

Notes from the October 8, 2007 Meeting of the East Campus Redevelopment Community Review Steering Committee

Introduction

Doug Duncan opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.

Richard Perlmutter made a special announcement that the Birchmere will be opening a venue at East Campus. They came for a tour and decided the same day that they wanted to be part of this project. This effort is now in the initial planning stages. One possibility is locating them in the Pocomoke building. There would be significant benefits, but it is early and there are also potential challenges to that location.

The meeting was then opened to the Committee to raise questions and comments on any outstanding issues.

- Question: Are there any plans to sell the University-owned Graduate Hills?
 - Response: Absolutely not. The University's goal is to increase, not decrease, graduate housing.
- Question: Will East Campus streets be private or public? [The context of this question is a free speech (photography) issue that recently arose in Silver Spring.]
 - Response: The streets will be private. The policy will be the same as in places like Silver Spring, where free speech rights in public-like forums were recently confirmed.
- Question: Where exactly on North Campus will the Leonardtown replacement housing be built?
 - Response: A new building will be added to the Denton residential community. Note also that the University is working on other undergraduate housing projects: on South Campus (an RFP was released recently) and another on North Campus (under consideration). Also note that Leonardtown is part of Phase 2 and will not be torn down until the replacement housing is completed.
- Question: There is a concern about the projected rents for the designated graduate housing. What would happen if there isn't enough demand from graduate students for these units?
 - Response: The University and developer would consider various strategies to address this, such as subsidizing additional beds and making units available to non-graduate students.

Note: The presentation portions of each meeting topic largely followed the presentation slides. Printouts of the slides were available at the meeting and will be posted on the website, so these notes will not reproduce all of the information they contain but will instead focus on any additional information that was provided by the presenter and the Q&A segments that followed each topic.

Discussion

Introduction

Presentation (Richard Perlmutter)

- Quick overview of the agenda (transportation and parking).

Preliminary Traffic Study

Presentation (Wes Guckert, The Traffic Group)

- The developer team is currently working with MNCPPC on the study scope. Wes will be sending the scope agreement to MNCPPC this week, for review by that organization as well as by College Park and SHA.
- Transportation elements
 - Shuttle-UM has 10-minute headways on the route that goes to the College Park Metro Station – this is very impressive for a bus system.
 - Current traffic volume is much higher on Route 1 than on Kenilworth Avenue, but both are 4-lane streets – this project will direct traffic away from Route 1 and onto Kenilworth Avenue and Paint Branch Parkway.

Q&A

- Question: How many of the intersections to be studied are already failing (Level of Service (LOS F)?
 - Response: We don't know yet.
- Question: Will developments which are in the early planning stages (not yet in the regulatory review stage) such as the Cafritz property be taken into account?
 - Response: No; these are not included in traffic studies. Cafritz, for example, does not even have the necessary zoning yet for its intended use.
- Question: To clarify, Route 1 traffic at commuting hours is currently considered acceptable?
 - Response: Yes, for an urban environment such as this one. But it is not at acceptable levels during special events.
 - Follow-up comment: LOS E is considered acceptable by SHA in transit-oriented development (TOD) areas but not in other areas.
 - Response: This is correct. Prince George's County considers LOS E acceptable for College Park, while SHA considers the minimum acceptable standard to be LOS D for this area.
- Comment: There is concern about directing traffic onto Paint Branch Parkway, which is currently a fast street and not safe for bicyclists.
 - Response: Paint Branch Parkway (and Kenilworth Avenue) is fast because it is underutilized – adding traffic will slow it down, making it safer for bicyclists.
 - Response: Also, we will be adding medians and pedestrian crossings along Paint Branch Parkway.

Scope Assumptions and Trip Distribution

Presentation (Wes Guckert, The Traffic Group)

- There will probably be two Shuttle-UM stops in East Campus.
- The University and developer team all want East Campus to be as transit/bike/pedestrian-oriented as possible.
- This orientation is a product of both its location (including its proximity/accessibility to the University and to multiple transit services) and design (elements such as locating housing and retail next to the University).
- University and community shoppers will be able to remain in College Park instead of driving farther away, for example. Related to this idea, most weekday shopping traffic will not be additional traffic but will be pass-by (additional stops as part of commuting trips) and non-auto-related.
- There is a nationwide trend of people wanting to live close to their jobs. With East Campus, not only will commutes be shorter but many people will be able to commute without using their cars.

Q&A

- Comment: Shuttle-UM is mostly funded by undergraduate students, yet the proposed use of it for East Campus will benefit other groups.
 - Response: The University recognizes this and will work on determining a fair funding method for this route.
- Question: Will people not associated with the University be able to use this Shuttle-UM service?
 - Response: Under current rules the University is not allowed to offer this, but it is looking into how to do so.
- Comment: Don't overlook maximizing the use of existing WMATA bus service as well.
 - Response: All efforts to maximize transit use will be made.
- Comment: There is a lot of traffic during weekends too.
 - Response: Weekend traffic is included in the traffic study scope.
- Question: East Campus includes a lot of new housing, but how much of this will just replace existing housing?
 - Response: Only a small fraction of the housing can be considered replacement housing, for Leonardtown. But those units will also be replaced on North Campus.
- Question: How much of a reduction will there will be in people driving to the University?
 - Response: It is too early to say.
 - Response [Rob Goodspeed]: The University issues approximately 10,000 parking permits to staff and faculty.
- Comment: The statement that most weekday retail traffic will be pass-by does not apply to dining.
 - Response: Agreed.

Suggested Road Improvements

Presentation (Wes Guckert, The Traffic Group)

- [No additional information.]

Q&A

- Question: Are additional lanes on Kenilworth Avenue suggested?
 - Response: No; additional lanes on this street will not be necessary as part of this project.
- Question: What happened to having the Purple Line go through this site as opposed to along Paint Branch Parkway?
 - Response: The required right-of-way (ROW) for light rail is 130 feet versus 75 feet without it. It was decided that this wide of a ROW would create a cavernous feel, especially during the many years before the Purple Line is built. This placement will not have an impact on the rest of the Purple Line alignment.
 - Response: There still will be stops in East Campus for the various bus lines.
 - Follow-up question: With a Paint Branch Parkway alignment, will improvements be needed to the rail underpass to accommodate the Purple Line?
 - Response: This has not yet been determined, but this project will provide the needed ROW.
 - Follow-up question: Is there enough clearance for this under the rail underpass?
 - Response: We will look into this. The State is also looking into this, as it has to investigate these kinds of issues for all Purple Line segments.
- Question: What improvements to Route 1 are suggested?
 - Response: We will follow the suggestions and requirements of the 2007 ICF Route 1 study and the SHA selected alternate plan.
 - Follow-up comment: But the SHA plan does not take into account recent development projects that have been proposed in this area.
 - Response: SHA is one of the agencies that will review the East Campus traffic study and project.
 - Response: As stated earlier, the East Campus traffic study will take into account projects that are likely to occur.
- Comment: The University and developer team are urged to advocate more strongly for the Purple Line, based on a common and solidified opinion (for example regarding its alignment).
 - Response: We agree and are working on it.
- Question: What access points are proposed along Route 1?
 - Response: There will only be one additional intersection, for the new street between Rossborough Lane and Paint Branch Parkway. By way of comparison, seven intersections (and crosswalks) are planned along Paint Branch Parkway.
 - Response: These will be complete intersections, including crosswalks.

Preliminary Transportation Recommendations

Presentation (Wes Guckert, The Traffic Group)

- [No additional information.]

Q&A

- Question: When will the traffic study be completed?
 - Response: In approximately 60 to 90 days.
 - Response [Doug]: We can have the Committee can reconvene at that point to review the study results.
- Question: Since it had always been communicated before tonight that the Purple Line would run through the project, how definite is it that it will now run along Paint Branch Parkway? Was this done to create room for more development?
 - Response: It is pretty likely that it will run along Paint Branch Parkway. This change was not made to allow more development. As stated earlier, the Purple Line is many years away; setting aside space for it on East Campus would mean having a large empty space for years.

Cars, Transit, Pedestrians and Bicycles Plan

Presentation (Richard Perlmutter, Foulger-Pratt/Argo)

- [No additional information.]

Q&A

- Question: On the presented map, one of the lines drawn for Shuttle-UM travels behind Fraternity Row; is this an existing route?
 - Response: Yes. [Follow-up note: The Campus Connector South and Orange routes include this segment.]
- Question: Are the planned bike facilities bike paths or lanes?
 - Response: Bike lanes are planned.
 - Follow-up comment: Paint Branch Parkway is currently too dangerous to ride a bike in the street; most bicyclists use the sidewalk. Commuters may use bike lanes but casual riders (including children) won't use them on this kind of street.
 - Response: We are still determining the best approach and want input from bicyclists, for instance regarding how to separate the lane from the street and sidewalk.
- Question: Where will service access points be located?
 - Response: There may be a secondary road system for service vehicles. But it is too early to know where specific access points will be.
 - Follow-up question: To clarify, will service vehicles be able to reach East Campus via Old Town?
 - Response: We can't prohibit this but measures can be taken to discourage it. Also, service vehicles prefer to travel as quickly as possible, and this generally means using large streets.

- Response: Also note that service access will primarily be via Paint Branch Parkway and Kenilworth Avenue.
- Comment: The map does not show pedestrian linkage along Route 1.
 - Response: There will be much pedestrian linkage there; the map just doesn't show it.
- Question: Will the primary pedestrian link to the Metro station be along Paint Branch Parkway? A preferred path (south of East Campus) is being promoted by the City and University as the recommended route between campus and the station.
 - Response: Yes. The path referred to is outside of the project area, but we can do things like wayfinding to draw attention to it.
- Question: The map shows pedestrian linkage across the Fraternity Row lawn; does this mean a path is planned for this location?
 - Response: No, this was just done to illustrate linkages and major travel directions.

Parking

Presentation (Jon Eisen, StreetSense)

- The project's emphasis is on transit, bike and pedestrian travel, but there is inevitably a need for parking.
- As the project is still in the planning stage, the specific parking program is also still being worked out.
- Parking will be well-distributed, with an emphasis along Paint Branch Parkway.
- Most parking will be below-ground and structured and some will be on-street, and there may be a little surface parking as well. The structured parking will be masked by the other uses such as retail.

Q&A

- Question: What kind of bike facilities will there be?
 - Response: Bike parking will be located throughout the site, inside and outside.
- Comment: The University should establish a rule that people can have on-campus parking permits or East Campus parking permits, but not both.
 - Response [Doug]: We are talking to College Park about this concept.
- Question: Approximately how many parking spaces are projected?
 - Response: We don't know yet.
 - Response: To provide some context, the usual determination of parking needs process starts with understanding the magnitude of each land use (for example, square feet of retail or number of apartment units), then considers the amount of shared parking possible, taking into account that most residents will use their cars during the day thus freeing up spaces for daytime users, and then calculates the total number of spaces needed. We believe that for this project the assumption that most residents will take their cars during the day is not valid, as most residents will travel to work/school (to the University and other places) using another mode of transportation. Therefore, there will be a lot of car storage – cars that are not used for a large percentage of the time. Also, it is known that most University students own cars. [Follow-up note: the University issues approximately 20,000 parking permits to students.]
- Comment: Keep in mind that fewer graduate students need/have cars.

- Response: We are taking this into account.
- Question: Aren't parking requirements determined by zoning?
 - Response: Yes. [Follow-up note: Zoning includes parking regulations but does not prescribe an exact number.]
- Comment: The developer team is urged to study Arlington County which has been very successful in getting people to use transit. The County uses Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures such as limiting the number of spaces. Parking spaces increase car demand.
 - Response: Noted; however, a balance is needed. For instance, if there are not enough spaces, people will park in nearby residential neighborhoods.
- Comment: Residential parking spaces should be charged separately from rent to make their cost clear.
 - Response: This is what we are planning to do.

Connections

Presentation (Jon Eisen, StreetSense)

- The plan is for this project to be an example for the enhancement and revitalization of Route 1.
- The project will add to the many already-existing connections in the area.
- Development along Paint Branch Parkway will be at a lower intensity.
- The developer team advocates increasing connections to Old Town.

Q&A

- Comments regarding increasing connections to Old Town:
 - There is a lot of opposition among Old Town residents to doing this.
 - There is already too much cut-through traffic in this neighborhood.
 - Connections will decrease safety.
 - If there are going to be bike/pedestrian connections, why are street connections also needed?
 - It's important to keep in mind that not all stakeholders are opposed; there is a diversity of opinion on this issue.
 - Details on specific proposed connections are needed in order to evaluate them on a case by case basis.
 - Perhaps the project could fund a reserve to be used to mitigate any impacts of new connections.
 - This doesn't have to be a black-and-white, connections or no connections issue: there are other, intermediate options, such as use restrictions based on the time of day.
- Responses to these comments:
 - It is good planning practice to increase connections, to create a hierarchical street system.
 - Doing so enhances the authenticity of an urban setting and would decrease traffic on Route 1.
 - It is easier to build connections now (then monitor the situation and make adjustments as necessary) than to add them later.

- In the end, this decision is up to the City and community; we will do what they tell us to do.
- Question: Will East Campus' private roads be maintained publicly or privately?
 - Response: The roads will be maintained privately.

US 1 Improvements

Presentation (Doug Duncan, University of Maryland)

- The University supports the SHA plan all along Route 1, not just for the segment fronting on East Campus.
- The College Park segment may get implemented in two phases.

Other Issues

- Question: Since specific details were not available tonight, can the Committee also re-address parking when it reconvenes?
 - Response: Yes.
- Comment [Doug]: Parking should mostly be central so that people can park once and walk to multiple destinations.
- Question: What is the order of major construction activities?
 - Response: Generally, it is underground facilities, then roads, then pads and buildings.
- Question: Is the Birchmere sensitive to the idea of mixed-use/TOD parking standards?
 - Response: Yes, they understand and endorse this idea.