

Pentagon City: Vornado Pen Place Proposal Update

By Don Clarke, Nick Giacobbe of Aurora Highlands Civic Association, Dick Herbst, Nancy Swain, Joan Quinn

Vornado Corporation is seeking nearly 1.9 million additional square feet of office space for Parcel 1D of the Pentagon City tract. Both the Arlington Ridge Civic Association (ARCA) and Aurora Highlands Civic Association (AHCA) are on record as supporting the original plan for Pentagon City, which does not allow for any more additional office development. A 2009 Arlington County staff report stated that "Parcel 1D was identified as the prime hotel and secondary residential component, within the larger mix of uses in the PDSP." The Vornado proposal violates the General Land Use Plan (GLUP), the C-O 2.5 zoning for the area, the Phased Development Site Plan (PDSP) and the Master Development Plan.

Arlington County's Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) is presently reviewing and apparently seeking to justify the site plan proposal filed by the Vornado Corporation for the office complex on the Pentagon City tract near the Marriott Residence Inn. The allowed office space use on the Pentagon City tract has been exhausted, and Vornado has no legal right for this additional office use. However, they are vigorously pursuing this development with apparent County interest. A member of the LRPC has noted that Pentagon City lacks sufficient office space. It was also noted that if the office space is approved, the County should encourage redevelopment of the four "suburban" office buildings on Army Navy Drive between Hayes and Fern Streets to more "urban" 22-story office buildings.

Approving additional office buildings would severely change the planned vision for the Pentagon City Metro Station Concept Plan. Because office buildings generate the most traffic and air pollution, impacts that affect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public, this Metro station was planned for a Pentagon City with an emphasis on residential development and specifically limited office development as compared to the intense office development in Crystal City and Rosslyn. The air pollution has only been exacerbated since the 1976 rezoning.

Moreover, the County has just approved a massive rezoning of the entire Crystal City area and has expanded Crystal City across Route 1. Given the PenPlace proposal, citizens should ask, "How can we depend on Vornado to adhere to the Crystal City sector plan when these developers are invested in undermining the zoning, GLUP, Pentagon City Metro Station Concept Plan, and integrity of the Pentagon City tract?" If the proposal is accepted, it will set the precedent to "gut" the rest of the Pentagon City plan as well as Pentagon Centre, which is a "hole in the doughnut" in the middle of the Pentagon City tract. The "hole" includes Costco and the strip of stores near the Metro (the former Western Electric property). Finally, what hope does that give us that the recently-approved Crystal City Sector Plan will be honored to its planned completion? Do planning documents even matter?

Interestingly, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has a nearly \$3 million dollar "spot Improvement" project to widen the I-395 exit ramp on to Eads Street which allows an easy flow to the Parcel 1D site. A VDOT public hearing on the ramp widening is scheduled for August 16th, 5-8 p.m., at Arlington County Central Library.

Recently, the LRPC and County asked for comments from LRPC representatives regarding "Draft Guiding Principles" for the Parcel 1D site. Some general excerpts are as follows:

Nick Giacobbe, Vice President, Aurora Highlands Civic Association and LRPC representative wrote, "I think we are at a crossroads in which there is a conflict between good planning and the "considerable reward" that was identified more than three decades ago [in the Master Development Plan]. The neighborhood I represent has gone on record numerous times as supporting completion of the 1976 plan and encouraging the County to live up to the commitment made more than three decades ago. The plan had very specific limits established for a reason; Pentagon City was not intended to be a mega office district and for that reason it was limited to 1,250,000 gross square feet of office space. Instead, it was intended that there would be a special emphasis on residential development and regional shopping facilities. Other areas of Arlington County can fill the niche for office space quite nicely, and the plan the County Board just approved for the redevelopment of Crystal City should be able to more than meet the office space needs of the foreseeable future. In fact, limiting the development on Parcel 1D to what is permitted under 1976 plan may be just the stimulus that is needed to jump start the Crystal City redevelopment. "

Don Clarke, former President of ARCA and LRPC representative, said, "To begin, I wish to endorse all of the extensive commentary submitted by Nick Giacobbe, of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association; his suggestions and notes will, if adopted, do much to clarify the intent of the document, as well as align the principles with the Pentagon City PDSP. My own comments are general in nature and directed toward what several of the concerned residents of the ARCA feel are unfortunate assumptions that seem to be driving the Committee's deliberations toward a report that will call for a change in the GLUP and the zoning that apply to Parcel 1D. We in ARCA are not aware of any provisions in the Committee's charter that call for reaching such a conclusion. Consequently, I will point out several places in the Guiding Principles that make it look as though the Committee is attempting to provide a rationale for accommodating a developer's desire for increased density in a parcel that has no provision for such density in the PDSP."

Joan Quinn, ARCA member, long involved with Pentagon City issues points out that "Parcel 1D is, and has long been, part of the Pentagon City tract. It is not a separate parcel of land disjointed from the requirements of the PDSP for Pentagon City, and it has no connection to, or association with Crystal City, no matter how hard Vornado and Company attempt to make it appear so. Therefore, the only proposals for development of Parcel 1D should be proposals involving hotel and residential. The recently approved

redevelopment of Crystal City vastly increased the capacity for new office buildings in Crystal City; more than enough office space for the next 30 years. The PDSP for Pentagon City specifically notes that Pentagon City is not to be office centered like Crystal City."

Nancy Swain, former ARCA president and LRPC alternate, asks "On what basis can the LRPC, without a clear charge from the elected officials, explore changing the existing Metro station concept for Pentagon City by adding more office when none is...available? ... PenPlace office proposals are clearly outside the parameters of the Pentagon City tract Metro station concept, PDSP, and C-O 2.5 zoning ordinance. It is also outside the current GLUP. To add additional office goes against the visionary leaders of the 1970's and 1980's to limit office space there in order to protect the public health and welfare of our community. Additionally, the emphasis in the 1990's of the Pentagon City Task Force and County Board action was on residential in the future development. One can postulate, absent any charge from the County Board, the only thing important is profit for the developer, Vornado. The developer has already made a \$27,000,000 million profit as reported on page A19 of the December 8, 2009 issue of the Washington Post. This was when an undisclosed purchaser forfeited its deposit. One can only imagine the value the County would be giving Vornado with the additional office density."

The process still has a long way to go. There will be another meeting or two of the Long Range Planning Committee as the group develops a recommendation to fit with the "guiding principles." A work session is planned to discuss the matter with the County Board. Eventually the matter will go to the full Planning Commission and County Board for approval.