

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



Office of the Director

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

TO: District of Columbia Zoning Commission
FROM: Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director, Development Review and Historic Preservation
DATE: June 29, 2007
SUBJECT: Supplemental Report for Zoning Commission Case # 04-14/01-31TE/98-17F/95-16P
Florida Rock Property, 100 Potomac Ave. SE. (Ward 6, Sq. 707, 708, 708E, 708S)
Application for a Second Stage Planned Unit Development

I. BACKGROUND

The 5.8 acre Florida Rock Properties (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 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. It is within the Capitol Gateway Overlay District, and is currently zoned CG/W2. The site is occupied by the Virginia Concrete plant, and there is no public access to its 800 linear feet of waterfront.

Stage I approval of a PUD and PUD-related zoning map amendment (1998, extended in 2003) established a plan for 4 mixed use buildings (office, residential and hotel) with retail space on the ground floor and heights varying from 90 feet to 110 feet, and a significant amount of open space.

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. On September 18, 2006, the Zoning Commission held a public hearing and requested additional information from the applicant. The applicant filed a supplemental submission on November 17, 2006, with minor modifications to the proposed design and amenity package, as detailed in the OP analysis in a report dated November 27, 2006. At its February 12, 2007 public meeting, the Zoning Commission declined to take proposed action, with the major issues of concern summarized as follows:

“...we need heavier weight of the mix of uses in favor of residential. We need better views of and from the stadium and a more prominent expression of place by the project as it faces the water. (page 98)

The applicant discussed with OP various ways to address these issues; submitted to the Commission as correspondence (dated May 23, 2007) an amended concept plan; and requested that the Zoning Commission “*endorse these modifications to the height, bulk, mass and use allocation of the project*” prior to preparation of a more complete package and resubmission of a revised PUD submission. At its June 11, 2007 public meeting, the Zoning Commission requested OP comments on this submission. OP is supportive of the changes to the concept site plan. This report provides comments on the concept design against the major issues which the Commission noted, and goes on to comment on additional significant changes to the site plan.

II. OP ANALYSIS OF THE MAY 23, 2007 CORRESPONDENCE SUBMISSION

A. Mixed Use Development

At the public meeting, the Commission indicated that an increase in residential use (which includes hotel) to a minimum of 50% of the total FAR is desired with any additional residential considered an amenity. The correspondence from the applicant includes an increase in the residential to the desired amount. OP agrees that a larger residential component 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 retail spaces.

| Standard | CG/W-2 | CG/C-3-C PUD | PUD Stage I Order 850 | Order 910-B | Proposal at Setdown | December 11, 2006 | Current Proposal |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Height: | 70 ft. max. | 130 ft. max. | 109 – 130 ft. | 90 – 110 ft. | 90 – 110 ft. | 92 - 112 ft. | 92 – 130 ft. |
| FAR total: | 5.0 max. | 8.0 max. | 6.0 max. | 4.4 max. | 4.28 | 4.40 | 4.40 |
| Office | 2.0 max. | 8.0 max. | 6.0 max. | 2.47 max. | 2.38 | 2.40 | 1.86 |
| Retail | 2.0 max. | 8.0 max. | 6.0 max. | Included above | .16 | .24 | 0.34 |
| Residential | 5.0 max. | 8.0 max. | 6.0 max. | 1.74 min. | 1.76 | 1.76 | 2.20 |

B. Views To and From The Adjacent Ballpark Stadium

Concerns were expressed by the Commission and OP regarding the impact of the proposed design on the relationship between the ballpark main entrance and the waterfront. The previous proposal showed the east office building extending well into the viewshed from the Ballpark’s south grand stairway, limiting the sense of connection across Potomac Avenue to the proposed park and the riverfront. The applicant has modified the design of the east office building to largely set it back from this viewshed, with the only remaining element a somewhat iconic glass tower. The applicant proposes a larger, plaza area, active with outdoor seating, to tie into the adjacent park. OP is supportive of this change, and, at the direction of the Commission, would work with the applicant to clarify the building form and massing, the intent and the impact of the glass tower, and the design of the plaza area prior to a full submission by the applicant.

A secondary aspect would be the views to and from the stadium through the center of the site. A more comprehensive view analysis will be required to assess this item fully, but OP notes that the site retains significant breaks in the massing of the buildings which would likely afford some framed views through the site towards the stadium. Views from the stadium to the waterfront would likely be concentrated towards the east of the proposed FRP development, although framed views through the FRP buildings from the ballpark concourse level would also appear to be afforded. These will be facilitated by the lower level semi-transparent pedestrian access / retail corridors (labeled Capital Quay and Potomac Quay).

C. Expression of a Sense of Place Along the Waterfront

In discussions with the applicant, OP suggested that a more varied and refined approach to the waterfront was needed. While maintaining a proper setback along the waterfront is important, a more varied setback to buildings can create a linear park and a series of spaces that people can enjoy and which will activate the riverfront area in a wider variety of ways. The applicant is

working towards this goal, and OP is supportive of the direction that the concept plan is taking. Of particular interest is how the significant amount of retail space will directly relate to the promenade, how the building design at the ground level will be pedestrian scale, and how pedestrians will access and experience this area. OP will continue to work with the applicant to define and refine the design of the ground floor of all of the buildings and the design of the outdoor spaces prior to a full submission.

A major new element opening onto the waterfront is the courtyard (or “piazza”), which provides access to the hotel and interior vehicular drop-off access to the residential and west office buildings. In past schemes, this was designed to be an internalized courtyard, and OP had expressed concerns that it did not meaningfully relate well to either the waterfront or Potomac Avenue. At OP’s suggestions, the applicant has opened this space up to the waterfront in the current scheme. This is a design direction worth pursuing, and Zoning Commission comments on this aspect of the design are particularly requested. At the direction of the Commission, OP would continue to work with the applicant to ensure that this element enhances the waterfront experience and serves as an inviting pedestrian connection.

Finally, the applicant has, at the Commission’s suggestion, removed the pedestrian pier at the west end of the site, which could have been an interesting way for pedestrians to directly relate to the river and experience longer views up and down the waterway. OP feels this issue warrants further discussion with the Commission.

D. Potomac Avenue Elevation.

OP is particularly supportive of changes to the overall form and massing along Potomac Avenue. Previous schemes showed a relatively undifferentiated office façade which did not related well to the more organic form of the ballpark across the street. The concept significantly improves this façade, providing a more inviting and varied streetscape. Further review of building elevations and more detailed massing is anticipated.

E. Building Height

In order to refine and reduce the footprint, the applicant is proposing that the permitted height for two of the four buildings be increased from 112’ to 130’. Such a height would be permitted under the Height Act of 1910, and is, in fact, envisioned in South Capitol Street planning documents prepared by the then Anacostia Waterfront Commission and the National Capitol Planning Commission. The ballpark will rise to a maximum height of 130 feet.

Although the FRP site would front onto Potomac Avenue and the proposed new traffic circle, rather than on to South Capitol Street proper, OP is not opposed to the additional height. The additional height is not requested for additional density, but rather to “free up” additional ground level space. The additional height should not likely block any additional views from ground, water, or bridge levels, and appears to allow a slightly more slender building form, thereby facilitating framed views through and around buildings. This is a form of viewshed enhancement successfully employed in many waterfront communities. Further the additional height is only for the hotel and residential buildings (not for the offices), and will provide even greater height variety on the site (formerly from 92 – 112 feet; in this proposal from 91 – 130 feet). As such, OP is supportive of this change, and looks forward to seeing more detailed building renderings and view analysis.