

Docket Item # 10a and 10b
MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT #2005-0006
TEXT AMENDMENT # 2005- 0007
Potomac Yard

Planning Commission Meeting
December 6, 2005

ISSUE: Consideration of a request for: (1) a revision to the transportation chapter of the City's Master Plan to designate Route 1-Jefferson Davis Highway as the route for transit (2) amendment to the City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to revise the CDD Zone regulations, Section 5-600, to designate Route 1-Jefferson Davis Highway as the route for transit (3) amendment to the City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to revise the CDD Zone regulations, Section 5-600, to eliminate the requirement for a pedestrian connection for the Monroe Avenue Bridge.

APPLICANT: Department of Transportation and Environmental Services.
Department of Planning & Zoning.

LOCATION: For the properties bounded by Four Mile Run, Jefferson Davis Highway, Braddock Road, Slater's Lane and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

I. SUMMARY:

The three applications related to Potomac Yard consist of the following:

- An amendment to the Transportation Chapter of the Master Plan (MPA#2005-0006) to designate Route –1 as the corridor for a transit way;
- An amendment to the CDD zoning to designate Route –1 as the corridor for a transit way; (TA# 2005-0007); and
- An amendment to the CDD zoning to eliminate a requirement for a pedestrian connection for the Monroe Avenue bridge. (TA# 2005-0007).

The first two applications are intended to amend the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance to designate Route 1 as the corridor for a transit way. The final design, phasing, financing and implementation of any transit service will require considerable future input from the community, stakeholders and subsequent approval by the Planning Commission and City Council. The two applications regarding transit and Route 1 will do the following:

- Designate Route 1 as the corridor for transit, rather than Main Street or Potomac Avenue.
- Shift the eastern curb approximately 24 ft. to the east on Route 1 to accommodate potential dedicated transit lanes. The relocated curb line would be incorporated into the developers reconstruction of Route 1.

The final design and implementation of any potential transit will require considerable input from the community and subsequent approval by the Planning Commission and City Council. The current applications simply say that if dedicated transit lanes are to be provided, the lanes should be provided on Route 1, connecting to Potomac Avenue in the vicinity of the Town Center. The only immediate change for the City, will be the shifting of the east curb lane to accommodate possible dedicated transit lanes as discussed in more detail below.

The third application is to eliminate a pedestrian connection from the Monroe Avenue bridge. The goal of providing enhanced pedestrian connectivity from the bridge to the future Potomac Yard open space and parks is a good idea. However, because of the height of the bridge (approximately 30 ft.) above the open space and the fact that ramps would need to be handicap accessible, the ramps become long and circuitous and provide little benefit for pedestrians as discussed in more detail below. The other option of an elevator raises concerns for T&ES and Police regarding safety and maintenance. Rather, staff is recommending pedestrian enhancements and connections along Slaters Lane as discussed in more detail below.

As with any proposal, there are numerous challenges and opportunities that include:

Opportunities:

- Enhanced transit services for existing and future residents and workers;
- The transit way could be designed to accommodate either bus rapid transit or light rail transit; and
- Implementation in phases.

Challenges:

- Providing two dedicated transit lanes while maintaining the “urban boulevard” envisioned by Potomac Yard Design Guidelines;
- Increasing the curb to curb distance of the street by approximately 24 ft. while also maintaining a green landscaped median with trees and appropriate building setbacks;
- By shifting the Route 1 curb to the east to accommodate transit, the area typically planted with street trees (adjacent to the curb) is occupied by underground utilities. It is unclear whether street trees can be planted on top of the utilities; and
- Integrating the two additional dedicated lanes and increased paving into an urban and pedestrian friendly street.

Staff is recommending approval of the proposed Master Plan amendment and CDD zoning text amendment predicated on the fact that the final design of any dedicated transit lanes will require considerable input and review by the community and approval by the Planning Commission and City Council. In addition, the recommendation of staff regarding relocating the curb line farther to the east on Route 1 is based on providing appropriate building setbacks, landscaping and maintaining the character Route 1 as envisioned by the Design Guidelines as discussed in more detail below.



II. STAFF ANALYSIS:

As the Commission and Council are aware, the applicant is proceeding with the construction of the framework streets and the Monroe Avenue Bridge for Potomac Yard. The construction, type, size and location of the streets are based on the approved CDD and Design Guidelines. This approach of constructing the streets-infrastructure first is similar to what was done for the Carlyle development and other developments within the City.

While the construction of these streets would not “preclude” future transit, future relocation of curbs, storm sewer lines, etc. to accommodate future transit lanes would require



considerable future expense by the City. As part of the *Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transit Corridor Alternative Analysis*, it was recommended that the most viable option for providing transit was to provide bus rapid transit (BRT), which was a way to provide transit service in a cost effective and phased manner compared to the other options of light rail or a metro station. Initial implementation of BRT service in this transit way does not preclude possible future conversion to light rail or similar service, nor does it preclude the possible future construction of a metro rail station.

The City has requested that the applicant consider relocating the eastern curb line as part of the construction of Route 1 to accommodate potential future dedicated transit lanes. The applicant has agreed to design, relocate and construct the eastern curb line to accommodate potential future transit lanes.

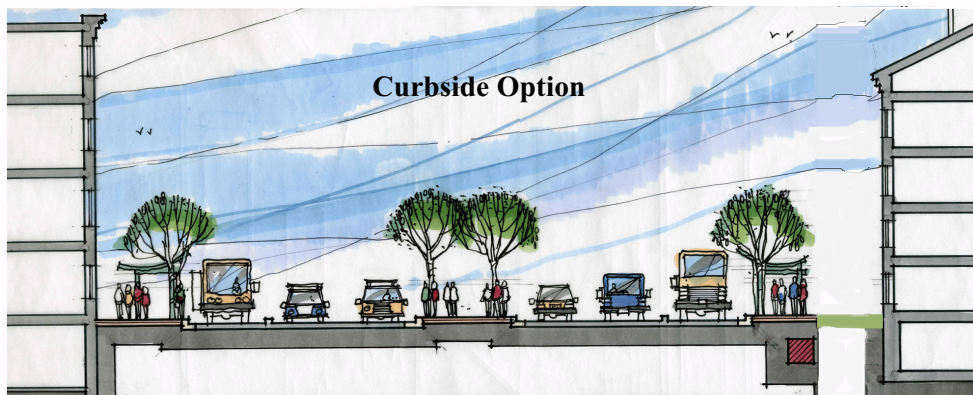
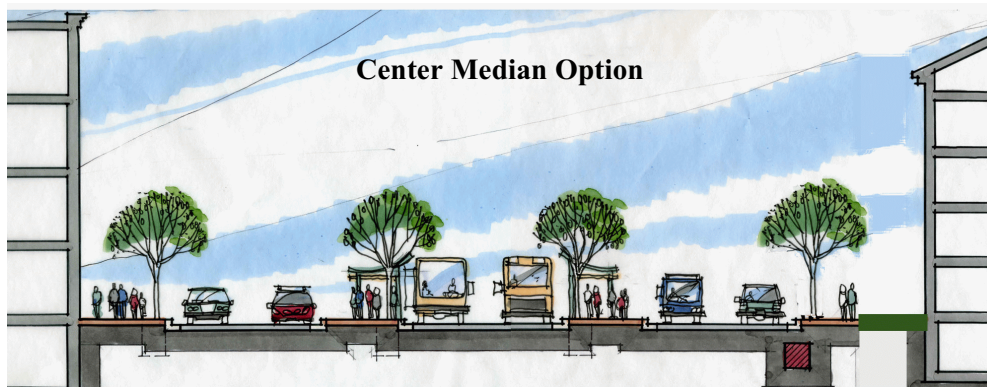
The approved Design Guidelines, permit a curb to curb distance of approximately 82 ft. for Route 1, which consists of two north-bound lanes, two south bound lanes and a central median. To accommodate two (one northbound and one southbound) dedicated transit lanes, the curb to curb distance for Route 1 would need to be increased from approximately 82 ft. to 106 ft. For comparison purposes, the right-of-way for a typical Old Town Street is 66 feet and the right-of-way width for Washington Street is 100 feet.

A. How will providing two dedicated transit lanes impact the character of Route 1 ?

One of the challenges for the City has been how to accommodate dedicated transit lanes on Route 1, while also maintaining the character envisioned and required by the current approval as a pedestrian friendly “urban boulevard” with a wide landscaped median and street trees. A challenge with providing dedicated transit lanes on Route 1 is that the curb to curb distance on Route 1 will be increased by approximately 24 ft. compared to what is currently required by the Design Guidelines.

There are essentially three options to providing dedicated transit lanes on Route 1:

- two-way transit lanes within a central median;
- two-way transit lanes adjacent to the curb; or
- one-way transit lane adjacent to the curb on the eastern and one-way transit lane adjacent to the curb western portion of Route 1.



The relocation of the curb to the east would allow two dedicated transit lanes, either within the median or adjacent to the curb. There are pros and cons to where the transit lanes are located. However, the curb side BRT does allow for potentially more green and landscaping within the central median. While the location and design of any future BRT system is not part of these applications, staff is recommending that any future BRT system maintain the character of Route 1 as an “urban boulevard” with a continual median, trees and street trees.

The two other challenges with relocating the curb an additional approximately 24 ft. farther to the east than anticipated by the current approval include:

- Street trees on the eastern portion of Route 1; and
- Relationship-setback of the buildings on Route 1.

Street trees on the eastern portion of Route 1 :

Relocating the curb approximately 24 ft. farther to the east than the current approval locates the curb adjacent to an approximately 15ft wide 230 KV electrical line and electrical easement, which is located on the entire eastern portion of Route 1. Staff has been working with the applicant to determine the profile (depth) of the utility line. While there appears to be sufficient depth (a minimum of 4-5 ft.) to plant trees, Virginia Power has not yet approved planting trees on top of the underground utilities.



230 KV Line (Shown in Red)

Relationship-setback on the buildings on Route 1.

An initial concern of staff regarding relocating the eastern curb farther to the east is that the setbacks and landscaping envisioned on Route 1 be maintained. The setbacks (from the curb) envisioned by the Design Guidelines along Route 1 were approximately 45 ft. Under the current proposal for Landbay H (with the relocated curb) the buildings are approximately 15-30 feet. Staff anticipates working with the applicant to increase setbacks for the buildings adjacent to Route 1 to the extent possible as part of the development special use permit approval for Landbay-H.

III. AMENDMENT TO THE TRANSPORTATION CHAPTER OF THE MASTER PLAN:

The Master Plan amendment is a consideration of a request for a revision to the transportation chapter of the City's Master Plan to designate Route 1-Jefferson Davis Highway as the designated route for transit, rather than Main Street or Potomac Avenue. Staff is recommending the transit route be provided on Route 1 and connect with Potomac Avenue in the vicinity of the town center. Staff is recommending Route 1 because dedicated transit lanes on Main Street would significantly impact the character of Main Street as a mixed use street compared to King Street. Providing transit on Potomac Avenue would negatively impact the adjacent park. In addition, locating transit on Potomac Avenue would not provide service to Del Ray and would be on the perimeter of Potomac Yard. For all of these reasons, staff recommends Route 1 as the designated transit corridor.

While staff is recommending language to be included as part of the Master Plan to designate Route 1 as a transit corridor, staff has also included language that will require that the final location, type, design of any future dedicated transit service shall require approval by the Planning Commission and City Council. Any future transit lanes should maintain the character of Route 1 as an urban boulevard with a continual median, trees and street trees.

IV. CDD ZONING AMENDMENTS:

The second application, is the proposed zoning text amendment that will revise the zoning table to include the following language. The languages states that if designated transit lanes are provided, the lanes will be provided on Route 1 and will require subsequent approval by the Planning Commission and City Council and consistency with the proposed Master Plan amendment.

The second amendment to the Zoning Ordinance allows the elimination of the pedestrian connection from the Monroe Avenue bridge contingent on the provision of a pedestrian connection on Slaters Lane as discussed in more detail below.

5-605 *Preliminary development plan approval.*

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[The following is all new language]

XIII. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (J) of this section and of any approved conceptual design plan, the following required and permitted changes from an approved conceptual design plan shall be required or permitted, as the case may be, for the subsequent approval of a preliminary development plan subject to such conceptual design plan:

- I. Within CDD No. 10 (Potomac Yard/Greens), no preliminary development plan shall be approved which does not conform in all respects to the designation of U. S. Route 1-Jefferson Davis Highway as the route for transit-bus rapid transit, consistent with the provisions of the master plan of the City of Alexandria in effect on the date of approval of such preliminary development plan.
- II. Within CDD No. 10 (Potomac Yard/Greens), an approved preliminary development plan may permit the elimination of a pedestrian connection for the realigned Monroe Avenue Bridge.

V. PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION:

As part of the approval for the straightened Monroe Avenue bridge, a condition was included that required a direct pedestrian access from the bridge to the adjoining open space. The developer, Potomac Yard Development, LLC (Pulte-Centex) has elected to proceed with the construction of the straightened bridge.

This condition required a more direct connection from the bridge to the future Potomac Yard open space and parks. The condition was added to enhance pedestrian connectivity for residents and communities to the east of the realigned bridge. Staff strongly encourages pedestrian connections wherever possible, however, because of the height of the bridge and the requirement for handicap accessibility, a pedestrian connection from the bridge will not significantly reduce the distance for pedestrians to reach the open space, will have significant visual impacts on the bridge and raise safety concerns.

In preparation for the final design and construction documents for the bridge, staff and the applicant began to evaluate the feasibility of constructing a more direct connection from the bridge to the Potomac Yard open space. For this to be accomplished, while also providing handicap access there are essentially two options

- An elevator; or
- A ramp on the side of the bridge.

The primary challenge with both of these options is that the bridge deck is approximately 30 ft. above the future open space and that any option needs to be convenient, safe, easy to maintain and also not detract from the overall design of the bridge from Route 1 or from Monroe Avenue.

A. OPTION # 1 - Elevator:

One possible option is a vertical elevator from the bridge, which would provide access from the bridge to the future open space. An elevator would provide a slightly shorter distance to the open space. From a design perspective, the elevator could be integrated into the bridge design as part of a “tower” element, typical of many urban bridges. However, the primary concern with an approximately 30 ft. tall elevator are safety, usability and long-term maintenance. The height of the elevator (approximately 30 ft.) would be comparable to the height of a four level building. However, unlike other typical elevators for office buildings, parking garages etc. where the elevator can stop at 10 ft. intervals and at each stop there are uses and natural surveillance that would not be the case with this elevator. The elevator would have only one stop and would be approximately 450 ft. from the nearest use that could provide natural surveillance. In addition, the elevator would require a considerable amount of short and long term maintenance by the City. Due to the concerns of T&ES and the Police regarding safety and maintenance, staff is strongly opposed to providing an elevator.

B. OPTION # 2 - Ramp:

If an elevator is not provided, the only other option is a ramp. A ramp could provide slightly less walking distance than the sidewalk on the bridge. However, because of the height of the bridge and the need to provide handicap accessibility a ramp would be extremely long. Because of the length, height and number of ramps this approach would not provide a useable or desirable pedestrian connection. In addition, because the ramps would be quite long and due to the height of the bridge,



the ramps would appear as an appendage to the bridge that has been designed to be open. The ramps would also be prominently visible from Monroe Avenue. Because of the limited walking distance saved, the visual impact and limited usefulness of a ramp, staff is recommending that a ramp not be provided from the bridge.

C. Slaters Lane Sidewalk Connection:

Instead of the pedestrian connection from the bridge(elevator or ramp), staff has recommended that the applicant extend the sidewalk from Slaters Lane under the bridge (adjacent to the roadway) which will connect to the sidewalk on the south side of the bridge. This sidewalk is not required by the approved Potomac Yard Plan or bridge plan.

When the Potomac Plaza retail development was approved (now under construction), the sidewalk on Slaters Lane was extended as far west as possible to enable a possible extension of the Slaters Lane sidewalk. In addition, the Braddock Metro study currently underway anticipates a sidewalk-trail connection to Braddock metro. These two connections would eventually provide a continual sidewalk connection from the King Street metro to the George Washington Memorial trail.

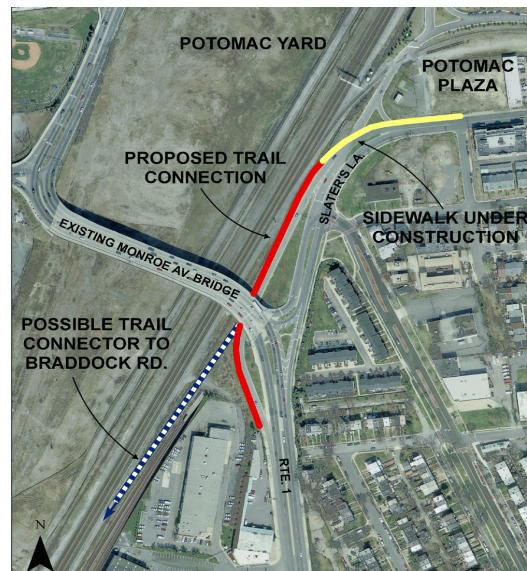
While the sidewalk connection as proposed by staff does not provide a more direct connection to the Potomac Yard open space for the neighborhoods to the east of the bridge, the connection will significantly increase pedestrian connectivity for the neighborhoods to the east of the bridge. The connection will also result in the connection of existing trails and neighborhoods a primary goal of the City. For these reasons, staff is recommending approval.

VI. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT

Staff recommends **approval** of insertion of the following text within the Transportation Chapter of the Alexandria Master Plan.

“Route 1-Jefferson Davis Highway shall be designated as a transit corridor. With the corridor high-capacity transit service connecting Braddock Road Metrorail Station to the Crystal City/Pentagon area may be developed in general conformance with the Crystal City / Potomac Yard Transit Corridor



Alternatives Analysis and compatible with the operational requirements of both bus rapid transit (BRT) and light rail transit (LRT).

If dedicated transit lanes are to be provided for the Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transit Corridor, the lanes shall be provided on Route 1, connecting to Potomac Avenue in the vicinity of the Town Center. The final location, type, and design of any future dedicated transit service shall require approval by the Planning Commission and City Council. Any future transit lanes should maintain the character of Route 1 as an urban boulevard with a continual median, trees and street trees. The approval to designate Route 1 as a designated corridor for transit shall include; relocating the eastern curb, increasing the curb to curb distance for Route 1 from approximately 82ft to approximately 106 ft. The eastern curb line shall be constructed by the developer at the time of the reconstruction of Route 1.

Other than the sidewalks on each side of the Monroe Avenue bridge and the accompanying crossings and improvements, a direct pedestrian connection(s) shall not be required. The applicant shall be required to provide a continuous sidewalk connection on Slaters Lane under the bridge to the southern portion of the bridge to provide a continual sidewalk on Slaters Lane.”

Staff recommends **approval** of a zoning text amendment to the City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance to revise the CDD Zone regulations, Section 5-600, to designate Route 1-Jefferson Davis Highway as the route for transit-bus rapid transit to include the following language. and to eliminate the requirement for a pedestrian connection for the Monroe Avenue Bridge to include the following language.

5-605 Preliminary development plan approval.

* * * *

[The following is all new language]

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