

Mayor Euille and members of City Council,

Not quite two weeks ago, a groundbreaking ceremony marked the culmination of years of planning and the true beginning of construction that will result in 2000 new homes and hundreds of thousands of square feet of commercial office and retail space. True there is still some haggling to be done as we try to figure out just what the Potomac Yard design guidelines really mean, but essentially it is possible to sit back and let the project proceed.

But I hold that to do so is to pass up a golden opportunity for the City to acquire a substantial piece of land that could be used as open space, playing fields, or a site for a future school.

I propose that the City give serious consideration to negotiating with the developer to reallocate or redistribute some of the approved development within Potomac Yard in order to acquire at least the minimum land necessary for a school.

This has several consequences:

- It will be necessary to increase the density at some locations within Potomac Yard.
- It will mean building higher at some locations within Potomac Yard.
- Because townhomes and condominiums are not equivalent, it will probably mean compensating the developer for lost profit.
- It will mean compensating the developer for the land.
- To avoid actual expenditures from the City's coffer, it will mean some increase in the amount of approved development, ergo a density bonus.

I ask that Council consider such negotiations with the developer and direct staff to determine the possible options for reallocating the approved development and the corresponding details of compensation including both financial and increases in density.

Personally, I prefer the option outlined in my letter published this week in the Gazette Packet. Consolidating development in the land bay south of the bridge by building higher at the end closest to the Braddock Road Metro station keeps the total development, total people, total cars, etc., the same in that land bay. The increase in density, assuming that method of compensation is selected, hopefully will be modest. It could either be spread over the remaining land bays or concentrated in the town center.

Having more people located in several smaller but key footprints might also help clarify how to maximize the value of a Bus Rapid Transit system in the Potomac Yard corridor or help justify a new Metro station when the Potomac Yard Shopping Center is redeveloped.

But first we need a list of possible sites, acceptable to the developer, together with the details of the resulting density and financial consequences. Then we can perform the cost/benefit analysis and make an informed decision.

Finally, I would like to close by paraphrasing David Speck, "In 20 years, when someone asks what wise people had the forethought to reserve land in Potomac Yard for a future park or school, we'll be able to point to this day and the people in this room."

Sincerely,
David Fromm

Wishful Thinking

by David Fromm

At the Alexandria Planning Commission hearing on 7 February 2006, one detail became obvious: There will be a future battle between the school system and the open-space proponents and sports-playing-fields enthusiasts. The expanded park at Simpson Field may start its life as playing fields but are subject to being developed as a future elementary school.

The city needs open space and playing fields now, but with 2000 residences coming on line in Potomac Yard in the near future, we will probably need the school too. You don't require much experience with Alexandria's community workshops, planning commission hearings or city council hearings to envision the presentations by staff, the public testimony by all the affected groups and the concerned city activists, the hand wringing deliberations by our appointed and elected officials.

And in the end, regardless of the outcome, we will have lost because there is not enough land at the site to do it all.

There is an alternative solution but it would require an amazing set of circumstances, especially for the City of Alexandria.

The following article would make a great April Fool's story. I hope it is not pie in the sky dreaming. I hope that by publishing it now the future will be different.

Potomac Yard CDD Amended Painlessly Alexandria Acquires Land for School

Decisions made at the April public meeting of the Alexandria City Council concerning the Coordinated Development District (CDD) plan for Potomac Yard truly made history. Never, in recent events, have citizens, civic activists, neighborhood civic associations, city staff, planning commission, city council and developers come to such a major agreement so quickly or so painlessly. "It was amazing," said one council member. "Only one person signed up for the public testimony and after introducing themselves, asked all those in support of the docket item to stand. I almost fell out of my seat as the entire chamber stood!"

Having it all!

So what did this historic decision produce? Open space and playing fields enthusiasts will never have to worry about losing the expanded parkland at Simpson Field. The school system has over seven acres reserved for its future elementary school. And with control of all the land adjacent to the west side of the bridge, the city can now design the promised pedestrian crossing. "This school is expected to serve communities on both sides of the tracks and we have already had productive meetings between the school system, planning, and T&ES to develop a design that combines the school with a pedestrian crossing. We felt it was best to start this effort early since there is a possibility of using part of the support system from the existing bridge to cross over the tracks – a substantial savings."

Remember the children

It all started after the Alexandria Planning Commission meeting of 7 February 2006. A small group of citizens were concerned about the future conflict between the school system and the open space/playing fields enthusiasts over the land of the expanded park at Simpson Field. Calling themselves *A Piece of the PY*, they came up with the idea of freeing up land in Potomac Yard by redistributing development within the Yard now, before it is built. "Everyone would smile at the idea, but then say it will never happen in Alexandria," recounts one member of *A Piece of the PY*. "But by keeping everyone focused on how much we had to lose if we failed eventually paid off. 'Save a piece of the PY for the children' became the rallying cry that trumped all the other agendas!"

High Rises

"One big problem we had was the best way to compensate the developer for the lost density at the school site. The design process for the land bays north of the bridge was pretty far along and the developer was understandably hesitant to open that part of the plan for such significant revision," said one city planner. "The breakthrough came when someone suggested that we allow high rises in the remaining portion of the land bay south of the bridge. This way most of the development stayed in the land bay with only a modest amount being dispersed north of the bridge – primarily into the town center. Dense development south of the bridge will be well served by the Braddock Road metro. In fact, mixed-use high rises on this location actually compliment the redevelopment that is being planned on the other side of the tracks in the Braddock Road metro area. One architecture firm has already proposed designing the buildings on each side of the tracks so that a skyway could connect them."

Affordable Housing and Public Transportation

"Once we altered our mind set, the feasible possibilities became almost endless. For example, working with a non-profit group we leveraged some of our Affordable Housing Funds. The affordable units will be distributed throughout the complex, but it is as though we acquired several floors of living units in the high rises for work force housing," said a member of city staff. "Also, this process brought renewed focus to the possibility of connecting Main Street to Braddock Road for the purposes of public transportation."

"This almost killed the entire deal," noted the president of *A Piece of the PY*. "People were arguing that with the increased density at the high rises it almost makes sense to run the Bus Rapid Transit down Main Street if they can access Braddock Road. They felt that truly easy access to the BRT would be a great way to reduce car usage by those living at the high rises and the Yard in general. So some people tried to insert a trade-off into the CDD that if the BRT is on Main Street, the developer no longer had to provide a local bus loop in the Yard. But a different group could not accept that. Fortunately, by refocusing on 'Save a piece of the PY for the children' we got back on track."

Open Space Funds

The real turning point came at the March meeting of the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations. In an amazing, almost unprecedented, showing of consensus and solidarity, the Federation recognized the importance of acquiring the land for the school and voted unanimously to support the amendment to the CDD. This was in spite of serious concerns about how the city would pay for the land. "Although we had shifted the development around, we could not get agreement for increasing the total development in the Yard as a way of paying for the land," said the president of *A Piece of the PY*. "We had thought of using monies from the Open Space Fund since we are essentially buying parkland, but the details had not been worked out. And then a miracle occurred. I don't know if it was the fact that he had never seen so many Alexandrians in agreement or what, but the developer said he would sell the land to the City at cost, and so as not to deplete the Open Space Fund, would accept payment at the rate of 20% of the future tax proceeds to the fund until the land was paid off."

Pulte-Centex Elementary School?

"It has really been an amazing couple of months," said the president of *A Piece of the PY*. "If I had not been involved I would have thought someone was playing an April Fool's joke. A lot of people did not believe it was possible, but by staying focused on what was truly important, we did it. I think all Alexandrians now have a real reason to smile. By the way, did you know there is a petition to name the school Pulte-Centex Elementary School?"

Supported, in principle, by the future members of *A Piece of the PY*:
David Fromm,
and hopefully others.
Are you one? Let the Alexandria City Council know now!

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2-25-06

City Council Meeting
Saturday, February 25, 2006
9:30 a.m.

Good morning, I'm Debra Chandler. I live at 6101 Edsall Road. I am a resident of Alexandria Knolls West, and I have been a resident of the City of Alexandria for 21 years this coming July 4. Joining me today is Ms. Boyce Price, also a resident of Alexandria Knolls West and member of our security committee.

I understand we live in an urban area, and understand there are criminal elements that our City and our Police Department combat each and every day, which are considered more serious than vandalism. With this said, four weeks ago tomorrow at 10:30 Sunday evening, Officer Richard Sandoval knocked at the front door of my condo to inform me that two young men, reportedly between the ages of 14 and 16 had thrown rocks at the cars on the top deck of our parking garage, leaving a window shattered in my recently acquired vintage Jaguar. Imagine my level of frustration, after acquiring the car & having extensive work completed, which took weeks, and having it returned to me *just days earlier*, so that I could begin enjoying the car (I had not even had the paperwork processed by the DMV yet!)...I had to once again, return the car to the dealership for specialized work. In addition to my vehicle there were four others damaged that night. I picked up 25 rocks from the deck, and was up until 1:30 a.m. cleaning up glass shards and covering the windows w/plastic. My car remained at Rosenthal Jaguar for 10 days at a total cost of \$1,106.00. \$106.00 dollars more than I originally paid for the car. Now, I'm looking at a paint job and dent removal...we won't go into the cost there! I do not have the costs to the other residents, but knowing two full front windshields had to be replaced, and that our condo board is now reviewing additional expenditures of \$38,000 for upgrading the camera system at AKW...it was indeed an expensive way to entertain these two young men.

However, it saddens me that the ultimate cost to our city is greater than the damage done to the vehicles. The cost includes a frustrated officer who has barriers to performing his duties. Much, much more significant is the serious cost to our youth in this city. Speaking to other residents and business owners, employees of the City, and close friends throughout our city...I am

very concerned this is common occurrence in our neighborhoods and entire community.

I am not alone in erroneously thinking our City had a curfew for children under 18 years of age. An enforced curfew, for the safety of our children/teenagers, and to aid our police department in curtailing escalating vandalism and petty theft acts that can and do evolve into more serious crimes. I was alarmed to find otherwise. I was even more discouraged to find that my City Council in years past had addressed this issue on more than one occasion, and felt the civil rights of children would be seriously in question with an enforced curfew. Many jurisdictions have such curfews.

My determination has been fueled further, after returning home from a late business engagement in Loudon last Saturday evening. In the early hours of Sunday morning I personally witnessed a total of 13 children...all boys and all appearing to be underage...walking Edsall Road, from the edge of the Fairfax County line to the corner of Van Doren & Edsall Rd. in four small scattered groups. Whether they realize it or not, these children are inviting trouble. On so many levels, they are in potential danger walking the streets after dark, whether in groups or alone. Their parents must be accountable.

I was baffled, as to why City Council would not take a stronger stand, why we cannot work as a city to protect these children, particularly after the gang related violence of last year on Edsall Road in Fairfax County. *Everyone I've spoken with has an opinion and can easily place blame. I'm not interested in playing the blame game.* We must be proactive in finding an improved solution to protect the children, their future, and our business and individual property rights. We cannot ignore this problem, nor allow it to continue to fester, and take over in our neighborhoods. **This is not a invitation to live in Alexandria.** We cannot continue to consider vandalism a casual loss that cannot be stopped on any level, and that we as citizens can afford. City Council and residents need to work together in waging a constructive war to bring about significant improvement where these issues are concerned. This engagement should be waged in our schools and on the streets, with new programs for children and parents alike. I am asking that City Council once again proactively address the vandalism and curfew issues in our City.

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2-25-06

City Council public hearing 02.25.06
Docket item 2
Amy Slack

Good Morning

Del Ray is home to community building organizations such as the Del Ray Artisans, whose art show lines the walls outside these chambers, the Potomac West Business Association and the Del Ray Citizens Association. And home to individuals who volunteer for annual events like Art on the Avenue, the Halloween Parade, and the Turkey Trot. We proudly serve on city boards, commissions, planning efforts and committees. As organizations and individuals, we've earned a splendid reputation. Council paid DRCA high praise last month when we didn't make a controversy out a day labor agency locating in our midst. I was pleased to receive positive recognition for our work, even if I thought it was election year lime lighting.

To me, it wasn't a "big deal". Under the zoning ordinance, Ace is an allowable use when granted an SUP. It's a business. And finding ways to say, "Yes" to business, is what DRCA does month after month, year after year. Often we say "Yes but" and asked for conditions to be included that give us a greater level of comfort. Even in the few cases, we've outright said "No, we've laid out a set of "Yes" conditions. Our conditions are not offered as an "al la carte" menu but a balance between the wants of a business with the change it brings to the surrounding community. The Land Use committee works openly with applicants to find reasoned solutions and recommendations because we believe the process is meant to allow a restricted use to operate while giving the community control in how or when it does so. And over the past decade, I've watched some of our conditions adopted by staff as "standard".

Today, Council will consider several items that DRCA has weighed in on. We found a way to say "Yes" to change. Can you?