

PTO President's Column

Tom Matecki

(703) 241-1572

tmatecki@verizon.net

Dear St. James Parents:

What a difference a month makes. We have had number of meetings on the hotel project being proposed for 706 West Broad Street. Just to clarify, I want review the two projects taking place near the school: 800 W. Broad and 706 W. Broad. Per the City's Comprehensive Plan, the Broad Street corridor is slated for development. The city is pursuing development to increase and diversify its tax base to meet ever increasing expenditures particularly of its school system. Both projects belong to Jefferson One, LLC., which is headed by Robert Young and his business partner Joseph Wetzel.

800 West Broad

This address is at the corner of Oak Street and Broad Street next to 'B' Lot and is zoned B-1 or business. The project is already underway and has been approved by the city government. It will be a 4 story business office building fronting on Broad Street with 2 level parking area in the back adjacent to 'B' lot. There will be landscaped buffer area between 'B' Lot and the parking deck. Egress points will be along Broad Street (upper level) and Oak Street (lower level). There will be no ramp between parking levels. Future tenants will include the Falls Church City schools administrative offices and a retail post office operation. At this point other tenants remain unclear. There were two waivers required for this project:

- 1) Reduction of the required 20' buffer distance between a business zone and a residential zone to 10' along part of the property line with St. James. Schools in Falls Church City are zoned residential.
- 2) A waiver to allow a business driveway within 100' of a residential zone. This was for the lower level of the parking structure entrance along Oak Street.

This project is 22 parking spaces short of requirements. To satisfy that requirement, the developer has been allowed to include the parking lot currently at 706 West Broad as part of the parking for 800 W. Broad. Additionally when the 706 project is completed, it will share parking with the 800 building. Thus, a time shared parking arrangement will be used by both projects since neither have sufficient parking for the size of the proposed buildings. Denial of the waivers would not necessarily have prevented the development from taking place, but could have forced it to proceed "by right" meaning that the developer would be able to build without city approval so long as he didn't need any special approvals (exceptions, variances, waivers or zoning changes). The consequences of this are uncertain. He could have put in a smaller business office or some other commercial venture. In this case the Diocesan Attorney, Mark Herrmann, negotiated an agreement with the developer agreeing to the waivers. After approval, the parish and

school made clear our desire to the developer on how to mitigate any adverse effects of construction on school operations. Unfortunately, those requests have not been followed as much as we had hoped. Fencing, dust, truck deliveries and worker identification have all had problems in the early going. Once approval was granted and subcontractors became involved, our requests seemed secondary at best. Consequently, the developer has created a credibility problem with many of us. This problem has clearly impacted our attitude with regard to the 706 project. Whether we are talking about traffic studies or ABC licenses, the confidence level in what we are being told is very low.

706 West Broad.

This address is between Davies Realty and Burger King and is currently a public parking lot. Presently the proposal includes a 6 story Hilton Garden Inn , a three story business office fronting on Park Avenue and a two level deck parking area between the two buildings. Egresses for the parking structure will be along Park Ave. (one way in lower level), Oak St.(two way lower level) and Broad St. (two way upper level). Due to the odd lot configuration the ‘side’ of the hotel will be along Broad Street while the ‘front’ will face Oak Street. Landscaped buffer zones will separate the hotel from the adjacent properties. The 706 project approval is pending before the city government and requires a zoning change on the back part of the property from Transition-1 to Business-1 for the parking deck, a special exception for a building height of 65 feet and multiple waivers. One of the waivers would allow the 706 block to have a driveway within 100 feet of St. James which is zoned R-1 or Residential on Oak Street. Others concern buffer zones and landscaping requirements. You can read the city council document related to the project at the following link:

http://www.fallschurchva.gov/Content/Docs/TO8-06TR8-18_706Broad031008.pdf?cnlid=1507

The city already approved a drive way next to ‘B’ lot for the 800 block project. So an additional driveway for the 706 block will further load traffic onto Oak just across the street from ‘B’ lot. The consensus in the St. James community is that we do not want a hotel that close to the school. The major concern is that this urbanization will increase traffic and crime in the neighborhood of St. James. Of particular concern is the introduction of a transient adult population so close to a school. In addition to the possibility of sexual predators using the hotel as base of operations, the hotel will most likely have a restaurant and bar which will be open during the day serving alcohol. There have been some people who point out that there is no legal precedent or statistical evidence preventing a hotel from locating next to a school. One must be careful when making such findings. There’s little evidence on the negative impact of landfills next to hospitals as well and for good reason. The fact is that hotels and many other commercial ventures are very rarely located next to schools when any forethought is put into city planning. My own opinion is that the hotel idea is largely a response to the stagnant condominium and office space markets in Falls Church City. While the city feels the need to increase revenue through development, there seems to have been little weight given to providing St. James with a buffer space compatible with an elementary school. Thus the St. James community will have to do what it can to ensure the future vitality of

the school. Change is inevitable, but not predestined. To the extent possible, we should try to influence the land use around the school. We can't expect the city government or anyone else to advocate for us.

What to do?

Our position is to oppose the hotel construction. We plan to do so on the political, civic and business fronts. A number of people have expressed pessimism on the wisdom of such a position. In addition to being parents of students, we are stewards of the school. As I've noted before we've been bequeathed a wonderful school by our predecessors. It's incumbent upon us to preserve and protect that legacy during our watch. We may win or we may lose, but we have to try. Stay tuned for updates via the St. James Notes and check out the city's plans via its website.

The next critical public hearing will be on **April 21st in City Hall at 7:45 pm**. The Planning Commission will take public comment on the proposed waivers for the 706 W. Broad Hotel project. **I want to urge each and every family to send one person to this meeting to have our voices heard.** I've attached the agenda.

Regards,

Tom

AGENDA
MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING OF THE
CITY OF FALLS CHURCH PLANNING COMMISSION
TO BE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER
300 PARK AVENUE, FALLS CHURCH, VA
MONDAY, 21 APRIL 2008
7:45 PM

The Planning Commission's Rules of Procedure limit each speaker, other than an applicant, to a three (3) minute initial presentation. Plats, plans, and reports are available for review in the Planning Division, 300 Park Avenue, Monday-Friday, 8 AM-5PM, and at the Mary Riley Styles Public Library, Reference Section, 120 North Virginia Avenue.

1. Call to Order:
2. Roll Call:
3. Planning Commission Reports:
4. Receipt of Petitions:
5. Planning Director's Report/Worksession Schedule:
6. Old Business: None.

ASSIGNMENTS

Staff _____

Commissioner

7. New Business:

A. *Application 200700733, Special Exception (Height) and Rezoning, 706 West Broad Street*

Perry

Fauber

Hold Public Hearing and Continue Hearing to 5 May 2008 for Recommendation to the City Council

B. *Capital Improvements Program for Fiscal Years Rodgers 2009-2013, As Revised*

Mester

Recommendation to the City Council

8. Other Business: None

9. Approval of Minutes: 7 April 2008

10. Adjournment:

The City of Falls Church is committed to the letter and to the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request a reasonable accommodation for any type of disability call 703.248.5040 (TTY 711).

MATTERS SCHEDULED CURRENTLY FOR
FUTURE PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS
AND LISTING OF WORKSESSIONS SCHEDULED

Monday, 5 May 2008

Application 200700733, Special Exception (Height) and Rezoning, 706 West Broad Street (Perry/Fauber)

MATTERS NOT CURRENTLY SCHEDULED

Application 20070409, 472 North Washington Street, "Northgate", Subdivision and Site Plan.

Application 20070528, 500/510/520 North Washington Street, "Gateway", Special Exception-Height, Special Exception-Mixed Use, and Rezoning