

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



Office of the Director

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

TO: District of Columbia Zoning Commission
FROM: Ellen McCarthy, Director, Office of Planning
DATE: November 22, 2006

SUBJECT: Supplemental Report for Zoning Commission Case # 04-14/01-31TE/98-17E/95-16P
Florida Rock Property, 100 Potomac Ave. SE. (Ward 6, Sq. 707, 708, 708E, 708S)
Application for a Second Stage Planned Unit Development

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I. BACKGROUND

The 5.8 acre Florida Rock property (FRP) site is located on the Anacostia River at the corner of Potomac Avenue SE and South Capitol Street, directly to the south of the new ball stadium currently under construction. The property is within the Near Southeast Target Area of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, and within the Buzzard Point / Near Southeast Development Opportunity Area, where it is envisioned as a mixed-use redevelopment site with public waterfront access. The site is occupied by the Virginia Concrete plant, and there is no public access to its 800 linear feet of waterfront.

On September 18, 2006, the Zoning Commission held a public hearing regarding an application for Stage II approval of a PUD for this site. This followed Stage I approval of a PUD and PUD-related zoning map amendment in 1998 and an extension of that Stage I approval in 2003. The Stage I approval established a plan for 4 mixed use buildings – two office, one residential and one hotel – with retail space on the ground floor and a significant amount of open space, particularly along the waterfront. Stage I approval also established specific heights for the various buildings, varying from 90 feet to 110 feet.

The current Stage II application was set down for a public hearing on September 13, 2004. The public hearing was delayed pending resolution of changing contextual issues – notably the ball stadium to the north and planned District Department of Transportation (DDOT) improvements to South Capitol Street and Potomac Avenue SE. On August 25, 2006, the applicant submitted a modified pre-hearing statement, showing an amended design and amenity proffer responding to the new context. Detailed Office of Planning (OP) analysis of the proposal is provided in a report dated September 8, 2006.

At the public hearing, the Zoning Commission requested additional information from the applicant, and noted that the hearing should be continued to provide an opportunity for the Commission to question the applicant with regards to any additional information submitted. The applicant has since filed a supplemental pre-hearing statement dated November 17, 2006, with additional information and minor modifications to the proposed design and amenity package.

Although the Zoning Commission did not request specific additional information from OP, the following report provides supplementary OP comments on the applicant's most recent submission.

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ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

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CASE NO. 04-14
EXHIBIT NO. 51

II. OP SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSIS

A. East end of East Office Building

At the public hearing, both OP and the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation (AWC) expressed concerns about the relationship between the east end of this building to the ball stadium to the north and the First Street Landing park to the east, in that office building footprint would extend well into the main view angle from the ballpark to the waterfront. As such, the design could act contrary to the overall vision for the area, that the ball stadium's south entrance should provide a significant connection – visually and physically – to the planned First Street Landing park and the riverfront.

The applicant has redesigned this corner of the building, reducing the footprint at this location and stepping upper stories back somewhat. While not providing for the desired full angle of views or connectivity between the ballpark south entry concourse and the river, this solution does appear to provide for an improvement in this regard. OP also supports the elimination of secondary underground retail space at this location, and the provision of two levels of above grade retail. OP would encourage the applicant to devote the second floor roof terrace (above the retail space) to use by the retail below (for roof-top seating) rather than for exclusive use by the adjacent third floor office space. OP acknowledges that this may present functional difficulties.

Of some concern is that the below grade parking now extends out to the property line, beneath the landscaped area adjacent to the park. This may limit design options for this area, particularly for larger vegetation. However, trees may be inappropriate at this location in any event, as they may block remaining views from the ball stadium.

B. Mixed Use Development

As noted in past OP reports, the mixture of uses was established in the Stage 1 approval for this site, to include office, residential, hotel, and retail. To date, the applicant has only proposed one change from the approved mix - to add more retail which OP fully supports. OP agrees with the analysis of the applicant that a full range of uses on this site will help to activate this space and the surrounding neighborhood year round and for longer periods of the day, and facilitate the success of on-site and adjacent commercial spaces.

C. Parking Reduction

The applicant is proposing to reduce the number of on-site parking spaces by approximately 23%, to 1,054 in total. OP has no concerns with this reduction, which may alleviate traffic related impacts, but defers to the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) for detailed comments.

D. Vehicular Access from the Traffic Circle at South Capitol Street and Potomac Ave.

At DDOT's request, the applicant has removed the vehicular access to the proposed hotel from the traffic circle. OP has no concerns with this, provided the hotel and adjacent office building remain separated to provide a visual and pedestrian link through the site from the circle to the waterfront, as shown on the most recent drawings.

E. Bike Path Refinement

The applicant has proposed refinements to the design of the bike path through the most heavily pedestrian portions of the esplanade. The path is generally sited to be segregated from pedestrian pathways and from areas where internal retail space could spill out onto the esplanade. Where pedestrian access to a viewing area along the waterfront crosses the bike path, the applicant has proposed special paving, bollards, and signage to alert both bicyclists and pedestrians. While it may be appropriate to require bicyclists to dismount at this location, OP would defer to the DDOT Bicycle Coordinator for comments on the proposed design.

F. Architectural Embellishments

The Commission questioned a “telecommunication equipment screen wall” which rises up from the Potomac Avenue elevation of the east office building. OP continues to support this element as it is within the height limit of the Height Act of 1910, it would screen unsightly equipment from view (both from the ground and from upper stories of adjacent buildings), and it would help to modulate and articulate the Potomac Avenue elevation.

G. Amenity Package

No significant changes to the amenity package are described in the most recent submission, with the exception of the elimination of the water taxi dock (as recommended by DDOT, OP and AWC) and the reallocation of those funds to the design, construction, and maintenance of the First Street Landing park. The applicant has provided more detail on the First Street Landing Park amenity item, noting that the total contribution would be \$3,487,200. The applicant has supplied a copy of a draft “Plaza Planning and Development Agreement” between FRP and AWC, with a signed document anticipated prior to the continued public hearing.

The applicant has also provided additional detail regarding green building elements and certification, and regarding the pedestrian viewing pier. OP fully supports the efforts of the applicant to maximize “green building” elements, such as green roof and bio-filtration systems. The pedestrian viewing pier is described as a relatively simple structure intended to provide opportunities for pedestrians to walk out over and view the river. A more elaborate structure, with, for example, seating areas or a covered “gazebo” at the end, would also be supported, but OP feels that the pier as proposed will be a positive feature along the river-walk and a benefit to “river-walkers”, so OP continues to support the construction of the pier as an amenity item.

III. CONCLUSIONS

While OP does not feel that the current proposal fully addresses issues with regards to the relationship between the FRP proposal and the surrounding context, notably the ball stadium to the north, the current changes represent an improvement and should to some extent alleviate concerns. OP continues to support the development of this site as a mixed use project as proposed, with significant new office, residential, hotel, retail, and open park space which are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, and other District planning initiatives for this part of the Southeast neighborhood.

EM/jl