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Alexandria City Council  
Public Hearing Re the Beauregard Small Area Plan (Draft of March 27, 2012)  
May 12, 2012

Comments of Donald N. Buch

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. My name is Don Buch and I reside in the West End.

Concerns about a matter as complex as this Plan cannot easily be summarized in 3 minutes. In turn, I have provided you with some written comments. However, I would suggest that the decision before you today can really be boiled down to a rather simple choice – do we want to:

- A. Watch 4.5 million sq ft of new development take place with extremely limited community involvement and the most meager of proffers, or
- B. Are we prepared to accept 6.9 million sq ft of new development undertaken with extensive community involvement – as we have already witnessed – and with public benefits worth somewhere in the neighborhood of \$210 million.

I would hope that you view the latter as the obvious choice.

That said, I would ask that you be sensitive to community concerns about how the Plan evolves and is implemented from this point forward. Staff are quick to stress that this is simply a “vision” and the devil is in the details – details such as the Design Guidelines, the various SUPs and the Rezoning. Please understand that we don’t want to see “the devil” prevail. Too often the community ends up feeling that what we got was not what we expected or understood we were getting. The community needs to be actively involved as the refinements take place and the Plan is progressively implemented.

Some people here today will ask you to slow down. In contrast, I view your “approval” as simply being approval to continue to move forward; it casts nothing in stone. To me, delaying that approval accomplishes nothing and may, in fact, put a variety of things at risk.

Finally, allow me to make a point that should not go unrecognized but which the developers cannot easily make without it being perceived as a threat. I’ve been a developer for more than 30 years. I’ve often spent a lot of money hoping to enhance my opportunity but there comes a time when one faces the reality that the costs of continuing to pursue those enhancements are about to outweigh the benefits even if you “win”. We are playing with a house of cards. If even one developer pulls out I would anticipate the entire Plan could well be in jeopardy if not totally fall apart. Let’s move forward – together – before we have no option but to watch 4.5 million sq ft develop without our involvement and with minimal proffers.

Thank you.

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**Related Concerns of Donald N. Buch**

1. **Use of \$1.5 Million Received From DoD:** The City Council should specifically exclude any approval, implicit or otherwise, authorizing expenditure of the \$1.5 million received from DoD for the contemplated purchase of .85 acres of land (currently a parking lot) known as Eliot Court.
  - A number of questions remain with respect to how these monies can be used and the meaning of terminology in Duke Realty's letter to the City.
  - The selection of the identified (Eliot Court) site was done without any community involvement.
  - The City Council should ensure that the community is involved in proposing and evaluating alternative uses for these funds. They should not be spent without explicit City Council approval.
  
2. **Affordable Housing:** To date "planning" of (dedicated) affordable housing in the Plan area has been a lengthy series of "knee jerk" reactions to community pleas about the number of units, locations, whether units should be in dedicated or shared buildings, new vs. existing, AMI levels, the need for surveys, should units be dedicated for 30 years or 40 years, how the intended beneficiaries will be selected, how it will all be paid for...and the list goes on. This is not planning. Prior to the City entering into any further agreements with respect to "affordable housing" within the Plan area or elsewhere in our City, the Council should insist that City staff prepare and fully substantiate a comprehensive plan addressing the future of affordable housing in the City of Alexandria. That plan should include detailed consideration and assessment of:
  - the appropriate percentages of AMI below which rents should be subsidized;
  - whether or not an expectation of 30% of income being allocated to rent and utilities is reasonable given that many local residents have chosen to live within the beltway and devote a higher portion of their income to rent while lowering the portion they allocate to transportation;
  - how the subsidized housing units will best be reserved for the intended occupants, those seemingly being people who work in our City, most specifically those rendering public services (e.g.: teachers, firefighters, City staff);
  - programs that will be available to the occupants of the subsidized housing units so they might improve their skills and advance their careers to the point where they will no longer have a need for rental subsidies;
  - the reasonableness of subsidizing the same tenant for 30 (or 40) years;
  - how the City might encourage and increase home ownership;
  - the impact of each proposal on the taxes to be paid by the residents of Alexandria.
  
3. **Comprehensive Financial Evaluation:** The community continues to have many unanswered questions about various financial aspects of the Plan.
  - What specific constraints are there to ensure the City's financial commitments and exposure never get appreciably ahead of those ("proffers") of the developers?

- How does the City ensure it not make commitments only to subsequently find the developers have some reason they cannot or will not fulfill theirs? In the case of a significant “proffer” not being provided (for whatever reason) then the City must have some pre-agreed mechanism in place for recouping whatever it gave up in return for the not-to-be-realized “proffer”.
  - What are the inherent, implicit financial commitments that the City is making as a direct consequence of the Plan but not included in the financial plan - e.g. for Transit Corridor C?
  - What contingency plans are in place should major assumptions contained in the Beauregard SAP fail to materialize? To cite a specific concern: how would an additional school(s) get funded should the projection that a 64% increase in housing units will result in 47% decrease in student population prove to be materially incorrect?
4. Transportation Issues: It remains extremely difficult for the community to understand the ultimate and combined impact of all the contemplated transportation-related projects - Transit Corridor C, the ellipse, the new HOV ramp to Seminary Road, the HOT lanes terminating just south of Duke Street, the I-395 auxiliary lanes, the impact of SuperNoVa, not to mention increasing Metro fares and reduced Metro subsidies for Federal workers.
- The City Council should insist upon a thorough analysis of the proposed route, timing, cost and financing of “Transit Corridor C”, including that portion from Sanger Avenue to the Van Dorn Metro station (and return, should that route be materially different) which appear to have received only limited attention.
  - Little or no response has been received to questions about the ability of the Southern Towers and/or “BRAC” transportation centers to cope with the projected volumes.
  - Comparing levels of service at Plan area intersections in 2010 with the “post-development” (2035) projections, the number operating at LOS “E” increases from 11 to 12 and at LOS “F” from 6 to 7. If that is the best we can reasonably expect, the community needs to understand that reasoning.
  - Given the anticipated increase in traffic, what is the plan for coping with the material increase in volume on Seminary Road west of Beauregard? How will it be paid for?
5. Future Additional Development in the Plan Area: How is future “new” development and redevelopment in the Plan area to be addressed? As current examples, references to Goodwin House and the Hermitage have just been added to the Plan, with no elaboration and with no public discussion or involvement.
6. Terminology: Numerous terms in the plan need to be clarified to minimize future confusion or misunderstanding. Use of the word “recommended” should be avoided; it appears to require nothing specific in response. Examples of some terms needing clarification are provided as “Exhibit A” at the end of this document. We need to define our expectations from the outset.
7. Future Deviations from the Plan: You are familiar with the specific steps in the evolution of developments in Alexandria but many in the community are not. So when people are told “that will be dealt with” in the Rezoning, or in the Design Guidelines or in the SUP, they don’t always take great comfort in that. Some recent examples that give community members pause for concern:
- What was to be a 77 foot tall commercial building with self-contained visitor parking recently became a 99 foot tall residential building with no visitor parking;
  - Underground parking at Potomac Yard was explained to be a very expensive proffer yet now one of the first buildings out of the ground is seeking a waiver of that very requirement;

- We have a pizza parlor supposedly capped at 32 seats which apparently had in excess of 80 seats but the City appeared to feel that was “close enough”;
- The Landmark Gateway development departs from the Landmark Van Dorn Plan in numerous significant ways, most/many seemingly to the disadvantage of the community.

### **Exhibit A – Examples of Some Terms Needing Clarification/Greater Specificity**

- “a significant level” of committed affordable and workforce housing (page 11)
- “disbursed throughout the Plan area” (page 11)
- “great new neighborhoods” (page 17), “distinct neighborhoods” (page 18), “original and identifiable neighborhoods” (page 18)
- “larger caliper street trees” (page 21)
- “urban, human scale block sizes” (page 24)
- “landscaped streets” (page 25)
- “recommends contemporary building design elements” (page 27)
- “visually reinforce prominent locations” (page 29)
- “these buildings will generally range in height from approximately 50 to 60 ft” (page 46)
- “will likely incorporate” (page 55)
- “encourage underground parking” (page 57)
- “adequately handle stormwater” (page 68)
- “recommend canopy coverage of 40%” (page 70)
- “parking on the streets...will be strategically located to be compatible with the...Park” (page 74)
- “If additional development beyond what is approved in the Plan be approved in the future as ‘bonus density’...” (page 92)
- “recommends sustainability measures” (page 98)
- “recommends improvements for individual buildings to increase efficiency” (page 98)
- “recommending...an overall environmental site certification” (page 98)
- “recommends a Stormwater Master Plan” (page 99)
- “recommends that future development consider the following” (page 100)
- “explore compliance with the potential strategies for implementing the goals” (page 104)
- “Consider City public service amenities” (page 117)

Perhaps a useful test of clarity is to ask “If the objective were met, how would you know it?” We need to define our expectations.