



Plans Move Forward at The Wharf

BY WILLIAM RICH

Over 300 people attended a community workshop at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel on June 7 organized by the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly and Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6D to discuss the Stage One Planned Unit Development (PUD) for The Wharf, which is the \$2 billion redevelopment of the Southwest Waterfront by the Hoffman-Madison Waterfront team. At the meeting, five main themes were discussed: design & public realm; transportation, traffic & parking; maritime plan; sustainability & environment; and retail & amenities.

In its current form, the Southwest Waterfront is an underutilized area of the city with little open space, acres of surface parking lots, and low slung buildings with single uses. Water Street, SW runs parallel to Maine Avenue, SW and is used as a service road to access local businesses. In addition, there are cruise ship operators and the largest live-aboard community on the East Coast of nearly 100 live-aboard houseboats at the Gangplank Marina.

The Wharf PUD calls for a complete overhaul of the 26-acre site west of Maine Avenue, SW from the fish market to the Metropolitan Police Department pier. There will be a total of 1,500 multifamily units, three hotels with a total of 625 keys, 400,000 square feet of office, 300,000 square feet of ground floor retail wrapped around most buildings, a music hall, 2,500 parking spaces in five garages, and 400-



The waterfront promenade along The Wharf will have space for pedestrians, sidewalk cafés, and a streetcar line. Courtesy of Hoffman-Madison Waterfront

500 marina slips (including space for the live-aboard houseboats at Gangplank). Jason Kopp, President of the Gangplank Slipholders Association, is mostly pleased with the plan. “We are excited that the development team is committed to preserving the Gangplank live-aboard community during the transition and in the new marina. As our homes will be directly affected, we are a built-in and engaged stakeholder,” said Kopp. However, Kopp is waiting for the Hoffman-Madison Waterfront team to provide a transition plan that will avoid disruption of utilities and limit the shuffling of houseboats during the redevelopment.

Stan Eckstut from EE&K Architects gave an overview of the master plan for The Wharf at the community workshop. In his remarks, Eckstut mentioned that the design

of the Southwest Waterfront is not an interpretation of other cities’ waterfronts, but is uniquely Washington. More of the commercial activity will occur in the northwest portion of the development with less active uses closer to the existing residential neighborhood. Water Street, SW will be removed and the promenade will be widened to 60 feet, broken into three equal sections and in most places will be at “elevation 13” or 13 feet above the surface of the channel. The 20-foot section closest to buildings will be for outdoor

seating. The middle 20-foot section will be a new roadway called Wharf Street, SW with limited vehicular access and possibly a streetcar line that will run northwest-bound. The 20-foot section closest to the shoreline will be for pedestrians. All of the parking for the development will be located below-grade, which is unique for waterfront developments and all of the buildings are designed to not cast a shadow on the water’s edge. The blocks at The Wharf are designed to be 250 feet long compared to the typical length of building blocks along other corridors of the city such as K Street, NW, which is 600 feet. Eckstut also noted that the buildings are



The redesigned Maine Avenue, SW will feature a protected bike lane, separated from the road by a row of street trees. Courtesy of Hoffman-Madison Waterfront

designed so there is no back side to the buildings along Maine Avenue and as much attention is being paid to the water side of the development as the land side.

Public spaces will be focal points of the development, such as

M Street Landing, which will serve as the “front yard” for Arena Stage and feature family-oriented retail and perhaps an ice skating rink in the winter. The City Pier will be located at the terminus of 9th Street from Maine Avenue and will jut out into the Washington Channel. This will be the main civic space of the waterfront, where tall ships can dock, a band shell may be located at the end of the pier, and a landmark light tower may be located adjacent to the pier. This will also be the area that will have the most programmed activity. 7th Street Park will be at the terminus of 7th Street, SW and will be more formal in nature. It will be a grassy area with lots of trees and the retail space adjacent to the park will be reserved for higher-end restaurants. There will be a pedestrian pier with perhaps a gazebo and kayak rental facilities.

Maine Avenue, SW will become a neighborhood street, with ground floor convenience goods retail running along its length, such as dry cleaners, bakery, pharmacy, etc. Each side of Maine Avenue, SW will have a travel lane on the left, a second travel lane that shares space with a streetcar line, and a parking/loading lane. A row of street trees will separate the road from a 10-foot wide bike lane and a 15-foot sidewalk, so buildings will be 25 feet away from the street. Tour buses will be moved to Maine Avenue, SW near M Street Landing so dinner cruise ship patrons have easy access to the commercial pier.

Another unique feature of the development is the amount of affordable

housing that will be available. 30% of the first 500 residential units will be set aside as affordable housing - half of the affordable units will be for those earning up to 30% of Area Median Income (AMI) and the other half for those earning up to 60% of AMI. 20% of units over 500 will be reserved as workforce housing for those making 100% and 120% of AMI. The affordable units will blend in with market-rate housing, but two of the planned condominium buildings will be fully market-rate. There will be a mix of housing types besides the houseboats currently at the waterfront, including apartments, condos, hotel-served condos, and townhouses.

Due to the amount of density planned at The Wharf, about 55% of the site area will be public space. A consequence of the planned density at the project is taller buildings than what currently exist on the waterfront, which is of great concern to nearby residents. Harbour Square residents worry their views toward the Washington Channel will be marred by housing planned at Pier 4, currently used by the Spirit Cruises. Meanwhile, residents of Town Center Towers expressed concern at the community workshop that views from their condos would be blocked by tall buildings near 7th Street, SW.

About half of the buildings will rise to 130 feet, but will be stepped and angled to reduce the appearance of a wall of buildings along Maine Avenue, SW. The average height of the other buildings will be 60-70 feet. Both residential and commercial buildings

will have ground floor retail with a height of 20 feet; the residential buildings will be 10 feet per floor above the base level and commercial buildings will be 12 feet per floor. So, for a building 130 feet high, that translates to a 12-story residential building or a 10-story office building. According to zoning, an additional 18-foot mechanical penthouse is allowed on up to 33% of the surface area on top of the 130-foot buildings for a total of 148 feet. The taller buildings are concentrated in the middle of the development with shorter buildings closer to Arena Stage and the fish market.

At the community workshop, there were concerns raised by each of the five major themes.

Concerns brought by the Design & Public Realm group include: too many 130-foot buildings; Pier 4; and vistas and views. The Traffic & Transportation group had concerns regarding: shared pedestrian safety/crossing esplanade zone; bike path/parking (valet service); resident parking; streetcars; bus parking; accommodations for those with disabilities; rush hour impact and traffic during Nationals games; and a traffic study. In the Maritime Plan group, there are concerns about a transition plan for the Gangplank community; holding regular meetings with people who live along the waterfront; and what the community wants at the end of 7th Street Pier. The Sustainability & Environment group wants public access to green roofs & community gardens (integrating design into sustainability); more storm water retention and

providing Capitol Hill residents with the confidence and practical means to live safely and comfortably in their own homes

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\$649,000



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gray water; and demonstration sustainability externally by turning it "inside out". Finally, the Retail & Amenities group wants "being a local" to mean something with regard to parking, affordability, jobs, and opening a business; they want unique experiences at the music hall, food, shopping, etc.; and they want proprietors and facility managers to keep locals, their kids, and visitors safe.

Will any elements of the current Southwest Waterfront remain? There will be space for the Gangplank Marina and Capitol Yacht Club, which will both receive new clubhouse facilities. The fish market will remain, but will be cleaned up and enhanced with a new farmers market to replace the head house market that existed in the area back in the 1930s. Monty Hoffman, the lead developer of the Hoffman-Madison Waterfront team, stated they are hoping Cantina Marina and Jenny's Asian Fusion return once the redevelopment is complete, and Phillips may reappear in a smaller format restaurant.

The next step in the process is the ANC will vote on the Stage One PUD at their July 11 meeting and the Zoning Commission meeting will take place on July 18. Multiple Stage Two PUDs will be submitted closer to the start of construction that will give more details about building design. Construction is slated to begin by the end of 2012 and deliver in phases over the next eight to ten years.

"We welcome the rest of the District and our visitors, and we are devoted to bringing new life to the Southwest Waterfront," said Kopp. "This is going to be the neighborhood you want to visit, live in, and support." ★