
Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) of the Planning Commission
Meeting Summary
February 24, 2021, 7:00pm

This meeting was a virtual public meeting held through electronic communications means.

Planning Commissioners in attendance:

Elizabeth Gearin (Co-chair, LRPC)
James Schroll (Co-chair, LRPC)
Jim Lantelme
Elizabeth Morton
Jane Siegel
Sara Steinberger
Daniel Weir

Planning Commissioners absent:

Denyse "Nia" Bagley
Stephen Hughes
Devanshi P. Patel
Tenley Peterson
Leonardo Sarli

Representatives in attendance:

Christer Ahl, Crystal City Citizen Review Council (CCRC)
Ben D'Avanzo, Aurora Highlands Civic Association
Shruti Kuppa, Park and Recreation Commission (PRC)
Chris Slatt, Transportation Commission

Staff in attendance:

Matt Mattauszek, CPHD – Planning
Tim Murphy, CPHD – Planning
Pablo Penades Lopez, CPHD – Planning

Members of the public in attendance:

Mary Beth Avedesian, Craig Ciekot, Nick Cumings, Aubrey Fenton, Carol Fuller, John Nelson, Gerry, Georgia Papadopoulos, Megan Rappolt, Malaika Scriven, Eric Shullman, Sachin Swami, Pamela Van Hine, Robert Vaughan, Paul Voutsas, Stratis Voutsas, Kedrick Whitmore, Jeffrey Williams, Chris Wimbush

Crystal City Building Heights Study

LRPC Co-chair James Schroll opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Commissioner Schroll recognized the members of several other Arlington County boards and commissions and civic leaders in attendance, as well as staff members.

Commissioner Schroll provided that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to seek feedback from the LRPC on draft guidance developed by staff to be used during the study and on staff's work to identify the maximum building height potential.

Tim Murphy presented an overview of the Crystal City Building Heights Study's goals, process, and schedule. Pablo Lopez presented staff's work to identify the maximum height potential that could be achieved above the maximum heights in the Crystal City Sector Plan and below maximum height guidance established by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Tim Murphy then presented an overview of draft guidance developed by staff intended to assist staff during the evaluation of potential changes to building height to identify potential impacts. The draft guidance was developed as a checklist of binary questions, the answers to which would help staff identify impacts and approaches to mitigating those impacts. Tim Murphy then presented discussion topics and next steps.

Once the staff presentation concluded, Commissioner Schroll solicited comments and feedback from LRPC attendees.

The Commission members offered the following comments and raised several clarifying questions:

Comments related to the Maximum Height Potential Analysis:

- Clarifying question about the Building Heights Map in the Crystal City Sector Plan and whether 400 ft. is currently permitted. The Building Heights Map includes dimensions on the map that establishes the position of a boundary between different height zones. The 400 ft. dimension indicates that the height zone is 400 ft. in length.
- Clarifying question regarding whether recent site plan projects will be included in the study's analysis moving forward. Staff has updated the existing three-dimensional model, originally established to illustrate existing conditions in 2010, to include site plan projects that have been completed and approved but not yet completed as of 2020.

Comments related to the Guidance Questions – Height:

- Clarifying question regarding whether the guidance will consider potential impacts related to an increase in density. During the study, staff will explore theoretical increases in building heights and density to understand what the potential impacts of a density increase may be. Questions in the draft guidance related to demand for open space and transportation seek to identify potential impacts from density.
- Clarifying question about whether a local jurisdiction can increase building heights all the way up to the limit established by the FAA. The FAA reviews proposed projects and issues a Determination of No Hazard if a project complies with the FAA height guidance. The height analysis serves to illustrate how much additional height is available above the maximum height limits in the Sector Plan. Staff has not determined that heights should be increased; the study will lead to a recommendation whether to increase heights, and, if so, what height may be appropriate.
- Comment that any unilateral increase in building heights would create a conflict with earlier expectations for density that were anticipated in 2010 with the development of the Sector Plan. Sculpting was anticipated to control density.

- Comment that the Aurora Highlands community will be carefully monitoring any proposed changes to building height in the western edge areas of the Sector Plan area.
- Clarifying question related to the question regarding height tapering in key locations and the meaning of “key locations.” “Key locations” refers to the geographic areas identified in the Sector Plan’s Policy Framework in two objectives under Goal 6 – Preserve the Integrity of the Single-family Neighborhood to the West. These areas essentially make up the western edge of the Sector Plan area.
- Comment recommending that the question related to height tapering identify the “key locations” referenced in the Sector Plan’s Policy Framework.
- Comment suggesting that staff continue to reiterate that the FAA height limits are just one data point in the study; they are not intended to be a staff proposal or recommendation.
- Comment suggesting that greater height be considered within the spine of the Sector Plan area while continuing to taper height west toward the lower-density residential neighborhood.
- Comment suggesting that a question be focused on height impacts to lower-density commercial areas, in addition to the question focused on height impacts to lower-density residential areas.
- Clarifying question regarding other elements of the Sector Plan that might be impacted by changes to building height. As staff evaluates height framework scenarios, changes to other plan elements, such as build-to lines, bulk plane angle, and the street network, may be identified.
- Comment about the question related to the varied skyline recommending that the question call out language from the Sector Plan, to help explain what a “varied skyline” means. Consider defining and adding the term “undulating” to this question. Consider how we arrived at the current skyline, which is considered less variable than what the Sector Plan envisioned.
- Comment suggesting that height could be considered block by block or within each block to support the varied skyline concept in the Sector Plan. Other plan guidance beyond building height may need to be relied upon to achieve this outcome.
- Comment recommending staff consider and continue to follow VDOT’s Route 1 study and potential implications for pedestrian connections as part of this study. VDOT and County staff are aware of each study and are monitoring how each study moves forward for potential implications and opportunities.

Comments related to the Guidance Questions – Open Space and Transportation:

- Clarifying question and comment recommending that micro-climate impacts (e.g., wind tunnel, reflection, urban heat island, etc.) be considered as an addition to the open space shade impact questions. Consider adding a standalone question related to micro-climate impacts that focuses on impacts to the larger neighborhood.
- Comments expressing dislike for the existing transportation question. The existing transportation question is unnecessary; planning should be dictating transportation, not the other way around.
- Comment suggesting the existing transportation question be rephrased to say, “What changes in transportation demand management (TDM) strategies are necessary to support / in response to additional height?”

- Comment expressing that the Sector Plan contains interconnected elements; one element, such as building height, cannot be changed without considering potential effects on other aspects of the plan.
- Comment that there are additional aspects of Livability 22202 and the Sector Plan that could be affected by additional density, such as housing and schools. Consider other questions related to additional density.
- Comment suggesting that consideration for transportation should be thinking about this in terms of Mode Split and what the building can do to support a shift toward more space-efficient travel modes.
- Comment supporting the discussion about supporting shift in Mode Split. Using the existing Sector Plan isn't adequate, and current development patterns seem to be inadequate; this study could help with a shift in Mode Split.

Comments related to Guidance Questions – What is missing from the Guidance:

- Comment that when the study was initially proposed last year, the request for greater building height was tied to one or two specific projects and that there would be some community benefit required. These requests then led to this greater study of the Sector Plan area. There is a need to maintain awareness throughout the study of the earlier goals/objectives to help set expectations of what could be considered in the future and under what circumstances greater height may be available (e.g., through the provision of community benefits).
- Comment suggesting that the analysis allude to or reference impacts on historic preservation and historic resources, such as the 23rd Street commercial area, within the Sector Plan area.

Public Comment

- Supports varied heights that have the potential to establish a unique identity for Crystal City. Supports building on Crystal City's past, such as 23rd Street, which would be helpful in protecting past/existing neighborhoods, rather than just exist in the shadow of Amazon. Consider how this study could contribute to or preserve Crystal City's identity.

Commissioner Schroll adjourned the meeting close to 9:00 pm.