

Community Liaison Team Minutes from the 1/5/06 meeting

Introductions of Team Members

The following representatives are members of the Community Liaison Team:

Stephen Rideout – Old Town Greens
Patricia Schubert – Inner City
Mariella Posey - NorthEast
Pat Phibbs – NorthEast
David Fromm – Del Ray
Buddy Johnson – Del Ray

Absent:

Michael Babin – Slaters Lane Businesses
Miles Keogh – Lynhaven
Kevin Reilly – Potomac West Business Association

Also in Attendance:

Cathy Puskar – Walsh, Colucci, Lubeley, Emrich & Terpak, PC
Duncan Blair – Land, Clark, Carroll, Mendelson & Blair P.C.
Chuck Smith – Shirley Contracting
Rich Baier – City of Alexandria, Transportation & Environmental Services
Emily Baker - City of Alexandria, Transportation & Environmental Services

Introduction

Mayor Euille welcomed everyone and indicated that members of the Community Liaison Team were to be the eyes and ears of their community who would report back on issues of concern associated with the bridge construction.

Discussion of Liaison Team Roles

Cathy Puskar introduced the Team members and echoed the Mayor's comments regarding the role of the Community Liaison Team. The Team meetings will provide a forum for the community representatives to bring forward the concerns of neighbors and fellow business owners regarding issues related to the construction of the bridge. Citizens are encouraged to contact their representatives with any comments or concerns, which will then be brought forward at the Team meetings for discussion/resolution.

Citizens can also register comments/questions on the Potomac Yard website www.potomacyardalexandria.com. All materials presented to the group will be put on the website, as will the minutes once they are approved by the Team.

Overview of Potomac Yard

Duncan Blair gave a brief overview of Potomac Yard:

Potomac Yard Development is a partnership between Centex Homes and Pulte Homes.

The parcel of land that makes up Potomac Yard extends from the existing Potomac Yard retail shops to the Braddock Road Metro Station. This area will be separated into landbays for the creation of a mixed-use community.

Potomac Yard is currently working on submittal plans for Landbay H, which will contain 5,000 square feet of retail space and residential homes as well as 60,000 square feet of office space. A public hearing on Landbay H is expected to occur in the Spring of 2006.

Potomac Yard will be built on a framework of streets. The spine road of this network is Potomac Avenue. As part of the approval process the Council considered a concept plan that called for Potomac Avenue to connect to the Monroe Avenue Bridge directly.

The alternative concept plan called for the Bridge to be straightened. The alternative plan subsequently became the primary plan that is being used today. As currently designed, Monroe Avenue will pass under the Bridge and loop around through Potomac Avenue to meet Route 1. The current design allows for additional land at Simpson Field to be utilized, the use of which is currently impeded by the Monroe Avenue Bridge. Construction is set to begin shortly on the pile driving. The City is also considering options regarding the tie in of Monroe Avenue to the new bridges as well as the direct pedestrian connection from the bridge to the park. These items will be discussed at the City's meeting, January 11, 2006 at the George Washington Middle School Cafeteria.

It is a misconception that the new configuration for the Monroe Avenue Bridge is to accommodate Potomac Yard Development and their community designs. The process and planning for the straightened Monroe Avenue Bridge began even before PYD bought the parcel of land.

History of Monroe Avenue Bridge Straightening:

Emily Baker gave an overview of the Community process regarding the straightening of the Monroe Avenue Bridge. Emily explained the concept plan bridge improvements (connecting Potomac Ave to the existing bridge), which were estimated to cost \$30 million. The alternative concept plan, which included the straightening of the Monroe Avenue bridge was estimated to cost \$45 million. The original 1999 approvals for Potomac Yard, included both options, with a decision to be made at a future date. After additional public input, in 2003 the Council adopted the alternative concept plan, which committed the City to pay the \$15 million cost difference between the two alternatives. In 2005, the developer, PYD, agreed to pay the entire cost of straightened bridge, including the City's \$15 million obligation.

Emily cited the community benefits associated with the straightened bridge, including land use, recreation, transportation, and aesthetics.

From a land use perspective, the new bridge will allow Del Ray to connect to Potomac Yard at grade via Monroe Avenue, thereby bringing the two communities together.

From a recreation perspective, there will be a consolidation of additional open space with the existing Simpson Field and two new fields will be constructed.

Regarding transportation, there are a large number of accidents that occur on the current bridge. The straightened bridge will improve public safety. In addition, Route 1 functions better from a transportation standpoint with the straightened alignment than it would have with Potomac Avenue connecting directly onto the existing bridge.

From an aesthetics standpoint, the community wanted an attractive bridge that would provide the maximum benefits visually to the community – high quality design including fewer piers, attractive lighting and fencing, and sidewalks on both sides of the bridge with one side wide enough for bicyclists.

Emily invited interested citizens to attend the City's Community Workshop on January 11, 2006, where options and modifications for the Bridge will be discussed.

Review of December 12th Community Meeting

Cathy provided a review of the December 12th community meeting to discuss plans regarding the Monroe Avenue Bridge. She announced that approximately 350 people attended the meeting and that the power point presentation used at the meeting is posted on the Potomac Yard Web site at www.potomacyardalexandria.com. In addition, she passed out a written Question & Answers document that was prepared by the City and Potomac Yard Development as a follow up to questions raised by the community at the December 12th meeting. That document is also available on the website.

Community Input

The following is a list of questions asked by the Liaison Team and audience with responses provided by City Staff and PYD.

Q: How will citizens access Slaters Lane? Will it still be closed for 30 months, the entire length of construction?

A: PYD is working with the City to mitigate the impact of construction on Slaters Lane. The number one priority is to ensure safety. It appears that there is a solution that will improve the timing and routing of the Slaters Lane detour. This information will be shared at the January 11th meeting.

Q: What is the proposed Metro Bus rerouting? When the routes are reconfigured, how will the new schedules and routes be distributed to the community?

A: Since connections between Route 1 and Slaters Lane/Powhatan Street will be impacted by the bridge construction, some detouring of these routes will be necessary. The initial plan was to detour these routes between Route 1/Slaters Lane and Washington Street south via Montgomery and Madison to Columbus and Powhatan. This plan would avoid lengthening these routes, but would necessitate changes in service from 9A to 9B at some existing bus stops and possible relocation of other stops.

A preferred alternative that is currently under review by WMATA, is to maintain existing service on the 9A and 9B routes by using longer detour routes as follows:

- The 9A southbound route would be detoured from Route 1/Slaters Lane south on Route 1 to Madison, east on Madison to Columbus, north to Slaters via Powhatan, east on Slaters to West Abingdon, then south to Washington returning to the existing route.
- The northbound 9A route would follow this same detour in the reverse direction, returning to Route 1 via Montgomery Street.
- The 9B route would be detoured between Route 1/Slaters and Slaters/Powhatan via Route 1, Montgomery and Madison, Columbus and Powhatan, essentially following the same detour as the 9A. Otherwise, this route would be unaffected.

The City will coordinate with WMATA to provide advance notice to riders of upcoming changes in the routes or bus stop locations and the information will also be posted on the project website.

After construction, the existing bus stop at Monroe Avenue and Route 1, served by Routes 9A, 9B and 9E will be relocated to the intersection of Route 1 and Potomac Avenue in the general vicinity of the current bus stop.

Q: Are members of the City or PYD working with the local school system to reroute school bus routes? Will the detour routes accommodate full size buses?

A: PYD is working with the Alexandria School System to reroute school bus paths affected by construction detours. All detour routes will accommodate full-size school buses as well as all emergency response vehicles.

Q: What efforts are being made to prevent Powhatan being used as an arterial route during construction?

A: Powhatan is a local street and is not intended to become a major traffic route, although there will be some detour traffic during construction of the bridge. Several traffic calming efforts have already been implemented on Powhatan. In addition, monitoring will occur throughout construction and if a problem is identified, the City will work with the neighborhood.

Q: What are the haul routes for construction vehicles? Will their speed and routes be enforced by police?

A: The designated haul route for construction vehicles to the site will be from Interstate 395, east along West Glebe Road to East Glebe Road and southbound along Route 1 to the project site. Haul routes from the site will be the reverse. As problems with speed and routes are identified, the City will take enforcement action as necessary.

Q: One citizen suggested that the community, which resides in a metropolitan area, should take a more altruistic approach to the construction traffic and share the burden in an effort receive an improvement to the community, the new straightened bridge.

Q: Have members of the Park Service been asked to join the planning team?

A: The National Park Service is not part of the planning team.

Q: Some audience members had safety concerns about being routed through the high-crime neighborhoods along Madison and Montgomery. Patricia Schubert invited them to attend the Neighborhood Safety Meeting January 12, 2006 at the Duran Center at 7:00 p.m. Her citizen group will be addressing safety issues within the neighborhood.

Q: Will emergency vehicles be assured access to all neighborhoods during construction?

A: Yes. All emergency response vehicles will have access to neighborhoods impacted by construction at all times.

Q: What monitoring methods will be used during construction to make sure that cut through traffic does not become a problem, especially on Bellefonte and Howell Avenues?

A: Different methods of monitoring may be used during construction. These methods include spot monitoring, origin and destination counts, and/or pneumatic tubes placed along construction routes.

Q: A citizen suggested that a stop sign be placed at La Grande Avenue between Howell and Bellefonte.

A: Rich Baier stated that, according to the current method of evaluation, a stop sign is not warranted at this time but encouraged the citizen to write a letter to the city requesting reexamination of the stop sign placement and to contact his neighborhood representative, Buddy Johnson.

Q: Stephen Rideout suggested the developer hire additional police force to monitor the speed and routes of traffic during construction.

Q: It was suggested that the development team bring in construction materials through the rail road lines.

A: Due to the location of the rail road track and construction site, this is not possible.

Q: What is the timetable for the decision on pedestrian access?

A: Over the next few weeks, the City will evaluate four alternatives for pedestrian access. These will be considered at the same time as the Monroe Avenues alternatives and will be heard by the Planning Commission and City Council for decision in February.

Q: What is the timetable for the start of construction?

A: Chuck Smith stated that construction work on utility work, storm drains and pile driving can begin while the different options associated with Monroe Avenue and the pedestrian connection are being worked through by the City. Construction is set to begin shortly.

Wrap Up and Adjourn

The audience was invited to attend the City's Community Workshop on January 11, 2006. All future meeting dates concerning the Monroe Avenue Bridge will be posted on www.potomacyardalexandria.com. The liaison team will meet monthly. Cathy will send out an email requesting best dates to get a regularly scheduled meeting on the calendar.