

# ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

## Meeting Summary

7:30 p.m. Monday, September 25, 2017

2100 Clarendon Blvd, Lobby Conference Room "A" for "Azalea"  
at the Courthouse Metro

**Members Present:** Mike Hanna, John Seymour, Sarah Meservey, John Bloom, Christine Ng, Jessica Skerritt, Kimberly Fedinatz, Virginia Castro

**Members Absent:** Gabriel Thoumi, Michael Mesmer, Irwin Kim, Claire O'Dea

**Staff Present:** Joan Kelsch, Stephen Crim, Bethany Heim, Rich Dooley, Susan Bell (parking consultant)

**Others:** Aleksander Belinsky, Bill Browning

Jessica Skerritt is a new member and lives in Claremont. She works for an association management company and has a professional environmental background.

### **1. Public Comment on General Topics**

Bill Browning is Master Naturalist and is looking to join a commission. He is interested in observing the Commission meeting.

### **2. South Park at Potomac Yard Update – Bethany Heim**

Bethany Heim reported that Parks has done a lot of public outreach on the project. The project team includes staff from Arlington and Alexandria as well as consulting designers. The Arlington/Alexandria boundary mimics the old meandering stream boundary, but it was not changed when the stream was straightened by the Army Corps of Engineers. The corridor is a former railroad yard. The proposed park sits on the bank of Four Mile Run just downstream from Arlington's wastewater treatment plant. About 2/3 of the 3.6 acre site is available for use. The Potomac Yard Phased Development Site plan was completed in 2000 and planning has continued in the area since then.

The South Park project will develop in conjunction with various plans (Four Mile Run Master Plan, etc.), other parks and the planned development in the area. The project will be presented to the Board in December 2017. The park includes playground, seating, dog run, open lawn, gardens, bioretention, trails for pedestrians and bikes. A native riparian meadow will be planted on the west end of the park.

Heavy metals are present in the soils on the site and on the bridge. Soils will be removed and the area will be capped with clean soil. The bridge will not open immediately until Alexandria has funds to do the work. Bike connections will be improved and the trails will be ADA accessible.

The bike trail is designed to slow bicyclists, using elevation and visual cues. The Bike Advisory Committee will be consulted on the bike trail. Mike Hanna expressed concern about safety, speed, and conflicts between bikes and pedestrians. The focus is on multi-use trails for pedestrians and bikes. Mike noted that this is a major commuter route along Four Mile Run. The trail will be widened 1 foot (width is constrained by bridge abutments and slopes). Christine asked if a wide viewing deck similar to the one on the W&OD trail could be constructed to allow

people to stop and get off the trail. Bethany reported that cost and terrain constraints limit ability to create extra space.

The amount of paved space is limited due to RPA constraints. The park provides passive green space as requested by the public. On the north end, a heavily used private drive aisle is used for deliveries and garage access.

The first phase will start soon and CIP funds will be proposed for full construction in 2023. 113 new trees will be included along with 4 different eco zones (lawn, riparian, interpretive garden, bioretention). The proposed dog run will incorporate specially designed artificial turf. Park names are being discussed and will be determined by a park naming process to be approved by County Board in December.

Timeline: Park Master Plan is scheduled to go to the Board in December 2017. The Trail Design and Construction begins in 2018. Park Construction estimated for 2023 is dependent on CIP and Park bonds. Total budget is \$4 million. The Alexandria portion is a Superfund site and will be remediated accordingly.

Bethany would appreciate a letter from E2C2. She is available to answer questions. She will check into when the Environmental Assessment is to be completed. Phase I is being managed by DES Transportation. E2C2 will draft a letter (due in November prior to the December Board meeting) after hearing from the Bike Advisory Committee. Christine will circulate a draft for commission discussion. This item will be added to E2C2's October meeting agenda.

### **3. Residential Parking Working Group Update – Stephen Crim**

Stephen Crim and Susan Bell presented information on the off-street parking policy for multi-family residential projects. A Request to Advertise will go the Board in October and final Board action is anticipated in November. Stephen would like E2C2's endorsement. The process was initiated in 2013 because the Board wanted to look at parking requirements for multi-family development. Recently the Board has approved projects with less parking than required by-right. This action is designed to codify existing practice and make the process more predictable. The policy applies to the Jeff Davis and the R-B corridors in site plan or mixed use development process. It does not apply to Lee Hwy, Columbia Pike or by-right development.

Existing policy encourages shared parking and more flexibility in deciding the amount of parking when other transportation is available. The policy allows for reduced or elimination of parking. Stakeholders served on a Working Group and participated in a robust public process. Benefits of the policy builds on commitment to Metro and transit, encourages housing production and housing choice (less parking reduces construction costs), and creates a more predictable approval process.

#### Elements of the Policy:

- New range of parking minimums related to distance to Metro. Buildings further from Metro can increase parking. For example, buildings up to 1/8 mile have a minimum of 0.2 spaces/unit. Sites more than 3/4 mile have a minimum of 0.6 spaces/unit.
- 1.65 spaces/unit is “excess” parking and they can accommodate that by tandem or stacked parking or they have to make contribution of \$3,060/space/year. The policy is designed to discourage more parking.
- The minimums are established below recent demand because they want the policy to address uncertainty for future car use demand (assuming fewer cars in the future).
- Offers the ability to exchange a few parking spaces for bike parking over and above the minimum site plan requirements or car/bike sharing.
- One space per 20 units for visitor parking.
- Allows for shared parking for residential and office joint use development.

- Allows developer to count underutilized nearby parking spaces toward minimum parking requirement.
- Consider reductions in parking if site constraints exist: underground Metro tunnels, historic buildings, site size, soil conditions, etc.

Shared parking in residential/office is complex. Security, liability, and agreement from affected parties will be considered. The policy formalizes the County's consideration of this option to help streamline the process. Shared parking arrangements are much easier if both builders are the same owner. JBG Smith owns much of the R-B corridor so there is potential there for shared parking arrangements.

John Seymour noted that data show that parking needs are currently greater in affordable housing currently than the proposed minimums in the policy. Stephen noted that the policy establishes minimums and more parking can be included.

Public comment by Aleksander Belinsky. He opposes the policy. He encourages shared parking. He expressed concerns about limitations on affordable housing.

Sarah thinks the excess threshold of 1.6 is very high. No one has come close to the excess threshold since 2010 (higher than recent approvals). Gabriel Thoumi was the E2C2 rep on the stakeholder group. Christine will ask Gabriel to draft a letter by the October meeting to meet the project deadline. The Commission agrees with the proposed policy and encourage him to write a letter reflecting this.

#### **4. EA Update and Discussion – Rich Dooley**

Environmental Assessments are required on various County funded projects.

Christine noted that E2C2 is often brought in too late and the design is determined without environmental input. Some significant projects don't go through the EA process at all because they are considered "exempt" or "excepted."

Rich reported that interests were gathered from Stakeholders to determine common interests and outline a proposed a process. We need to institutionalize new processes, technology, and tools to update the process.

Stakeholder interests include:

- Protect the environment
- Do not increase time, costs, and night meetings
- Integrate environmental review early on in the process – upfront before design phase
- Improve transparency
- Allow for real-time updates as project is revised
- Allow for a uniform process that would apply to all projects
  - Similar/simple projects (street paving, etc.) would have a list of environmental components that would apply to all such projects
- Would not apply to emergency projects

Rich proposed that an electronic worksheet be developed to guide staff through the EA process. This would generate a report outlining environmental issues. A related map would be developed to show where EA projects are located and what environmental issues are associated with the project. A group of staff could meet quarterly to discuss projects and answer questions.

Outstanding question: Who will decide which projects get EA review from E2C2?

John Seymour doesn't agree with the stakeholder common interests – he is concerned there is too much focus on reducing cost, time, etc. His interpretation is that no EAs will be written. Information will be on the website and available as people want to see them. He asked if an EA document will be available for review and approval. Rich said that E2C2 could decide which projects E2C2 wants to hear.

Alternatives evaluation – E2C2 asked if staff assesses the basic need for the project? They see the need to have input early on in the process during the community engagement process. Rich noted that comments on a project could be handled as part of the formal comments response process. John noted this is a profound change to past process. E2C2 has a role that is important. Perhaps if they can check the database regularly, then E2C2 can ask questions. EAs assimilate all the information to evaluate which option has the least environmental impact. Reviewing the document offers a holistic view of the project for evaluation. John Seymour is concerned about throwing Admin Reg 4.4 out the window as it will reduce thoughtful environmental review.

Mike Hanna fears that no projects would come to E2C2. Public hearing is an issue. Should E2C2 review public and private (site plan) projects? Mike thinks that public projects are the priority to be reviewed by E2C2. Elimination of open space is an issue and isn't covered by a standard template or checklist. Things that don't violate a County policy may need environmental review. If a park is changing the amount of open space, passive/active recreation, impervious areas, then the project needs an EA. Do the EA really early – evaluate the project when it's an idea. Then E2C2 can ask why the project is necessary and what impacts are.

Basic checklist would include all County environmental regulations and policies. E2C2 highly values the presentations by staff. How do we screen projects so there aren't 100s of projects to look at? (for example, group all paving projects into a category). They would like to see a mock-up of the template. What key information would the proposed map application report? Include a date for the projects in the database so it is easy to search. Commission could assign an advocate for each project. Evaluate the project scope and attributes to determine if EA review is required. This would require a specific set of criteria and would require more work for E2C2. Get review for some projects that aren't reviewed now. The map could include a function to turn off road projects. Template would allow for screening for specific components – outdoor lighting, impervious surface, buildings, parking, etc. The initial EA could make early estimates on impact and can make numbers more precise with time. As projects change they may need review later on. The map/database could include an option to subscribe to an alert if project changes. Think about what the triggers would be.

John Seymour sees great value in E2C2's letters that go to County Board regarding EAs. He likes a document that addresses each of the components. E2C2 agreed there is a need to keep public comment and letters to the Board. The EA is a public document as well that is helpful. John thinks they offer context and opportunity to raise issues and he doesn't want it to be abandoned. Set a bar for which projects get full EAs. Mike would like to see a better document with more detailed information. The EA allows E2C2 to comment on projects and participate early and offers a mechanism to review environmental issues, have public comment, and comment to board.

Do an EA process early in the project process. E2C2 could provide a list of things and write it up in a letter saying we put staff on notice that E2C2 is looking for these things. Track through the electronic map. Later in the process, note that they did some things and didn't do others. Set a threshold early on and if project exceeds thresholds, then the project needs an EA.

At some point need to have an EA. Could do it early and then do it again later and review project for site specific critical environmental impacts.

Minor projects are exempt. It is difficult to come up with clear threshold criteria to determine what needs an EA. The EA would explain options for the site. It would include some specific numbers – energy efficiency, impervious area and stormwater mitigation, change in open space, lighting, predevelopment green, etc.

Mike Hanna offered some potential criteria:

Change land use/condition – sq ft threshold

Change in interior space – sq ft threshold

They asked that Rich add E2C2's thoughts to the common interests list from stakeholder slide. They encourage the County to build the most environmentally responsible project for the identified need.

Look at Christine's draft E2C2 Principles for Public Space Design from last year (in Google Groups documents).

John wants to see stormwater management plans and how vegetation will be addressed. Preliminary design may be a good time. Wants more focused information. Joan responded that the EA process is not designed for the Commission to provide a detailed review of all the plans submitted on a project. This is an item for further discussion.

## **5. Meeting Minutes – August 27, 2017**

Approved as amended.

## **6. Old/New Business**

Sarah Meservey has heard some opposition to the Donaldson Run Tributary B watershed restoration project. Commissioners would like more information. Joan will ask OSEM staff to provide an update.

John Seymour reported that the County Board asked for study of light pole heights at the Williamsburg Middle School rectangular field. They also asked for "tiered" choices for how to increase athletic field capacity County wide (new turf fields, lights, etc.). The Board also asked that the POPs process evaluate how athletic field are selected countywide.

Mike Hanna reported that work on the Bike Element of the Master Transportation Plan continues.

Christine Ng reported that she met with staff and several state legislators (Senator Adam Ebbin, Delegate Alfonso Lopez, a representative from Delegate Rip Sullivan's office, and Arlington County Board members Jay Fisette and Christian Dorsey to discuss environmental issues facing the Virginia Legislature. E2C2's letter on legislative issues was very helpful in guiding the discussion.

Jessica and Sarah offered to represent E2C2 in the PFRC process for Reed Elementary School. The first meeting is scheduled for October 25.

Scott Dicke will no longer represent E2C2 on the Long Bridge Park Advisory Committee. He can provide details on the process. Virginia may be interested in covering.

The Sierra Club's Ready for 100 campaign staff would like to give a presentation to E2C2. Members asked that they come with a specific request for E2C2 to consider.

