

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) Agenda

Friday, January 10, 2020

Notes Taken By: Amanda Farber

- I. INTRODUCTION OF NEW IAC MEMBERS
- II. ROLE OF IAC, PRESENTATION AND Q&A (PLANNING BOARD CHAIR CASEY ANDERSON)
- III. 7000 WISCONSIN AVENUE, REVISED SITE PLAN DESIGN (MATT GORDON)
- IV. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS (STEPHANIE DICKEL, LESLYE HOWERTON, NAOMI SPINRAD, EMILY VAIAS)
- V. NEW BUSINESS
- VI. NEXT MEETING – FRIDAY FEBURARY 7

Agenda item: Battery Lane Project (Nancy Regelin/Doug Wrenn)

Agenda Item: 4824 Edgemoor Lane (Pat Harris)

Agenda Item: Rules and Procedures Update (Emily Vaias, Naomi Spinrad, Leslye Howerton, Stephanie Dickel)

Meeting Notes and Attendees:

I. Introduction of New IAC Members

New IAC members Joyce Gwadz (residential) and Kristi Smith and Chris Smith (commercial) shared mutual introductions with current IAC members.

II. Role of IAC, Presentation and Q&A

Casey Anderson, Planning Board Chair, spoke about how the IAC can be most helpful to the planning process. He indicated the IAC is advisory rather than regulatory and can call attention to concerns and bring issues to the planning staff and Board if it sees concerning trends developing.

He said it is less important for the IAC to look at individual applications and more important to bring a broader perspective based on group members' understanding of the area and the master plan. He also noted that it is important to review how the plan is working out over time.

It is fine to comment on issues covered by the Design Advisory Panel (DAP) but best to focus on areas not covered by the DAP (the IAC is not DAP part 2). For example, certain broader functional design issues seem to come up a lot such as loading, construction impacts, etc. These kinds of issues should be shared with DOT/SHA as well as Planning. The DAP focuses on architectural review and the Planning Board will generally defer to them on those kinds of issues. If the IAC sees trends with the DAP (such as cantilevers) it is fine to comment as interested observers. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) looks at just "historic," and DAP looks at "design," whereas the IAC can look at the bigger picture.

It is within the scope of the IAC to advise County Council, County Executive, and the CIP budget, and within its scope to work with agencies such as DHCA, Recreation, Parks, etc.

Because the IAC represents different interests it is important to make it clear if there is a split vote on an issue. If that is the case it is important to explain the different points of view, as well as providing reasons for any position; the more evidence the better.

A question was raised about what the best “value add” is from the group and when is it most helpful to provide comments. By the time the staff report comes out it is often too late to have a discussion and take a position because the IAC does not always meet in the right timing cycle (the IAC only meets once a month). Chair Anderson’s response was that input can’t be too early. It is harder to influence the outcome later in the process. For example, storm-water management can dictate site plan. Planning staff can even struggle with push back. It’s best to provide input before the Development Review Committee (DRC).

Planning staff added that the IAC is responsible for overarching monitoring. Applicants are required to present to the DAP and encouraged to present to the IAC. The planning staff is working on trying to get project and general information to the group as soon as possible.

Chair Anderson stressed that the Planning Department and Board welcome the IAC weighing in on broader issues anytime.

III. 7000 Wisconsin Avenue Revised Site Plan Design

Matt Gordon is the land use attorney for the applicant and presented to the IAC. He provided an overview of the project. The project will be going to the DAP on January 22, 2020 and will go to the Planning Board for site plan in April or May.

The project will be 122 feet tall and will provide “more than 17.5% MPDUs.”

The public alley has generated a lot of the discussion. The other issue is the through-block connection. There will be a 30-foot tall clearance for the connection in the section under the building. There will be an interim condition until the property to the north redevelops, which would ultimately make the connection wider. There will be a stairway and an elevator in the connection to be ADA compliant. The walkway will be 7 feet wide in the interim condition.

The public alley is close to 30 feet wide at this location. The applicant must put the parking and service access on the alley to allow for pedestrian design on Wisconsin Ave. There are issues with utilization and enforcement of parking in the alley.

Where the alley is narrower, the project is proposing to set back the building 4.5 feet to create additional alley width (that would apply to the other properties backing the alley as well as they redevelop). DOT had asked for 9 feet in all but there is usually a 50-50 split for confronting properties so the 4.5 feet is acceptable to DOT. The alley will have striping on the pavement to mark the crosswalk. The applicant is not sure if DOT is amenable to changing the alley materials but notes they will need to update utilities.

There will be a 15-foot setback on part of the northern side of the building. On Wisconsin Avenue this indentation will be close to a 30-foot build-to line. The layby to the east would remain until the property to the north redevelops.

It was noted that the tower separation is confusing, as is access to the alley units. There will be some activation on the alley with windows/landscaping. But units will not open onto the alley; they will be accessible from the main lobby.

IV. Administrative Matters

The IAC reviewed the new draft version of the Rules of Procedure. Potential edits were provided by the co-chairs of the IAC taking into account the experience of the past two years as well as suggestions from IAC members and Planning Staff. The purpose of the review and revisions is to clarify the rules for the group.

The discussion addressed how many terms members can serve, with agreement that members can be appointed for 2 terms. If someone resigns before the end of their term the planning staff will reach out to prior applicants or put out a notice if needed. The specific language was left to be determined.

Co-chair terms were also addressed, with agreement that co-chairs will be elected for a one-year term and may be reelected for one consecutive one-year term.

The IAC also discussed how to handle conveying minority opinions when commenting to the Planning Board or other agency on matters of concern. The specific language was left to be determined but the group discussed whether a letter should be sent if there is not a majority agreement or if there was a tie. It was noted there are other ways for people to participate and submit input (for example as individuals, through civic associations, through the Chamber), and that in any comment the IAC must provide reasons and/or evidence for majority and minority decisions, as Chair Anderson commented.

Although most of the proposed changes were accepted, because some need additional work the IAC will take up further revisions at the February meeting. There was agreement that if a designated note-taker cannot do that on the assigned date, they will find a replacement; that Ad Hoc subcommittees may do research and make recommendations but have no independent authority to make decisions; and various clarifications and updates were agreed to.

Members discussed and approved starting IAC meetings at 8 AM instead of 8:15 AM to give the group some additional time. Meetings will run from 8am to 930am.

V. New Business

A concern was raised that certain projects should be getting more attention. For example, the group has spent considerable time on the alley for 7000 Wisconsin but other major projects need addressing such as Battery Lane which involves multiple buildings, a bike lane, and green space.

It was also suggested that staff can help the group focus on important and upcoming projects.

Staff reported on a few projects and dates to be aware of: Bethesda Place plaza renovation plans were submitted; Battery Lane project has asked for a hearing extension; 4824 Edgemoor project will likely have its sketch plan hearing in March; St. Elmo project will also be coming up but the date is TBD; and 7000 Wisconsin will have a site plan hearing in April/May.

Meeting Attendees:

IAC Members: Naomi Spinrad, Dedun Ingram, Amanda Farber, Michael Fetchko, Joyce Gwadz, Emily Vaias, Jad Donohoe, Matt Gordon, Patrick O'Neil, Jack Alexander, Kristi Smith, Chris Smith

Montgomery Planning Department: Leslye Howerton, Stephanie Dickel, Casey Anderson
Bethesda Urban Partnership: Jeff Burton

BCC Regional Services Center: Derrick Harrigan, Ken Hartman
Public: Allan Glass (resident).