



To: Site Plan Review Committee, Arlington County Planning Commission
From: Christopher Wimbush, Vice President of Policy and Planning, on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Crystal City Civic Association
Date: January 11, 2021
Re: Online Feedback Opportunity – 2001 S. Clark St. (2001 S. Bell St.)/Crystal Plaza 1

The Executive Committee of the Crystal City Civic Association (CCCA) provides the following comments at this stage of the public engagement process related to Arlington County’s consideration of JBG Smith’s proposed redevelopment of an existing office building into two (2) residential towers with ground-floor retail at a 2.4-acre (104,404 sq. ft.) site – located at 2001 S. Clark St. in the CCCA neighborhood. We respectfully reserve the opportunity to raise additional issues during expected meetings of the Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC) and in response to the development of JBG Smith’s plans.

As an initial matter, the Executive Committee notes that the Long-Range Planning Committee (LRPC) and the SPRC processes are vital mechanisms for community engagement. Because of the importance of these two processes and the value they add to ensuring that development in Crystal City is consistent with the Crystal City Sector Plan (Sector Plan), we believe the LRPC process utilized for this development failed to meaningfully address long-range planning issues implicated by the proposed site plan, like open space, as intended by the Planning Commission’s bylaws (“[t]he LRPC shall advise the Commission on matters coming before the Commission related to land use, urban design, long-range plans, the Comprehensive Plan, and the General Land Use Plan”). As a result, important questions regarding the availability of open space in Crystal City will not be addressed holistically by the County. The site plan’s extraordinary breadth – involving multiple owners, acreage, and anticipated future development – compounds this issue. The Planning Commission’s decisions and those ultimately of the County Board will shape Crystal City development for decades to come.

Next, we believe the Pedestrian Passageway from 20th Street to the Crystal City Shops contemplated by JBG Smith’s site plans is inconsistent with the Crystal City Sector Plan, which calls for a “[p]ark with trees, gardens and benches along a path connecting the park to Crystal Drive.” We recognize that developers require flexibility in the design, placement, and composition of open space they are responsible for developing.

However, any design should be consistent with the Sector Plan's requirements; the current plans for Open Space #8 are not. Instead, as currently proposed, Open Space #8 is a pedestrian plaza rather than a park, as it is a hardscape. The proposed space also encompasses less square footage than contemplated by the Sector Plan (7,200 v. 9,700). Moreover, without the benefit of a shadow study for space, and based on our review of the plans, it appears from its location, the area will be in the shade most of the time. Rather than proposing a thoughtful and inviting space, it instead seems that this space is an afterthought.

As an improvement to the proposed Open Space #8, we urge the consideration of installing an alternative park along the length of 20th Street or South Bell Street, an expansion of park space on 23rd Street or making the proposed interim park #11 on 23rd Street permanent. As a final alternative, the County Board could require that any future development of Crystal Plaza include increased open space (though we note this could be 20 years from now or more) as contemplated by the Sector Plan. Lastly, the timing for the availability of the proposed open space is unclear. We would appreciate additional detail on how the build-out for both interim and permanent open space will be phased on the site.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of maintaining Underground connectivity from 12th to 23rd Streets. Although we would prefer to keep this connectivity without traveling through an open garage, we appreciate JBG Smith's effort to adjust its original plans. As a result, we acknowledge JBG Smith's "hybrid proposal" for a new tunnel passageway from the Crystal City Shops to a G2 corridor, elevator to the G1 level, and a passageway through the garage to the connecting 20th Street tunnel, as a possible solution. However, we strongly suggest the following. First, the G1 Passageway through the garage should be as light and pleasant as possible, potentially through a guardrail extended by a glass wall to enclose the passageway. Second, we suggest the G2 corridor be wider than 6 feet and as attractive to pedestrians as the existing tunnel is. Third, we encourage JBG Smith to conduct additional outreach to surrounding buildings that use the current passageway to get to the Metro (e.g., Crystal Plaza, The Buchanan, Deloitte, etc.) if they have not yet done so. Finally, we support JBG Smith's commitment to the CCCA to propose a holistic approach to revitalizing the entire Underground. We are looking forward to meeting with the community in the next few months to provide additional feedback on several suggestions that have already been made.

The CCCA appreciates County Staff and JBG Smith's efforts to respond to the community's aspirations for Crystal City and site-specific concerns and questions regarding individual private development within the neighborhood. We look forward to engaging in the SPRC process going forward.