

Docket Item #22
BAR Case #2003-0240

BAR Meeting
November 5, 2003

ISSUE: Construction of 79 new townhouses
APPLICANT: Potomac Greens Associates, LLC and Craftmark Homes
LOCATION: Potomac Yard - Landbay A, Tax Map 035.02-02-01
ZONE: CDD/Coordinated Development District

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the project with the following conditions:

1. All front doors should be wood;
2. For those units fronting on Carpenter Road the roofing material should be either slate/faux slate or metal; and,
3. That solid core PVC shutters that are one half the width of a window and are hinged and operable be used.

DISCUSSION:

Applicant's Description of the Undertaking:

"To build within the Old and Historic Alexandria District 79 townhouses as shown on the supporting materials. The townhouses are part of a larger development subject to the requirements of DSUP 2002-0026."

Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of 79 townhouses to be constructed on Potomac Yards which are within the boundaries of the Old and Historic Alexandria District. This development is named Potomac Greens.

Members should understand that this project is being developed by two different developers with two different architectural teams. Because of this, two separate sets of architectural drawings have been provided. However, there is no single point of differentiation between the two teams and the townhouses of one team are often times directly abutting those of the other team. Each set of drawings has a key plan which must be used in conjunction with the elevations in order to understand the context of any individual townhouse.

In May 2003, the Planning Commission and City Council approved DSUP2002-0026 for the construction of 227 townhomes within Potomac Greens, the first of 9 parcels within the Potomac Yard CDD- Coordinated Development District to be redeveloped. The CDD zone and Guidelines were adopted by Council in 1999 after nearly two years of planning efforts and numerous meetings with adjoining residents and Civic Associations. The intent of the Potomac Yard Guidelines and Concept Plan is to create a street grid network similar to Old Town and Del Ray that provides high-quality urban and architectural design, pedestrian-oriented streets and sidewalks, high-quality useable open space and parks, ultimately redeveloping Potomac Yard to be compatible with the fabric of the adjoining neighborhoods.

The Potomac Greens site is an approximately 34-acre parcel located on a visually prominent portion of Potomac Yard, situated north of Slaters Lane and the existing Old Town Greens townhouse development, and between the Metrorail tracks to the west and the George Washington Memorial Parkway to the east.



Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens Coordinated Development District (CDD) Concept Plan

The site is subject to the requirements of the Coordinated Development District (CDD) Concept Plan approved for Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens in 1999 (CDD Concept Plan #99-0001). The CDD Concept Plan was approved by City Council in 1999 after almost 10 years of planning and development attempts for one of the most important redevelopment sites within the City.

The Concept Plan governs the type, amount, location and manner of redevelopment for the entire Potomac Yard site. The Concept Plan includes Design Guidelines, which provide a vision, framework and principles for new Potomac Yard development to be utilized in evaluating specific proposals. The Concept Plan also created an Potomac Yard Urban Design Advisory Board (PYDAC) to ensure compliance with the Guidelines.

Potomac Yard CDD Illustrative Plan

Site Plan Configuration and Street Grid

The proposed 227 fee-simple townhomes are concentrated on the western portion of the site. The proposed townhomes are arranged within small blocks created by the grid of new streets that are oriented north-south and east-west through the site. The internal street grid forms the framework for the development and connects to the primary access street, Potomac Greens Drive. Potomac Greens Drive is an extension of the existing public street that connects with Slaters Lane and provides access for the existing Old Town Greens townhouse development. All streets within the community (excluding the internal alleys) will be public streets, dedicated to the City. Most of the streets are designed with on-street parking on both sides, a significant amount of parking for visitors and users of the parks.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The subject property is currently one lot of record with 66 feet of frontage on Potomac Greens Drive, 41 feet of frontage on West Abingdon Drive, and approximately 3,150 feet of frontage along the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The lot dimensions are approximately 3,000 feet by 600 feet, for a total lot area of 38.56 acres, 33.66 acres excluding the WMATA rail easements. The site is currently undeveloped, except for a stormwater management pond and sewer pumphouse along the southern boundary of the site and the previously mentioned WMATA tracks and easements.

The parcel is unique in its configuration and location. The site is a peninsula of land that is isolated by wetlands and National Park Service lands to the east and north, and by the WMATA rail corridor to the west. Its only point of connection to existing city development is along its southern boundary where it abuts Potowmack Crossing II condominiums and the rears of 10 townhouse units in the Old Town Greens development.

The 227 proposed townhouse units are concentrated on the western portion of the site, with a proposed 16-acre public Potomac Greens Park wrapping the townhouse project to the east and north. The proposed townhouses are arranged within blocks created by a grid of new streets that run north-south and east-west through the project. All the townhouses face the streets, with garages accessed from a system of alleys in the interior of the blocks. The townhouses range in size from 16 feet to 24 feet in width, 42 feet to 55 feet in depth and 2 ½ to 4 stories in height. The units are designed to incorporate a variety of architectural styles arranged in a progression throughout the project, which helps create a unique character for various blocks.

Building Types & Locations

The Potomac Yard Guidelines recommend a variety of unit types, as well as variety in building height and design. The townhouse units proposed by the applicants vary in width from 16 feet to 24 feet, and in depth from 42 feet to 55 feet. All of the units are individual rear-load-type garage townhouses. Heights of the structures vary from 27 feet to 45 feet, or 2 ½ to 4 stories, which are articulated stylistically with dormers, mansards, gables, etc. to create further architectural variation at the public street front.

The proposed rear-loaded townhouse unit types vary in width from 16' to 24' and in height from 27' to 45' and range in size from approximately 1,500 to 4,500 square feet. In keeping with the Concept Plan and Guidelines, the buildings incorporate a variety of architectural styles and a variety of colors, material and varied fenestration patterns in order to provide articulation of the street wall and variations between the units.

The overall breakdown of units by unit type is now proposed as:

- 20 2 ½-story units, with a partial third story under a gable roof with dormers;
- 5 3-story units with a 2-story cornice and a third story under a mansard roof;
- 131 3 ½-story units with a partial fourth story under a gable roof with dormers;
- 12 partial 3-story and 4-story units, with a 3-story main facade, and a fourth-story roof deck and fourth story loft portion of the dwelling;
- 59 4-story dwellings with 3-story cornices and a fourth story under a mansard roof.

The tallest townhouses proposed are 45 feet tall. The Guidelines require that units be constructed of traditional materials, such as brick, wood and stucco. The units are proposed to be constructed of brick and cementitious siding, and covered with roofs of asphalt shingles or standing seam metal.

Building Design

In working with Staff, the applicants revised the architectural scheme to present a more organic pattern of architectural variation across the development, reflecting a more natural pattern of development, such as occurred historically in Old Town, and which contributes to its overall varied impression. Specifically, the direction has been to group houses of similar style together in groups of two and three, rather than the more random or house-by-house variation of architectural styles originally shown. The intended effect is that each street or string of elevations may have a more dominant architectural style, i.e. one segment of houses might be more Federal style, while another might be Victorian, and a third, Second Empire—with various accents of styles from another period to mitigate the impression of either unmodulated randomness or relentless conformity. Staff has worked closely with the applicants to revise the plan and believes that the applicant has introduced a more convincing progression of styles and a beneficial measure of uniqueness between the blocks.

George Washington Memorial Parkway View Corridor

A primary concern of any site adjacent to the George Washington Memorial Parkway is maintaining the integrity of this important and historic corridor within the City. While there are a considerable amount of existing trees between the Parkway and the proposed buildings, these trees are primarily deciduous and the proposed buildings will be visible during the months of the year when these trees lose their foliage. Additionally, there are many areas of treeless slopes within the future Potomac Greens Park natural areas that need additional tree plantings. While not immediately adjacent to the Parkway, the proposed buildings are within 200-300 feet of the Parkway and are at a higher grade than the Parkway and, therefore, will be at least partially visible from the Parkway. This portion of the Parkway, unlike other portions within the City, is a more pastoral setting with landscaping and large trees and only limited views of buildings from the Parkway.

The design standards promote adhering to established traditional building character in terms of style, massing, scale, proportions, materials and details. The requirement that the buildings be designed to look separate and not more massive than historic buildings has been addressed by working with the Staff to introduce variations in height and front setbacks as well as adding mid-block passages in longer strings of townhouses.

While it is true that the houses closest to the Parkway will be removed approximately 200' from the roadway, they will clearly be visible and, as such, will be the first residential development seen when entering the historic district from the north and will thus become a gateway into the historic district. The roofs of the individual townhouses and the roofscape of the entire development will be especially visible from the Parkway. The design has been revised to present a variety of roof heights and types among those units facing the Parkway. Staff believes that the roofs of these townhouses should reflect historic building materials that correlate with the historical style of a townhouse. Thus, Staff believes that asphalt shingle should not be used on the roofs of the townhouses which face the Parkway and instead slate/faux slate or metal roofs should be installed. The maintenance of the memorial character of the George Washington

Memorial Parkway was the major impetus for the establishment of the Old and Historic Alexandria District in 1946. In the opinion of Staff, the installation of roofing material appropriate to the architectural style of a townhouse will contribute to the maintenance of the memorial character of the Parkway.



View from GW Memorial Parkway (Top: simulated summer view; Bottom: winter view)

The section of the Guidelines addressing this portion of the Washington Street corridor recommend that the units facing the Parkway be articulated as primary facades; this is facilitated by applicants' location of the perimeter street with front-facing units overlooking the Park. .

The Potomac Yard Guidelines indicate that masonry cladding materials are preferred with colors that allow the buildings to blend into the background.

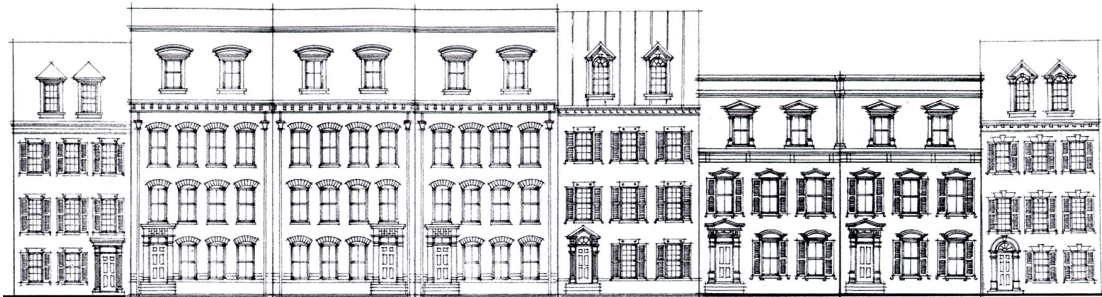
Architectural Treatment

The strength of the Potomac Greens plan—its reliance on rear-loading units with enhanced public streets—creates problematic architectural treatment at the rears of units, where alleys are lined by the garage doors of every unit. In general, the rear elevations proposed are often unrelated to the architectural treatment which has been carefully presented on the street elevations, even in locations (such as the southern townhomes or the townhomes adjacent to the Metro rail) where the rears will be highly visible from the public realm.

The Guidelines are silent as to the designs of unit rears, except to specify that the same high quality materials used on the front elevations also be used on the rear; the applicants responded to this requirement by proposing the use of cementitious siding on a majority of the rears of units.

The applicants have improved the architectural expression of the project over the course of the review period. On initial submission, the architectural styles varied randomly from unit to unit, in a manner more typical of present-day suburban development. The applicant also worked with

Staff to provide groupings of similar architectural styles that reflect the historical pattern of townhouse construction in Old Town. In Alexandria, historically townhouses were generally constructed three to four units at a time by different builders, resulting in varying front setbacks, and inadvertently creating building articulation that creates variety and richness for the street while still maintaining an urban “streetwall.”



Potomac Greens elevation showing aggregation of architectural styles and variation of building heights

Elevation Descriptions

Facade elevations have been included for each of the strings of townhouses within the historic district, even if some of the houses within the string lie outside the boundaries of the district. The elevations of the townhouses outside of the district boundaries are included for illustrative and comparative purposes only and are not subject to approval by the Board.

Lots 14, 15 - south end of Carpenter Road

Styles: one Italianate Revival, three stories, three bays, double dormer, brick
one Victorian Revival, four stories, three bays, brick

Lots 21, 22, 23, 24 - south end of Carpenter Road

Styles: two Victorian Revival, four stories, three bays, hip roof, brick
one Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, gable roof, brick
one Italianate Revival, three stories, three bays, dormers, brick

Lots 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 - Carpenter Road, facing George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: three Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, gable roof, brick
two Victorian Revival, four stories, three bays, hip roof, brick
three Colonial Revival, three stories, three bays, dormers, siding
two Italianate Revival, four stories, three bays, dormers, brick

Lots 31, 32, 33, 34, east end of Bracey Lane

Styles: one Colonial Revival, three stories, three bays, roof dormers, brick
one Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, gable roof, siding
two, Italianate Revival, four stories, four bays, flat roof, brick

Lots, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76 - Carpenter Road, facing George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: two Colonial Revival, four stories, four bays, gable roof, brick
one Italianate Revival, four stories, three bays, double dormer, brick
two Victorian Revival, four stories, three bays, gambrel roof, brick
one Mansard Revival, three stories, three bays, brick

Lots 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82 - east end of day lane, lot 77 faces George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: three Victorian Revival, four stories, four bays, gable roof, brick
two Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, dormers, siding
one Mansard Revival, three stories, five bays, brick

Lots 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93 - east end of Day Lane, Lot 93 faces George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: two Italianate, four stories four bays, flat roof, brick
four Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, gable roof with dormers, three brick, one siding

Lots 94, 95, 96, 97, 98 - east end of Miller Lane, Lot 94 faces George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: two Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, gable roof, brick
one Italianate Revival, four stories, four bays, roof dormers, brick
two Italianate, four stories four bays, flat roof, brick

Lots 127, 128, 129, 130 - east end of Miller Lane, Lot 130 faces George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: one Mansard Revival, three stories, four bays, brick
one Victorian Revival, four stories, four bays, brick
two Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, one brick, one siding

Lot 131, 132, 133 - east end of Rose Square, Lot 131 faces George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: one Mansard Revival, four stories, four bays, brick
one Colonial Revival, four stories, four bays, gable roof, brick
one Victorian Revival, four stories, three bays, brick

Lots 141, 142, 143 - east end of Rose Square; Lot 143 faces George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: one, four story, Romanesque Revival, four stories, two bay, gable roof, brick
one Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, gable roof, siding
one Colonial Revival, three stories, three bays, gable roof, brick

Lots 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151 - Carpenter Road, facing George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: three, Colonial Revival, three story, three bay with roof dormers, brick
three, Colonial Revival, four story, three bay with roof dormers, two brick, one siding

two, Italianate Revival, four story, four bay with roof dormers, brick

Lots 152, 153 and 154 - East end of Lyles Lane

Styles: two Colonial Revival, four story, three bays, gable roofs, brick
one, Italianate Revival, four story, three bay, flat roof, brick

Lots 198, 199 - East end of Lyles Lane,

Styles: one Mansard Revival, four stories, four bays, brick
one Colonial Revival, four story, four bays, gable roofs, brick
one Italianate Revival, four stories, four bays, brick

Lots - 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212 - Carpenter Road, facing George Washington Memorial Parkway

Styles: five Colonial Revival, four stories, three bays, dormers, two brick, three siding
three Colonial Revival, three stories, three bays, dormers, two brick, one siding
two Victorian Revival, four stories, four bays, gable roof, brick
_____one Mansard Revival, four stories, five bays, brick
one Italianate Revival, three stories, three bays, brick

Lots - 213, 214 - north end of Carpenter Road

Styles: one Italianate Revival, four stories, three bays, double dormer, brick
_____one Italianate Revival, four stories, four bays, dormers, brick

The siding material proposed is fiber cement siding. Fypon will be used for decorative brackets.

The applicant has provided samples of the following building products:

Full size windows. Simulated divided light windows are proposed.

Door hardware

Exterior lighting fixtures

Brick samples.

Paint colors and roof colors have also been provided.

These will be made available to members at the public hearing.

History and Analysis:

Potomac Yards was established as a rail classification yard in 1905 it was abandoned in the 1990s and all improvements were demolished. The proposed site of the new townhouses is vacant land. This first section of the planned residential development is located at the extreme southeastern corner of Potomac Yards. The boundaries of the historic district extend to 500 feet on either side of the centerline of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Thus of the 227 houses proposed for the Potomac Greens residential development a total of 79 fall within the purview of the Board.

The design vocabulary of the proposed townhouses attempts to mirror historic rowhouse design typologies found throughout the Old and Historic Alexandria District. In the opinion of Staff, the

proposed design, height, scale, massing and texture of the rowhouses is compatible with the established rowhouse design found within the historic district. In the opinion of Staff, the design of the rowhouses proposed meets the recommendations contained in the New Construction - Residential section of the *Design Guidelines*.

While Staff is supportive of the proposed townhouse design and the vast majority of the detailing of the buildings proposed by the applicant, Staff does have concern about some proposed building materials. First, Staff believes that all of the front doors of the rowhouses should be wood and not a composite material. The doors are the first tactile encounter with building materials that anyone coming to a townhouse will experience. Therefore, Staff believes the front doors should express the value placed on building material that is evident throughout the historic district.

Second, Staff believes that for those units fronting Carpenter Road and thus, the George Washington Memorial Parkway, that the roofing material should not be asphalt shingle, but rather roof covering materials on these strings should be either slate/faux slate or metal. This is consistent with the standards applied to other new development projects fronting on the Parkway that have been approved recently by the Board including Old Town Gateway and Liberty Row. Potomac Greens is the first residential development fronting the Parkway that is being proposed for Potomac Yard. Thus, the Board's decisions regarding Potomac Greens will have value as a precedent for the next phases of residential development in the Yard. Because of this Staff believes that it is important that the roofs of the townhouses remain historically consistent with the overall architectural treatment.

Third, the shutters proposed on various townhouses models should meet the recommendations for shutters contained in the *Design Guidelines*. The *Guidelines* recommend that shutters be one half the width of a window and be hinged and operable. Several months ago, Staff showed samples of a solid core PVC shutter to the Board which indicated that this type of shutter would be appropriate for use on new housing projects. In this instance Staff recommends approval of the solid core PVC shutters that are hinged and operable.

With these minor changes, Staff recommends approval of the project.