

**Marymount University Task Force
Meeting 4 | July 6, 2006
Minutes**

In attendance:

Michael Foster, Task Force Chair, Planning Commission
Peter Fallon, Transportation Commission
Anne Wilson, Donaldson Run Civic Association
Maxine Nagel, Donaldson Run Civic Association
Christine Smith, Old Dominion Civic Association
Pamela Gillen, Old Dominion Civic Association
Ted Weihe, Yorktown Civic Association
David Parker, St. Mary's Church
Loretta Seigley, VP Academics, Marymount University

Abby Denham, WCLEW
Robert Atkinson, DCS Design
Doug Carter, DCS Design
Steve Saff, DCS Design
Ernest Ulibarri, DCS Design
Amelia Gunn, Dewberry
Chris Champagne, Dewberry
Robert Esselburn, Lewis Scully Gionet
Robert Kohler, Wells

Jill Griffin, Arlington County, CPHD
Robert Gibson, Arlington County, DES

Thomas Buford, Neighbor
Jim Pebley, Interested Party

The meeting started at 7:15 p.m.

Introductions

Michael Foster asked for brief introductions.

Prior to starting the agenda, Mr. Foster recognized that traffic and transportation issues have been a concern. He stated that he wanted to discuss the issues as a committee of the whole. However, he recognized that if more detail is merited, a smaller working group may be appropriate.

Overview of Consensus Points (Part 1)

Mr. Foster mentioned that there were a couple of points of consensus. However, the task force still needed to look at the compatibility, the architectural character and specific conditions.

Conditions

Jill Griffin passed around standard conditions and explained the variety of conditions.

Peter Fallon stated that the conditions from the previous use permits need to be either incorporated or perhaps amended as appropriate.

Ted Weihe spoke on the photographic record. He suggested that the university also find photos of the site as it had been used for a temporary school.

Mr. Foster stated that he was hesitant for the university to document the full history. He suggested that the condition was to indicate the present status of the site.

Loretta Seigley said that the university would be interested in that history and would like to find additional information.

Mr. Weihe stated that the temporary school was there prior to Yorktown Boulevard construction.

Overview of Consensus Points (Part 2)

Anne Wilson asked for clarification about the term consensus.

Mr. Foster explained that it was general – perhaps not unanimous – agreement about the use, the parking and the zoning. The items that did not have such consensus were transportation and traffic issues.

Maxine Nagel suggested that there was continued community concern about the dormitory use within the site. Mr. Fallon agreed based on personal discussions with neighbors and comments made at the recent Donaldson Run Civic Association general membership meeting.

Mr. Foster again stated that it was not necessarily unanimous agreement. He also stated that the task force still needed to determine the compatibility of the proposal with the neighborhood.

Mr. Fallon stated that he has accepted the application at this location as a means to provide the university with needs required for its current enrollment. He stated that he accepted that there were not other viable sites given the University's current program requirements. However, he also stated that he would not necessarily prefer this site over other locations.

Mr. Foster stated that the use of this site provides the opportunity for underground parking.

Mr. Fallon agreed that it is preferable to have parking underground – not another above grade garage. He stated that perhaps there is not complete consensus among the community as to the number of proposed spaces, garage entry points, etc.

Ms. Wilson asked about the auditorium. She stated that Donaldson Run did not have any consensus about the auditorium. She also stated that there was concern about the overall density.

Ms. Wilson suggested that the term "consensus" be changed. She suggested that the term "majority" be used. She understood that consensus seemed to imply a bit more give and take.

Mr. Foster recognized that the concerns addressed may reflect the majority. He then asked clarification about the parking, the enrollment numbers, dormitories on-site as compared to hotel use and the trips generated from each use.

Mr. Foster then stated that sometimes consensus is not unanimous – and that not everyone gets their way. However, he did state that he hoped that everyone was being heard.

Mr. Weihe spoke of the previous use permit for the original parking garage. He stated that there had been numerous compromises: caps on enrollment, off-site parking, etc.

Mr. Weihe stated that he had some concerns about the auditorium – the use, the frequency, and perhaps that it contributed to too much on the site. He stated that there needed to be justification of the auditorium. He stated that the dorms and the classrooms provided good connections with the university. He reiterated the need to provide documentation of historic artifacts.

Tom Buford asked about the density being related to the enrollment.

Ms. Seigley stated that there was an enrollment cap established by the hour of the day.

Mr. Weihe commented that there needs to be documentation about the enrollment caps, the off-site parking and the past history of on-site and off-site parking. This has changed over time. He stated that this is consistent with the over all intent.

Mr. Buford suggested that the density isn't defined by the enrollment. He also asked about the "S-3A" zoning.

Mr. Weihe asked about the uses.

Ms. Griffin provided an explanation of the zoning and the use permit.

Mr. Weihe commented on the historic changes: the off-site parking, the shifting of uses, administrative changes for the Ballston campus, etc. There has been an evolution.

Transportation & Parking

Robert Gibson spoke of the coordination of DES staff about the various projects along Old Dominion Road. He stated that there was a meeting scheduled for the following week to discuss. The projects would not have an impact on the university project.

Mr. Fallon questioned the time table of the County-approved traffic lights along N. 26th St. at Old Dominion Drive and Glebe Road. Mr. Gibson responded that it was currently in the air. The 30 percent design plans were under review by VDOT.

Pamela Gillen stated that this project may provide the opportunity to finish the project. She stated that she witnessed accidents at 26th and Old Dominion. This is a problem intersection – especially merging from two lanes to one lane. She suggested that a left turn is needed on 26th to go to Old Dominion. This is the time to maximize the opportunities for these improvements.

Mr. Gibson stated that DES staff will look at these issues. He stated that pedestrian signals will assist in crossing. He understands the concern with the merge issue and will pass that along to colleagues.

Ms. Gillen had understood that the merge issue really hadn't been studied to date.

Mr. Gibson said that DES would look at it. He suggested looking at 66 from Washington Boulevard as that merge seemed to work more smoothly.

Mr. Weihe stated his concern about 25th or 26th Streets being stacked up to make left turns.

Mr. Gibson clarified that the traffic signalization should help the turning movements onto Old Dominion at rush hour.

Mr. Foster asked about the information provided by Wells for the project counts, etc. The significant issue is about safety. We need to understand how the past, present and future conditions are applied to this project.

Mr. Gibson stated that the Wells provided a broad traffic analysis using existing & future data. The information includes the signalization. In addition, Mr. Gibson stated that he would work with other DES staff to obtain the accident data.

Mr. Foster asked what has been integrated into the TIA. Ms. Gillen suggested that it is not necessarily Wells' responsibility. Mr. Fallon agreed and stated that often "scope creep" occurs...looking to solve all of the other problems on the neighborhood.

Mr. Fallon asked about the cross-section of the streets. Ms. Gillen suggested that staff should be recommending the widths – not the task force.

Chris Champagne reviewed the cross-sections.

Mr. Fallon had questions about the dimensions and if a bike lane was included. Ms. Gillen suggested that a bike lane will be on Old Dominion up to 26th Street. Connectivity should be provided to the bike lanes. Mr. Fallon noted the bike trail entrance along N. 26th street.

Ms. Wilson questioned the dimensions. Upon this, Mr. Foster suggested that the landscape/streetscape plans be reviewed because the other drawing was difficult to read.

Bob Esselburn provided a description of the landscape plan – around the project.

Mr. Foster stated that the landscaping provides compatibility. While the setbacks were not as large as for a house – the landscaping provided a deeper setback than many other structures.

Mr. Weihe stated his concern about the landscaping – because, to date, Marymount has done a poor job in maintaining the landscaping for the existing parking garage.

Mr. Fallon stated that the standard travel lane width varies between 11 – 10.5 feet and parking is 8 feet wide. He asked about Yorktown Boulevard and whether there was room to create a turning lane. It was confirmed that there was suitable pavement width.

Mr. Fallon stated that with all of the entry points at one location – a turn lane could help to moderate the movements. Doug Carter said that a third lane could be used for right and left turns.

Ms. Wilson asked about the visibility from the garage to Yorktown. It was explained that it was indicated on the drawings and further clarification was provided of the dimensions. There is visibility.

Ms. Gillen questioned the landscaping. The landscaping is tied into the traffic discussion as there is a continuation of an urban plaza through to the street. Ms. Gillen stated her concerns that there are two locations where the street trees are not present and therefore appear to indicate a pick-up/drop-off point. This should not be an unintended consequence. There should be other ways to treat this edge.

Ms. Seigley stated that there is not a lot of drop-off traffic. This was meant as an invitation to the pedestrian.

Mr. Carter stated that they had questioned staff about a drop-off. Mr. Foster stated that the location on Old Dominion is not a good location because of the speed and the capacities of the road. Mr. Gibson suggested that Wells further develop plans for the pick-ups and drop-offs.

Ms. Gillen asked about the radius of 26th and Yorktown – currently optimized to right turns. It was clarified that this radius could be tightened to a 15 – 20 degree which would bring the stop bar back and make visibility better and create a shorter pedestrian crossing. Christine Smith suggested that the grade of the street and the number of pedestrians crossing should be considered. Ms. Gillen stated that the radius is a tool to manage pedestrian safety with the traffic. Mr. Gibson followed-up stating that the radius would be looked at and further, a well-marked/well-lit crossing with the possible use of colored paving would be suggested.

Ms. Gillen asked about the data collection – the use over time and the amount of other traffic. It was stated that a 12-hour count was taken (6 am – 6 pm) at the driveway access points. The full documentation is in the TIA – but a summary chart should be provided.

Mr. Gibson clarified that in staff's review – the study is on the parking supply and not the parking demand.

Mr. Weihe provided some observations. The university starts after the rush hour. However, for the two garages to be efficient – signalization and directional signs will be necessary. Mr. Kohler stated that this would be an element of the parking management plan. Ms. Seigley stated that the university wants to ensure the use of the garages.

Mr. Buford reiterated the comments from Ms. Gillen about the potential perceived drop-off points. He also questioned the element at the corner – particularly the sight lines. He stated that he did not understand all of the details but recognized that the university has an enrollment cap. Finally, he stated his concerns about 700 vehicles on 26th Street.

Mr. Gibson clarified that there is a build-up in the garages with a discharge over a long term.

Mr. Foster explained that a parking management plan should work to address the concerns that have been raised. He asked about the program requirement for the number of spaces. Mr. Carter stated that the university does have a parking problem – the design accommodates four levels of parking – with a total of 376 spaces.

Mr. Foster suggested that the answer needed to be sharper than “generally meeting the needs of the university.” Questions such as - how shy of the optimum and how much the parking would ensure the needs of the university - should be answered. He also stated that he found it interesting that Arlington is different in specifying the minimum number of parking spaces rather than the maximum number.

Mr. Weihe suggested that there were less resident students before – now there are fewer commuters.

Ms. Seigley stated that there is a changing policy for the campus. Currently the freshmen are not permitted to have vehicles. This will be changed next year – neither freshmen nor sophomores will be permitted to have vehicles. Further, only one vehicle per student eligible to have a vehicle would be permitted.

Mr. Foster reiterated the need for preciseness in the answer of the number of parking spaces – either the number of spaces is the optimum, it exceeds the need, etc.

Mr. Kohler explained that currently the parking spaces on the campus achieve a 99 percent optimization. Additional spaces are needed to just eliminate the searching. There are 691 spaces currently and 682 spaces were in use at 4 pm. The searching adds to traffic on the road. One element of the proposal is to reduce this traffic.

Mr. Weihe said that he regretted that another level was not added to the existing deck. He stated that the architect had informed him that the structure could accommodate an additional level.

Mr. Gibson clarified the parking numbers – 170 spaces existing on-site; 100 spaces at Mt. Olivet; 40 – 60 vehicles in the neighborhood.

Mr. Fallon suggested that we should keep in mind that the new uses will increase the need for parking. The additional classrooms would generate more students. Therefore, parking management is important – focus on the students going to class. The cap states the number of students in classrooms at one time – not necessarily the number of students on the campus. Students may be visiting friends or using campus facilities and not count toward the cap, thus parking was required to meet this need too.

He further stated that admissions materials and information for special events should have parking information. He was not concerned about students being dropped off – but was concerned about special events – an opportunity for valet parking? Ms. Seigley stated that the lecture hall would not be scheduled for the peak period and that the university would encourage patrons to use the garage.

There was a general question about traffic counts over the past years. Mr. Gibson responded that the county has a regular count program. However, this program is generally for streets and not specific intersections. He stated that 26th Street has a count – but he was not sure where this count was taken from.

Ms. Seigley further addressed the drop-off points. She suggested that another location on campus would be appropriate. Mr. Kohler stated that use of the transit stop – off of Glebe Road – within the main campus could be a valid location.

Mr. Gibson asked the applicant for a chart indicating the number of spaces full over time.

Mr. Fallon asked for a map of the streets with the existing zoned parking.

Ms. Wilson asked about the use of the lecture hall and the traffic generated.

Jim Pebley asked whether the new structure would accommodate the spaces from Mt. Olivet? Ms. Seigley responded that the plan assumes that the parking at Mt. Olivet would continue.

Mr. Foster clarified that the solution should not overpark.

Mr. Buford stated that the university was to also have off-site parking. Ms. Seigley stated that there has been a shift.

Ms. Smith asked for information about the number of spaces at Ballston, the number of sophomore spaces – particularly the number that have vehicles. Mr. Foster agreed that this information would be useful – especially in a summary matrix.

There was general discussion about additional levels of the parking garage – and already, it was noted, that this parking garage had four levels below grade.

Ms. Gillen stated that even with all of the parking – we should encourage the use of mass transportation. Perhaps the 40 employees without parking use alternative means of transportation. She recognizes that there is a fine balance of encouraging metro use and keeping the vehicles off the neighborhood streets. She asked about the number of shuttle riders that were using the metro as well. Mr. Kohler stated that the shuttles were full – however the counts were only done on campus and not at the metro.

Mr. Foster asked if there was support to schedule additional time to discuss just the transportation elements. This would address questions that had been asked over the course of the evening and provide additional data and deliverables. There was general agreement that this was a good approach.

Landscaping & Streetscape

Ms. Gillen stated that the immediate trees help to define the context and the scale. She asked if there had been any species selection. At this time, nothing has been decided.

Mr. Weihe said the specifications of the trees would be helpful. He had a question about the canopy ten years from now – making sure that the street trees would not overshadow the ornamental trees. He also suggested that Marymount add street trees on the other side of Yorktown Boulevard.

Ms. Gillen asked about street lights and whether it would be standard Carlyle lights. Staff responded that we would have the applicant install the lights and would work with DES on the appropriate specifications.

Ms. Gillen restated that the “civic break” of the urban plaza needed to be modified. Mr. Esselburn stated that he liked the open aspect – but suggested that the street trees could be continued. Mr. Foster stated that the area needed to be a welcoming community place without confusion. Ms. Gillen suggested that this area should not have a strong urban feel – this area is not an urban corner gateway. Mr. Esselburn stated that it was a large expanse which is currently shown as paved and perhaps this could be softened. The landscape needs to be more campus like and less urban hardscape.

Ms. Gillen clarified that the internal could be hardscaped – but the external should be soft.

Mr. Foster told the applicant that the landscape and streetscape needed to be combined with the architecture. This would help to achieve the compatibility. The architecture doesn't necessarily need a radical change – but the applicant should use a similar “softening” approach to the building elevations. There is a way to tie the building to the university through colors and pediments – but the building also needs to be compatible with the residential neighborhood. The building needs to have the elements broken down. Soften the façade to make this building a residential campus rather than an institutional campus.

Mr. Pebley stated that a lighting plan should also be provided. Bright lights would lessen the compatibility of the project.

Ms. Wilson asked if the sidewalk and landscaping could be reversed. Mr. Esselburn stated that the layer of the planting materials could be compromised. The spacing now allows for appropriate distances.

Mr. Fallon stated that there is no irrigation with the existing garage and questioned whether there would be irrigation with this proposal. It was stated yes, there would be irrigation. He also asked whether there would be undergrounding. Staff stated that undergrounding around the periphery of the site would be required. Ted Weihe stated that the university had been generous in the past regarding undergrounding.

Architecture

Mr. Carter presented the architecture. There had been some changes – including the enclosed entry area, exterior corridors, and additional articulation through the creation of window seats. He explained that the materials would have a limestone at the base and EIFS on the upper levels. After further discussions with the university – the roof would remain a red color.

There were questions about the necessity of enclosing the pedestrian bridge. Mr. Carter said they would look at the options. The bridge is a key element of the proposal. An enclosed bridge would make the structure appear more corporate. An open bridge would allow it to feel more like a neighborhood bridge.

Mr. Foster stated that the closure of the corner helped the design.

Mr. Buford expressed his concerns about Yorktown Boulevard and site distances. Mr. Carter indicated that the distances were appropriate.

Ms. Wilson asked about fire access. It was explained that the applicant had met with the Fire Marshal's Office.

Mr. Carter posited the question of why have all the uses in the building if the cap was not being increased. He stated the following: the parking; students currently being housed in hotels; and the use of a lecture hall – as there are very few areas for assembly at the university. The lecture hall, as proposed, could provide more than just a lecture hall – and provide an opportunity for small events (no scenery flies for elaborate productions). He stated that the occupancy would be 247 people.

Mr. Weihe encouraged the university to look at LEED – especially the innovation credits.

Ms. Gillen asked for clarification about the use of the lecture hall. Ms. Seigley stated that it was not for day-to-day lectures but rather to provide an opportunity to pull together a number of classes for a speaker series. She also stated that currently there was no place on the campus for theatrical events – this would provide such a venue for small student productions and possibly summer stock productions. It would also provide a space for student music performances. She hopes that in the future there would be more invitations to the community for speaker events.

Updates

Before asking for the updates from the task force members, Mr. Foster stated that there would be a designated transportation meeting. There have been refinements to the project which are starting to address concerns/issues that have been raised.

Ms. Wilson provided an update from Donaldson Run. She stated that she was pleased to see the central location of the pedestrian bridge. She had concerns about the process and the timing of the project. There are still transportation issues; questions and concerns about the density, massing and the dormitory use. She questioned the parking for the auditorium and its management. She stated that the last meeting of Donaldson Run was relatively calm – but also not heavily attended. She acknowledged that she felt as though she had been heard about the density but the project didn't necessarily respond to the concerns. She suggested that a balance was needed within the university – there is too much on this particular site and the scope of the functions was too much. Donaldson Run wants to keep the neighborhood quiet.

Ms. Gillen spoke for Old Dominion. The meeting was sparsely attended but the attendees seemed fairly positive about the proposal.

Mr. Buford stated his concern about the amount of uses on the site.

Mr. Fallon was glad to hear that things are amiable. However, this should not be construed to suggest that the immediate community is entirely in support of the proposal. Leaders of the "Neighbors of Marymount Group" have stated to Mr. Fallon that they have become frustrated with the current task force process. Nearby residents may have temporarily withdrawn from the public process as evidenced by their absence at tonight's task force meeting.

Mr. Weihe reported from Yorktown. The concerns are about zoned parking and the safety along Yorktown Boulevard.

Mr. Foster spoke about consensus points – but recognized the need to respect the points of the citizen advocates and not to brush the concerns away. He stated that it is a struggle – but the goal is to determine the issue of compatibility.

He suggested that there is consensus that there is a parking problem at the university. There are several options to solve that problem: pave over more area of the campus – resulting in too much area paved; ignore – which would burden the neighborhoods; or add a story to the existing garage and build an above-grade structure. Is this not a commitment that needs to be solved?

Mr. Fallon agreed that there is an existing parking problem and that the university would solve for that commitment. However, he suggested that the neighborhoods feel as though the parking problem is a by-product of the university. The parking problem needs to be resolved in a manner that provides relief to the nearby residents.

Mr. Foster then stated that, yes, a parking problem is a consensus point. There has been a change in the university – becoming less a commuter school and more of a destination – resulting in the need for more housing.

He stated that there is a density balance – and that programming above-grade uses helps to pay for the below-grade parking.

Ms. Wilson posited what would make it more palatable to the neighborhood - perhaps it would be more classrooms at this location and changing existing offices to dorms.

Ms. Seigley stated the university's concerns of timing and implementation.

Mr. Foster stated that while the classrooms would not be in use at night, the dorms are proposed to face the university. He stated that looking at the landscape plans, the noise and the lightscaping are all part of the compatibility question.

Mr. Foster suggested that the pedestrian bridge was a point of consensus.

Mr. Foster explained that the density helps to achieve the underground parking through economies of scale. Generally we have been seeing buildings with three – four levels of below grade parking have six – plus stories above to cover this cost.

Mr. Buford suggested that there is a tendency to grow into a shoe – the facility would create a demand for the campus. It would become never ending.

Mr. Weihe stated that he supported the school and was becoming more comfortable with the design. The site is relatively isolated from the neighborhood. There is good architecture, landscaping and a commitment to LEED. He is okay with the proposed uses and would like to see a better campus.

Mr. Fallon stated that he sees this differently and has accepted the “right” of the university to proceed the County Board with a request to amend their use permit. He doesn’t necessarily think that parking is the primary issue for the community. Rather, this proposal brings everything together. Although the neighborhood has gotten comfortable with the existing conditions, he applauds the university in fitting all of the uses into one site and to meet its needs. He accepts that this is a package deal – the parking issues are solved through the additional dorms and uses. The master plan indicated above ground parking. He suggested that the people that live in this area are isolated, by choice, from the more urban areas of the county. It is understandable that many nearby residents are concerned with what they view as further encroachment by the University upon their quality of life.

Dates were discussed for follow-up meetings including the SPRC, TC, PC and CB meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 pm.