

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) Agenda

Friday, November 6, 2020 (Virtual Meeting)

- I. **REMINDERS ON EXPIRING TERMS/CO-CHAIR ELECTION IN DECEMBER**
(Leslye Howerton, Planning Department; IAC co-chairs Emily Vaias & Naomi Spinrad) (10 minutes)
- II. **DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL: VISION AND DESIGN GOALS** (Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Designer) (30 minutes)
- III. **BETHESDA STREETScape** (Leslye Howerton, Planning Department) (15 minutes) **RULES OF PROCEDURE, FINAL APPROVAL** (IAC co-chairs Naomi Spinrad & Emily Vaias) (10 minutes)
- IV. **NEW BUSINESS** (as needed to close of meeting) Next meeting is December 3, 2020

MEETING NOTES AND ATTENDEES:

REMINDERS ON EXPIRING TERMS/CO-CHAIR ELECTION IN DECEMBER

Presenters: Leslye Howerton, Planning Department; IAC co-chairs Emily Vaias & Naomi Spinrad

We have 6 seats expiring this December; 3 property/business owner reps and 3 community members. The solicitation letter from M-NCPPC will go out to various organizations (Chamber, NAIOP, civic organizations, CBAR, community groups); Leslye is sending out the letters now; applicants have 2 weeks to submit with a letter with their qualifications. It's preferred that residents be in the downtown area or just outside the boundary. Any member who wants to be reappointed should submit a letter of interest about your time on IAC, and mention if you took over someone's term that is now expiring, Letters of interest are due by 11/20; planning board on 12/17 will take up proposed appointments / reappointments. There are term limits of 2 full consecutive terms (exempted for initial members). New chairpersons will be appointed in January.



DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL: VISION AND DESIGN GOALS

Presenter: Paul Mortensen, Senior Urban Designer, Planning Department

Paul was appointed Senior Urban Designer in the Director's Office at the Planning Department 5.5 years ago to lead the Design Excellence Program. It's high on the Director's priorities to improve the quality of design and architecture throughout the County. That included updating the quality of review, which led to the creation of the Design Advisory Panel (DAP) for development applications, and improving the quality of master plans and design guidelines.

Using examples from the Bethesda DAP, Paul commented that the guidelines are suggestions and include flexibility to better express something or improve design and the quality of public realm. A project must earn 10 points to move forward in the regulatory process. Two projects have received the maximum of 30 points.

Some recent projects and the critical issues discussed at DAP:

4725 Cheltenham:

- Emphasized the strong relationship to the park
- Strong connection across the alley with textured materials and possibly a raised crossing; it's important to know that you're crossing an important space and you'd be cognizant of that and looking around
- Topographical change between park and this building
- Very early in the design process; at sketch plan; just a massing model at this time

Hampden East:

- Looked at other nearby public spaces to see how to site the building
- Vertically mixed-use building with retail on ground floor then residential and office above
- Important corner on Hampden for pedestrian linkages

Avondale:

- Increased height from sector plan up to 70' on south side; north side up to 45'
- This is the first project on this street; if you're the first, you need to create a vision for the entire street, so the DAP was focused on a design that would suit the whole street
- Proposed build-to line is set back from the allowed build-to line; previous proposal was not and was too imposing on street
- Building now has a bigger front yard and massing will be more in line with the adjacent buildings today

4702 Chevy Chase Dr:

- DAP looked at elevations closely and the relationship to Nottingham Dr to the south
- Worked hard to make the applicant create a pathway between Nottingham Dr and Chevy Chase Dr



- Originally only had back of house services on Nottingham but encouraged applicant to line the ground floor with units for more residential character and activation on the street

4824 Edgemoor Lane:

- DAP immediately saw that the building is allowed to be built to the property lines as it is less than 120' in height but the tall elevation facing the condos directly to the south was very imposing
- Thought it needed to be modified to allow for some views on new building and existing adjacent building
- Ultimately the applicant canted the walls at southern end of building to allow light and air between the two buildings

8015 Old Georgetown Road:

- Important to address how the building stepped back to the single-family neighborhood and to include a path to link through site
- Discussion on where the main entry should be as the elevation did not signify the entrance
- Through the review more emphasis was placed on the entrance and planters were added near units adjacent to lobby
- Also encouraged ground floor units to walk out onto street for activation

4702 West Virginia Ave:

- Unique, interesting and difficult site
- Adjacent to Chase Ave Urban Park and near Future Eastern Greenway
- Reduced the massing from 4.5 stories originally to 3 now
- Suggested that they provide access to the east to activate future greenway

Q&A

Have there been any changes in the design guidelines since created or do you anticipate any having gone through a number of projects? What's the process to change them? No, we have not changed the guidelines at all since their 2017 approval. It's probably a bigger haul for guidelines to change because it has to be done through the Planning Board). They are less cumbersome to update than a master plan and they could be updated if needed but we haven't contemplated at this time.

What about in the context of the discussion regarding the 4824 Edgemoor Lane building to the property line and tower separation? Guidelines and master plans try to look at things generally; there are always going to be those specific projects that are outside of the boundaries of guidelines to protect or encourage.

So overall you're still comfortable with elements of the plan for towers under 120'? Typically great buildings have a 1-2 story base for pedestrian interaction; then a podium of 5 stories or so to respond to historic character and heights of nearby buildings including wood



frame buildings, and finally more of an individual tower on top separated from other towers. We're trying to avoid long street walls with imposing towers.

What about setbacks in residential areas – the DAP encouraged Avondale to have a “front yard” with an extra 15’ in front but we didn’t hear that same concern on Battery Lane; most of the architects were happy to have buildings come closer to Battery Lane; how do you decide on setbacks in a primarily residential area? The master plan tried very hard to try to improve the pedestrian quality of all our streets (whether smaller residential or larger ones with towers on each side), and to promote wider sidewalks and a strong pedestrian realm. Avondale was one of those streets - how do you step it down to smaller scale residential. It’s also a dead-end street – how do you deal with fire truck access. Battery Lane projects focused on the quality of the street – a lot of those existing apartments have deep front yards. There was some discussion about that but we were more focused on the street itself and public spaces than the buildings siting to the street, we wanted to make sure that the public access to public spaces was more opened up and accessible. The street there is wider and fire access was not an issue.

Comment: Developers say that virtually every single site is constrained – it become a pattern that they can’t abide by guidelines because a site is constrained and that’s discouraging. Now that we’re actually getting to see some of the buildings that have gone through the DAP process, neighbors say we’re getting walls - now that we’re seeing Marriott and Avocet, it feels like a wall and narrow sidewalks against the towers. Response: One thing that we understand at the DAP and among staff is that property owners aren’t going to get all of the bonus density that is technically permitted in terms of the benefits offered per the master plan. In order to make it a better project you can’t maximize all of the density (e.g. cantilevers, projecting back out over sidewalks). We never really know what the economics of a project are and need to balance feasibility with design. Most new projects are creating wider sidewalks and we’re trying to push buildings back and most of the master planned streets have wider sidewalks. The Board has empowered DAP to push back more. (Elza Hisel-McCoy added that the standard sidewalk width in downtown Bethesda has been 15’ – some of the bigger projects approved since then are even bigger, with a lot of 20’ sidewalks but there has to be a balance between lots of things in the ROW. It is always a priority to maintain wider sidewalks.)

BETHESDA STREETScape

Presenter: Leslye Howerton, Planning Department

The Planning Board approved the Bethesda Streetscape standards in October; we sent out the link after the Board meeting. Planning staff presented the streetscape standards to the IAC in Jan/Feb and IAC provided comments that were reviewed with Health and Human Services and the Commission on Aging and people with disabilities for their feedback.



Urban loading and Delivery Management: planning staff took a scope of work on the urban loading and delivery management study to the Board recently. It was approved so we will begin the existing conditions and best practice research, then listening sessions. Downtown Bethesda will be a case study to develop a set of best practices and policy recommendations. This will be on the December IAC agenda for 30 minutes.

RULES OF PROCEDURE, FINAL APPROVAL

Presenters: IAC co-chairs Naomi Spinrad & Emily Vaias

We had completed all revisions but one, regarding how to handle when there are differing opinions or lack of consensus on something that doesn't necessarily require a majority. What we ultimately decided was that it's most important to reach consensus and our goal is to get to consensus but also that all voices are heard. The co-chairs have agreed on the proposed language on page 4 of what was sent to all members. The new rules of procedure were approved unanimously, in full.

NEW BUSINESS

Next meeting is December 3, 2020

Virtual community meeting on a possible dog park in Norwood park next Tuesday 7-830 pm (11/10)

ATTENDEES:

IAC: Amanda Farber, Joyce Gwadz, Dedun Ingram, Naomi Spinrad (Co-Chair), Susan Wegner, Steve Long, Michael Fetchko, Emily Vaias (Co-Chair), Jack Alexander, Jad Donohoe, Matt Gordon, Patrick O'Neil, Kristi Smith, Christopher Smith

BCC Regional Services Center: Ken Hartman, Derrick Harrigan

Bethesda Urban Partnership: Jeff Burton

Bethesda Green: Adam Roberts

Councilmember Friedson's Office: Cindy Gibson

Montgomery County Planning Department: Elza Hisel-McCoy, Leslye Howerton, Stephanie Dickel, Paul Mortenson

