

Docket Item #7
MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT #2005-0001
REZONING #2005-0001
TEXT AMENDMENT #2005-0001
POTOMAC WEST SMALL AREA PLAN
MT. VERNON AVE BUSINESS AREA PLAN

Planning Commission Meeting
March 1, 2005

ISSUE: Consideration of a request for (1) a revision of and an amendment to the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan to include the Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan, new CDD guidelines and general updated language; (2) amendments to the City of Alexandria zoning map to reflect the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay Zone, a new CDD #13 and a new CDD #14; (3) amendments to Section 5-602 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to add new CDD #13 and CDD #14 zoning designation; (4) amendments to Section 2-100 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to add definitions; and (5) enactment of Section 6-600 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance pertaining to the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay zone.

APPLICANT: City of Alexandria, Department of Planning and Zoning

LOCATION: The commercial properties along the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor bounded generally by Herbert Street to the north and Nelson Street to the south, including the properties located at 415 and 425 Monroe Avenue.

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission, on its own motion, initiate the following amendments:

1. Amendment to and revision of the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan to include the Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan, CDD guidelines and general updated language;
2. Amendment to the zoning maps to reflect the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay zone, new CDD #13 and new CDD #14;
3. Amendment to Section 5-602 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to add new CDD #13 and new CDD #14 zoning designation;
4. Enactment of Section 6-600 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance pertaining to the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay zone; and
5. Amendment to Section 2-100 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to add definitions.

BACKGROUND:

Over the years, a series of planning efforts have been undertaken, with substantial public investment and community involvement, to improve the Potomac West area. Most recently, a three year long planning process in the Arlandria neighborhood resulted in the creation of the Arlandria Neighborhood Plans and related zoning and small area plan changes that were adopted by City Council in June 2003.

The City continues to recognize that Mt. Vernon Avenue is a vital corridor, with a rich history and eclectic character that makes it an attractive place to live, work and shop. In late spring 2003, the City formed the Mt. Vernon Avenue Work Group (Work Group) to embark on a comprehensive planning effort for Mt. Vernon Avenue's "Main Street" retail district, broadly defined between Glebe Road and Luray Avenue. Working collaboratively with the Work Group comprised of residents, businesspeople and community representatives from the Del Ray and Warwick Village Citizens Associations and the Mt. Jefferson Civic Association, and the Potomac West Business Association (PWBA), a future direction for Mt. Vernon Avenue (the Avenue) was defined to guide neighborhood changes while protecting adjoining neighborhoods.

MT. VERNON AVENUE BUSINESS AREA PLAN:

The vision for the Avenue involves preserving its traditional neighborhood character, protecting its unique historical identity, serving the needs of the surrounding community and maintaining its viability and competitiveness as a commercial district. Building upon its unique characteristics, the Avenue will remain a special neighborhood as change takes place. The Work Group adopted the following statement that succinctly expresses this vision:

Mt. Vernon Avenue is a vibrant and welcoming Main Street that reflects the surrounding neighborhoods' diversity, integrity and small town charm. The Avenue is comprised of enthusiastic, successful and responsible community partners. We offer an eclectic and friendly living, working and shopping environment for Alexandrians and visitors alike.

With extensive community input, guiding principles were developed to direct the future of Mt. Vernon Avenue and the specific recommendations of the *Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan (Plan)*. These guiding principles are to:

- Preserve existing historic scale and character;
- Protect and enhance Mt. Vernon Avenue as a vibrant commercial corridor;
- Encourage and support mixed use development;
- Celebrate the Town of Potomac Historic District;

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- Preserve and protect existing residential areas;
- Promote partnerships;
- Enhance public spaces;
- Provide convenient parking and transportation solutions to support retail growth;
- Encourage independent retail;
- Capitalize on the neighborhood arts community; and
- Provide alternative multi-modal transportation linkages

The primary study area extends along the length of the Avenue from Herbert Street to Nelson Avenue. Due to the differing characteristics along the length of the street, the study area is divided into three focus areas, as follows:

- ***Commonwealth District*** – Extending from Herbert Street on the north to Uhler Avenue, this area functions as a transition area between the pedestrian-oriented traditional urban form of the Historic Core and the more automobile-oriented form on the street and properties to the north;
- ***Historic Core*** -- From Uhler Avenue south to Bellefonte Avenue, this section of Mt. Vernon Avenue is located within the Town of Potomac National Register Historic District and has maintained a traditional “Main Street” feel over the years; and
- ***Monroe Gateway*** – Extending south from Bellefonte Avenue to Nelson Avenue, (and including the small shopping center located on the west side of the Avenue at Luray Avenue and the Giant grocery store and CVS pharmacy located in the 400 block on Monroe Avenue), this area is the most diverse, with a variety of service and automotive uses, small retail, office and residences, and is the linkage to the Route 1 corridor.

Plan Strategies

The Plan outlines six interrelated strategies that work together to achieve the overall vision for a vibrant, competitive Main Street where change builds upon and preserves the existing historic and eclectic characteristics of the community. Strategies for land use, parking, pedestrian and multi-modal connections, retail marketing and arts promotion, urban design/streetscape and zoning have been developed consistent with the guiding principles and the vision for the Avenue. A brief overview of each strategy is provided below.

Land Use Strategy

The land use strategy is generally focused towards promoting and reinforcing a consistent, vibrant and pedestrian-oriented retail environment, while protecting adjacent residential neighborhoods. The

strategy includes overall recommendations for the entire Avenue, as well as those specifically crafted for the three focus areas. For the entire Avenue, the Plan recommends:

- **Promoting infill development** compatible with the mass and scale of existing buildings, through the use of building form design guidelines;
- **Protecting residential neighborhoods**, by minimizing impacts through the use of buffers and building setbacks;
- **Enhancing the pedestrian streetscape**, through improved lighting, streetscape and crosswalk improvements, strengthened connections to the Metro station and improved appearance of the service uses;
- **Providing visual open space**, by maintaining existing visual open space elements and providing open space in new construction on medium and larger sized sites; and
- **Encouraging a mix of uses**, including second floor residential and office uses to support the retail activity and concentrated retail in key locations.

For the individual focus areas, the specific land use, open space and streetscape recommendations are:

Commonwealth District - Herbert Street south to Uhler Avenue

- **Encouraging a mix of uses**, including residential, office and institutional uses with limited retail, as well as a variety in the housing types, and some affordable housing;
- **Promoting coordinated development** of the underutilized properties in the triangular assemblage north of Commonwealth Avenue for a quality residential and retail project with defined development standards;
- **Improving streetscape, open space and pedestrian safety**, through pedestrian improvements in key locations, street tree planting and enhancements to Colosanto Park; and
- **Providing future use direction and improvement for two opportunity sites**, the Sun Trust property at Commonwealth and Mt. Vernon Avenues, and the lots at the southeast corner of Mt. Vernon and Raymond Avenues.

Historic Core - Uhler Avenue south to Bellefonte Avenue

- **Encouraging street-level retail**, by defining a retail focus area to target the ground floor for retail uses;
- **Preserving the historic character**, by utilizing several historic preservation approaches, including tax credits and community education, and allowing appropriate infill development through the building form design guidelines;

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- ***Creating a “town square,”*** by providing improvements to the City lot at Oxford and Mt. Vernon Avenues to enhance this lot as a public gathering space for community events;
- ***Considering reuse of the historic fire station/town hall*** for community functions/activities should the station outgrow the current facility; and
- ***Providing future use direction and improvement for three opportunity sites***, the parking lot behind 2401 Mt. Vernon Avenue, the vacant lot at 2207 Mt. Vernon Avenue and the 7-11 Store at Custis and Mt. Vernon Avenues.

Monroe Gateway - Bellefonte Avenue south to Nelson Avenue, the Giant/CVS sites on Monroe Avenue

- ***Encouraging a mix of uses***, including residential and retail uses that promote a transition into the Historic Core area;
- ***Enhancing the streetscape and urban design***, by completing the undergrounding and streetscape improvements and improving the appearance of the automobile and service-related uses;
- ***Improving Gateway Park*** on land made available by the realignment of the Monroe Avenue/Route 1 bridge, in a manner that provides a high-quality gateway for the community;
- ***Enhancing the neighborhood Giant and CVS sites***, by working with the owners to maintain the facilities as part of the community, and, if market forces make it no longer viable, to redevelop the sites with residential in a coordinated manner using specific design guidelines and incorporating the grocery/pharmacy use as part of the redevelopment;
- ***Enhancing access to the Metro Station***, by providing bike and pedestrian access on the east side of George Washington Middle School, identifying other opportunities for pedestrian improvements with the Potomac Yard development, and enhanced signage, lighting and bus shelters; and
- ***Providing future use direction and improvement for six opportunity sites***, the Salvation Army sites in the 1800 block of Mt. Vernon Avenue, the service uses in the 1800 and 1900 blocks, the auto dealerships in the 1600 and 1700 blocks, the service stations at Monroe and Mt. Vernon Avenues, the undeveloped lot at 1503 Mt. Vernon Avenue and the Verizon building at 301 Alexandria Avenue. Although it is unlikely that these sites will redevelop in the short term, the *Plan* recommends property and site improvements to enhance their appearance.

The creation of the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay Zone is recommended as the primary mechanism to implement the *Plan*'s land use, parking and urban design recommendations. The overlay zone is principally intended to provide zoning and parking flexibility to encourage new retail uses, to allow restaurants, outdoor dining and other limited uses by Administrative SUP, and to provide the mechanism to apply the building form design guidelines to new infill development. In addition, the Coordinated Development District (CDD) approach is recommended for the consolidated Triangle sites and the Giant/CVS sites to implement the design, use and development recommendations for these sites. The overlay district and the CDDs are discussed in more depth later in this report.

Parking Strategy

Consistent with other urban neighborhoods, parking along Mt. Vernon Avenue is at a premium during certain times of the day. The perception of insufficient parking has raised neighborhood concern when new businesses seek to locate on Mt. Vernon Avenue or existing businesses desire to expand their operations. There is limited ability to create new parking opportunities along the Avenue, due to the developed character of the street, the typically small lots and the desire to maintain the continuity of the retail and the pedestrian environment along the street.

With the finite supply of parking, the principal goals of the *Plan* are to better utilize the existing parking resources and to balance the supply and demand for parking to ensure that parking demand is met without negatively impacting nearby residences. A parking utilization study was conducted to understand current and potential future parking conditions along the Avenue and to assist in formulating appropriate parking strategies. The study concluded that the current supply of and demand for parking are in balance although parking utilization along the Avenue varies by location as well as the time and day of the week.

A shared parking program is recommended to more fully utilize ten identified privately owned off-street parking lots during the lot's off-peak hours. Using the overlay is also recommended to provide some flexibility in the parking requirements. Such flexibility includes waiving the increase in parking requirements when an existing office or personal service use changes to retail; waiving the parking requirement for outdoor dining; and reducing parking requirements for new infill development and additions on constrained lots where the new development is compatible with the building form design guidelines delineated in the *Plan*. A parking reduction policy is also outlined to provide guidance in assessing future parking reduction applications.

The parking strategy balances small increases in density and changes in use with significant development, and requires the latter to comply with the existing parking regulations. Inherent in this strategy is the need to monitor parking demand and utilization over time as well as the

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responsiveness of the strategies as the area changes and demand increases. The Plan recognizes that the existing parking resources have a finite capacity and includes several options that could be considered over time to further manage parking and, if the conditions warrant, to construct new public parking.

Pedestrian and Multi-Modal Strategy

To support and enhance the existing pedestrian-oriented nature of the Avenue and nearby neighborhoods, a multi-modal strategy is recommended, and highly desired by the community. The major focus of this strategy is to encourage and promote greater use of transit, walking and bicycling, and increase pedestrian safety. Actions such as enhancing existing bus stops with benches and shelters, providing bicycle racks and other streetscape amenities and improving pedestrian connections to the Braddock Road Metro Station will encourage people to use these modes of transportation. Expanding DASH service to the Avenue is also recommended when the new maintenance facility is complete in 2008 to provide more frequent service and better cross-town connections between the Avenue and the rest of the City.

A priority improvement of the Work Group is the installation to pedestrian lighting of the sidewalks to enhance pedestrian safety. Their second priority is the reduction of the existing four lane section of the Avenue between Commonwealth Avenue and Glebe Road to two lanes by restriping the existing road section to include two vehicle travel lanes, two bicycle lanes and one parking lane, or two travel lanes and two parking lanes. This improvement can be undertaken at minimal cost, greatly reducing vehicle speeding and increasing pedestrian safety. Bulb-outs and crosswalks at key intersections will also enhance pedestrian safety by highlighting areas for pedestrian movement and reducing the street's crossing distance.

Retail Marketing and Arts Promotion Strategy

To strengthen the existing retail district and attract new complementary businesses, a marketing strategy is recommended that builds on the successful efforts of Potomac West Business Association (PWBA). This strategy includes utilizing a variety of media to market the Avenue, integrating retail marketing efforts into events and festivals, such as Art on the Avenue or First Thursday events, maintaining uniform hours of operation for stores, and enhancing the identity of the Avenue through vertical banners, heritage signage and gateway improvements.

The arts are a fundamental component of the Avenue's retail marketing strategy. The arts have played an important role in the revitalization and growth of the Avenue into the vibrant Main Street character it has today. From the efforts of the Del Ray Artisans to the success of Art on the Avenue, art and the Avenue have a very complementary and synergistic relationship. The *Plan* places a high

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priority on developing and maintaining the arts as a prominent feature of the Avenue's retail and cultural offerings and recommends the development of an arts promotion strategy. Elements of the strategy include artists' studios, galleries, art supply stores, an art education center, public art and arts-related festivals and promotions.

The community has significant accomplishments in marketing and promotion through a dedicated group of volunteers. In organizing events, marketing the Avenue and making community improvements, PWBA, Del Ray Artisans and neighborhood citizens associations have significantly contributed to the improvement of the Avenue's business climate. It is difficult, however, using solely volunteer efforts to sustain a high level of activity over time. For such efforts to continue, the Plan suggests the establishment of a business improvement district (BID) to provide a consistent funding source to sustain and expand existing marketing and promotions activities, ensuring that current efforts are continued on a long-term basis. As an implementation item, the Plan suggests a series of steps to undertake in exploring the creation of a BID.

Urban Design/Streetscape Strategy

The urban design strategy seeks to enhance the character and definition of those elements that make up the public realm – the public streetscape, public and private open space and the scale and form of the buildings that define the street. The guiding principles for the urban design strategy are to:

- ***Preserve and protect existing residential areas***, through the use of building form design guidelines to buffer adjoining uses and minimize the impacts associated with commercial activity;
- ***Encourage and support a mixed-use environment***, by emphasizing retail uses on the ground floor and developing standards to enhance the quality of the pedestrian/retail experience;
- ***Preserve existing historic scale and character***, through the use of standards/guidelines for quality and appropriately-scaled infill development, and encouraging the redevelopment of incompatible buildings; and
- ***Celebrate the "Town of Potomac Historic District,"*** by improving the Avenue's appearance through streetscape and facade improvements.

Building Form Design Guidelines

A major thrust of the urban design recommendations for the Avenue is to protect and enhance its historic and eclectic character as change takes place. Building form design guidelines have been developed to ensure quality development that reflects the existing pattern of development along the Avenue while preserving the contributing buildings in the Town of Potomac Historic District. The building form design principles are intended to meet the following general objectives:

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- New construction should reflect the scale of existing buildings;
- A consistent street wall should be maintained, with some variations to allow for landscaped open space, an opportunity for side windows and for site access where necessary;
- New construction should be two to two and one-half stories, with a setback where a third story is provided;
- New buildings should help define the corners where side streets intersect Mt. Vernon Avenue, with retail storefront windows extending onto the side streets;
- Appropriate building setbacks and parking lot screening will minimize impacts on adjacent residential properties;
- Ground level retail storefronts should contribute to the vitality of the streetscape and the pedestrian experience;
- Direct driveway access to Mt. Vernon Avenue is not desirable; and
- Off-street parking lots should be located to the rear of the property, with access provided from rear alleys, when available, side streets or access easements from adjoining properties.

Specific building form design guidelines are used to achieve the general objectives. These guidelines are depicted visually in the *Plan*, using graphics to show the desired form and location of buildings and parking areas, building massing, height and scale, building facades and screening requirements. The design intent for each guideline is presented to ensure an understanding of goal and application of each guideline.

Storefront Guidelines

The *Plan* recognizes that storefronts are generally the first point of contact with potential customers and that they define the character of a neighborhood and retail street. With the unique, eclectic nature of the retail along the Avenue, standardized or generic storefronts are strongly discouraged. Storefront design should reinforce the Main Street quality of the Avenue, with its organic small town character, and is recommended to include the following elements:

- Individual storefront displays should change often to add richness to the Avenue;
- The primary pedestrian entrance should directly front along the sidewalk or at the corner;
- On corner sites, ground level retail storefront windows should extend a minimum of 20 feet along the side street, and both the architecture of the building and the storefront design should address and articulate the corner at intersections along the Avenue;
- Storefronts should have a minimum of 75 percent glass at the ground floor facade,

- with signage limited to the ground level;
- Creative displays of merchandise and services should be included in storefront windows; and
- Ground level storefronts are encouraged to have exterior awnings that are coordinated with the storefront design.

The existing Mt. Vernon Avenue Design Guidelines, adopted by City Council in 1993, have been incorporated into the proposed guidelines, to enhance and maintain consistency in building facades along the Avenue.

Streetscape Improvements

The *Plan* recommends improvements to lighting, sidewalks, bulb-outs and crosswalks, street trees, public signage, and site amenities, including street furniture and public art to enhance the pedestrian environment. Pedestrian scale lighting is strongly desired by the community to enhance pedestrian safety along the Avenue during evening hours. The existing cobra head light fixtures illuminate the street. Limited light filters through the existing tree canopy to the sidewalk level. Of the pedestrian safety improvements, the Work Group unanimously selected pedestrian scale lighting and a reduced roadway width north of Commonwealth Avenue to Glebe Road as their highest priorities.

Implementation Strategy

Specific delineated approaches for implementing the *Plan's* recommendations are critical to ensuring the goals of the *Plan* are achieved. A key element for implementation will be a coordinated effort of public and private entities. The Potomac West Business Association is the recommended organization to implement the marketing, business organization and retail promotion efforts. A Business Improvement District approach is outlined to provide a regular source of funding in benefit of business along the Avenue.

The *Plan* outlines a series of actions and steps, and the principal agencies involved, to ensure the successful implementation of the vision, guiding principles and strategies. Taking that one step further, a draft implementation schedule is included with this report that identifies the proposed actions, the departments responsible for each action and the projected fiscal year during which the actions will be undertaken. With limited public funding available to undertake the suggested physical improvements, working with the community to prioritize the public improvements is an initial implementation step.

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Conclusion

The Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area planning effort has lead to the creation of a plan outlining a vision and guiding principles to ensure the Avenue continues to meet the needs and expectations of the community while realizing its potential as a vibrant and competitive place for business. The *Plan* includes strategies to strengthen existing businesses and attract new businesses along the Avenue; to provide a direction for marketing and arts promotion efforts; to improve the pedestrian/retail environment; to maximize parking resources; and to ensure high quality new construction of compatible mass and scale. An implementation schedule for immediate, mid and long term improvements and actions will move the community closer to achieving its vision and goals for the future of the Avenue.

LAND USE AND ZONING ACTIONS

In order to incorporate the Mt. Vernon Avenue planning work within the City's Master Plan and to implement the zoning recommendations of the Plan, the following actions are necessary:

Amendment to the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan to include the Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan (the Plan) and CDD guidelines, and general updated language.

The recent Mt. Vernon Avenue planning process has resulted in a plan with planning principles and design guidelines to ensure that, as new development and infill development occurs, the bulk, mass, scale and orientation of the new buildings are compatible with the existing character of the commercial district along the Avenue.

In general, the creation of two new coordinated development districts (CDDs)(discussed in more depth in the following pages), incorporate the guidelines and planning principles developed during the planning process into the text of the CDDs. The purpose of the defined principles is to guide new development in accordance with the community's vision, to establish an appropriate level of development for the CDD sites, and to provide certainty to the property owner/developer of the amount of desirable development. The text seeks to provide a clear understanding among all interested and affected parties – residents, commercial property owners, City staff and elected officials, and the development community about the standards for compatible building design and the bulk, mass and scale of new development, and to protect the integrity of the adjacent residential neighborhoods while providing some certainty as to the acceptable scale and type of new construction.

The adoption of the *Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan* as part of the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan represents the second major change to that Small Area Plan. (The first major amendment was the adoption of the *Arlandria Neighborhood Plans* and CDD guidelines in June 2003.) In addition to incorporating these planning efforts, the Small Area Plan has been amended to reflect changing physical conditions, including the approved Potomac Yard project, since its original adoption in 1992 and to provide up-to-date demographic information on the area.

Amendment to the zoning maps to reflect the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay zone, a new CDD #13 and a new CDD #14.

The Avenue is regarded as one of the region's most unique neighborhoods, due in large part to its small town, Main Street character. The current CL zoning regulations, however, do not provide a framework to ensure that the form and scale of new or infill development will be compatible with

the historic scale and character of existing buildings along the Avenue.

A new overlay zone, the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay zone, is proposed to supplement the traditional Commercial Low (CL) zone and would be applied to those properties with frontage along Mt. Vernon Avenue from Commonwealth Avenue south to Nelson Avenue (see attached map). The purpose of the overlay zone is to achieve a mixed use, pedestrian-oriented environment that both supports economic activity and protects existing residential neighborhoods, and to provide for appropriately scaled infill development, compatible with the character of Mount Vernon Avenue, the existing community and the Town of Potomac Historic District. With the *Plan's* emphasis on form, quality and the relationship of buildings to each other and the street, a more flexible, design-oriented zoning approach is necessary to support and encourage appropriately scaled and designed new construction. (The specific provisions of the overlay zone are discussed later in this report.)

The creation of two new coordinated development districts (CDDs) is also proposed. CDD #13 is proposed for the 11 parcels, totaling approximately two acres in size, located on the east side of the Avenue between Commonwealth Avenue and Herbert Street, known collectively as the "Triangle Sites." (The property, with an existing office building at the intersection of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Herbert Street, is not included in the proposed CDD, nor is the parcel to the east of this area developed with the Commonwealth Terrace Apartment building.) The creation of a CDD is proposed to encourage the coordinated redevelopment of the parcels in a manner consistent with the design and planning principles presented in the Plan. The underlying zoning for the new CDD #13 is Commercial Low (CL); however, in order to offset market forces and to achieve the mixed use development desired by the community, single, two-family and townhouse uses will not be permitted by right.

CDD #14 is proposed for the two parcels totaling 1.9 acres in size, located at 415 and 425 Monroe Avenue. The parcels are developed with a Giant grocery store and CVS pharmacy and are known as the "Giant and CVS Sites." The creation of a CDD is proposed to ensure a coordinated redevelopment of the sites should market conditions render the current buildings or uses obsolete. The community strongly supports the existing grocery and pharmacy uses in this location and such uses are desired in any future redevelopment of the sites. The underlying CL zone will remain.

Amendments to Section 5-602 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance with respect to a new CDD #13 and a new CDD #14.

The requested amendment will add two new coordinated development districts to those delineated in the zoning ordinance.

CDD #13 Triangle Sites

The designation of CDD zoning for the Triangle Sites, on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue, north of Commonwealth Avenue is intended to provide the guidance necessary to ensure that redevelopment of the properties occurs in a coordinated manner and is generally consistent with the design guidelines and planning principles articulated in the *Plan*. The new CDD #13 has the following features:

- The underlying CL zone is applicable without a CDD Special Use Permit, except that single, two-family and townhouse uses are no longer permitted by right;
- With a CDD SUP, an increase in FAR from .75 to 1.0 is permitted. An additional bonus increase of 0.25, for a maximum of 1.25, is allowed subject to the provision of affordable housing. Any increase in density is subject to the performance standards;
- The overall height of buildings is limited to 2 ½ to 3 stories, with step downs to Commonwealth Avenue;
- Site design and building massing should consider the location of Commonwealth Terrace Apartments and include appropriate setbacks and height reductions to minimize potential impacts and provide an appropriate transition;
- Desired uses include residential and/or office with ground floor retail in a mixed use building;
- A minimum of 25% ground level, consolidated and usable open space, a significant portion of which should be publicly visible from Mt. Vernon Avenue; and a large functional open space area at the corner of Mt. Vernon Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue that is physically accessible;
- Affordable housing units should be provided on site in accordance with the policies in effect at the time of the CDD SUP application;
- The development should conform with the design recommendations in the *Plan*, as adopted in the Potomac West Small Area Plan.

CDD #14 Giant and CVS Sites

Creation of a new CDD for the two parcels known collectively as the Giant and CVS Sites, at 415 and 425 Monroe Avenue, is designed to ensure coordinated redevelopment of the sites if future market conditions render the current buildings or uses obsolete. Further, the CDD zoning is intended to ensure generally consistency with the design guidelines and planning principles expressed in the *Plan*. The community strongly supports the existing grocery and pharmacy uses in this location, and desires these uses in any future redevelopment of the sites. The new CDD #14 has the following features:

- The underlying CL zone remains for development without a CDD Special Use Permit.
- With a CDD SUP, an increase in FAR from .75 to 1.0 is permitted. An additional bonus increase of 0.25, for a maximum of 1.25, is allowed subject to the provision of affordable housing. Any increase in density is subject to the performance standards;
- The overall height of buildings is limited to 2 ½ to 3 stories, with step downs to any adjoining residential use;
- Building mass and scale should be compatible with existing mass, scale and character of the area;
- Desired uses include grocery store, pharmacy, and other ground floor retail uses, with residential and/or office uses on upper floors;
- A minimum of 25% ground level, consolidated and usable open space, a significant portion of which should be publicly visible.
- Affordable housing units should be provided on site in accordance with the policies in effect, at the time of the CDD SUP application;
- Internal streets and open space should be coordinated with Potomac Yard and the existing neighborhood;
- The development should conform with the design recommendations in the *Plan*, as adopted in the Potomac West Small Area Plan.

Enactment of Section 6-600 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance pertaining to the Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay zone.

The Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay Zone is designed to achieve the vision of the *Plan* for a mixed use, pedestrian oriented corridor where the business environment is strengthened and the adjacent residences are protected, and to provide a mechanism to allow appropriately scaled infill development compatible with the existing character of the Avenue, the existing community, and the Town of Potomac Historic District.

The major purpose for the overlay zone are to:

- encourage ground floor uses that promote an active retail street;
- provide more flexibility for desired uses, such as restaurants and outdoor dining, by allowing administrative approvals subject to standards instead of a special use permit;
- promote signage that creates a more attractive streetscape in keeping with the character of the street;
- encourage the retention of contributing structures within the Town of Potomac Historic District; and,
- encourage compatible development of infill and vacant sites by allowing the use of form based development in lieu of the more traditional CL zoning approach.

Permitted and Special Uses

There are a few uses within the existing CL zone that are inconsistent with the goal of an urban, pedestrian-oriented retail environment. The overlay zone specifically prohibits the following uses:

- Seminary, convent or monastery;
- Medical laboratory;
- Public school;
- Funeral home;
- Rooming house;
- Check cashing business;
- Payday loan business;
- Pawnshop; and;

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- Motor vehicle parking or storage, except that a public parking lot is allowed with a special use permit.

For the most part, these uses are not prevalent along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

The current CL zoning does not permit amusement enterprises such as live theater, music venues and other forms of entertainment. However, the market analysis for the Mt. Vernon Avenue retail found that this type of use would complement the existing restaurant and retail uses and is thus proposed to be permitted in the overlay zone in two ways: (1) live theater is allowed as an administrative use (see details below); and (2) live theater that exceeds the limitations as an administrative use, as well as music venues and other similar entertainment establishments are permitted with a SUP.

Retail Focus Area Uses

In order to strengthen retail in the core of the Mt. Vernon commercial area, a retail focus area is designated within the overlay zone. The retail focus area is generally consistent with the Town of Potomac Historic District boundaries on the Avenue and extends from Bellefonte Avenue on the south to Uhler Avenue on the north (see attached map). Within the retail focus area, uses occupying first floor space of a building will be limited to the following:

- Retail shopping establishment;
- Restaurant;
- Amusement enterprise, as limited above;
- Personal service establishment, with less than 30 feet of frontage on Mount Vernon Avenue (additional frontage space may be permitted with a special use permit);
- Arts and crafts studios, where arts and crafts products are created on site, with 50% of the building frontage on Mount Vernon Avenue devoted to retail display and sales; and
- In addition, for existing buildings clearly not conducive to retail activity (defined with a first floor 40 inches or more above grade), office and residential uses are allowed.

The purpose of the retail focus area is to strengthen the existing compact commercial district to retain existing businesses, attract new complementary businesses and prevent the conversion of first floor retail space to office and other non-active uses. Economic development and marketing professionals recommend the concentration of retail uses in a compact area to achieve an active

and healthy commercial area,, with customers able to shop both sides of the street. Along Mt. Vernon Avenue, this condition exists between Uhler and Bellefonte Avenues, in the heart of the commercial district. It should be noted that office and residential uses are permitted on the upper floors of buildings located in the retail focus area.

Administrative Uses

This category of uses will be permitted through an administrative permit process, subject to general and use-specific standards. The administrative uses are:

- restaurants, with 60 seats or less;
- outdoor dining, with 16 or fewer seats;
- live theater;
- outdoor food and crafts market;
- neighborhood outdoor garden center of less than 10,000 square feet; and
- outdoor display of goods.

The standards for these uses are modeled after those adopted by City Council in June 2003 as part of the rezoning of the commercial properties fronting along Mt. Vernon Avenue in Arlandria. The standards were initially derived from the list of standard conditions that City Council imposes on all special use permit approvals. They include requirements to police the property and adjacent rights-of-way for litter, to complete the Crime Prevention work with the Alexandria Police Department, to store trash and garbage properly, to require employees who drive to work to park off-street, to participate in a shared parking program when/as adopted by City Council, and to encourage the use of public transportation by posting information about routes and the locations where fare passes are sold. Use-specific conditions are included to address the possible impacts of a particular use. For example, limitations on restaurants include the number of seats, both indoors and outdoors, the hours of operation and alcohol sales to ensure that the restaurant does not adversely impact its residential and commercial neighbors.

An applicant for an administrative permit is required to submit an application for review for compliance with the applicable standards. Notice of a pending administrative permit will be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the City, posted on the subject property and given to nearby civic and business associations.

Any change in the nature of the use or any enlargement, extension or increase in the intensity of the use will be reviewed by the Director and a determination will be made as to whether a special use permit approved by City Council is required. Similarly, if an applicant is unwilling to

comply with the administrative standards, he or she may file an application for a special use permit and go through the normal public hearing process.

The goal of the administrative uses is to allow new business development on the Avenue to open much more quickly than if they were required to obtain special use permit approval, while having standards in place to protect the community. Staff believes the standards will minimize potential impacts on adjacent neighborhoods and that this approach, with its flexibility, should be tried to support and to strengthen the business district and make it attractive to new business investment.

Accessory Apartments

Under the existing CL zoning, a maximum of two apartment dwelling units are currently permitted on the upper floors above commercial or retail uses as accessory uses. In order to encourage the provision of residential uses above first floor commercial uses and a mix of uses on the Avenue, a maximum of eight units may be provided within the overlay zone.

Noncomplying Uses

Any use within the overlay zone that is inconsistent with the provisions of the zone (e.g. a check cashing business) and legally existing on the date that the ordinance is adopted will become a noncomplying use. Under the current regulations regarding noncomplying uses, these uses may continue to operate as they currently operate; however, any expansion or intensification of the use requires special use permit approval. The purpose of changing the status of these uses is not to prohibit them outright, but rather to acknowledge they exist and to provide for their continued operation, while anticipating that they will ultimately be replaced with more desired uses. These uses are delineated in a prior section.

The automobile-oriented uses currently located on the Avenue, such as the gas stations at the corner of Monroe and Mt. Vernon Avenue, and the Hyundai car storage lot, were made nonconforming or noncomplying with the comprehensive rezoning in 1992. No changes are proposed to the status of these existing uses.

Parking

The overlay zone proposes to provide some flexibility with off-street parking requirements. Currently whenever a change of use occurs, the new use is required to comply with today's off-street parking requirement. However, in many cases, buildings were not constructed with off-street parking spaces or there is not enough land on which to build parking, thus when a change

of use occurs, the new use cannot comply with today's requirements. In that case, either the proposed operator seeks another location for the business or he or she may file a special use permit application for a parking reduction in hopes of getting the parking requirement waived by City Council. Most of the properties along the Avenue have this constraint. In order to allow for uses to change to desired retail use without discouraging new businesses or requiring a special use permit, staff recommends the waiver of the additional parking requirement for such change of use.

Furthermore, the additional parking required by the expansion or enlargement of a retail use is waived. Staff believes this waiver is supportable for a number of reasons. Existing buildings along the Avenue are small, with an average retail use occupying approximately 1,500 square feet. In addition, the existing mixed-use and walkable nature of the neighborhood encourages patrons to frequent the businesses without the use of an automobile or by drivers who park once and visit more than one business. It is true that certain uses, such as retail shipping and postal services, copying, and even patrons purchasing coffee and other quickly consumable carry-out goods, generate a higher demand for parking. However, unlike other driving customers who may park for extended periods of time, customers of these businesses usually spend a brief amount of time inside the business and use the parking for a few minutes at most, allowing for a greater turnover of the parking spaces.

The parking requirements for the first 16 outdoor seats at a restaurant and for an outdoor food and crafts market are proposed to be waived, as these uses are seasonal and therefore have little practical impact in parking. Restaurants, even those proposed to be permitted administratively, are required to comply with the current parking requirement. Except for outdoor markets, no waiver or reduction of parking requirements is proposed for the other administrative uses.

For new construction meeting the building form design guidelines, the requirement for and amount of parking varies depending on the lot size. These requirements are described in detail below in the form based development section.

On balance, staff believes that this parking flexibility will be beneficial for small business owners without overburdening the existing parking resources and impacting nearby residents. As is stressed at length in the *Plan*, monitoring parking supply and demand over time is critical to ensure that the parking supply and demand are in balance and to determine when additional strategies are necessary.

Signs

The purpose of the proposed sign requirements is to achieve pedestrian-scale building signage that will enhance and strengthen the small town, Main Street character of Mt. Vernon Avenue. The language in the existing Mt. Vernon Avenue Design Guidelines encourages appropriate signage but lacks the authority to require it. In the overlay zone, signs oriented to the automobile, such as freestanding signs, internally illuminated signs, and box signs affixed perpendicular to the building wall will no longer be permitted. They will be considered noncomplying. Existing freestanding signs may be substituted with a monument sign. Aside from the replacements for existing freestanding signs, new monument signs will not be permitted. Wall signs, projecting signs, signs applied to storefront windows and awnings are permitted below the second floor of the building.

Form Based Development

The Avenue is regarded as one of the region's most unique neighborhoods, due in large part to its eclectic, small town character. The current zoning regulations, however, do not provide the framework to ensure that the form and scale of new or infill development will be compatible with the historic scale and character of existing buildings along the Avenue. With its emphasis on form, quality and the relationship of the buildings to each other and the street, a more flexible, design-oriented approach is recommended to support and encourage appropriately scaled and designed new construction.

In order to prepare the building form design guidelines, an analysis was conducted to understand the existing built environment and the relationship among the adjacent properties, uses and the street. The analysis found several commonalities among the three focus areas, including:

- Typical commercial lot size is approximately 60 feet wide by 110 feet deep;
- Sidewalk width varies;
- Typical width of the Avenue is 40 feet from curb-to-curb;
- The location of the building (i.e. the street wall) varies but is generally located 10 to 15 feet from the curb; and
- Building heights are primarily 2 to 2 ½ stories, with some one- and three-story structures interspersed.

The next step in the analysis was to understand the location of the buildings and parking and their relationship to adjacent residential and commercial properties. As part of this analysis, issues and challenges were identified to assist in the development of the design principles that make up the form design approach. Several issues identified include dissimilar building types along the

Avenue that create variety and diversity in some places and discontinuity of the street wall in other places, the presence of historic structures that should be preserved to maintain the history and character of the Avenue, small infill lots with little opportunity for access to rear yards for parking, and vehicle access directly from the Avenue that interrupts the street wall and the continuity and safety of pedestrian flow.

With an understanding of the existing built environment, the relationship of buildings, parking and adjacent properties, a series of design principles were developed to direct new construction that will be compatible with the existing development pattern, preserves historic structures, and minimizes impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods. Briefly, the design principles call for a consistent street wall, with some variations for landscaping or open space, appropriate building setbacks and parking lot screening to reduce potential impacts on adjacent residences, and off-street parking provided behind buildings accessed to the greatest extent possible by side streets, alleys or access easements from adjoining properties. Based on these design principles, the proposed building form design guidelines have been created. The design principles are depicted graphically in Section 6.3 of the *Plan*.

The overlay zone proposes to allow the waiver of the underlying CL requirements for area and bulk for new development designed in accordance with the building form design guidelines through the SUP process. Form-based development provides an option for developers and property owners who choose to build pursuant to the standards instead of the rules for development under the CL zone. The form-based development process is available for new projects exceeding 1,000 square feet in size.

The existing density, area and bulk requirements of the CL zone do not reflect the development pattern along Mt. Vernon Avenue, thus precluding the design of new buildings to complement the desired urban form of mixed use buildings with a variety of heights. The proposed building form design approach addresses this conflict through the use of design guidelines and the waiver of the current FAR limitation for new construction, while preserving historic structures and discouraging the consolidation of existing lots for the purposes of achieving a larger development. The SUP approval process will ensure that the proposed development meets or exceeds the building form design guidelines and achieves the high quality of development that the City and the community expect.

The proposed parking and open space requirements for form-based development were developed after careful analysis to determine the amount of both open space and parking that is feasible to provide based on the constraints of existing lot size and scope of desired development:

Lot Size	Parking Requirement	Open Space Requirement
7,000 sf or less	No requirement for interior land-locked lots May reduce requirement for corner lots and lots with rear yard access	Undeveloped land should be designed and planted to serve as amenity for residents and users of building
7,001 - 15,000 sf	1 space per residential dwelling unit Provide a minimum of half of the required parking for non-residential uses	Minimum 15% ground level visible usable open space Provision of additional open space is encouraged
15,000 sf +	Provide all the required parking on site	Minimum 25% ground level usable open space, publicly visible and consolidated Provision of additional open space is encouraged

While potentially limited in number, development projects of 15,000 square feet or greater in lot area are expected to represent the highest standards of building design and materials, site layout and orientation, provision of open space, and the ability to be integrated into the scale, character and context of the existing neighborhood. To achieve this standard, additional requirements are outlined in the guidelines to reduce the mass and scale of such projects to reflect the existing small lot development pattern along the Avenue.

Amendment to Section 2-100 of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to add definitions.

Currently, the following uses are not defined in the City’s zoning ordinance. Staff recommends adding these definitions that will be applicable in both the new overlay zone and the existing zones as well:

Section 2 - 127.1

Check cashing business: A business regulated by Section 6.1- 432 et seq. of the Virginia Code.

MPA #2005-0001
REZ #2005-0001
TA #2005-0001

Potomac West Small Area Plan
Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan

Section 2 - 182.1 *Payday loan business:* A business regulated by Section 6.1 - 444 et seq. of the Virginia Code.

Section 2-198.1 *Theater, Live:* An establishment that has an audience viewing hall or room and a permanent stage for the presentation of live performances by live actors to a live audience in a theater setting. Theaters may include but are not limited to live performances of music, dance, plays and orations.

CONCLUSION

The *Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan* defines a future direction for the corridor and provides recommendations to help guide neighborhood change, while protecting the adjoining residential neighborhood. Adoption of the *Plan*, and incorporation in the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan, is the first step towards bringing the Plan to reality. Staff recommends approval of the amendment to the Potomac West Small Area Plan to incorporate the *Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan*, the new CDD guidelines and the general updated language.

Staff recommends adoption of the proposed Mt. Vernon Avenue Urban Overlay zone and its application to the CL - commercially zoned properties that abut Mount Vernon Avenue. The new overlay zone was designed to achieve a mixed use, pedestrian oriented corridor that strengthens the existing businesses and allows for appropriately scaled new construction compatible with the existing character of Mt. Vernon Avenue. Further, it will provide some flexibility in terms of parking requirements, administrative uses and FAR that will enhance the functioning of the retail environment, while preserving the integrity of the adjacent residential zones.

Staff also recommends approval the creation of the two new CDDs, in order to provide guidelines that ensure that new development is compatible with the existing development pattern and that it relates well to the adjacent residential neighborhoods. These zoning elements, as well as the revised Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan, will provide clear guidance to the public and the development community as to the desired vision for the *Mt. Vernon Business Area Avenue* and the greater Potomac West area.

STAFF: Eileen Fogarty, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;
 Kimberley Fogle, Chief, Neighborhood Planning;
 Kathleen Beeton, Urban Planner.

RESOLUTION NO. MPA 2005-0001

WHEREAS, under the Provisions of Section 9.05 of the City Charter, the Planning Commission may adopt amendments to the Master Plan of the City of Alexandria and submit to the City Council such revisions in said plans as changing conditions may make necessary; and

WHEREAS, the City initiated an extensive community participation process to establish a shared vision and direction for the future development and enhancement of Mt. Vernon Avenue; and

WHEREAS, the community planning process culminated in the development of the Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan that represent a comprehensive approach to guide and manage future development along Mt. Vernon Avenue; and

WHEREAS, a duly advertised public hearing on the proposed amendment was held on March 1, 2005, with all public testimony and written comment considered; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds that:

1. The proposed amendments are necessary and desirable to guide and accomplish the coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of Mt. Vernon Avenue as part of the Potomac West Small Area Plan section of the City; and
2. The proposed amendments are generally consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the 1992 Master Plan and with the specific goals and objectives set forth in the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the 1992 Master Plan; and
3. The proposed amendments show the Planning Commission's long-range recommendations for the general development of the Potomac West Small Area Plan; and
4. Based on the foregoing findings and all other facts and circumstances of which the Planning Commission may properly take notice in making and adopting a master plan for the City of Alexandria, adoption of the amendments to the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the 1992 Master Plan will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the residents of the City;

RESOLUTION NO. MPA 2003-2005

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NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Planning Commission of the City of Alexandria that:

1. The Mt. Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan, CDD guidelines and updated language are hereby adopted in their entirety as an amendment to the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the 1992 Master Plan of the City of Alexandria, Virginia in accordance with Section 9.05 of the Charter of the City of Alexandria, Virginia.
2. This resolution shall be signed by the Chairman of the Planning Commission and attested by its secretary, and a true copy of this resolution forwarded and certified to the City Council.

ADOPTED the 1st day of March, 2005.

Eric Wagner, Chairman
Alexandria Planning Commission

ATTEST:

Eileen P. Fogarty, Secretary

**REPORT ATTACHMENTS
AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE**

**THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS CAN BE FOUND IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD
PLANNING SECTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING
WEBSITE AT WWW.ALEXANDRIA.VA.GOV/PLANNINGANDZONING**

**MT. VERNON AVENUE BUSINESS AREA PLAN
TEXT AMENDMENT-MT. VERNON AVENUE URBAN OVERLAY ZONE
TEXT AMENDMENT-CDD
ZONING MAPS
AMENDED POTOMAC WEST SMALL AREA PLAN**