



Long Branch Sector Plan, Worksession 1

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Description

Worksession No. 1: Long Branch Sector Plan

Staff recommendation: review and approve the recommendations for vision, phasing, historic preservation and development of the Long Branch Town Center

Summary

This memorandum summarizes public testimony and staff responses regarding the Long Branch Sector Plan. The following work sessions have been scheduled:

- February 21, 2013 - Worksession #1 will address Plan vision, phasing of zoning, historic preservation and the Long Branch Town Center.
- March 7, 2013 - Worksession #2 will address recommendations for mobility, parks, recreation, environment, design guidelines and the Piney Branch Neighborhood Village.
- March 21, 2013 - Worksession #3 will address any remaining issues and will request approval to transmit the Planning Board Draft Plan to the County Executive and the County Council.

Public Testimony

There has been a consistent level of community participation since the Public Record opened on December 26, 2012. This includes a community meeting held on January 14th, 2013, to review Plan recommendations and further explain the public participation process. Testimony has included written and oral correspondence with 35 interested parties participating in the Public Hearing held January 31, 2013.

Testimony covered a variety of issues which Staff sorted into a matrix also with Staff responses (see Attachment 1). That testimony will be discussed in greater detail during the work sessions.

Discussion

Issue 1: Vision

This Plan builds on the recommendations of the 1993 General Plan and the 2000 East Silver Spring and Takoma Park Master Plans which viewed the Long Branch community as an urban ring community. These Master Plans emphasized preservation of existing neighborhoods, expansion of transportation options, compact development and improved quality of life for the community's diverse population.

The 2000 Takoma Park and East Silver Spring Master Plans also provided for a Commercial Revitalization Overlay Zone, which was intended to provide development flexibility and allow for residential uses on commercial properties.

The Long Branch Sector Plan supports and builds upon this vision by encouraging pedestrian friendly, mixed use development, with an emphasis on improved public benefits and amenities at planned Purple Line stations. Additionally, the Plan attempts to preserve community affordability through staged zoning and land use recommendations that provide increased residential FAR to provide for diverse housing types.

Testimony:

Strong support for the Sector Plan vision (p.5 and p.28):

Staff response:

Retain the vision as proposed.

Issue 2: Phasing

The Public Hearing Draft (p. 21) recommends a comprehensive and phased approach for development within the Long Branch Sector Plan area that utilizes zoning to provide for continued affordability, encourage reinvestment, and support infill development. The Plan also utilizes phasing to insure and facilitate the development of infrastructure improvements necessary to support proposed development. This will be accomplished by phasing in new

zoning categories through two Sectional Map Amendments (SMAs are the legislative action used to rezone property).

The first Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) would provide for much needed interim development and rezone commercial properties noted in the Plan as Site #1 (Super Block) and #2 (Piney Branch Neighborhood Village – NE Quadrant). These sites represent the largest developable parcels within the Long Branch Town Center and the Piney Branch Neighborhood Village (key reinvestment areas). They have the following characteristics:

- Large parcels under single ownership
- Large surface parking lots with potential for infill development
- Proximity to existing and planned public facilities

Site #1 includes the Flower Theater and Shopping Center, which has also been recommended for a historic resource designation.

Total interim development (Sites #1 and #2) would allow more than 1,000 additional residential units (including 130 Moderately Priced Dwelling Units) and nearly 50,000 square feet of new commercial development. The first SMA will occur upon approval and adoption of the Long Branch Sector Plan.

The second SMA will be timed with Purple Line funding and will rezone the remaining Plan area properties, allowing for roughly 700,000 square feet of new mixed-use development; including 565 Moderately Priced Dwelling Units. This SMA will be initiated after the full funding grant agreement for the Arliss Street/Piney Branch Road section of the Purple Line has been approved.

Testimony:

Several property owners, stakeholders and the City of Takoma Park testified regarding the phasing of the zoning recommendations and the impact on proposed development. Most of the testimony was not site specific and is best addressed comprehensively as part of the overall land use and zoning discussion.

However, Staff will address the phasing of the Super Block and other properties located in the Long Branch Town Center that were specifically referenced in public testimony. These sites include the Super Block (Site 1), Piney Branch Road/Flower Avenue Northwest (Site 3) and Piney Branch Road/Flower Avenue (Site 4).

Staff response:

Staff believes that the phased approach provides several comprehensive benefits including:

- Potential reduction of residential and commercial displacement
- Encourages development that can be supported by existing infrastructure

As such, Staff recommends the phasing approach be retained as proposed.

Issue 3: Development of the Long Branch Town Center area

The Long Branch Town Center (p.14) area includes all of the commercially zoned properties and identified residential properties east of the Long Branch Stream Valley Park. The Super Block (Long Branch Town Center) (p.53) represents one of the largest developable sites within the Town Center area and serves as the focal point for Long Branch. The Town Center (aka Super Block) is comprised of six individually owned parcels and acts as the economic engine and the primary destination within the Plan area. It has a strong regional reputation due to its concentration of small businesses including a large number of culturally diverse shops and eateries, which also provide a considerable number of local jobs.

Equally important is the site's proximity to a number of public facilities (i.e. Long Branch Library, Community Center and Swimming Pool), densely populated garden apartment complexes and a planned Purple Line station. The Sector Plan seeks to enhance the capacity of the Town Center by increasing density, introducing mixed use development, and defining its focus as the center of the Long Branch Community.

Long Branch Town Center

8701, 8800, 8805-8809 Flower Avenue

8528 and 8550 Piney Branch Road

8750 Arliss Street

Size: 431, 010 square feet

Existing Zoning: C-1 and CROZ

Existing Height: varied 18-45 feet

The Sector Plan recommends the following:

Zoning: CRT – 2.5, C .5, R 2.0, H 60

Additional recommendations include the conveyance of up to one-half acre of land to the Parks Department for the creation of a Civic Green. This would provide much needed urban open space within the Long Branch Town Center area.

Testimony:

During the Public Hearing, testimony was received regarding the zoning, design and phasing of development at Long Branch Town Center. While residents primarily raised the issues of compatibility and appropriate transitions, property owners and developers expressed concerns that the proposed densities and maximum building heights were insufficient for many of the sites to reach full development potential. There was also general testimony regarding the utilization of the CRT Zones rather than the less intensive CRN Zones. Testimony from the City of Takoma Park, the Housing Opportunities Commission and a developer requested changes in phasing.

WRIT

The largest of these property owners is the *Washington Real Estate Investment Trust (WRIT)* and it owns the 5.4 acre site located on the Super Block, in close proximity to the planned Purple Line Station. This property is home to the Giant Grocery Store and a number local serving retail and commercial services.

Representatives of WRIT testified that the Sector Plan's recommendation of 2.5 FAR is not achievable due to the following limiting factors:

- Maximum 60 foot height
- Loss of land along Arliss Road due to an expanded Purple Line and ROW
- proposed public benefits and amenities (including structured parking and the Civic Green)

WRIT has proposed a maximum height of 150 feet, with a transition to 60 feet along Arliss Road. Additionally, property owners recommend that the proposed private street be relocated so that it does not bifurcate the property. According to WRIT the street, as currently proposed, further reduces developable area.

Flower Theater

The owners of the Flower Avenue Theater and Shopping Center (*Flower Avenue Shopping Center Limited Partnership*) testified that while they support the Plan's goal of reinvestment they disagree with the Historic Preservation Commission recommendation to designate the Flower Theater and Shopping Center (p. 29) as a historic resource. Additionally, the owners testified that the recommended 2.5 FAR is not achievable due to other recommendations in the Sector Plan (i.e. structured parking, LEED Gold certification, and increased MPDU requirements). According to their testimony, the reduced FAR and limited mix of uses will not offer a reasonable return on investment and would likely discourage reinvestment.

HOC

The *Housing Opportunities Commission* provides a number of affordable housing options in the Long Branch area and Manchester Manor (8401 Manchester Road) is their largest. It is located within Site #3 and is recommended for the following:

Piney Branch Road/ Flower Avenue (Northwest)

8736-8472 Flower Avenue and 8426 Piney Branch Road

Size: 89,429 square feet

Existing Zoning: R-10, C-1 and CROZ

Existing Height: varied 16-45 feet

The Sector Plan recommends the following:

Zoning: CRT – 2.5, C .25, R 2.5, H 60

Additional recommendations included the acquisition of 8426 Piney Branch Road for a future park (Piney Branch Road Urban Park)

HOC submitted testimony that was supportive of the Sector Plan vision and the potential for future public/private partnerships within the Long Branch area. Testimony also referenced the aging Manchester Manor and the pending expiration of the agency’s tax increment financing limits. HOC expressed that they need to begin making decisions about potential redevelopment within the Long Branch area and stated that the Sector Plan doesn’t allow sufficient heights and the density necessary to incentivize the redevelopment of Manchester Manor.

Takoma Park

The City of Takoma Park Resolution #2013-6 (see attachment 3) states that the City Council is supportive of the Sector Plan but would like to see Site #4 (Piney Branch Road/Flower Avenue - Southwest) occur as part of interim development phase (Phase One).

Piney Branch Road/ Flower Avenue (Southwest)

8640 Flower Avenue and 8435 Piney Branch Road

Size: 20,671 square feet

Existing Zoning: C-1 and CROZ

Existing Height: varied 16-45 feet

The Sector Plan recommends the following:

Zoning: CRT – 1.5, C 0.5, R 1.5, H 60

Additional recommendations included the extension of Winding Hill way to Flower Avenue

Their testimony gave the following reasons for the change:

- important gateway into the City of Takoma Park
- integral quadrant of the Long Branch Town Center
- Community legacy funding for recent development of 8435 Piney Branch Road
- Coming public art installation
- Coming Flower Avenue Green Street Project

Staff Response:

Staff believes that while it may be necessary to discuss the building height recommendations and proposed phasing for Sites #1, #3 and #4, the FAR and mix of uses are adequate and reflect the Plan’s vision of a neighborhood town center providing locally serving retail and commercial uses. Additionally, Staff recommended Public Benefits and Amenities (i.e. Parking and Affordable Housing) are comprehensive in nature and are necessary to provide much needed

physical and quality of life improvements. The recommendation for the Civic Green requires further study and an exploration of other appropriately located sites.

Staff further believes that the proposed CRT Zones are appropriate for the Long Branch Town Center as the majority of the properties are currently zoned C-1, with a CROZ overlay allowing a mix of uses. Additionally, a Purple Line station is planned for the area, which supports mixed use development recommendations. Development of the Super Block and other properties located in the area is best suited for the CRT Zones since they accommodate buffers and transitions to protect existing single-family neighborhoods from potential impacts. These transitions and buffers will be described further in the urban design guidelines.

Staff will study the proposed ROW improvements including Winding Hill Way, the parking strategy and parkland as part of a larger discussion of the Plan's open space and mobility network which is scheduled for the March 7th work session.

Issue 4: Historic Preservation – Flower Theater and Shopping Center

The Flower Theater and Shopping Center (p.29) (1948; 1954) is a post-war planned commercial/entertainment complex executed in a modern style. The complex, designed by Frank Grad & Sons, includes the last extant Woolworths store in the county and the last extant movie theater in the county designed by John J. Zink, who designed Baltimore's Senator and Washington's Atlas theaters. The Historic Preservation Commission has recommended a 2.4 acre environmental setting, which includes the parking area located in the front of the retail building and the parking lot to the North.

HPC Staff believe that this resource, which the State Historic Preservation Office has found to be National Register-eligible, contributes to community identity by providing continuity of design and a sense of place. The Plan recommends that the Flower Theater and Shopping Center be designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* and be integrated into the redevelopment of the Long Branch Town Center.

The Staff recommended zoning of CRT 2.5, C .5, R 2.0, H 60 and proposed design guidelines that would clarify future development efforts and provide guidance to the Historic Preservation Commission when evaluating future redevelopment proposals.

Testimony:

Numerous public testimonies were received regarding the historic designation of the Flower Theater and Shopping Center, either in support or opposition to the designation. Testimony or written submissions in support of designation were received from the following organizations: Historic Preservation Commission, Montgomery Preservation, Inc., Silver Spring Historical Society, and the Art Deco Society of Washington. These groups viewed the Flower Theater and

Shopping Center as an integral community component whose preservation and/or adaptive reuse could act as a catalyst for redevelopment.

Others questioned the recommendation to designate the entire complex, which is comprised of the Flower Theater and Shopping Center and its environmental setting. There was also concern that the designation could jeopardize small businesses located within the Flower Theater and Shopping Center. These included the owners of the property who testified that only the façade of the theater should be considered for designation and presented testimony that indicated that the rest of the complex was unremarkable and ineligible as it was not a unified development, but constructed over time. The owners also raised the issue of insufficient density and building height and asked for additional height and FAR. They felt that the Plan recommendations were unachievable due to the following constraints: parking, insufficient building heights and the historic designation. Additionally, the owners requested that design guidelines be used to guide development.

The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development (DED) also testified that the historic designation of Flower Theater and Shopping Center is unwarranted and that a designation of the entire property will create challenges to revitalization. Additionally, DED Staff testified that the historic designation will make the recommended zoning unachievable.

Staff Response:

HPC Staff has provided examples of how density can be achieved with historic designation. There are numerous historic sites that have been redeveloped with high density, including the Sears building in Tenleytown and the Greyhound Bus Station in Washington, DC. Historic status also provides benefits due to county, state, and federal tax incentives, which can aid in repairs, renovation, etc.

HPC Staff continues to support the recommendation proposed by the Historic Preservation Commission (see attachment 4) and believes that the Flower Theater and Shopping Center meet the criteria for designation (see attachment 5). However, Staff will study the proposal submitted by the owners of the Flower Shopping Center.

Issue 5: Arliss Street Development

Arliss Street (p.61) is a major business street located in the Long Branch Town Center area. It is adjacent to the Super Block and is the location of the planned Purple Line station (see attachment), which is proposed to operate in the median. It will not have a typical cross-section due to transit station and circulation needs. As a result, there are a number of impacts that had to be addressed by the Plan including the following:

- ROW will need to be widened and shifted east to accommodate the Purple Line
- Tunnel portal (Arliss Street between Flower and Garland Avenues) will create a significant visual and physical barrier between the Long Branch Town Center (Site 1) and the Arliss Street Town Homes (Site 7)

- Left turn movements along Arliss will be restricted to the Arliss Street and Garland Avenue intersection

The Plan offered the following land use, zoning and mobility recommendations to address these impacts:

- Rezoning of the Arliss Street Town Homes to allow for a higher density mixed-use development that better addresses the significant changes to the Arliss Street right-of-way and also provides for an appropriate transition between the adjacent single family community and the proposed Long Branch Town Center redevelopment.
- Introduction of private street network on the Super Block and other adjacent properties that will allow for additional connectivity and address the loss of left turn movements along Arliss Street.
- An attractive pedestrian-friendly cross section of the street that includes street furniture, wider sidewalks and bike lanes.
- Efforts to reduce the visual impact of the tunnel portal will be addressed in greater detail in the urban design guidelines.

Testimony:

The WRIT testified that the widening of Arliss Street created an unreasonable impact to their property (see attachment) resulting in a loss of nearly one acre of developable land. This combined with other Plan recommendations created a scenario where the recommended 2.5 FAR was unachievable. Additionally, residents testified to the ongoing access, congestion and parking issues related to Arliss Street and the Super Block. Residents stated that the introduction of new development, the Purple Line and other plan elements could create a potential chokepoint at the Arliss Street, Walden Avenue and Garland Avenue intersections.

The County Executive Staff testified that the Plan is inconsistent with the Purple Line cross-section and width proposed for Arliss Street and that the Plan also didn't provide for MTA input, or the required property acquisition needed to accomplish its goal of an increased right-of-way. *(However, Staff has discussed Arliss Street with MTA on numerous occasions.)*

Additional testimony included concerns that the redeveloped Arliss Street Town Homes (Site 7) would become or is intended to be "affordable" housing, which some believe is unnecessary because of the number of existing affordable units located in the Long Branch area. There was also concern about how the increased height of the proposed development would impact residents on Plymouth Street and the surrounding single family community.

Staff Response:

The current Purple Line concept PE plans do indicate an alignment that shifts an estimated 25 to 50 feet onto the WRIT property – depending upon the location along this segment, and

differences between the sections proposed for the Purple Line and by the sector plan. Further coordination is taking place to determine options available for reconciling the different treatments within any ultimate right of way as well as the impacts upon all adjacent parcels. These discussions will also address the intersection of Arliss Street, Walden and Garland Avenues.

The Arliss Street Townhomes (Site #7) are not being proposed as affordable housing. Staff has recommended a mixed-use development with the following zoning: CRT 2.5, C .25, R 2.5, H 60. Additionally, the Plan supported Live/Work development with less intrusive commercial uses. Concerns regarding compatibility with the existing community are addressed through recommendations for vegetated walls and buffers with greater detail being provided in the urban design guidelines.

Attachments

1. Summary of written and verbal testimony received for the public record.
2. Long Branch Sector Plan – Development Site Map
3. City of Takoma Park Resolution
4. Maryland Historical Trust, Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form
5. Historic Preservation Master Plan Amendment, Designation Criteria, Chapter 24A of the Montgomery County Code

Attachment 1: Summary of written and verbal testimony received for the public record

Note: The public record will not close until Thursday, March 7, 2013. Any testimony received after this memo, but while the public record is still open, will be added to the matrix and presented to the Planning Board at the following work session.