






**Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan, Work Session #14**

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**Description**

**Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan: Work Session #15**

**Summary**

Work session #15 will be a continuation of work session #14, furthering the discussion on the Option Three Bethesda Overlay Zone requirements as recommended by the Planning Board, including further discussion on the Priority Sending Site incentives as requested by the Board and the Design Review Advisory Panel.

Staff will present the Priority Sending Sites incentives as outlined in the May 2015 Public Hearing Draft as well as additional incentives to be added to the Plan, including discussion of particular sites that should be added or removed as a priority sending site. Staff will also discuss the mechanics of the Design Review Advisory Panel and how it would work under the Overlay Zone as well as the role of the Urban Design Guidelines in the Master Plan.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Park Impact Payment**

During work session #14 held on June 9, 2016, staff presented the Park Impact Payment parameters, goals and methodology used in preparing the Park Impact Payment recommended cost. At the end of the discussion, the Planning Board requested feedback from the development community prior to the next work session on the Park Impact Payment methodology and cost as recommended by the Park and Planning staff. As of this staff report posted June 16, 2016, the Planning Department has received only one letter in response to this request.

### **Priority Sending Sites**

At the May 19, 2016, staff provided the Planning Board with an overview of the recommended incentives as outlined in the May 2015 Public Hearing Draft and also provided recommendations for additional incentives to be added to the Plan, including removing the BLT requirement for priority sending sites, eliminating the 15 percent MPDU requirement for priority sending site density, and removal of the Park Impact Payment. The Planning Board requested further discussion on how to balance the priority sending site incentives with the amenities in the option three density pool as well as staff's recommendation for other sites that may be added to the priority sending site designation and/or those that should be removed.

Staff will brief the Planning Board on added incentives for the priority sending sites provided by the land use bar and others (attached) and staff will provide the Board with a breakdown of the best possible options.

### **Design Review Advisory Panel**

An important goal of the Bethesda Downtown Plan is to heighten design excellence and improve the quality of architecture, urban design and landscape design. High quality design of buildings and the public realm are key to reflect Bethesda's community identity and improve economic competitiveness, livability and environmental quality.

As outlined in the last work session on May 19, 2016, a key requirement for projects seeking additional density through the Bethesda Overlay Zone (Option Three) is the Design Review Advisory Panel. The Planning Board requested that staff provide a more detailed overview as to how the advisory panel would work.

#### *Goal of the Design Review Advisory Panel*

- Achieve the highest quality design for the planned and built environment;
- Assist in resolving issues that arise in the regulatory process where urban design principles go conflict with other county agency regulations by providing a review and discussion earlier in the process;
- Prioritize the allocation of the CR Public Benefit Points in the Commercial Residential Incentive Density Implementation Guidelines.

#### *How it would work*

- Semi-autonomous group, similar to the Public Art Review Panel, to give design input on projects at the Concept Plan and/or Sketch Plan stage
- Currently recommended for Optional Method projects in the CR zone at Concept Plan, required

for property owners seeking additional density allocation through the BOZ

- Five-person group made up of three architects (Director, Senior Urban Designer), one developer, and one citizen.
- Meet once a month on an as-needed basis.
- Recommendations by the panel are forwarded to staff to assist in the review process, and are to be given great weight.

### **Design Guidelines Discussion**

With the increases to allowable building heights recommended for Downtown Bethesda and the flexibility to transfer and allocate additional density, design guidelines become critically important to ensure that Downtown Bethesda will be a walkable environment where buildings frame a vibrant public realm and relate to the human scale. The question for the board to consider is: how specific should the design guidelines be in the Sector Plan vs the separate Urban Design Guidelines document which traditionally accompanies the Sector Plan but is reviewed by the Planning Board at a later date?

Staff recommends including additional recommendations in *Section 2.6 Urban Design* that outline the expectations for building design and then further refining these recommendations in the Urban Design Guidelines document. It is important to note that the Urban Design Guidelines document will also include guidelines for additional topic areas such as open spaces, streets, placemaking and key sites within each district.

### **Attachments**

List of possible Priority Sending Site incentives provided by others  
Recent Correspondence between June 2, 2016 and June 16, 2016

General Policy Issues to Facilitate Implementation of Priority Sending Sites

(May 16, 2016)

To achieve the desired density transfers from Priority Sending Sites ("PSS"), in a timely, market-driven manner, I recommend the following:

1. Adjust Zoning Ordinance standards as noted below to facilitate/encourage transfers/density averaging with Priority Sending Sites.
2. Rezone PSS properties to zones, densities, and heights as recommended by the Planning Board in its previous worksessions. (Need to create density that can be transferred and have the PSS properties in the CR Zone.)
3. When averaging with non-contiguous sites, when one of the sites is a PSS, eliminate the current requirement that a density-receiving site must achieve an increase of 50% in incentive benefit points (i.e., 150 points, rather than 100 points).
4. When averaging with a PSS, reduce by half the number of incentive benefit categories from which points must be obtained (i.e., if 100 points must otherwise be accumulated from four categories, allow the 100 points to be accumulated from only two categories; total points stay the same).
5. Eliminate the current requirement that a "density-receiving" site be located within ¼ mile of a "density-sending" site;
6. Do not adopt the proposed requirements (Staff Draft @ pg. 142) that (i) "all development rights (on a PSS) must be extinguished before approval of any plan that uses such density in a density averaging scheme" and (ii) that no parking be allowed. In other words, continue with current practice, which allows density to be transferred in parts, as each amount is sought by a density-receiving site; do not impose operational restrictions on the projects.
7. Allow a density-receiving site to exceed its mapped building height if the additional height is needed to accommodate the density that has been transferred to that site from a PSS; and
8. Provide that density transferred from a PSS shall not be subject to the current requirements in the CR Zones for BLT purchase. In other words, provide that PSS transferred density shall be "BLT-free."
9. Eliminate impact tax and TPAR on development that: (i) averages density with a PSS, or (ii) provides at least 20% affordable housing.
10. Eliminate or reduce other development-related fees/charges (such as: building permit fees, SDC charges, etc.) when a development averages density with a PSS, or (ii) provides at least 20% affordable housing.

11. Eliminate the requirement of a rental agreement for the existing number of affordable units as a condition of transfer. Many such units may be affordable only because of being in old, obsolete buildings, rather than affordable under a County program.

12. Provide cost saving incentives when density is averaged with a PSS, such as not charging the Park/Open Space fee for the portion of density from the PSS.