

Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan Staff Report

Docket Item # 10
MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT
#2000-0005
Planning Commission Meeting
March 4, 2008



ISSUE: Consideration of a request for a revision of, supplement to, and amendment of the Braddock Road Metro Station Small Area Plan chapter of the City's Master Plan to include the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan.

APPLICANT: City of Alexandria, Department of Planning and Zoning

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission, on its own motion, initiate an amendment to the Braddock Road Metro Station Small Area Plan to include the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan.

BACKGROUND

The Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan provides a long-range vision for the Braddock Road Metro Small Area planning area as outlined in the map at right. The planning area overlaps with a portion of the Parker-Gray Historic District and includes the Braddock Road Metro Station, a section of Route 1, and a mix of residential and commercial uses, new and old. This Plan is the result of an intensive community planning process that began in the fall of 2007.



INTRODUCTION

A number of factors present unique opportunities in the Braddock neighborhood, including the Metro Station itself, numerous sites that have recently – or soon will – redevelop, a concentration of public housing likely to redevelop at some time in the future, historic cultural and architectural assets, and a walkable, human-scaled residential district. The Plan focuses on preserving and enhancing those aspects of the neighborhood that are beloved—particularly its traditional scale and character and walkable streets—while at the same time helping the neighborhood adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges—the changing nature of its diversity, the increased importance of transit, and the increased value society places on sustainability. The purpose of the 2008 Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan is to frame and document the community’s vision for the future, to build on the neighborhood’s assets and highlight its unique sense of place by celebrating its history and diversity, creating pleasant, tree-lined walking streets, a central park, vibrant neighborhood retail, redeveloped mixed income housing and high quality development at a human scale.

DISCUSSION

I. Conformance with Existing City Plans and Policies

The Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan embraces the goals outlined in **City Council’s 2004-2015 Strategic Plan** and the **City’s Master Plan**:

- *Quality Development and Redevelopment*: The Plan establishes urban design guidelines for the height, mass and architecture of new development to ensure quality building materials, longevity, and consistency with the neighborhood context.
- *Respects, Protects and Enhances the Natural Environment*: The Plan supports and enhances the natural environment both by recommending new green spaces, such as a major new neighborhood park, pocket parks, a plaza at the Metro Station, street trees, and enhanced landscaping; and through strategic recommendations for encouraging biking and walking and reducing vehicle use. In addition, new development must integrate greenbuilding design.
- *Integrated multimodal transportation system*: The transportation chapter of the Plan outlines recommendations for transforming the neighborhood into a more multi-modal community, using the Metro Station more effectively and better incorporating it into the community fabric. The goals in that chapter are consistent with the City’s **Draft 2008 Transportation Master Plan**, including transportation demand management (TDM) recommendations and a district-wide transportation management program (TMP).
- *Strong economy with varied small businesses*: One of the community’s primary redevelopment goals is an infusion of new retail opportunities, particularly neighborhood serving retail, as well as additional office, residential, and hotel space as the market dictates. In support of the recommendations of the **Economic**

- Sustainability Task Force** for higher density development at the City’s Metro Stations, the Plan recommends a development concept for the Metro Station site with approximately 300,000 square feet of office and ground floor retail uses, attempting to balance the community’s desire for appropriately scaled buildings near established neighborhoods with sufficient height and density from a market perspective to develop the site and reap the economic benefits for public amenities. In addition, the Plan recommends financial assistance to maintain small businesses and local retailers and recruit new ones, especially at key areas for neighborhood-serving retail, such as at the Metro site and along Queen Street.
- *Community that is diverse and affordable:* Finally, the Plan outlines principles for the redevelopment of the Andrew Adkins public housing complex into a mixed income community, with clear guidelines for one-for-one replacement of public housing units in the neighborhood and elsewhere in the City in accordance with **Resolution 830**. The mixed income environment will incorporate a true range of affordability, from publicly assisted units to affordable/workforce units to market rate units, ensuring preservation of racial and economic diversity within the community. The Plan also recommends the redevelopment of James Bland, Bland Addition, Samuel Madden Uptown and Ramsey Homes public housing developments. The planning for that area will occur during the Braddock East planning process to begin at the end of February 2008.

II. What distinguishes the 2008 Braddock Plan from the 2006 Draft Braddock Plan?

- A. **Renewed Planning Process:** The 2007-08 process has been more inclusive, more transparent, and more about providing the tools and information needed for the community to make informed decisions about their future.
- B. **Community Building:** This Plan has been about building a great community, respecting its historic scale and creating urban amenities, not reacting to development proposals.
- C. **Public Housing:** This Plan addresses all public housing blocks in the planning area, not some, and sets forth a general concept and urban design guidelines for the Braddock East Plan going forward.
- D. **Transportation:** This Plan re-examined transportation impacts and strategies to include ALL redevelopment sites, and recommends a district-wide TMP and TDM strategies.
- E. **Implementation**
 - **Implementation Advisory Group:** The Plan recommends establishing a neighborhood-based group to provide input on and monitor priorities and phasing of public amenities and other implementation actions.
 - **Funding:** Last but not least, this process, and the Plan itself, includes a thorough analysis of the financing required for public amenities, and lays out a strategy for developer contributions to fund public amenities district-wide rather than exclusively on-site, and represents the first time that the City has committed to funding neighborhood amenities based on tax increments from new development.

A. Renewed Planning Process

Over the course of the summer of 2007, the consultant team interviewed more than 100 stakeholders and residents from the Braddock Metro neighborhood. The purpose of the interviews was to air community frustration regarding the nature of the previous planning process in the Braddock area and to identify key planning themes to be addressed going forward. Many interviewees expressed strong frustration with the lengthiness of the previous planning process, a perceived lack of communication from the City and among City agencies, and ultimate concern that the 2006 Draft Plan was not a true response to public input.

Armed with information from the stakeholder interviews, planning staff and the consultant team embarked on a new Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan process in the fall of 2007 with a focus on consistent, systematic public outreach and engagement, improved communication with the community and among city agencies, and a clear sense of the issues that would need to be tackled in the ensuing months. The City's outreach plan successfully engaged a broader cross section of the community with meeting notices and ongoing updates regarding plan progress provided in key locations throughout the neighborhood, on the City's Braddock website, via periodic eNews updates, and in the Braddock Bulletin, a regular newsletter providing details on the planning process.

The intensive, four-month community planning process culminating in the February 2008 Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan began in late September 2007. From the start of the process, community members were urged to attend all meetings, and to express their views and goals throughout the process rather than waiting until the public hearing. In October, more than 160 stakeholders attended three educational workshops, where regional and national experts shared current thinking about planning issues affecting the Braddock neighborhood. The sessions introduced ideas and potential tools that could help the community and the City make decisions and trade-offs to facilitate a mutually supportable plan for the neighborhood. These sessions helped lay the foundation for a community charrette, held in November, and five subsequent worksessions over the course of the winter, where stakeholders evaluated and ultimately supported many of the principal recommendations of the Plan.

B. Community Building

From the beginning, the staff and consultant team worked with the community to establish general agreement about what redevelopment in the neighborhood would look like, responding to residents' concern that new development not overwhelm the character of the existing neighborhood. The Plan strives to integrate the value of the land while preserving the qualities of the area that the community likes: its historic character, appropriately-scaled buildings near existing homes, green spaces and walkable streets,

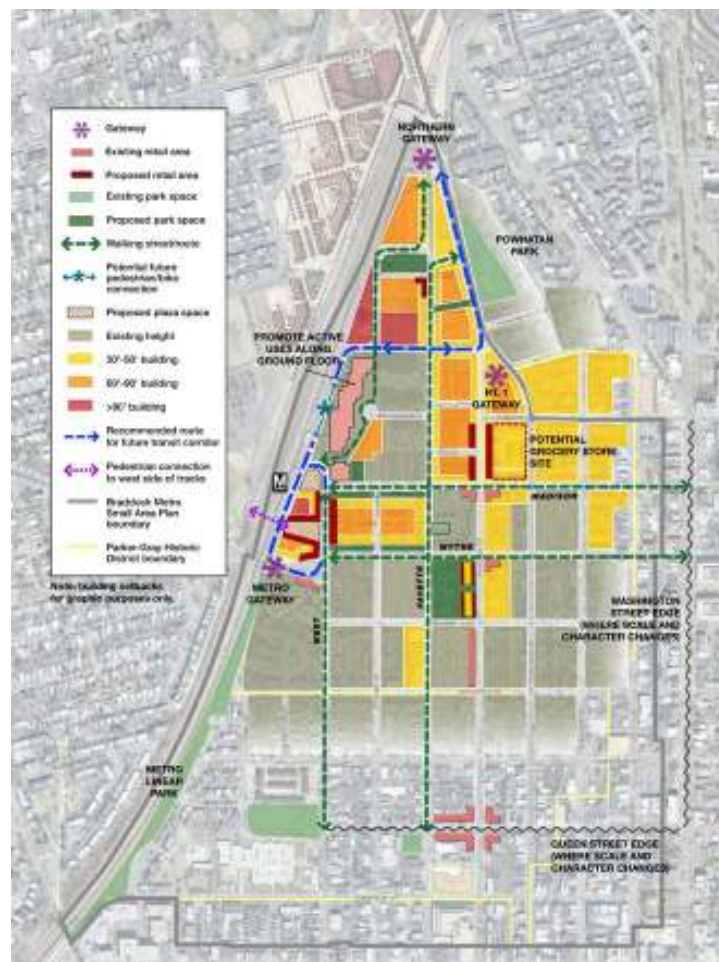
and incorporating those elements into the underutilized or obsolete industrial areas predominantly to the north of the Metro station.

The Plan is composed of seven main chapters – one for each of the seven principles created and unanimously supported by the community – that lay out the planning ideas and public policies that will further enhance the Braddock Metro Neighborhood’s livability for years to come. The seven principles represent the community’s aspirations for integrating and finding the right balance between preservation and change. All of the plan’s recommendations are shaped around achieving this integration and balance.

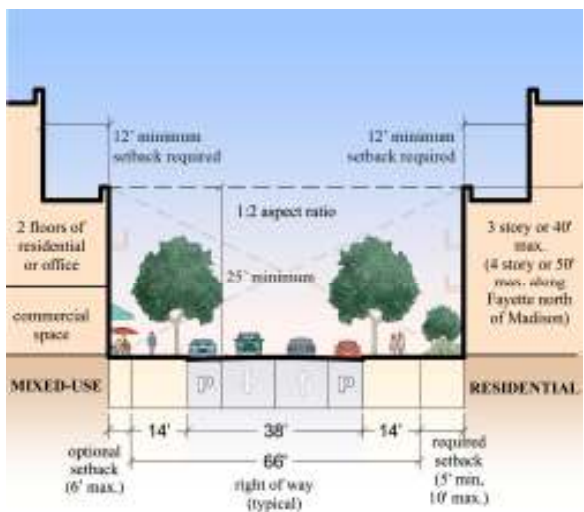
The principles are:

- Create a sense of place/neighborhood identity, vitality and diversity
- Establish a variety of community serving, usable open spaces
- Provide walkable neighborhoods that are secure and feel safe
- Promote mixed-income housing and follow an open, fair and inclusive process to deconcentrate public housing
- Encourage community-serving retail and services
- Manage multi-modal transportation, parking and road infrastructure
- Achieve varying and transitional height and scale

The Plan’s Urban Design Framework, at right and in Chapter 9, is a composite graphic map developed over the course of the planning process and comprised of a handful of layers that geographically articulates the Plan’s principles. In this case, the layers include the Character Areas diagram, the Urban Design Concept diagram, the Building Heights and Massing diagram and the Open Space Framework diagram. Each of these diagrams form the building blocks of the Plan: parks and plazas, walking streets, landscaped “green edges,” recommended transit corridors, retail locations, gateways, and recommended heights of the buildings that together represent the community’s vision for the future of the Braddock Metro neighborhood.



Urban design guidelines included in the Plan will help to ensure high quality architecture, compatible urban design and improved walkability. In response to community concerns regarding height, the 2008 Plan



recommends lower heights at the Metro and Andrew Adkins sites than those recommended in 2006. The 2006 Plan showed heights at the Metro of 77-100 feet over the entire site; the 2008 Plan limits heights to 77 feet. The 2006 Plan showed heights at Andrew Adkins of up to 90 feet; the 2008 Plan establishes an FAR of 2.5, with somewhat more flexibility for site design to occur during the Braddock East planning process. The other distinction related to heights is that the 2008 Plan illustrates the location of “building shoulders” on the height map; the 2006 Plan referred to the importance of step-

downs and transitions, but did not specify how or where this should occur. The Plan’s detailed requirements for “building shoulders” (see graphic illustration, above) will restrict building height on the block faces to preserve the neighborhood scale that the community values, while allowing some additional height in the center of the block.

The Plan’s conceptual drawing for the Metro Station site (shown at right) depicts two 77 foot tall buildings with approximately 300,000 square feet of office and ground floor retail uses. A large plaza provides a desired community amenity and a recognizable entrance to the Metro station. The concept also shows the reconfiguration of



bus circulation, provides additional bus bay capacity to accommodate future needs, kiss and ride and taxi stands as well as better pedestrian access to the site.

Throughout the planning process, the community expressed its desire to preserve and strengthen their neighborhood's sense of place. One of the keys to this is celebrating the neighborhood's rich history. In addition to the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan and the Braddock East Plan, the City is also working on a third coordinated initiative in the Braddock area – the nomination of Uptown/Parker-Gray to the National Register of Historic Places (completed in January 2008, with a determination from the Park Service anticipated in Fall of 2008). City preservation staff held a meeting with the community in early February 2008 to provide information about the nomination process and to solicit ideas about how best to celebrate the neighborhood's history and make it come alive in the context of the built environment. Suggestions from residents that will be further explored in the implementation phase of the Plan include the creation of an Uptown/Parker-Gray walking tour/trail (with an accompanying booklet and podcast), interpretive/wayfinding signs, and the installation of pavers imbedded with writing/art along walking corridors and at key locations, both to commemorate the neighborhood's history and also to set it apart as a unique district with a cohesive character.

C. Public Housing

The Braddock Metro neighborhood is home to one of the highest concentrations of public housing in the City. One of the clear concerns expressed by community members is for the deconcentration of public housing and the creation of mixed income communities. The Plan's recommendations recognize the City's commitment to public housing and established policy (Resolution 830) with regard to requiring the replacement of existing public housing units on a one-for-one basis. The Plan calls for redevelopment of the public housing developments in the Braddock Metro neighborhood with a mix of housing types for people of all incomes. This will be achieved through the Braddock East Plan in an inclusive planning process where the City, the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA), public housing residents and other Braddock residents will plan together for the future of these sites.

The Braddock East Plan will focus on redevelopment guidelines for the public housing sites within the larger area including James Bland, Bland Addition, Samuel Madden Uptown, Ramsey Homes and Andrew Adkins. That plan will take the principles outlined in the Braddock Plan and go into further detail to determine height, site planning, types of units, parking, appropriate mix of incomes, location of replacement units, and management.

D. Transportation

Traffic analysis was conducted on projected build-out of the entire area, including redevelopment of public housing sites that had not been included in the 2006 traffic analyses. Analysis showed that traffic congestion in the Braddock area will persist regardless of whether or not new Braddock development occurs. In fact, because of capacity constraints on Route 1 and elsewhere, analysis showed that any increase in local traffic volume due to new development will likely displace regional (cut-through) traffic volume on neighborhood streets.

Transportation demand management (TDM) programs that encourage travel modes other than single occupancy vehicles will contribute in a significant way to creating a livable neighborhood. Because of the public amenity improvements that will be achieved as a result of new development, and the fact that traffic will be an issue in the Braddock area regardless of new development, and the fact that TDM can provide effective mitigation – the community was urged not to look at traffic impacts as the primary criterion when evaluating proposed development. The bottom line showed that new development can be the source of funds for making desired improvements in the neighborhood, and that traffic 10-20 years from now will not feel significantly different to most residents. The changes proposed in this Plan will not result in a diminished quality of life for residents and the City is committed to monitor the traffic and parking impacts and ensure that the programs designed to mitigate traffic are working as planned.

First, the Plan recommends establishing a district-wide transportation management plan (TMP), managed by a coordinator to oversee TDM strategies and ease the demand for drive-alone vehicle trips within the neighborhood. A TMP Coordinator will establish benchmarks and evaluate current and future TDM strategies and make necessary adjustments to achieve the goals of the plan to reduce single occupancy vehicle trips and increase travel by other modes. All new development will be required to participate in the TMP district. Strategies include ridesharing programs, incentives to use transit, pedestrian and bike facility enhancements, and management of shared parking lots and garages.

Second, the Plan recommends revising current parking requirements for properties located within 2000 feet of the Braddock Road Metro Station, as the City has successfully done at the King Street and Eisenhower Avenue Metro Stations in an effort to encourage transit use and reduce the number of vehicles on neighborhood roads. After a careful review of existing parking requirements in those locations and new developments at Carlyle and in the Braddock area, the Plan recommends detailed requirements that seek to balance the community’s concerns about “under-parking” new development with the high level of existing and future transit service in the Braddock Metro neighborhood. It should be noted that much of the redevelopment anticipated in this Plan over the next 20 years will occur on properties north of the existing neighborhood, in close proximity to the Metro station, buses, and Zipcars, and between Route 1 and the Metrorail tracks. The benefits of appropriate parking ratios include not burdening new developments with the cost of excess parking that goes unused, encouraging non-automobile modes of travel, discouraging car ownership in general and multiple vehicle ownership in particular, and enhancing the walkability of the neighborhood.

E. Financing Strategy for Public Amenities

The Plan recommends harnessing the growing wealth of real estate in the Braddock Metro neighborhood to implement the improvements to the public realm that are the essential elements of a great community. Most of the funds for public improvement projects will come from contributions obtained through new development and by capital improvements that can be supported through the increased tax revenue that new development will create. The plan assumes a 20-year buildout period where developer contributions and public funds will gradually pay for the amenities that the community helps to prioritize in the implementation phase of the plan. The recommended public improvement projects include:

- A nearly one-and-a-half acre neighborhood park on the site currently occupied by the Post Office distribution facility.
- A half-acre public square on the Metro site surrounded by office and hotel buildings and activated by community-serving retail on all sides.
- A handful of small and medium-sized green spaces on parcels soon to be developed, such as the Jaguar and Madison site and more long-term locations, such as at the Andrew Adkins public housing site.
- Streetscape improvements such as additional street trees, new lighting, landscaping and traffic-calming features along Fayette, West, Wythe and Madison streets, the four designated “walking streets.”
- Intersection improvements at the Braddock-West-Wythe juncture to ease pedestrian access to the Braddock Road Metro station.
- Utilities that are buried underground on key blocks throughout the neighborhood.

III. Implementation

A. Zoning

The Plan does not rezone any portion of the planning area, but rather recommends a Coordinated Development District (CDD) in the Northern Gateway area. The CDD Guidelines implement the principles established in the Urban Design Framework and provide details regarding massing and height. The Plan also recommends the future designation of the Metro Station and Andrew Adkins blocks and the James Bland, Bland Addition and Samuel Madden Uptown blocks as coordinated development districts.



B. Implementation Advisory Group

This Plan represents a significant new step toward involving the community in managing implementation. While Alexandria has long embraced community-based planning, this Plan makes the community a partner with the City in implementation. Although the Plan provides a framework for the future, many details will need to be worked out with the community following the Plan’s adoption. Therefore, the Plan recommends establishing a Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan **Implementation Advisory Group** comprised of area residents, local businesses, public housing residents and other community members to oversee implementation of the plan. The group will work with City staff to prioritize and provide input on community improvements, such as streetscape and park programming, retail recruiting and support, and to monitor ongoing development to ensure that public amenities are provided.

The Plan also recommends that an internal City staff working group meet regularly to coordinate the implementation steps that have been or need to be taken. This group will provide quarterly reports to the advisory group and citizens as well as a yearly progress report docketed for Council, with all information regarding the process posted on the web and made public. This process will be a regular and public way to show what the City is doing to implement the Plan. There will be some technical or code issues that are not

open to debate, but they will also be reported to the public. This new process does raise staff resource issues, but will be proposed as part of the Plan.

CONCLUSION

The 2007-2008 Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan is the result of an exhaustive, extensive and inclusive process. It engaged a broad cross-section of the community and addressed difficult issues head-on with the benefit of tools and information to ensure that the community could effectively discuss tradeoffs and reach an informed consensus or community vision as laid out in the Plan.

This Plan takes advantage of a new approach to financing and implementation not available during previous rounds of planning—tapping into the neighborhood’s growing wealth and real estate values (stemming both from access to Metro and increased interest in living in close-in and walkable neighborhoods) to implement significant community improvements. The result will translate market support and community benefit dollars generated by new development into a new neighborhood retail square, amenities such as walkable streets and a new neighborhood park, and take advantage of the underlying value of public housing sites to transform islands of public housing into mixed-income housing that is part of the larger community.

This Plan is about writing another chapter in the story of a great neighborhood – a true community building effort that sought to achieve the appropriate balance between preservation and change, between building on opportunities and overcoming challenges, with a series of achievable recommendations that will improve the neighborhood’s quality of life for generations to come.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of the master plan amendment to include the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan.

STAFF

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