

Planning Commission Meeting
July 7, 1999
Verbatim Excerpts

CPA-86-C-121-2 - RESTON SPECTRUM L.P.

During Commission Matters

Commissioner Palatiello: Mr. Chairman, the Commission has had distributed to it a memorandum dated July 23, 1999 to you, Mr. Chairman, from Ms. Johnson. This is another revisiting of the same plan. As the Commission knows, within the Reston Town Center district we have a very unique instrument called the Town Center Conceptual Plan. Several years ago the Commission approved a Town Center Conceptual Plan for the Spectrum Center within Reston Town Center. Shown on the Plan, as approved by the Commission, were certain architectural screening walls along Reston Parkway. Spectrum is fully built out. The landscaping is in place. The Center is functioning. It's quite a popular destination within Reston, but given the grading, given the location of underground utilities, given existing landscaping, the architectural screening walls along Reston Parkway that were shown on the original plan are now in one respect impractical and in another respect somewhat superfluous. The applicant, Reston Spectrum L.P., has submitted a Conceptual Plan Amendment to delete showing those architectural screening walls. This application has gone before the Planning and Zoning Committee of the Reston Citizens Association and has its approval. I met with Ms. Johnson and representative of the County's Urban Forestry Branch, the applicant and the applicant's representative. We walked the site and we came up with the plan that is before us in the memorandum which does delete the architectural screening walls and in its place enhances the landscaping, vegetative buffer and planting along Reston Avenue, not only to give an attractive scenic attribute to the Center, but to also help screen the surface parking from the view that one has from Reston Parkway. With that, Mr. Chairman, I would MOVE THAT THE PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVE CPA-86-C-121-2.

Commissioner Byers: Second.

Chairman Murphy: Seconded by Mr. Byers. Is there a discussion of the motion?

Commissioner Alcorn: Mr. Chairman?

Commissioner Downer: Question.

Chairman Murphy: Mr. Alcorn, then Ms. Downer.

Commissioner Alcorn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question for staff. This development has been built for several years. Why did it take so long for us to find out that this was a problem?

Ms. Leslie Johnson: I'm not sure.

Commissioner Alcorn: Let me ask this. What is the process -- I mean we've had other cases where proffer commitments -- an applicant who doesn't fulfill a proffer commitment.

It's a fairly significant issue we've been dealing with recently. Is this considered a proffered commitment because it's referenced in the Town Center proffers? Or what is the process?

Ms. Johnson: No, it's not a proffered commitment. The original approval was done as a conceptual plan. There was a landscaping plan that was approved by the Planning Commission that showed these architectural screening walls. We don't, under the conceptual plan process -- it's a creation of the proffers. We do not impose development conditions, it's whatever is in the plan notes -- whatever they commit to on the concept plan. And they had committed to these architectural screening walls as a way to screen some of the surface parking from Reston Parkway and, you know -- you may want to ask the applicant. My feeling is they've been working on the landscaping over a period of time. They may not be totally off bond yet and this may be one opportunity to finish up. They are going to be replacing some landscaping that was originally shown on the plan that has died. They are going to be putting in some additional willow oaks. The problem has been the willow oaks they want to put in there are of a size that is greater than what you'd typically find in a nursery. We've been told that it won't be until next spring before they can get that specific tree. It's a spring planting tree.

Commissioner Alcorn: I have no problem with this concept plan. It's not a problem. What I am concerned about is that it sounds like we don't have a clear process to enforce the concept plan notes.

Ms. Johnson: They are enforced through the site plan process. They would be enforced through the site plan process.

Commissioner Alcorn: But how come this was not caught through that process? Was that why this was caught?

Commissioner Palatiello: Mr. Chairman?

Commissioner Alcorn: Maybe Mr. Palatiello can --

Commissioner Palatiello: I don't think it's a case of not being caught. This is something that both the applicant, myself, Supervisor Dix and staff has been aware was a "feature shown" on the Plan. There have been ongoing discussions as to how to best remedy this. I will tell you that this comes to us now, but I've been in discussion with the applicant on this for probably some four years. Because when the plan was actually built, it was recognized that these walls were somewhat moot and superfluous. Ms. Johnson is absolutely correct. As Mr. Alcorn knows, Reston Town Center is one of the most heavily proffered tracts of land in Fairfax County. There are literally tens if not hundreds of million of dollars in transportation improvements, many of which, including the road that serves where Mr. Alcorn lives, were built ahead of proffers -- Town Center Parkway and many others. In addition to those proffers, as concept plans come in, we have almost created yet another new instrument. It's not a proffer. It's not a development condition, but the notes on the plan are enhanced commitments. Many of them, in fact all of them, I would

say, are voluntary commitments of the applicant above and beyond what is required under the proffers. So this is not something that has fallen through the cracks. This is something that has been part of an ongoing discussion for quite some time. Quite frankly the fact that we have some landscaping to replace these walls, I think, is the benefit to all of this. I didn't feel comfortable simply saying: "Okay, we'll just eliminate the walls." I felt that some enhancement to improve the attractiveness was a reasonable tradeoff for the removal of those walls, and that is what we have before us this evening.

Chairman Murphy: Ms. Downer.

Commissioner Downer: Thank you. I guess my question was, when I read through the staff comments, it indicated there was a lot of turf grass and that they thought there ought to be additional ground cover, vinca, periwinkle, whatever, and shrubbery and trees, a mix of willow and flowering trees, which the cherry trees would be. And yet I only saw in their statement that they are doing the cherry trees. So when you mentioned landscaping, I assume they are doing more than just the cherry trees and replacing the dead willow trees.

Commissioner Palatiello: And a lot of it is ground cover because there is a very, very heavy incidence of underground utilities, including fiber optic lines and a significant amount of utilities through that right-of-way. So anything with any deep root system is going to be problematic. And that's the solution we worked out on site; that the Urban Forester felt was most advantageous and would not create any problems with the underground utilities.

Commissioner Downer: You mean the seven cherry trees? Or are you including ground cover? Because I didn't see ground cover in their little statement.

Ms. Johnson: Ms. Downer, I think some of that ground cover is being replaced as part of the things that have died. There is some turf grass. They are going to add -- one of the concerns was on one of the slopes. There are basically three road sections -- or three sections of Reston Parkway that the Spectrum has frontage on, and the additional cherry trees are being added on one section. What we were looking for was something between the willow oaks and something in between the ground cover to fill in. And that was where it was most desirable. On some of the other slopes and areas, they are replacing additional willow oaks and there are other types of plantings. We walked the whole site with the Urban Forester and that was what was agreed to. They are going to be doing a lot and they have already done so, I believe, some replacement of existing plantings that have died with last year's drought and just not being well maintained. And so they are going through with a whole new set of plantings to replace what was already shown on the plan.

Commissioner Downer: That was my basic question, being your comment showed that you'd like to see more plantings other than the trees. I was just questioning were they doing that, because it wasn't clear.

Ms. Johnson: And I think we all decided that what they were doing was satisfactory.

Commissioner Downer: Okay.

Chairman Murphy: Further discussion of the --

Commissioner Palatiello: Let me just add a point. Those who are familiar with the Center can visualize that there is a significant grade difference between Reston Parkway and the grade of the Spectrum Center. And to put these decorative walls along Reston Parkway, I think, would make no sense at all. It would make it look like the Dulles Toll Road with the sound walls. To put them down at grade at the level of the stores and the parking would serve no useful purpose either. So really what we are doing here -- what this application is is to remove the walls that were shown on the plan. The benefit that we are getting is some added landscaping.

Commissioner Downer: That's much better.

Chairman Murphy: Further discussion of the motion? All those in favor of the motion to approve CPA --

Commissioner Coan: Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Murphy: Mr. Coan.

Commissioner Coan: There's an obvious typographical problem with revised Note 14. It says in the last sentence: "In addition, seven Kwanzan cherry trees with a 2½ to 3" minimum caliper will be installed as indicated the attached landscaping plan." In, on, by?

Commissioner Palatiello: I don't see the problem.

Chairman Murphy: "As indicated on the attached landscaping plan." Is that preposition left out?

Ms. Johnson: That might have been a typo, yes.

Chairman Murphy: Insert "on." "As indicated on the attached landscaping plan." Further discussion of the motion? All those in favor of the motion to approve CAP-86-C-121-2, say aye.

Commissioners: Aye.

Chairman Murphy: Opposed? Motion carries.

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(The motion carried unanimously.)

LBG