

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. UR10/6685



FORT LINCOLN URBAN RENEWAL AREA (FORT LINCOLN NEW TOWN) THE SHOPS AT DAKOTA CROSSING

Bounded by New York Avenue, South Dakota Avenue,
33rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive, NE
Washington, D.C.

Submitted By the District of Columbia Office of the Deputy Mayor for
Planning and Economic Development

July 3, 2008

Abstract

The District of Columbia Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) has submitted revised concept site and building plans for the Shops at Dakota Crossing in the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area in northeast Washington, DC. The project was initially reviewed as the concept design for the Washington Gateway Regional Retail Center in October 2006; a change in the owner's representative and development team has resulted in revisions to the concept design.

The 42-acre site is owned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is subject to the terms of the Urban Renewal Plan for the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area adopted by the Commission on May 6, 1972 and re-adopted on April 5, 1990. The proposed development would include several large-scale retailers (including big-box) and a variety of smaller, independent retailers and service providers. The total planned development includes approximately 490,000 gross square feet of retail space and 2,200 parking spaces.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. §8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Comments favorably on the overall design concept for the Shops at Dakota Crossing in the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 52.10(38.00)42567.

Requires the following at the preliminary design stage, in order to ensure that the project complies with the Urban Renewal Plan:

- More fully developed pedestrian connections to adjacent housing areas and Anacostia Park through the design of crosswalks, site lighting and landscaping at major intersections with Fort Lincoln Drive and 33rd Place.
- More extensive fenestration, surface treatments, or landscaping to minimize the effects of blank façade areas of large-scale retail stores, and smaller buildings along Main Street and fronting on Fort Lincoln Drive. The treatments that may be used include additional fenestration, changes in façade materials/plane, landscaping, and/or other surface treatments (i.e., trellises, color, texture, etc.).
- Incorporation of either public use areas or additional retail buildings to further define the edges of the “Main Street” shopping area near Fort Lincoln Drive; the current parking configuration prevents a continuous pedestrian-oriented shopping corridor.
- Detailed landscape designs and lighting alternatives that minimize visual impacts to adjacent streets and residential development as well as enhance views and vistas to/from/within the site. Since much of the proposed retail design is not oriented toward Fort Lincoln Drive, landscaping or other site elements along that edge should be extensive and designed to provide for year-round screening, especially adjacent to loading areas.
- Parking and circulation plan showing trees, shrubs, and other landscape elements that reduce adverse visual impacts and may aid in minimizing stormwater runoff.
- An Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NCPC’s Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures. The EA or EIS is required to guide the decision making process for, and be reflected in, the preliminary and final site and building plans.

Recommends that the following be included at the preliminary design stage:

- Incorporation of low-impact design strategies to minimize the effects of stormwater runoff on the Anacostia River resulting from expansive areas of roof and paving.
- Screening methods to minimize visual effects of rooftop mechanical equipment from adjacent residential areas and circulation arteries.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background

The Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area (Area) was established in 1972 as a “model in-town community” comprised of mixed-use development that would maximize urban amenities and livability. The Urban Renewal Plan (Plan) for the Area was last amended in April of 1990 to allow for development of the current Land Use Plan [NCPC Map File No. 52.10(04-12)30399]; the Shops at Dakota Crossing project will satisfy the “Retail/Shopping” element of the current Plan. Accompanying the land use modifications in 1990 were circulation changes that were intended to further define the retail-shopping area as well as provide increased accessibility to the same.

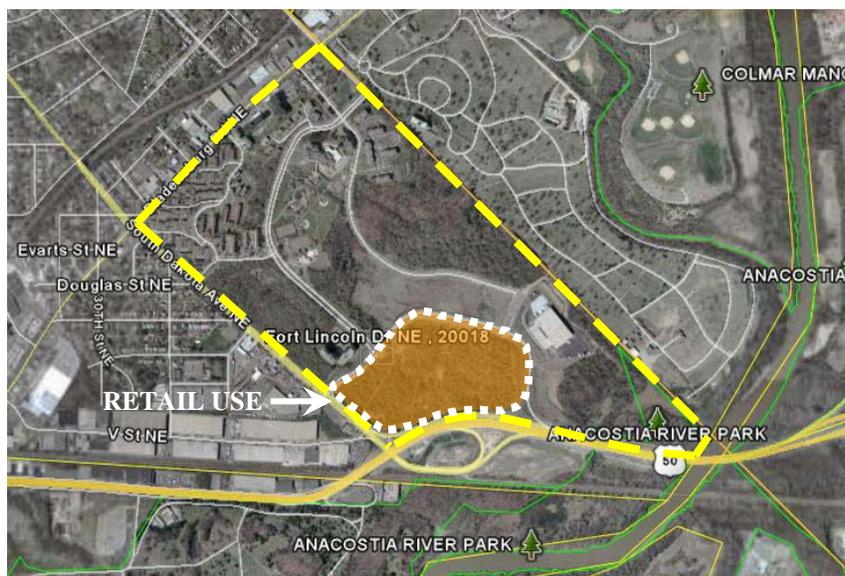
The site is owned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a federal agency; the applicant, DMPED, has been assigned oversight responsibilities and acts as the designated owner’s representative. Ft. Lincoln Retail LLC, a joint venture between Fort Lincoln New Town Corporation and Trammell Crow Company, is the developer responsible for all design, approval, construction, financing, and leasing activities for the project.



FORT LINCOLN – GENERAL LAND USE PLAN

Site

The 42.4-acre site is part of Square 4327 in Ward 5 in northeast Washington, DC and is bounded on the south by New York Avenue, on the west by South Dakota Avenue, and on the north/east by 33rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive. The land is currently unimproved and is covered by a variety of trees and other vegetation.



PROJECT SITE

The site has relatively steep grades, with elevations rising from south to north beginning at New York Avenue; proposed development includes regrading to create a level area on which to build. The finished grade is expected to be approximately 10-12 feet below the intersection of Fort Lincoln Drive and 33rd Place and between 10 and 20 feet above the grade of New York Avenue; larger buildings are sited with the intent to establish site lines that minimize views of buildings and rooftops, where possible.



SITE SECTION A-A



SITE SECTION C-C

The site has been vacant for more than 25 years, and is surrounded by residential/assisted living development to the north and office/light industrial use to the east. Mixed-income residential development (the “Heights”) to the north/northeast is currently under construction, and is comprised primarily of single family townhouses. Other areas surrounding the site contain a mix of commercial and retail uses, light industrial, public assembly/recreation areas, park lands, municipal facilities, and government offices. Primary access to/from the site is currently from New York and South Dakota Avenues.

It is important to note that the surrounding automobile-oriented residential and industrial development, and transportation infrastructure accompanied by a lack of public transportation, has resulted in the Fort Lincoln New Town area evolving into more of a suburban (rather than urban) area.

Proposal

In accordance with Section 632.00 of the “Urban Renewal Plan for the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area” (Urban Renewal Plan), the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, has submitted concept site and building plans for review by the Commission. The proposed development includes approximately 490,000 gross square feet of retail/service space and 2,200 surface parking spaces.



PROPOSED SITE PLAN

Included in the proposed development are several big-box anchor retail stores (Costco and Shoppers Food and Pharmacy confirmed) ranging from 50,000 to 154,000 square feet and a pedestrian-oriented “Main Street” shopping area consisting of a Staples store as well as smaller, service-oriented businesses. Modest landscaping and site embellishments are proposed to enhance/buffer site edges (identified as “landscape zone” on site sections), define parking areas, screen blank walls, and provide shade. Many, but not all, of the building and site elements conform to the design limitations and regulations established by the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Plan; staff recommendations (see *Project Analysis* section) are intended to bring the proposal more into conformance with the Urban Renewal Plan.

The planned development conforms to the established “Retail/Shopping” land use of the Plan, and is expected to aid in meeting the goal of providing a balance of shopping, recreation, employment and necessary community facilities to serve the daytime and nighttime needs of the area residents and surrounding neighborhood.

One of the focal points of the design is the pedestrian-oriented “Main Street” shopping area, which is planned to include design features and retail/service establishments at a much more human scale. Several restaurants are also planned for this area, as are two at the south end of the street sited to overlook the planned wetland preservation area.



PROPOSED “MAIN STREET” SHOPPING AREA



Through consultation regarding the requirements of the Urban Renewal Plan, the applicant has agreed to address staff comments regarding requirements for pedestrian connections to adjacent residential areas, design of pedestrian-oriented retail, landscaping, façade design, parking, stormwater management and other environmental issues, screening of roof-top mechanical equipment, signage, and the need for public transportation service to the site. The proposed concept design submission reflects some developments resulting from consultation, including the lay-out of pedestrian shopping areas, visual screening of loading areas, and increased landscaping of parking areas. The applicant and developer are committed to providing high quality landscaping, especially along circulation routes and adjacent to loading areas, to minimize negative visual impacts to the surrounding areas; development of landscaping plans will be undertaken in the preliminary and final design phases.

Also resulting from consultation, the preliminary design phase of the project is expected to further address some of the other areas that do not currently conform to the Urban Renewal Plan for Fort Lincoln: links to Anacostia Park will be evaluated, in consultation with the National Park Service; an accessible bus route to the shopping area will be developed in consultation with WMATA; and environmental review and compliance will be completed (and Environmental Assessment has been initiated).



PROPOSED ANCHOR RETAILER (Typical)



PROPOSED INDEPENDENT RETAILER (Typical)



PROPOSED ENTRANCE SIGN



In addition to serving the local neighborhood and nearby communities, the site also serves as a gateway to the National Capital; views along New York Avenue are critical, and a 75-foot setback area along the northern edge will be heavily landscaped, as required by the Plan. No buildings or structures will be placed in the setback area, and signage will be designed in accordance with the requirements of the Urban Renewal Plan.

Development Program

The Shops at Dakota Crossing project will be developed by a joint venture of Fort Lincoln New Town Corporation and Tramell Crow; the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development is the designated agent of the owner, HUD.

The development team is working towards final approval of site and building plans in December 2008 with construction commencing in June 2009. Full occupancy of retail stores is anticipated by April 2011.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

In October 2006, the Commission commented favorably on an initial concept design for the Washington Gateway Regional Retail Center at Fort Lincoln New Town. Due to changes in the designated agent of the owner and their development team, as well as commitments of intended retail tenants, the design has been revised and the name changed.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Plan (Plan) defines design requirements for the retail/shopping area. The table on the following page summarizes the requirements defined by the Plan and to what extent the proposed concept design meets those requirements.

Generally, the proposed concept site and building plans for the Shops at Dakota Crossing are consistent with the Plan, especially with regard to overall building and site constraints. The planned use of a local and regional retail/shopping area in the allotted location conforms to the established Land Use Plan, and the overall design also conforms to the density, Floor Area Ratio (FAR), height, and setback parameters defined. Additionally, locations for pedestrian connection been identified and aligned with streets and sidewalks of the adjacent residential development.

The concept design does not yet fully respond, however, to some of the Plan's more detailed design requirements for façade design, building orientation, parking, landscaping, loading areas, and pedestrian links to Anacostia Park; these requirements will need to be addressed at the preliminary design stage of the project. As residential development surrounding the site has evolved, new streets have been created and 33rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive have become main access roads rather than pedestrian-oriented circulation routes that the Urban Renewal Plan initially anticipated; therefore, a majority of the buildings are not oriented towards those major roads and are instead focused to the interior of the site or onto newly created streets. Many façades of the anchor stores, and some rear walls of the independent retail stores, are blank; screening will be required to conform to the Plan. Landscaping for parking areas, street edges, and loading areas is not adequate or not yet fully designed. Methods of incorporating Low Impact Development to limit stormwater runoff from the site have only started to be evaluated.

FORT LINCOLN URBAN RENEWAL PLAN
SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS FOR RETAIL/SHOPPING AREA

(excerpted)

ITEM	REQUIREMENT	CONFORMANCE
Site / Building Restrictions	Lot Occupancy, maximum: 60 percent Gross Floor Area, maximum: 700,000 sq. ft. Floor Area Ratio, maximum: 0.5 Building Height, maximum: 40 feet	Full
Building Orientation	Buildings and stores shall, to the extent possible, be oriented towards 33 rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive.	Partial
Façades / Blank Walls	Blank walls limited to a maximum of 50 percent of the individual front store façade.	Partial
Loading Areas	Loading facilities shall, at no time, be visible from residential areas or adjoining Streets unless landscaping, berming or other techniques are used to minimize their impact. Depressed loading areas shall be encouraged if they minimize visual impact.	Additional information req'd
Parking	One parking space for each 300 square feet of gross floor area, provided within buildings or in separate parking structures, where feasible. Structures shall be designed to take full advantage of the steep slope if they minimize cut and fill. All surface parking lots shall be improved with trees, shrubs and other landscaping techniques to reduce adverse visual impacts.	Full (landscaping plan req'd)
Pedestrian Ways	Pedestrian ways, a minimum of 20 feet in width (at least 10 feet of width paved) shall be provided to link project area to adjacent areas and to Anacostia Park. Pedestrian ways shall be lighted to assure safe and convenient night time use with a standard equal to that of a local street.	Details req'd
New York Ave. Setback Area	A 75-foot building restriction shall be established on the north and south sides of the New York Avenue right-of-way to maintain and enhance the character and quality of the avenue as a major Gateway. This area shall contain landscaping of particularly high quality, to enhance the natural setting, and adequately screen parking and loading areas, service road, and adjacent roof-tops and equipment. Landscaping should give attention to scenic views from the road and include attractive street lighting and informative signs for visitors. No buildings, structures, parking lot, or advertising signs are permitted in the setback.	Full (set-back) ----- Partial (landscaping plan req'd)
Landscaping	Landscaping shall be an integral part of the general development program... structuring major vistas to the Anacostia River such as from Fort Lincoln Drive or from other high points, reducing the negative impact of large paved areas by including planting strips and islands for shade trees and low shrubs, and lastly, enhancing the general character of buildings, structures, and blank walls.	Partial
Signs / Advertising	Signs and advertising within or upon any building is subject to design and location review, and must be compatible in design with the character of the use on the site.	Full

Staff has identified the following actions that are recommended as the preliminary design is further developed (*refer to next page for graphic depiction of recommendations*). Such actions are intended to guide the design so that it more fully complies to the Urban Renewal Plan.

- Develop more fully pedestrian connections to adjacent housing areas and Anacostia Park through the design of crosswalks, site lighting and landscaping at major intersections with Fort Lincoln Drive and 33rd Place.
- Incorporate more extensive fenestration, surface treatments, or landscaping to minimize the effects of blank façade areas of large-scale retail and façades of buildings fronting on Fort Lincoln Drive. The treatments that may be used include additional fenestration, changes in façade materials/plane, landscaping, and/or other surface treatments (i.e., trellises, color, texture, etc.).
- Incorporation of either public use areas or additional retail buildings to further define the edges of the “Main Street” shopping area near Fort Lincoln Drive; the current parking configuration prevents a continuous pedestrian-oriented shopping corridor.
- Develop detailed landscape designs and lighting alternatives to minimize visual impacts to adjacent streets and residential development as well as enhance views and vistas to/from/within the site (including views to the Anacostia River). Since much of the proposed retail design is not oriented toward Fort Lincoln Drive, landscaping or other site elements along that edge should be extensive and designed to provide for year-round screening, especially adjacent to loading areas.
- Create a parking and circulation plan that incorporates trees, shrubs, and other landscape elements that reduce adverse visual impacts and may aid in minimizing stormwater runoff. NCPC also encourages the applicant to incorporate low-impact design strategies to minimize the effects of stormwater runoff on the Anacostia River resulting from expansive paved areas.
- Prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NCPC’s Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures. The EA or EIS is required to guide the decision making process for, and be reflected in, the preliminary and final site and building plans for this project on federal land.

Staff also recommends the following:

- Incorporation of low-impact design strategies to minimize the effects of stormwater runoff on the Anacostia River resulting from expansive areas of roof and paving.
- Screening methods to minimize visual effects of rooftop mechanical equipment from adjacent residential areas and circulation arteries.

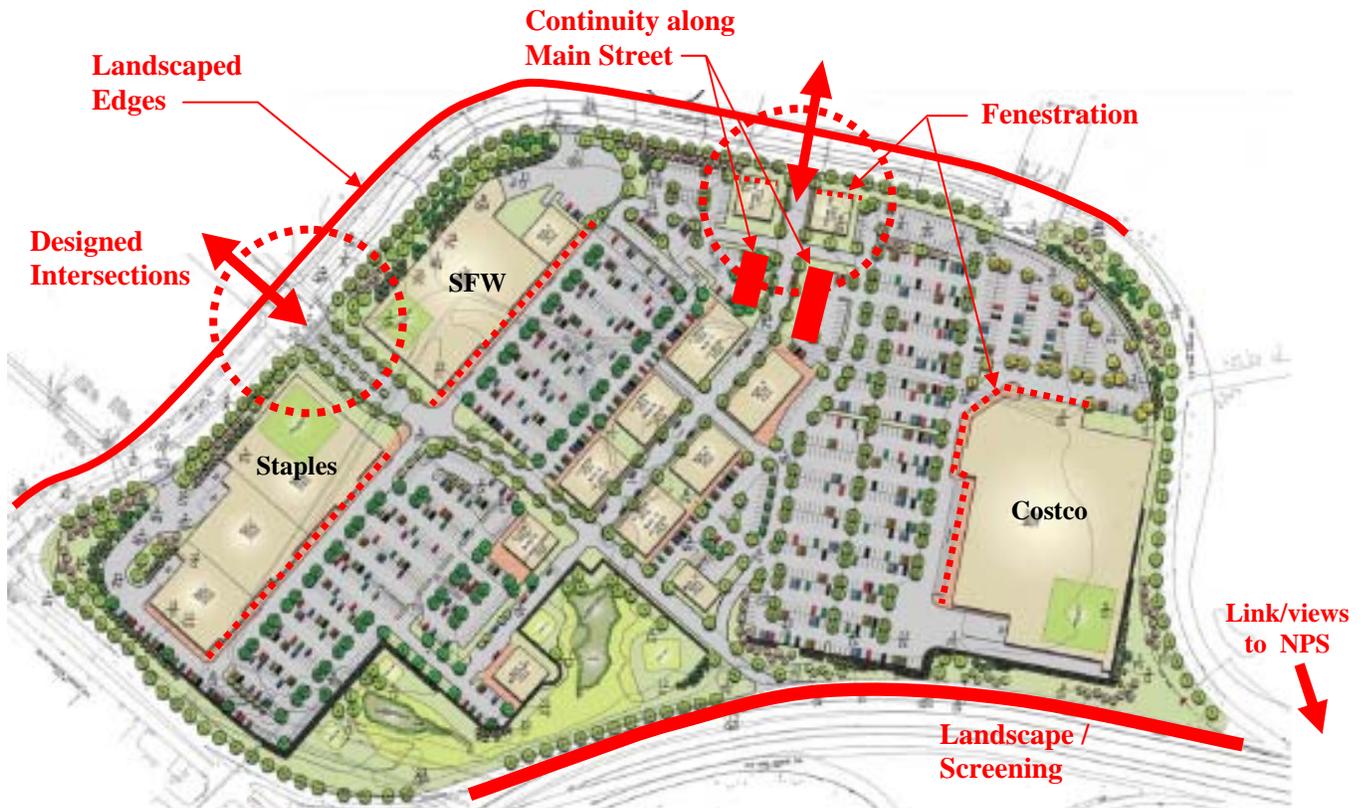
CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed development plan is not inconsistent with Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

The project site is within a District Development Opportunity Area, an area that offers opportunities to accommodate new growth and development. The proposed project supports the District Land Use Element, *Policies In Support Of The Commercial Areas Objectives*, subsection 1108.1:

- (a) Promote appropriate commercial development, including centers for retail and office uses, to serve the needs of the economy of the District and its neighborhoods, to provide a focus for the expansion of housing and employment that the District will have to accommodate in the future because of its urban center role within the region, and to expand employment opportunities in the region for District residents.



GRAPHIC DEPICTION OF STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

This project is being developed on federal land. NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures (Environmental Procedures) do not require a NEPA document at the concept design stage, but an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required with the preliminary design submission, as outlined in NCPC's Project Plans Submission Requirements and in accord with NCPC's Environmental Procedures.

As the federal landowner, HUD prepared an EIS for development of the Area in 1972, and subsequently undertook additional Environmental Assessments for specific projects in the Area. Due to the changes in land use as well as development programming for site since those studies were prepared, an Environmental Assessment is being prepared to evaluate the potential impacts associated with the current project.

Components of an environmental review that are of particular interest include, but are not limited to, the following: transportation, storm drainage, sanitary sewer service, construction effects, public safety/security, and solid waste management. NCPC invites the applicant to consult with NCPC to help facilitate the NEPA review process.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

HUD is the lead federal agency for historic preservation review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Since the proposal is a federal project in the District of Columbia, NCPC has independent review responsibility as well. The completion of such review is not required at the concept design stage.

While there are no known National Register-listed properties in the vicinity of the project site, past reviews for projects in the Urban Renewal Area have indicated that archeological remains and artifacts may be discovered during construction and, if encountered, should be adequately documented and archived.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on June 18, 2008, and forwarded it to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Council of the District of Columbia

A letter of support (dated June 10, 2008) for the project was submitted by Ward 5 Councilmember Mr. Harry Thomas, Jr. Councilmember Thomas stated that the proposed project will “help reverse the historic outflow of sales tax revenues to suburban jurisdictions...will also create a large number of permanent jobs, many of which will be filled by Ward 5 residents,...[and that the plan] combines the best of modern retail thinking with environmental best practices...”.