



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA
ARLINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

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July 14, 2015

Arlington County Board
 2100 Clarendon Boulevard
 Suite 300
 Arlington, Virginia 22201

SUBJECT: 2. Arlington County Retail Action Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS: **The Planning Commission recommends the County Board adopt the Arlington County Retail Plan as recommended in the County Manager’s July 1, 2015 memorandum with the following amendments:**

- 1. On page 10 after the word “streetscape” in the last paragraph insert a sentence, “However designed, retail equivalents should enhance the pedestrian experience.”**
- 2. Modify the Ballston map to indicate that North Glebe Road from North Fairfax Drive to the Hyde Park Condominium boundary become a gold street on both sides.**
- 3. Modify the Rosslyn map to indicate that Wilson Boulevard between North Lynn and North Nash Streets and between Pierce and North Rhodes Streets is a gold street.**

Dear County Board Members:

The Planning Commission heard these items at its July 6, 2015 public hearing. Jill Griffin, Arlington Economic Development (AED), Real Estate Development Group presented a summary of the substantial changes made to the final draft of the Retail Plan since the Request to Advertise in November 2014 which included reorganization, a clarified purpose, and updated street types with design standards to reflect greater flexibility. Also present were Marc McCauley, AED and Deborah Albert, Community Planning, Housing, and Development (CPHD), Planning.

Public Speakers

There were two public speakers for this item.

Jim Huryz, Fairlington resident, said that Shirlington is upscale retail in Arlington and in Alexandria retail consists of neighborhood services. In the past, the corridor consisted of neighborhood services but has been refurbished into a bar and restaurant corridor. Food trucks with low overhead costs are competing with restaurants. Next on the agenda is the Lee Highway corridor which will be redeveloped into A-Town East for Dominion Electric. He encouraged the Planning Commission to think about what they are doing when voting on smart growth proposals from County staff who do not live in Arlington.

Mitch Bonanno, Vornado/Charles E. Smith said the overarching goal is to make retail thrive. First, they would like the plan to address existing buildings and how to work with existing conditions and encourage reformation of those even if they don't comply with the design guidelines. Second, building lobbies tend to be the evil breaking of retail but in new development, the retail activates the street but the rest of the building creates the new development and activates the retail. Building lobbies should be addressed as necessary things that help development thrive instead of something that simply breaks up retail on the street. The trends are to have building lobbies be third spaces and activated by the residents. Third is to allow creative signage. There are lagging items in the sign ordinance such as old comprehensive sign plans prior to 2012 and how those need to be amended is difficult, and encourage creative signage.

Planning Commission Committee Report

Commissioner Gutshall said the Economic Development Commission is still formulating a letter.

Commissioner Cole said the LRPC heard the Retail Plan at five separate meetings. The last meeting took place on May 28 and issues discussed included flexibility, relationship to sector plans, role of the Site Plan Review process, principles and policies, the definition of retail, retail equivalence, and questions about maps and street typologies, design standards and implementation.

Planning Commission Discussion

Commissioner Forinash asked about what “other requirements” refers to in the design standards table. Ms. Griffin said it reflects there are existing sector plans that have more prescriptive design standards and is for all of the different street types.

Commissioner Harner asked if the map implies that retail would not be allowed in areas without a color even if allowed by zoning. Ms. Griffin responded that in areas without color, retail would not be encouraged. For by-right projects or extenuating circumstances and zoning would allow it, retail would be allowed. The map defines lines for a concentration of retail uses. Commissioner Harner asked for clarification on retail that wraps around a corner. Ms. Griffin said where there are streets that intersect with other retail street types or non-retail street types, the characteristics are intended to extend the depth of the storefront.

Commissioner Schroll asked for clarification on street colors. Commissioner Cole clarified that at LRPC there was a general consensus that blue and green should be combined and red and gold should stand. Staff did not respond to that suggestion and it remains unclear if the Planning Commission wants to act on the question of whether four colors are too many categories. Commissioner Schroll clarified his question and asked the differences if eliminating one of the colors, such as blue. Ms. Griffin responded that the distinction is that looking for the blue streets of external design elements which ensures an interesting and well-designed pedestrian environment regardless of use, and blue streets are typically further away from specific retail designations. The internal and external design standards on the gold streets provide a retail ready space which can accommodate a variety of uses over time and the difference between the two focuses on clustering of retail over time. Mr. McCauley added that the nature of the distinction is important because a lot of those retail ready infrastructure systems are costly in many ways and they want to provide flexibility of not requiring that in places that may not support the classic retail situations.

Commissioner Brown asked about changes in Clarendon and if it was in response to concerns expressed by Lyon Park. Ms. Griffin responded they were trying to balance Lyon Park concerns with the adopted Clarendon sector plan which is prescriptive and highlights edges and frontages where there would be retail, but makes a distinction where there would be edges and frontages for retail, business, and personal services. This is a step away from that recommendation in deference to what was heard at the County Board and the neighborhood. Commissioner Brown said Lyon Park was concerned that there was no expectation for retail along Washington Boulevard toward Pershing and asked if it would be addressed if their Neighborhood Conservation Plan later decided Washington Boulevard would be important for retail. Ms. Griffin responded the intent of the Retail Plan should reflect the dynamic nature of retail.

Commissioner Iacomini clarified that the reason red is from North Fillmore up Wilson Boulevard is due to the interpretation of the current Clarendon Sector Plan as opposed to gold. Ms. Griffin responded gold opens it up to services, repair, and retail equivalence. The idea is to remain true to the Sector Plan, and also the idea of clustering. Clarendon is one of the true retail hubs in Arlington and we want to achieve clustering.

Commissioner Iacomini responded there are some services in that red area and asked if they could not be replaced in-kind. Ms. Griffin responded there are existing service type uses in the area. For example, if there were an existing bank and a separate use came in and the site plan condition said retail, they would look at the proposal. A bank could replace a bank, however a fitness center is a service and would not be consistent with the plan and would require a site plan amendment.

Commissioner Iacomini appreciates the philosophy of clustering retail and said there is an experience of a lot of turnover at the moment and given the fact that the density is built out and is right next to single-family neighborhoods if we might not be doing a better service to turn it to gold to allow some variation. Ms. Griffin responded it is a mixed bag and it is important to point out that there have been changes in restaurants but that is sometimes a signal of a good retail environment since they are quickly replaced. It is balancing with the variety of different types of uses.

Rosslyn

Commissioner Cole said Wilson Boulevard is central Arlington's main shopping street and he has suggested Wilson between Lynn Street and Nash Street might be more appropriately gold or red, and also at the west end of Wilson Boulevard, there are other areas that could be gold as well. This plan will be used until it is replaced and the notion that Wilson Boulevard and the core of Rosslyn is not a primary retail is concerning.

Ms. Griffin responded that Wilson Boulevard along that point at Lynn and Nash Streets faces some challenging topographic features and standards would be challenging to meet, although we still want to have certain types of uses there and the exterior design moving through. The blue recognizes those topographic challenges. Moving further west is an instance of trying to start clustering, such as at Lynn Street and 18th Street. As it moves up into Courthouse, there is more focus on additional clustering.

Commissioner Cole responded he totally disagrees and Wilson is a continuous retail street through the core of Arlington and even in places where there are new developments on that incline, developers propose retail on that incline. The question is what kind of identity do we want Wilson to have – if we want nodes like Columbia Pike, we will fail because the private market is building retail all along. All the new buildings on Wilson have retail and they have no problem renting them. It is not clear why we would want to move toward a structure to encourage a particular type of construction that would discourage that.

Courthouse

Commissioner Cole said the section of Wilson Boulevard from Rhodes Street up to North Courthouse Road is developing to meet the gold standard and it is not clear why the map does not reflect reality for the next seventy years.

Virginia Square

No comments.

Ballston

Commissioner Cole said it is not clear why the mall is blue and not red. He believes that Glebe Road as a blue street is inconsistent with the plans. The nature of Glebe Road on the west side might be different than gold or red and it is a question of whether we care about the future.

Ms. Griffin responded that the mall's different sides relate differently to the community. Focusing energy on Wilson Boulevard is where this has been headed. This is looking at the concentration as it moves out and these are areas that staff was struggling with and this proposal represents conversations with the County Board.

Commissioner Iacomini clarified the difference between gold and blue and blue does not require interior design standards, including separate ventilation. Commissioner Iacomini asked Mr. Bonnano if separate ventilation for a possible restaurant is routinely included during construction of a building. Mr. Bonnano responded it is a question for every building and if there might be a restaurant, there might be a shaft left in the building which is giving up rentable FAR area in the building.

Commissioner Iacomini said there has been experiences with some shops that need venting and she is nervous about the west side of Glebe being blue. The interior spaces on that side of Glebe Road would not be ready for something.

Commissioner Hughes asked if there was a reason why the area between Henderson and Fourth Street North was not included to help connect retail in a north south direction in our County. Ms. Griffin responded that particular area is a residential zone.

Crystal City-Pentagon City-Potomac Yard

Commissioner Cole asked why Crystal City has no red areas. Ms. Griffin responded that Crystal City has a different identity and those types of uses do not fit into a traditional retail sales, food establishment, or entertainment use. Gold allows for greater flexibility of use but with design standards. Commissioner Cole said that this is emblematic of his suspicion that these colors do not matter and the market will decide. He finds this is one of those areas where they will be constantly spending time and finding exceptions to the rules that are being made now.

Commissioner Hughes said blue is on only one side of Joyce Street preventing the possibility of the River House development having retail frontage. Ms. Griffin responded that currently the GLUP and zoning for that property does not allow retail uses and by changing the color and recognizing there is a land use study, staff did not want to pre-suppose any decisions.

Columbia Pike

Commissioner Hughes said in other plan current maps are used, but in Columbia Pike there is a future map with street improvements that are not yet there. Ms. Griffin responded that the map uses GLUP maps which all show future street alignments.

Commissioner Schroll asked why there is no red or blue on Columbia Pike. Ms. Griffin responded that the FBC governs most of Columbia Pike and there are very specific design standards for FBC projects.

Commissioner Brown said there is a lot of difficulty with old signage and new requirements on Lee Highway and asked why that has not been addressed in the Retail Plan. Ms. Griffin responded the Retail Plan recognizes the importance of signage and the action items recognize that the sign ordinance is recently updated. There is a recommendation for a long term timeframe of reviewing that section of the zoning ordinance.

Other

Commissioner Gutshall suggested that the document should include signage in the graphic on page 45 to improve user-friendliness. Ms. Griffin said signs were separated out from the retail and urban design guidelines.

Commissioner Cole talked about the use of the document during site plan review and asked whether the standards are minimum or optimum. Ms. Griffin responded that they would not dissuade someone from doing something if they want, but they would be cautious in terms of encouraging someone to do more than required. Not precluding but not explicitly encouraging. Commissioner Cole said the history of retail plans in Arlington is not perfect, such as Ballston where the life is on Wilson and not Fairfax Boulevard. When 1401 Wilson was proposed, the

center of gravity in Rosslyn has changed. He struggles with how to apply this such as a two or three page guidance on how to apply this would be helpful.

Commissioner Iacomini asked if the reference on page 14 to older retail spaces is assuming the way of dealing with extent buildings. Ms. Griffin responded it might be buildings set far back from the street or where there are old arcades that do not address the street. Commissioner Iacomini asked how that would be implemented. Ms. Griffin said there would be a study to find the magnitude of what is being discussed, as well as looking at the entirety of the process around finding tools to implement that process.

Commissioner Schroll asked about the ongoing review after the plan was adopted and asked about the process for review. Ms. Griffin responded that if there is a sector plan that will change a retail designation, a change to the retail plan would occur at the same time.

Commissioner Hughes asked about the statement that Clarendon is the cultural and commercial center of Arlington and that Clarendon continues to remain the retail center of Arlington. He said staff should look at A2 carefully with historical context before moving forward.

Commissioner Iacomini said there is a bit of a disconnect with how retail has been traditionally used in Arlington as a way to activate the public realm. This plan talks about the commercial side and mentions the public realm but relates it back to retail rather than making an interesting street front. She worries that green streets lose the notion that having well designed retail equivalents are important and perhaps should include that while retail on these streets is optional the first floor facades in this designation should use materials and lighting that enhance the pedestrian experience.

Planning Commission Motion

Commissioner Cole made a motion that the Planning Commission recommend the County Board adopt the Arlington County Retail Plan as recommended in the County Manager's July 1, 2015 memorandum. Commissioner Ciotti seconded the motion.

Commissioner Iacomini made a motion to add to the main motion to modify the Ballston map to indicate that North Glebe Road from North Fairfax Drive to the Hyde Park Condominium boundary become a gold street on both sides. Commissioner Gutshall seconded the motion.

The Planning Commission voted to support the motion 9-0-1 with Commissioners Siegel, Ciotti, Siegel, Iacomini, Forinash, Cole, Harner, Gutshall, Schroll, and Brown in support and Commissioner Hughes abstaining.

Commissioner Iacomini asked unanimous consent on page 10 after the word "streetscape" in the last paragraph insert a sentence, "However designed, retail equivalents should enhance the pedestrian experience." There was no objection.

Commissioner Iacomini asked unanimous consent on page 22 in the description where there is the description of the street types with the color, add a sentence to the green description that

says, "while retail on these streets is optional, the first floor facades on any buildings in this designation should use materials and lighting to enhance the pedestrian experience." Commissioner Gutshall objected.

Commissioner Iacomini made the motion that the Planning Commission recommend to the County Board that on page 22 in the description, add a sentence to the green description that says, "while retail on these streets are optional, the first floor facades on any buildings in this designation should use materials and lighting to enhance the pedestrian experience." Commissioner Harner seconded the motion.

Commissioner Iacomini said she worries that with the green since there are no requirements, we lose something that contributes to the pedestrian in the dense site plan areas. Retail should not be everywhere but there should be a good pedestrian realm. Commissioner Gutshall said that there should not be blank walls anywhere and this creates a defensible position that says if it's not a green street, then why have windows on the ground floor. Commissioner Iacomini said in Ballston that some streets are occupied by half commercial and half residential and are white streets. The preponderance of white streets in the map are probably residential. Commissioner Gutshall said that is a risky assumption.

Commissioner Harner added that there are a number of green streets that are linkages and are infill and connect. Commissioner Gutshall is not arguing with green streets but saying it jeopardizes white streets.

The motion failed 4-4-2 for lack of a majority with Commissioners Brown, Harner, Cole, and Iacomini in support, Commissioners Siegel, Ciotti, Forinash, and Gutshall against, and Commissioners Schroll and Hughes abstaining.

Commissioner Cole said the distinction between red and gold disappears with elimination of the word predominant. Ms. Griffin said there are instances where there may be a space with multiple uses inside of it and this makes sure the sales piece is the predominant use.

Commissioner Gutshall asked about the difference between gold and blue and the impact on the standard site plan condition that requires ventilation shafts for retail space. We have the conditioned requirement in recognition that there are times when short term interests of developers may not lead them to make a long term investment for the greater good. We had testimony that provision of a ventilation shaft is prohibitively expensive once a building is constructed. He finds that sound policy balances flexibility v. predictability when we require modest investments that the market may not deliver in the short-term to achieve long-term economic value.

Commissioner Gutshall sought unanimous consent to combine the blue and gold streets. Commissioner Harner objected.

Commissioner Gutshall made a motion that the Planning Commission recommend that the County Board combine gold and blue street types into a single street type with characteristics of gold. Commissioner Cole seconded the motion.

Commissioner Ciotti said she would not support the motion and that it would lead to unintended consequences. Commissioner Forinash added that not all of them should be gold because some should be green.

Commissioner Schroll said if blue was eliminated, then some blue streets would need to be reclassified as green. The flexibility of future uses is most costly at the outset but give the community options for the future.

Commissioner Harner said blue does allow a retail character but not as onerous as gold. Commissioner Gutshall withdrew the motion. Commissioner Cole agreed as the seconder.

Commissioner Harner sought unanimous consent to modify the Rosslyn map to indicate that Wilson Boulevard between North Lynn and North Nash Streets and between Pierce and North Rhodes Streets is a gold street. There was no objection and the motion was amended.

The Planning Commission voted 9-0-1 to support the main motion with Commissioners Siegel, Ciotti, Iacomini, Forinash, Cole, Harner, Gutshall, Brown, and Schroll in support and Commissioner Hughes abstaining.

Respectfully Submitted,
Arlington County Planning Commission

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher Forinash". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Christopher Forinash
Planning Commission Chair