

Minutes for Town Hall Meeting July 10th St. Ann's Church

Attendance: Steve Cole, Terry Serie All members of Safeway task force to include: David Vanwagner, Mark Haynes, Maura Quinn, Paul Ducharme, John Herickhoff, Patty Stern, Robert Atkins, Bernadette Wolford, per sign in sheet 85 Community attendees

Mark Haynes called the meeting on order 7:04pm

Mark introduced himself as co-chair of Safeway task force. The Safeway Task Force was formed by the BCA (Bluemont Civic Association) in response to Safeway's recent issuance of a Request for Proposals to redevelop its 5101 Wilson Boulevard site. Mark explained that the meeting would be three part. The first part, Maura Quinn would discuss the Safeway RFP and show some of Safeway's recent redesigns of other stores in the area and some in California. The second part, Steve Cole and Terry Serie, citizen members of the Planning commission would discuss the site planning process and how it might unfold. The third part, time permitting, would be devoted to community concerns and questions. Mark introduced Maura Quinn to discuss the Safeway RFP.

Maura discussed the Safeway RFP (see below)

Location: 5101 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22205

Offering: Development Rights

Size: 2.37 Acres, or 103,254 square feet

Current Zoning: C-1 (Local Commercial District) Maximum density of 1.0 FAR and 35 feet in height are permitted by right.

Possible Rezoning Scenario:

C-2 (Service Commercial-Community Business District). Maximum density of 2.0 FAR and 45 feet in height, plus additional height for penthouses, is permitted. However, C-2 Zoning is subject to several conditions. First, the project must include a minimum of 0.4 FAR of retail uses on the ground floor and a maximum 1.1 FAR for residential. Second, at least 75% of the building's façade along Wilson Boulevard must be immediately adjacent to the sidewalk (i.e. a zero set-back) and all retail uses must be oriented toward Wilson Boulevard. Third, parking must be located to the rear or the side of the buildings and screened from the street and adjacent uses.

All offers should assume that the developer will be responsible for the construction of a 58,000 - 65,000 square foot Safeway Store per the Design Criteria outlined in section #4. The project should include a minimum of 170 parking spaces for the Safeway store.

Along with this information the Safeway RFP includes proposed grocery store layout, design criteria, aerials maps, property density information, examples of other Safeway mixed use projects. The full RFP can be viewed on the task force website <http://safewaytaskforce.wordpress.com/> Maura showed several examples of Safeway redesign projects. Safeway has redone 1000 of their 1600 stores to the

new Safeway lifestyle design. The task force is hoping to set up a meeting with Safeway representatives soon and will have more information then.

Q. What is the size of the current store and how many parking spaces does it have?

A. Unsure.

Terry Serie and Steve Cole, citizen members of the Planning Commission, were introduced to discuss the process of a major site plan development. There are three options that Safeway has to proceed with the development at 5101 Wilson Boulevard. They are: by right, site plan option and GLUP change (General Land Use Plan)

Terry discussed that Safeway can build by right. That is, as the property owner they can redevelop without a public review within current zoning up to 35 feet. They could build a store with parking on the ground level and store on the second level. The store would not have to improve sidewalks or landscaping.

Steve Cole then talked about zoning change. In the RFP, Safeway indicates that they would prefer to go beyond the current C-1 zoning. They indicate that they would like to find a development partner that would help them realize the full economic value of the property. They would like to build a store between 58,000 to 65,000 sq. feet with room for 170 parking spaces. This would require a site plan option. This form of "special exception" allows more flexibility in development form, use, and density than that permitted "by right" in a zoning district. Safeway indicates in the RFP that that a "possible rezoning scenario" would be to rezone to C-2 this would allow a building up to 45 feet. This is not to say that once a development partner is chosen they would not ask for zoning beyond C-2. However Safeway, as a community grocery store, has no interest in upsetting its customers so Steve does not think they will ask for anything that would go against the strong wishes of the community. The provisions that they list in the RFP would also seem to indicate that they would like to consider mixed use development for the site.

As far as how the site plan review process would work, the first step for Safeway is to choose a development partner. This can take many months for the contracts to be finalized so we are looking at this Fall for that to happen. The development partner will then prepare the site plan application this takes 3 to 5 months to process. County manager will then encourage the applicant to start talking to the neighborhood. After the application is accepted by the county staff (NOTE: This is not the final approval, Only the County board has final approval over the application) The applicant will start talking formally to the community, this should be around late winter. This is the opportunity for public involvement.

In order to be effective as a community in the process during this time period we need to:

- Be Organized, If the community is divided it negates the power of the community. Need to speak as one. The county has a long history of recognizing civic associations, should work with this group and other recognized neighborhood groups
- Be early, We already have a good start need to keep the momentum going
- Do homework on the issues

Before the application is submitted to the County Board; it is submitted to the site plan review committee. This helps to determine if the plan is approvable or not. The final report is prepared by the county manager and the last stop on the process is it goes through the planning commission. The Board gets the planning commission report and the county manager report and they then make the final call.

If the site would require a GLUP change that is an entirely different process. It would require a GLUP study that can take 3 to 5 months. It is a much more costly process. Steve thought that in order to save time and money they may well stay within the C2 zoning.

Q. In your experience with the site plan approval process what factors are most important to those making the decisions?

A. There is a link on the county website to site plan process that lists items such as traffic pedestrian safety, the rights of the neighborhood, mindful of single family homes- how you taper development into the neighborhood. What drives the site plan goes back to by right. They will recognize that the community has the right to improve. There is also a long standing county policy on grocery stores that encourage the support and development of grocery stores. There is economic benefit to having grocery stores and also concern with protecting residential neighborhoods. The question is how you balance the two.

Q. Is pedestrian accessibility also considered?

A. Yes, site plan development considers sidewalk improvement. The plan may very well recommend fourteen foot sidewalks. This is a precedent setting development, because the commercial space is so close to single family homes. Of the edge developments in Arlington (Westover/ Lee heights) this is the first to make a proposal. The County doesn't want to establish bad precedent.

Q. You have said that organizations such as civic associations have control over the site plan process would a neighborhood in the immediate area that organized as an association be recognized as a formal partner in this process?

A. Yes, that could be possible if all homeowners in a certain area that is highly impacted by the Safeway agreed to be represented by a single spokesperson. Something similar happened at the Peck/Staples building site process.

Q. Is it possible for the community to reach out informally prior to Safeway's submission of plans?

A. If Safeway applies to the site plan process the staff will encourage them to talk to the community. Civic associations and organized neighborhoods in the immediate neighborhood of the store should then begin the conversation with Safeway and development partner. Maura pointed out that the task force is hoping to meet with Safeway soon and as soon as we know anything we will share with the community via the task force website.

Q. Can Safeway do above ground parking?

A. Yes they can do above ground parking garage with current C1 zoning and with C2.

Q. Would a C2 zoning change affect only the Safeway site

A. Yes , the zoning change would affect only the Safeway lot.

Q. Does the County have a method of measuring the increased auto traffic the development would cause?

A. The County does have sophisticated ways of measuring traffic impact but we don't have specific answer. They would encourage the task force to talk to the transportation committee. One of the things that was recommended to the task force was to look at zoned parking in the immediate area of the Safeway if there was concern about people from the apartments parking in the neighborhood. Steve Cole thought the more significant traffic impact would be from having a nicer Safeway, rather than the apartments.

Q. Construction is planned at ATS(Arlington Traditional School) there is concern that having both construction projects ongoing at the same time would be a danger.

A. ATS is high end of list for construction whereas construction at the Safeway is pretty far out. Thought is that the projects would not overlap.

Q. Could Safeway build residential units with current C1 zoning?

A. No

Q. In the past County has traded added height and additional density for LEED certification. Could the get added bonuses through the site plan process?

A. The zoning ordinances that provide for C2 do not provide added height for LEED certification. They could do a “penthouse” which provides space for HVAC units etc (ie. Not living space)

Q. How would this change traffic flow?

A. Unsure , the County has process for speed bumps, survey of residents.

Q. What would have the most advantage to the community if Safeway built by right or through the site plan review process?

A. They felt the community would get more benefit if Safeway built through the site plan review process. The community would have more say through this process regarding sidewalks, landscaping etc.

Mark Haynes thanked Steve Cole and Terry Serie for their talk and opened up the forum to discuss items for Safeway task force community concerns

Q. is there a way to visualize how tall the new Safeway building might be?

A. One of the things the task force has thought of organizing is either balloons or ladder trucks from the fire department that we could raise to 35, 45, 65 feet so the public could visualize.

Q. There is a concern that the County board favors developers and we may just be going through the motions because they will invariably favor the developers?

A. Reminder that we are early in this process. For information as far as what the community wants we need to go back to the survey which indicated that the majority of residents wanted something that was 3 to 4 stories tall. We need to stay organized as a group and remember that this is a long process. Everyone will have to give and take. The task force will try to get informed on the issues and keep the public informed go to <http://safewaytaskforce.wordpress.com/> for latest information. The BCA wants to have a position that the community is comfortable with.

John Herickhoff, a member of the task force and on the executive board of the BCA shared his thoughts of the site plan process based on his experience with the Peck/Staples building. They were able to enact change on the development due to following.

- Organized group with consensus opinion
- Sustained engagement over time
- Core of people, at a handful of key junctures, sustaining a great level of involvement.

Q. Does the County have a database to cull through information on past projects?

A. Not aware of such a database, there is an interactive map on the website that shows site plan projects. Steve Cole suggested that we get informed watch County board discussions can go back and look on videotape at past County board decisions.

Q. Was there a development proposed at Westover that was stopped ?

A. Unaware of such a project. Reminder: this is a frustrating process. Safeway makes a valid point that they would the store to be large enough to make it economically feasible. The community needs to make a valid point also.

Q. What were your successes at Peck/Staples project?

A. Building was originally designed as a 16 story building negotiated down to 10 story building.
Tapered the building size down to the residential units.
Changed the parking garage for 800 and 900 North Glebe road to be interconnected to allow for flexibility of parking,
Traffic light.

Tapering the size of the buildings is a key issue when building commercial areas in the vicinity of single family homes.

Q. What were your losses at Peck/Staples?

A. Wanted more underground parking. Reminder for the community to look at zoned parking to preserve neighborhood spaces.

Reminder that zoned parking is not free.

Yes, that is true but it is possibility. County will need to do a study

Q. There is a petition to zone no higher than 35 feet, where is the most effective place to lodge citizen petitions?

A. Petitions can be lodged at county managers office/planning commission. However , Steve Cole pointed out we need to look at alternatives. The petition does not offer alternative to not building above 35 feet. Keep in mind that the store is not economically feasible as it is. Hope is that the neighborhood will be involved in shaping the change that takes place. If Safeway is not making a profit at location could always sell the store and let someone else do development at the site. Mark Haynes added that one thing is that petition send message that citizens are concerned with development at the site and that is a good thing. John Herickhoff added that they should encourage names on the petition as many of the online signatures on the petition as it is are anonymous.

Q. Is there a guideline for levels of underground parking required to sustain a certain number of stories of commercial development above ground?

A. Not known at this time.

Final thank you and reminder for all participants to sign in and put down their email in order to stay informed on what is happening with the development. The task force will try to get information out to the people in a timely manner. This is at best a two year process and will require sustained effort.

Meeting adjourned 8:50pm