

Special Committee on the Bethesda Downtown Plan
Thursday, May 4, 2017
7:00pm, Town Hall

Attendees: Cecily Baskir, Pat Burda, Tina Coplan, Christina Files, John Freedman, Dedun Ingram, Barney Rush, Jean Shorett, Quynh Tran, and Deborah Vollmer

1. Minutes: The minutes from the committee's March 8th meeting were approved with one correction.

2. Discussion of County Council Straw Vote on the Sector Plan: Barney Rush described the extensive efforts undertaken in the run up to the County Council's straw vote on the sector plan. These efforts included directly meeting with County Council members and council staff, working in conjunction with other communities through CBAR, and outreach to the public through a petition drive in support of more parks.

The specific decisions adopted in the Council's straw vote that were most of interest to the Town, were also discussed. These included:

- a significant reduction in the height of the Jaffe tower property;
- improving specifications for the greenway with a minimum of 35 feet buffer and a one-for-one formula relating height to the size of the buffer;
- language calling for landscaping/trail orientation for the rear of buildings along Montgomery Avenue that back on to the Capital Crescent Trail; and
- clear language recommending that surface parking lots be fully converted to parks.

Despite a favorable vote for staging of development from the PHED Committee, strong opposition from the Planning Board/staff and from the County Executive resulted in a shift from a binding regime to one based on planning and monitoring progress toward shifts in mode share away from automobiles.

The Committee also reviewed decisions concerning two properties where additional height was made conditional. One involved the Starr property on the west side of Wisconsin, south of Leland, where an additional 10 feet was added if a movie theater is included in the new development. The Bernstein building next to the Farm Women's Market was authorized an additional 25 feet if it participates in the renovation of the historic property.

3. Next Steps: While substantial gains were made, many key aspects of implementing the plan remain. The Committee discussed the process going forward. A number of critical areas of activities remain including: the Council will be taking a final vote on a resolution adopting the plan; the Council staff will be drafting the associated zoning text amendment (the overlay zone) that complements the sector plan and there will be a hearing on the proposal before the PHED and

Council vote on it; the design guidelines are being developed by the Planning Department staff; and the planning department has been tasked with developing a plan to enhance NADMS and to monitor its progress over time. We will need to stay fully engaged in each of these areas.

A separate note prepared for the Committee by the Chairs details specific follow up items.

4. Design Guidelines: Some preliminary details on what should be included in design guidelines were prepared by the Town's Land Use Committee and circulated by Dedun for comments. Committee members should provide comments directly back to her.

5. Future Work of the Committee: Given the need to continue to engage with the County Council and Planning Department staff on sector plan issues, there was agreement among the committee of the need to continue its activities.

The meeting was adjourned at 9 pm.