

# MEMORANDUM

TO: Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) of the Planning Commission

FROM: Anthony Fusarelli, Jr. DATE: December 6, 2016

SUBJECT: Proposed Crystal City Block Plan – Block Q

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform the Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) about staff's preliminary recommendations regarding the proposed Crystal City Block Plan for Block Q, following up on the **November 7** LRPC meeting. As outlined below, the memorandum provides **background** on the block plan proposed by Lowe Enterprises in conjunction with a site plan amendment and new site plan application to build a new multi-family residential tower atop an existing two-story building as presented at the LRPC meeting. It also summarizes the general comments from the **LRPC discussion** at that meeting, and presents **staff's recommended approach** for concluding the LRPC review of the block plan proposal and transitioning into the Site Plan Committee Review process. Information in this memorandum should help inform the discussion in the SPRC review of the associated Century Center residential site plan proposal.

## **Background**

To facilitate coordinated and incremental redevelopment that advances the vision set forth in the 2010 Crystal City Sector Plan (CCSP), final site plan applications for sites located east of Jefferson Davis Highway must be accompanied by proposed Crystal City Block Plans (CCBPs), to be adopted by the County Board concurrently with site plan approval. The primary purposes of CCBPs include helping to ensure that:

- Crystal City can develop consistent with the sector plan vision;
- Proposed new buildings do not preclude future planned improvements; and
- Systems and infrastructure continue to function over periods of redevelopment.

Prior to adoption, each proposed CCBP will be evaluated based upon the goals, recommendations, and other guidance set forth in the Sector Plan. The primary purposes of the LRPC review of the CCBP include: 1) Coming to general agreement around one or more CCBP Scenario Maps including the envisioned uses and level of development associated with each site across the block, and 2) Determining whether there are major outstanding issues with the proposed CCBP that should be addressed before or during the SPRC review of the final site plan. Once adopted, a CCBP provides a more refined but still general and guiding long-range plan than

what is expressed in the CCSP for existing and proposed building locations, land use mix, tower coverage, transportation and other infrastructure, public open spaces and other community facilities across an individual block.

### **Crystal City Block Plan – Block Q**

In June 2016, Lowe Enterprises submitted a proposed Crystal City Block Plan for Block Q, in conjunction with applications to create a new site plan for the Century Center Residential project and amend the balance of Site Plan #65. The proposed project would add a 23-story residential tower onto the first floor on an existing retail building base near the intersection of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street South and Crystal Drive. As conceived, the project would total approximately 327,000 square feet of gross floor area, in a building approaching 250 feet in height above average site elevation. Existing retail space in the ground floor would be retained, and additional ground floor retail area would be added elsewhere within the current first floor envelope. For purposes of comparison, the illustrative concept plan in the CCSP anticipated this site would be fully redeveloped, and replaced with a new office tower atop ground floor retail – although the plan does not include specific guidance regarding specific upper floor building uses on this block.

### **LRPC Discussion from November 7 Meeting**

At the November 7 LRPC meeting, staff presented materials associated with the proposed Crystal City Block Plan as prepared by the applicant. The proposed block plan submission culminated in one block plan scenario, largely reflecting the illustrative concept plan's depiction for the balance of this block as presented in the CCSP. Additionally, the applicant shared a brief presentation on the proposed site plan application for a new residential building at the northeast limits of the block, to provide additional context for the block plan review. In the staff presentation, three potential issue areas were identified with the proposed block plan as a result of the proposed site plan, including:

- **Deviation from the Crystal Drive recommended build-to-line:** The new residential tower addition proposed in the final site plan sits directly above an existing ground floor retail base, which is setback a range of approximately 60 to 80 feet from the Crystal Drive curb. Based on CCSP guidance for this block, buildings should meet a recommended build-to-line approximately 20 feet west of the curb.
- **Building heights exceeding bulk-plane angle limits:** Portions of the top of the new residential building would rise vertically beyond the bulk-plane angle limits set forth in the CCSP, which calls for a 50 degree angle beginning at 200 feet in height. Zoning provisions for the C-O Crystal City district allow the County Board to modify this component when projects can be demonstrated to still provide CCSP goals for adequate sunlight to the public spaces intended for protection through such bulk-plane angles.
- **Departures from preferred locations for service and loading:** The proposed new residential tower would continue to use existing garage and loading access points along Crystal Drive, while transforming an existing garage access point on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street South into the new residential lobby. Based on CCSP guidance for this block, the generally preferred locations for garage access and loading would be off of a new 25<sup>th</sup> Street or realigned Clark-Bell Street, neither of which has been implemented to date.

Regarding the build-to line issue, the LRPC discussion focused on the ongoing challenge of achieving planned public open spaces identified in the sector plan. Some LRPC members said that the County should consider adding new spaces when redevelopment occurs even if the sector plan does not identify a public open space. On this block, the only new open space envisioned in the CCSP is the 25<sup>th</sup> Street plaza, which will require the redevelopment of other sites, creation of a new street, and realignment of Clark-Bell Street. The feasibility and future of realizing these sites is currently unknown. However, LRPC members broadly supported the idea of pursuing near-term, unplanned open space at the corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street South and Crystal Drive, instead of horizontally extruding the building base out to better align with the recommended build-to-line for Crystal Drive in the CCSP. There was also general agreement that the design of the open space, to be further detailed through the SPRC process, should have a retail-activating nature to it, given that the space was originally envisioned in the sector plan to be ground floor retail at that location.

In terms of the bulk-plane angle and service and loading potential issues, the LRPC agreed that these matters should be addressed in the SPRC review. They also generally concluded that there are no other block plan-related issues located outside of the final site plan area for the proposed new residential building.

**Staff’s Recommendation for Two Block Plan Scenarios**

Taking into consideration the LRPC input from the November 7 meeting, staff is recommending the inclusion of two scenarios as part of the Crystal City Block Plan for Block Q. As proposed by staff, one scenario would generally reflect the build-to line along Crystal Drive as recommended in the CCSP, while the other would depict an unplanned open space at that location, as conceptually reflected in the applicant’s site plan proposal. Updated exhibits of these two block plans scenarios are presented below.

**Staff Proposed Block Plan Scenarios – Block Q**



*Scenario A (w/ build to line)*



*Scenario B (w/ unplanned open space)*

Arriving at a block plan with the two scenarios presented above can still help advance a range of sector plan goals while adding reasonable flexibility to address site specific circumstances. By including both scenarios, the block plan would effectively communicate that either approach for the subject area along the Crystal Drive frontage would be appropriate, given that:

- The potential to add public open space here would make progress toward County Board guidance appended to the CCSP that calls for aspiring to create up to 4-5 more acres of open space east of Jefferson Davis Highway beyond what is planned;
- The proposed development is a vertical addition to an existing building, column grid, and garage parking, which along with the retention of ground floor retail tenants, poses certain site constraints, compared to a scenario involving full redevelopment of the property as anticipated in the CCSP;
- Repurposing a portion of the streetscape here as public open space would not significantly diminish the overall urban design strategy for Crystal City, as it would maintain a continuous building wall albeit set further back from Crystal Drive than is envisioned in the CCSP;
- Implementing an unplanned open space at this location would not impact the desired streetscape experience along this frontage and in fact would provide a corner activity node at this important intersection; and
- Future consideration of adding a retail liner building in coordination with properties to the south that better meets the recommended build-to-line set forth in the CCSP would not be precluded.

### **Next Steps and Timeline**

Based on the information in this memorandum, staff recommends concluding the LRPC review at this time and moving forward with the two block plan scenarios provided above. The first SPRC meeting for the associated site plan applications is currently scheduled for December 8, 2016. An additional memo from the LRPC Chair for the block plan review to the SPRC Chair for the site plan review will be transmitted before then to help inform some of the site plan issue areas as identified by the LRPC for further discussion during the site plan review.