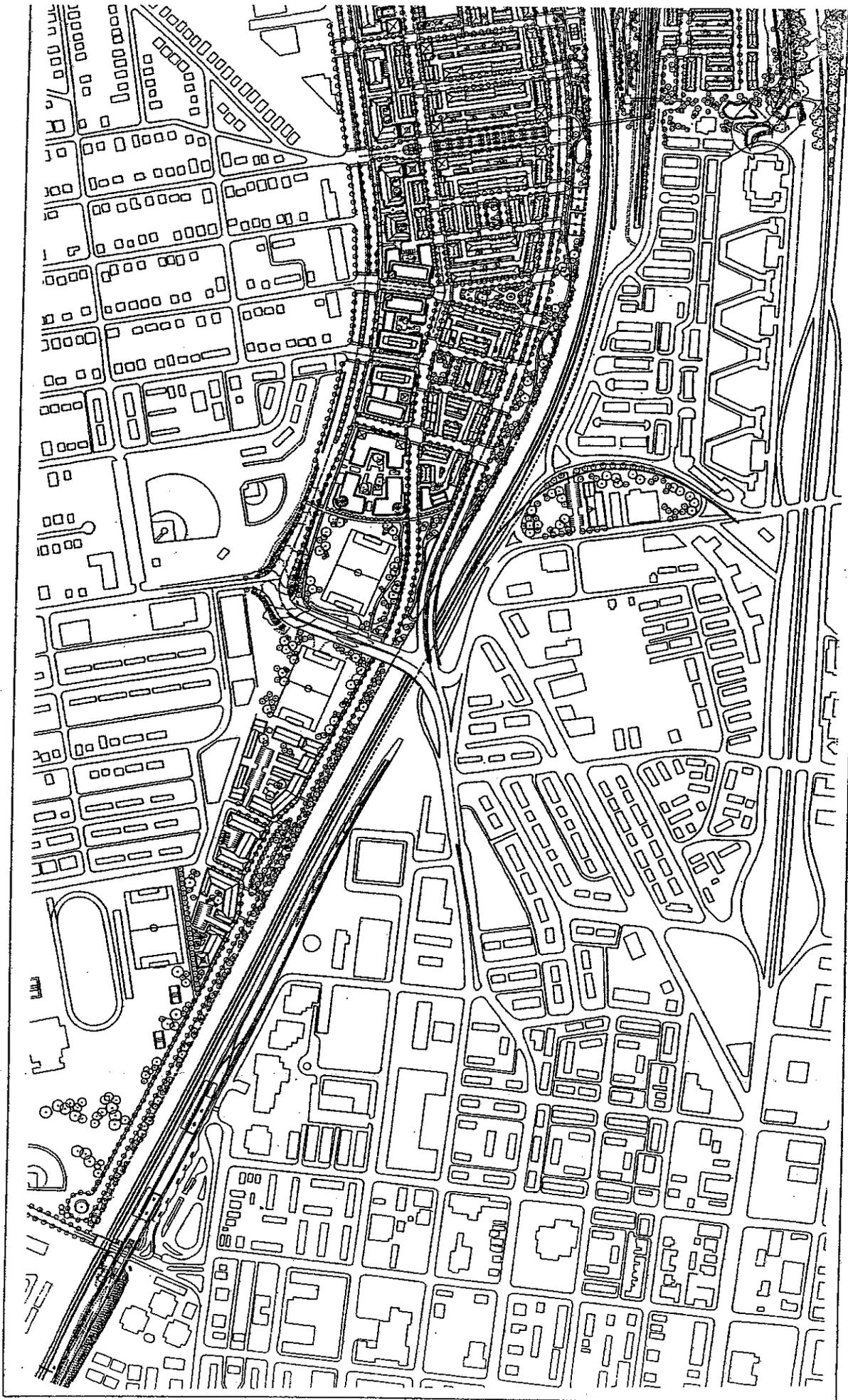
**FISCAL IMPACT:** The cost estimate provided by Crescent Resources, and accepted by City staff, for the Concept Plan is \$27,614,554 in year 2006 dollars. The cost estimate for the Alternative Concept Plan is \$42,352,712 in year 2006 dollars. If the Council selects the Alternative Concept Plan, the City would be responsible for the cost difference, or \$14,738,158. VDOT and Federal funds cover 98% of this cost difference and the City will be required to provide a 2% match, or \$294,763. The City currently has \$346,700 programmed in the FY 2003-FY 2008 Capital Improvement Program for this project. VDOT's current six-year budget has \$15,746,000 in Urban System Improvement Funds programmed for this project.

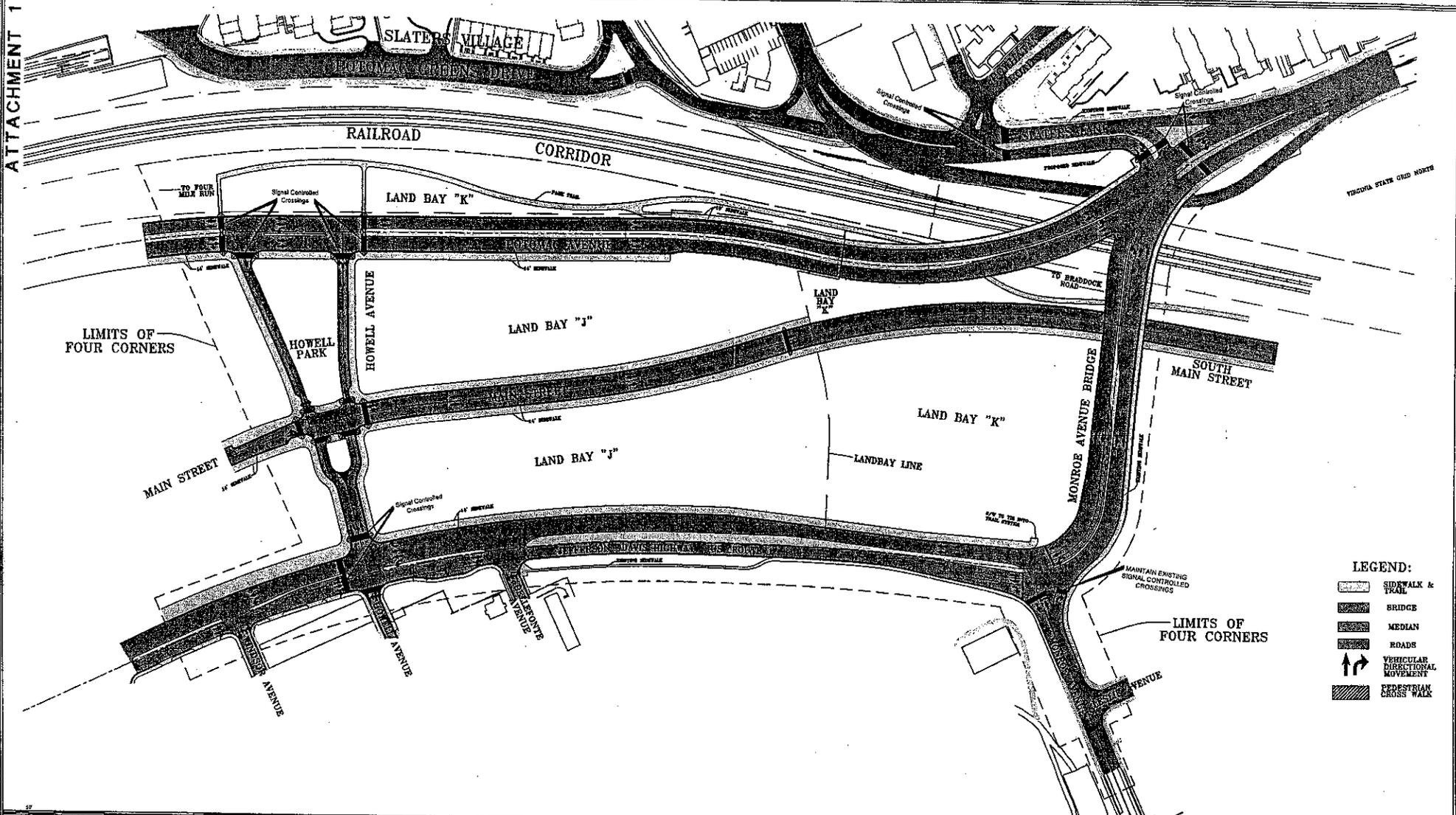
### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment 1. Concept Plan
- Attachment 2. Alternative Concept Plan
- Attachment 3. Del Ray Board e-mail

### **STAFF:**

Richard J. Baier, P.E., Director, Transportation & Environmental Services  
Tom Culpepper, P.E., PhD., Deputy Director, T&ES  
Emily A. Baker, P.E., City Engineer, T&ES  
Sandra Whitmore, Director, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities  
Kimberley Johnson, Division Chief, Planning & Zoning





- LEGEND:**
-  SIDEWALK & TRAIL
  -  BRIDGE
  -  MEDIAN
  -  ROAD
  -  VEHICULAR DIRECTIONAL MOVEMENT
  -  PEDESTRIAN CROSS WALK

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Crescent Resources, L.L.C.

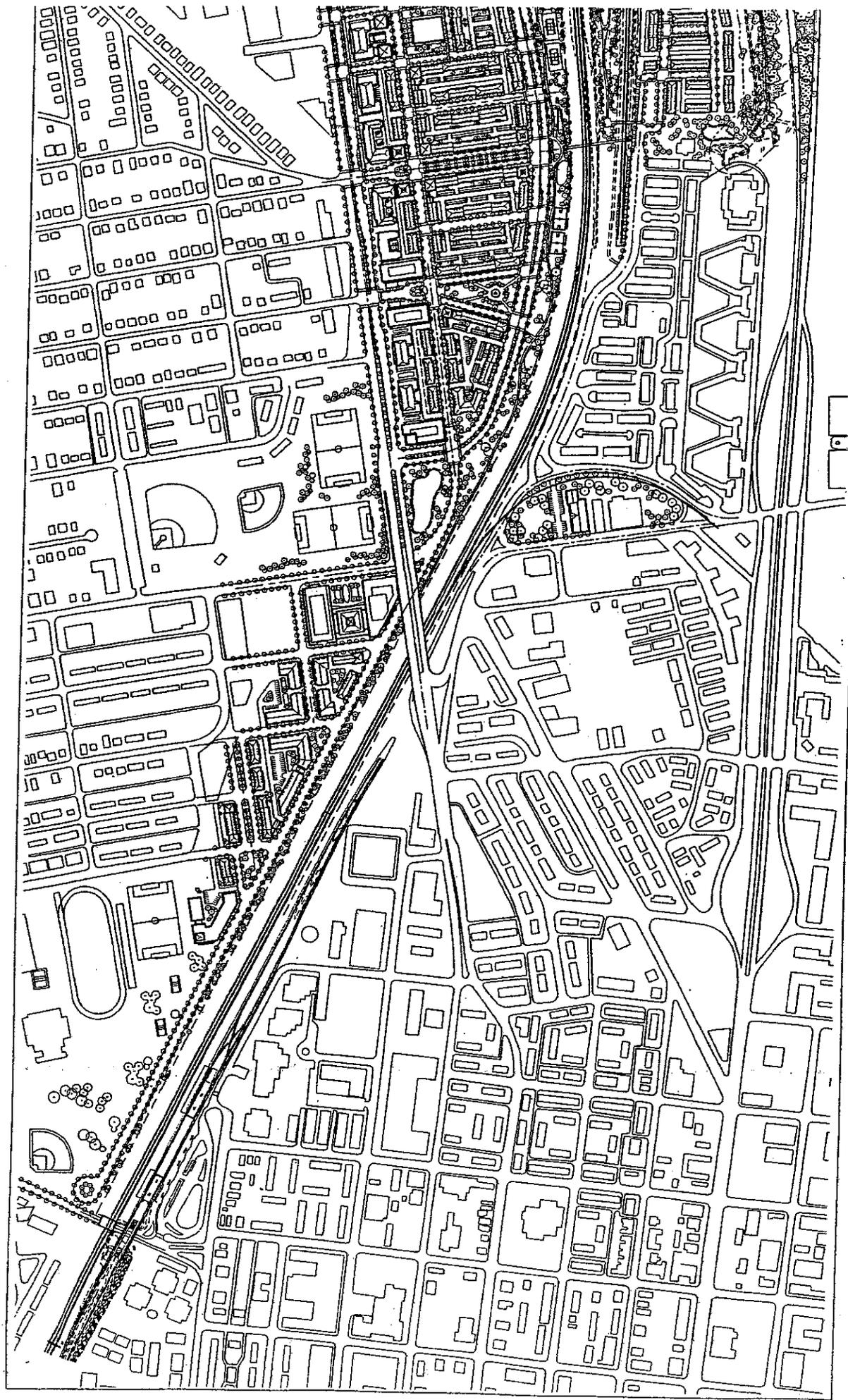
# POTOMAC YARD

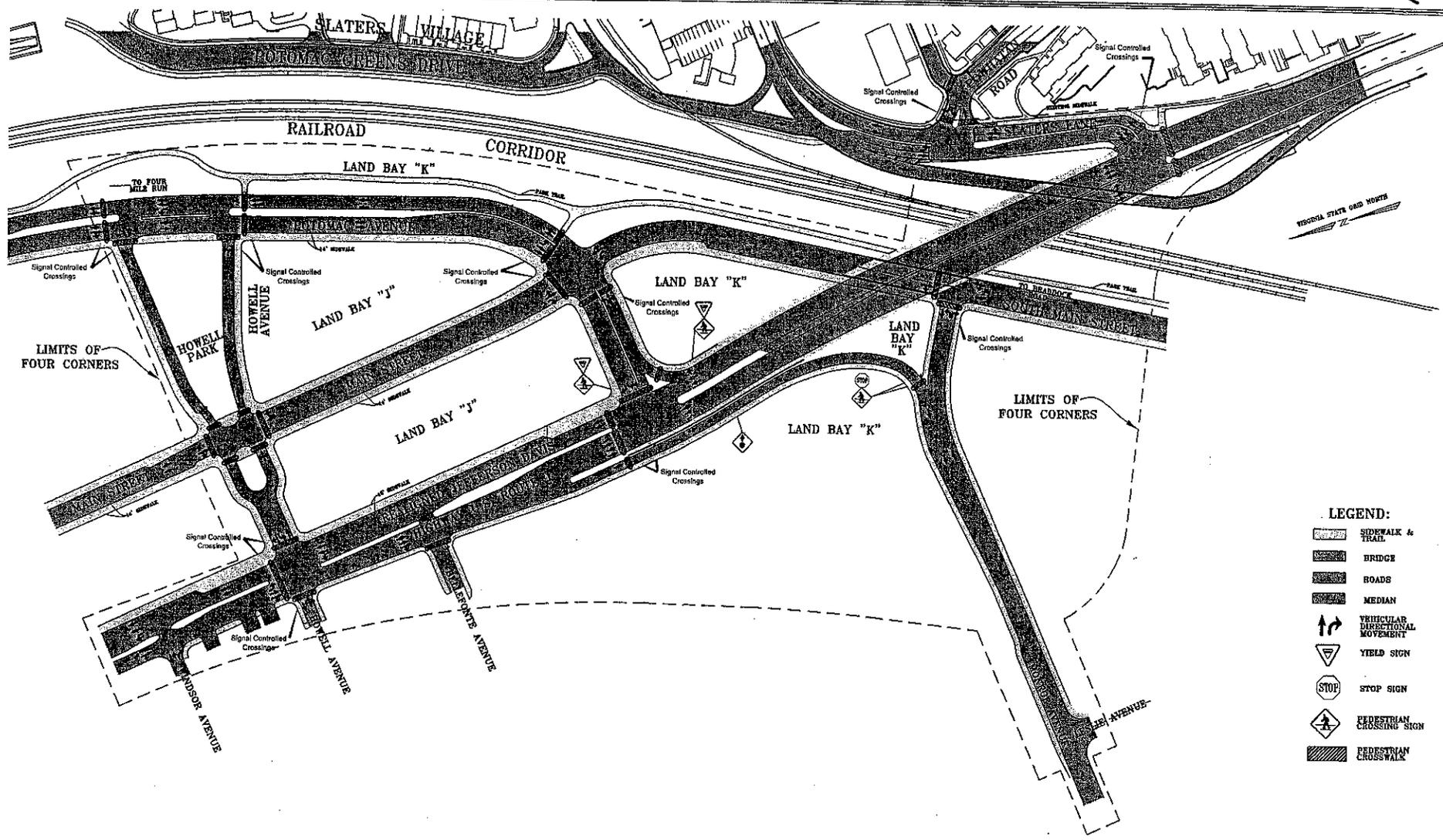
POTOMAC AVENUE BRIDGE CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN  
PEDESTRIAN - VEHICULAR CIRCULATION PLAN

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Cooper, Robertson & Partners  
OCHLUS  
christopher consultants llc  
Cunningham Quill  
Wells & Associates

OCTOBER 2004





LEGEND:

-  SIDEWALK & TRAIL
-  BRIDGE
-  ROADS
-  MEDIAN
-  VEHICULAR DIRECTIONAL MOVEMENT
-  YIELD SIGN
-  STOP SIGN
-  PEDESTRIAN CROSSING SIGN
-  PEDESTRIAN CROSSWALK

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Chequant Resources, L.L.C.

# POTOMAC YARD

ROUTE ONE STRAIGHTENED BRIDGE CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN  
PEDESTRIAN - VEHICULAR CIRCULATION PLAN

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Cooper, Robertson & Partners  
OCULUS  
christopher consultants inc.  
Cunningham Quill  
Wells & Associates

OCTOBER 2008

Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council and Phil Sunderland, City Manager:

Per your request, please see the attached memo identifying suggested budget priorities for the Del Ray area of Alexandria. We recognize that this upcoming budget will be challenging for the city and hope that the attached list helps you as you work

Respectfully,

Rob Krupicka  
President, DRCA

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# Del Ray Citizens Association

PO Box 2233

ALEXANDRIA VA 22301  
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ESTABLISHED

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**To:** Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council  
Phil Sunderland, City Manager  
**From:** Rob Krupicka, President  
**Date:** November 27, 2002  
**Subject:** Request for Comments On Budget Priorities

In response to the request by City Council for citizens to provide input into the upcoming budget process, the executive committee of the Del Ray Citizens Association compiled the following list of budget priorities for Del Ray.

Each year, new businesses and new citizens make Del Ray their home. Business and Citizen's alike are spending their hard-earned money to upgrade their offices and homes. Del Ray Citizens and the Potomac West Business Association recently submitted a proposal to the neighborhood partnership program that would have DRCA, PWBA and the city contribute to new trashcans along Mt. Vernon Avenue. Through this plan, DRCA would contribute over \$5,000 to Mt. Vernon Avenue. Del Ray is developing into a highly desirable retail destination. The rapid rise in home prices is just one indication that this change is desirable. In order to continue this progress, we request that the city consider the following neighborhood improvement projects.

- 1) Straighten the Monroe Avenue Bridge.
- 2) Renovate Duncan library. We are lucky to have such a wonderful facility in our neighborhood and we would like to see the planned improvements completed.
- 3) Finish under grounding the power lines along Mt. Vernon Avenue. This project began a long time ago and should be completed as promised.
- 4) Support for the Arlandria Plan. As one section of Mt. Vernon is improved, all of Mt. Vernon benefits.
- 5) Begin budgeting for new, pedestrian friendly lighting along Mt. Vernon Avenue. As part of this budget cycle, DRCA requests that the city allocate enough funds to create one demonstration block for new lighting. This demonstration block would serve as a model for future development along the rest of the avenue.
- 6) Increase traffic calming resources so that more projects can be funded. We believe that more should be done to eliminate cut-through and high-speed traffic.
- 7) Support new landscaping (more trees, plants, etc) along Braddock road between Mt. Vernon and West Street.
- 8) Repair the medians along Commonwealth Avenue. These medians have been left to wither away and they need our attention. One option is for the city to create a citizen program whereby citizens provided time and the city provided resources to repair and maintain the medians. As part of this, we need a plan to replace dead and fallen trees.