

12 (mm) 1
5-12-12

COMMENTS OF JOANNE LEPANTO
BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA
REGARDING DOCKET ITEM #12
MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT #2012-0003
BEAUREGARD SMALL AREA PLAN

Public Hearing Meeting
Saturday, May 12, 2012

My name is Joanne Lepanto. I live at 4009 North Garland Street and I am speaking on my own behalf. I have no financial interest in this plan.

I have many concerns with the Beauregard Plan put forth by property owners and Staff, and I urge you NOT to approve it today.

This plan would result in:

- The destruction of existing neighborhoods
- Too much density, too many buildings that are too tall, more traffic, and diminishment of existing quality of life
- A \$30 million ellipse that would make this area less “walkable” than it is today
- The City imposing its grid concept on an established community—which I liken to forcing citizens and their neighborhoods into a waffle iron

FINANCING

With regard to financing, the proposed TIF scheme is of great concern, especially in light of (1) BFAC’s recent warnings about the risks of implementing this plan on top of others that have already been approved, and (2) the unrealistic assumptions about growth in property values in the current budget.

Use of TIF would also mean that the redevelopment would not be paying its fair share. The plan would earmark significant property tax revenue that would otherwise go into the City’s general fund, and instead be dedicated to the redeveloped area.

As a result, the redeveloped area wouldn't contribute its fair share to the City general fund, but would enjoy 100% of City services the same as the rest of the City, *plus* the redeveloped area would get a bonus of the earmarked dollars dedicated to it. This leaves the rest of the taxpayers with the burden of making up the shortfall (i.e., dollars earmarked for use for redeveloped area) in the City general fund.

All infrastructure and other marginal costs associated with (re)development should be borne solely by the developers—absent the redevelopment these costs would not be incurred by the City, and the developers are the ones who stand to profit.

TRUST AND NO GUARANTEES

Regarding the City's mantra that without the plan there are no guarantees, I submit that there are no guarantees *with* the plan either, and this boils down to an issue of trust. Here is a possible, if not likely, scenario:

- If this plan is approved with its increased density, property values would increase.
- The current owners could flip the property, and walk with their profit.
- The new owner could come back to City asking for relief from "amenities" and other plan requirements, e.g., saying it couldn't provide 800 units of affordable housing, arguing it couldn't redevelop without that relief, especially having paid a higher price for the property.
- We've seen this happen before, and experience tells us that the Planning Commission and City Council would give the developer what it wants. A recent example is Potomac Yard, in which a developer was relieved of the underground parking requirement in order to be able to market to federal government tenants.

Back to the Beauregard area, several years ago Council gave Winkler more density, and we are still hearing some of you and Staff say that you never thought Winkler would sell. But Winkler did sell, to Duke, who sold to DOD, and now we have BRAC, which is now being used

by the City as a springboard for the proposed overdevelopment that is before us today.

The City attempts to allay citizen concerns with claims that if the plan is adopted, there is still plenty of flexibility. But it is exactly this “flexibility” that leads to the examples I just gave.

Promises of great retail are also not guaranteed. Just about every month Staff reports to the Federation that yet another developer is on an upcoming docket asking to replace retail space with office or residential because they can’t fill the retail space.

Somehow that “flexibility” always seems to work in favor of the developer, again at the expense of what citizens were lured with when the original plan was approved.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Regarding affordable housing, Staff has said that no one currently living in the units slated for demolition receives any assistance from the City in order to afford to live there. The loss of these homes would be a travesty—no amount of subsidized housing can make up for the loss of this “naturally affordable housing” (a term used in reference to Hunting Towers, Alexandria Times, 4/5/2012, p. 1, “Priced out of town?”).

POACHING

The plan area east of I-395 should have been excluded from this plan a long time ago. It was pilfered from the Strawberry Hill-Seminary Hill Small Area Plan, is separated by an interstate highway, and the City has never provided a valid or meaningful reason for including this in the plan.

IN CLOSING . . .

Staff keeps saying “we heard this from the community, we heard that from the community,” but think for a minute about what you *didn’t* hear. Before the City and the developers started this plan, did you hear

outcries from the community for a street grid, for an ellipse? Did you get e-mails from residents asking for more density and taller buildings in their community?

This plan is yet another example of planning in the City of Alexandria that is being done for people who don't live here yet, at the expense of those who live here now. And by "expense" I mean our tax dollars and diminishment of our quality of life.

At the April 3 Planning Commission work session, the Staff member making the presentation asked "What kind of place are we trying to create?" Who is "we" and what *are* they trying to create?

It seems clear that the "we" is the developers and the City, and it appears that they want to create another cookie-cutter development just like all the others planned in Alexandria and throughout Northern Virginia, and they want to impose *their* notion of "quality of life" and "amenities" on the citizens who actually live here now—citizens who chose to live here because of the quality of life and amenities that exist today.

Unfortunately the "we" don't seem to realize that this is already a highly desirable, walkable, diverse community with lots of trees and lovely neighborhoods.

Please do not approve the Beauregard plan as it is right now.

Thank you for your consideration.