**CCCA Meeting on the Transformation of Potomac Yard: How Soon and What Will It Entail?**

In our pre-meeting announcement we already indicated that there are plans for Alexandria’s ‘North Potomac Yard’ to be completely transformed through the tear-down of the movie theater and then also the existing shopping center. On February 23, in an unusually well attended General Meeting, we had a guest speaker, Mr. Jeffrey Farner, Alexandria’s Deputy Director of Planning and Zoning, who provided an overview of the emerging plans. Also present was Arlington’s chief planner for Crystal City, Anthony Fusarelli, who commented on plans for development in Arlington’s portion of Potomac Yard and on the potential impact of Alexandria’s plans on the future of Crystal City.

Before we summarize the information gleaned from Mr. Farner’s presentation and the subsequent Q&A session, it seems important to clarify the probable timeline for the overall project. There is a sharp contrast between the urgency in developing the ‘movie theater side’ of Potomac Avenue to match the expected, but possibly optimistic, opening date in year 2020 for the brand new Metro station, which will be located just south of the current movie theater, more or less opposite the Target store. It means that this phase will soon move ahead, taking into account that the lease for the theater runs through 2018.

The second overall phase, which will evolve in a few stages, will not start until after the initial phase has been completed, probably with a timeframe of 2020-2030 and beyond. The area is substantial and could not be done all at once. Here it could be noted that the lease for the Target store, one of their top stores in the entire country and thus also a ‘cash cow’ for Alexandria, does not end until 2028.

But the fact that the vast development area today mainly consists of parking lots presents the almost unique opportunity for Alexandria to plan and design ‘with a clean slate’. In comparison with the situation in Crystal City, where the Sector Plan anticipated the tear-down of large office buildings in order to fit in brand new structures, and the existence of many old but functioning apartment buildings, Alexandria will be able to create a new community from scratch, catering to a wide range in terms of income and age.

The emphasis is on a diverse, mixed-use neighborhood, which offers residences, office buildings, retail space, amenities and an open space network, making the area quite ‘self-contained’. Building heights will vary substantially, going from low/mid-rises to a number of tall buildings. Cutting across Potomac Avenue, there will eventually be three distinctly different neighborhoods: residential, retail-oriented, and transportation-focused, moving from Four Mile Run in the north to the Metro station area in the south. Generally speaking, the emphasis will not be on density and intensive land use but rather on excellent, timeless design and on diversity of use.

The idea is to create excellent transit opportunities, with the Metro station, the Metroway bus line, and local buses, so that the area will become pedestrian-friendly rather than car-dependent. A hierarchical street grid is intended to offer streets designed for different purposes and for differences in volume. For instance, the current Potomac Avenue will be reduced from four lanes to two, in order to reduce through traffic. More generally, the plan is to keep speed limits low for safety reasons.

Another strong point of emphasis is environmental and economic viability. Alexandria, in line with citywide policies, is aiming for a high level of energy and water efficiency and for great attention to ‘green’ building design and storm water management. The open space network is also part of this effort.

As Mr. Farner noted, while the principles of the emerging Plan are clear, and while the Plan is getting within months of being presented for approval to the City Council, one always needs to reckon that both timeframes and some concepts or details may change during the course of the implementation.

Anthony Fusarelli answered questions, from an Arlington perspective, for instance regarding the impression that very little is happening in the currently empty portion of Arlington’s Potomac Yard. He noted that, in fact, there are approved or emerging plans for some of those land bays. On the question of how Alexandria’s plans might affect Crystal City and other nearby neighborhoods, Mr. Fusarelli clearly emphasized the positive aspects. He pointed out that a combined Crystal City – Potomac Yard ‘corridor’ would match the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor in length and that there should be considerable scope for synergy and collaboration. To the extent that one might see Alexandria’s plans as presenting a tough competition, he (and Mr. Farner) saw this scenario as healthy and mutually beneficial.