



WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, May 28, 2003, for the purpose of meeting with the developers of Greenbelt Station.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at about 8:10 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, Alan Turnbull, and Mayor Judith F. Davis. Councilmember Thomas X. White arrived at about 8:35 p.m.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Celia W. Craze, Director, Planning and Community Development; Terri Hruby, City Planner; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Norman Rivera, Rifkin Livingston; Sandi Gallagher, Greenbelt Metropark/Metroland Development; Eileen Straughan and Leyla Lange, Straughan Environmental Services; Greg Ault, EDAW, Inc.; Joe Chang, M-NCPPC; Steve Gang, Lessard Architectural Group; Greg Ault, EDAW, Inc.; Delegate Pauline Menes; County Councilmember Thomas Dernoga; Andrew Eppelman, for Mr. Dernoga; Mayor Pattie Dennison, Berwyn Heights; Jerry Anzullvic, Berwyn District Civic Association; Mayor Stephen Brayman, Council members Robert T. Catlin and Mark Shroder, and Claire Sale, Planning Department, College Park; John Krouse, North College Park Civic Association; Brad From, for Delegate Justin Ross; Richard Santos, for County Councilmember Douglas Peters; Pat Blankenship, Lowell Owens, Doug Love, Barry Schlesinger, Citizens to Conserve and Restore Indian Creek (CCRIC); Larry Taub, Quantum Management; Sheldon Goldberg, Advisory Planning Board; residents Molly Lester and Derek Thompson; and Virginia Beauchamp, Greenbelt News Review.

Following some introductions, Mayor Davis explained that although this work session was originally intended to be between the Greenbelt City Council and the developers, it was decided to invite participation from other nearby communities that have an interest in the development of the Metro Station property.

Mr. Rivera said their goal tonight was to show Council where they are in improving the plan. He noted that the revised Conceptual Site Plan and Preliminary Plan of Subdivision had been approved by the County Council and the Planning Board. They are now in the process of meeting with various community groups and local governments in order to solicit comments and engage in dialogue. He said they have been making a serious effort to incorporate the comments and criticisms they have received so far.

Mr. Gang then described the revised plan, using illustrations that had been placed around the room. He said his firm was brought into the project a little over a year ago as specialists in high density, mixed-use development. Especially within the District, they have worked on a number of Metro-related projects, and they were asked to critique the Greenbelt Station plan. He said they viewed the conceptual design that

existed at that time as a reasonable start but “a simple way to do it” and “easy for a developer to build.” He said their goal was to make it more interesting. Among other problems, he said, the June 2002 design for the loop road was not pedestrian-friendly, and there were “lots of parking issues.” He said they have added more residential to the north core and have greatly increased mixed use. WMATA now wants its own parking garage. The parking facility would be five stories, the office six to eight, and part of the structure over the retail base would be 12 stories.

Regarding parking, he said the plan for more than 17,000 spaces was for a “worst case” scenario (i.e., Christmas), and they now have the target whittled down to 13,000, including 3,600 dedicated to WMATA.

Mr. Gang discussed using different “skins” on parts of the large structures to add diversity and give the illusion of a number of buildings constructed at different time periods.

Greg Ault of EDAW addressed changes in the plan for the streetscape and for open space and recreation. He said they have discussed doing landscaping on Greenbelt Road to “announce” the project. What was originally conceived as a four-lane road between the two cores is now a two-lane road of varying widths, including crosswalks and bike paths.

Mayor Davis asked about the City’s prior requests for recreational space and facilities. Mr. Gang said they were aware of this issue and were, among other things, looking at rooftop facilities.

Ms. Straughan described the purpose of her company as helping to build sustainable communities; in particular, they have worked extensively with issues involving minimizing impacts of transportation projects. A year ago, she was asked to critique and identify problems with this project. She tried to look at both regional impacts and further impacts on this property, especially in light of its already being a degraded site. She showed aerial photos of the site from the 1950s and 1989 to demonstrate the shrinkage of the woodland.

Ms. Straughan said that in the revised plan, they have gone through the process of avoidance and minimization of impact on water resources, with the result that the revised design is much improved in this regard. She commented that the criticisms and suggestions that had been received were listened to. Mayor Davis responded that it was obvious that if the City, CCRIC, and other communities and groups had not criticized the original plan, the situation would be very different. She said the City was still concerned about the double-counting that would result if the state property were used as a mitigation site.

Mr. Roberts commented that given the high water levels at the existing “failed” mitigation site, it was unimaginable to him that this area could not be returned to wetland. He said the mitigation site had been located where it was for a reason. He said the state land was already preserved and forested and that forest cover could not be removed under Maryland regulations. Ms. Straughan said the existing mitigation site was not getting the necessary hydrology.

Ms. Straughan stated that state Department of the Environment and the Corps of Engineers had previously had as their policy that mitigation should be done on site and in kind; if that proved impossible, it could be done off site, in kind. They are now backing away from that policy because the on-site mitigation can produce isolated sites that are not connected to the flood plain and can never function as if they are connected to flood plains.

The Mayor received confirmation that at its highest, the hotel would be 10 stories. She raised the suggestion that a platform be provided for a Metro stop in the south core, to obviate the need to travel to the north core to take the train. Mr. Rivera said he would discuss this idea with WMATA.

Mr. Putens said he was still concerned with the road over the existing mitigation site and with what will travel over that road. Mr. Rivera responded that they have moved the road to the narrowest point of the sensitive area and are willing to work with whatever design has the least impact on the fragile area. Ms. Straughan added that they preferred to bridge the area rather than create a culvert.

Mr. White asked if the streets were to be public or dedicated. Mr. Rivera responded that he thought the Main Street and the loop road would be public. Ms. Craze said the City should be involved in the development of public street standards.

Mr. Turnbull said he appreciated that the level of articulation of the plan was much higher than it was before. He was still concerned, however, that regardless of the architectural frills, the big retail "blob" would be just another mall. He said he was also concerned with the reality of having beltway traffic "crashing onto Main Street." He asked if the State Highway Administration (SHA) had commented on the plan, adding, "It isn't a Main Street streetscape if it is a deceleration lane." Sandi Gallagher responded that it was currently being reviewed by SHA. Mr. Rivera added that SHA "has some of the same issues" being raised by Mr. Turnbull. Mr. Owens later spoke in agreement with Mr. Turnbull and said another design was needed to handle traffic leaving the beltway. Mr. Turnbull also encouraged a train platform in the south core, saying people will not walk between the south and north cores. He said that would allow removing the road between the cores altogether.

There were some questions raised regarding traffic projections for which the data were not at hand. Sandi Gallagher said she could get these numbers.

Ms. Craze said she thought the traffic level in the south core would be higher than typical on a secondary residential street, with the result that people would not want to live with their front porches on this road. She also commented that the mandatory, dedicated recreation space had been ignored so far and that providing work-out rooms in buildings did not provide the range of choices needed in a community. Regarding the wetland mitigation, she said the City's perspective is that the existing mitigation site is a preserved area and it is not appropriate to overlay these three acres onto another preserved area. She expressed concern that the 111 acres of state land would be treated as a bank for mitigation needs. Regarding the mall, she commented that the design had moved from mall to Main Street and then back to mall. The problem, she said, with the mall is that it is not a permeable structure and is thus not street-active. She asked if a retailer other than Westfield could be involved or whether a

representative of Westfield should be taking part in these meetings. Sandi Gallagher said she had called Westfield to see if they would be willing to meet with Council.

Mayor Dennison asked about water run-off to Berwyn Heights and Hollywood. She said Berwyn Heights is also concerned about increased traffic on Greenbelt Road. Mayor Davis added that Hollywood is also concerned about the heights of buildings.

Mr. Dernoga said he had previously requested that Mr. Rivera provide a site impact analysis.

Ms. Blankenship asked Ms. Straughan what her previous success with mitigation sites had been. She said a member of CCRIC believes it is just a clay cap that is keeping the water from perking in the old site and that it should be possible for it to function again. She said CCRIC was concerned about how they could replace these three acres on the site without destroying something else or double-dipping with the state land.

Regarding accessibility from the south core, Mr. Rivera said that in addition to bike lanes, there had also been discussion of having a shuttle service between the cores to reduce car traffic.

Mr. Schlesinger questioned the transit-oriented nature of the project, saying the Metro station should provide an opportunity to reduce congestion and the use of cars. Instead, he said, Mr. Rivera was discussing the large number of car trips coming to station as an end-destination. The Mayor responded that the City's concept of "transit-oriented" and the state's are not the same.

Because the Hollywood/North College Park area is at a lower elevation than the proposed site, Mr. Krouse spoke regarding their concerns of with stormwater management. He also stated that they wanted to have "meaningful" scales on building height.

Mayor Davis said the City's understanding is that there is nothing outstanding on the issue of the environmental compliance of the Smith property. In response to her question about the time frame of their contract with WMATA, Sandi Gallagher said some of the milestones had been extended.

Mayor Davis commented that the residential units were still all high-end, with "affordability" being addressed only by the availability of smaller units.

Mr. Roberts asked about the existing artifacts on the adjacent property at the south end, such as the junk yard and the powering-generating facility. Mr. Rivera said his understanding was that this piece of property was on the market.

Mayor Davis thanked the developers for their presentation and for their cooperation. She said although "we're not there yet," the City appreciated the responsiveness they had shown to the City's criticisms and concerns.

Mr. Roberts added that for him the issue was still dealing with the existing mitigation site, with no construction on the mitigation site and no road through it. Mr. Putens

agreed with Mr. Roberts, saying that had been the central issue from the beginning. Mr. Turnbull asked Mr. Rivera what was driving the need to connect the north and south cores; he asked if it was incumbent on the developer to meet an agreement with WMATA. He said what the City sees is an attempt to yoke together two elements that are so far apart they can be joined only artificially. He said this is the "sticky wicket" and, if it is not of the developers' choosing, perhaps a way can be found to eliminate it. Sandi Gallagher responded that the residential builders of the south core want metro access, since "that's the whole idea." Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Roberts both said that problem could be addressed by putting a subway platform in the south core.

The meeting ended at 10:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen Gallagher
City Clerk