

**FAIRFAX COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2007**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Walter L. Alcorn, At-Large
Frank A. de la Fe, Hunter Mill District
Earl L. Flanagan, Mount Vernon District
Rodney L. Lusk, Lee District
Timothy J. Sargeant, At-Large

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Suzanne F. Harsel, Braddock District
Nancy Hopkins, Dranesville District
Ronald W. Koch, Sully District

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT:

Barbara J. Lippa, Executive Director, Planning Commission Office
Kara A. DeArrastia, Deputy Clerk, Planning Commission

STAFF PRESENT:

John Payne, Acting Deputy Director, Real Estate and Development, Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
Roberta Butler, Development Officer, DHCD
Eileen McLane, Zoning Administrator, Zoning Administration Division (ZAD), Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ)
Donna Pesto, Senior Planner, ZAD, DPZ
Heidi Merkel, Senior Planner, Planning Division, DPZ
James Patteson, Director, Land Development Services (LDS), Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES)
Audrey Clark, Building Plan Review Division, LDS, DPWES
Michelle Brickner, LDS, DPWES
Eta Davis, LDS, DPWES

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Chairman Rodney L. Lusk called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. in the Board Conference Room, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia 22035. He noted that the first order of business was approval of minutes.

Commissioner Flanagan MOVED THAT THE REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE MINUTES OF JUNE 21, 2007 BE APPROVED.

Commissioner de la Fe seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

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Chairman Lusk explained that Braddock District Supervisor Sharon Bulova had presented a Board Matter on February 26, 2007, requesting that the Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RHA) and the Planning Commission examine the issues regarding a townhouse community in Burke Centre constructed to Universal Design principles by Landmark Property Development LLC and discuss how Fairfax County could encourage the application of such features in future developments. He noted that Committee members had received a package that included a description of the Board Matter; definitions of accessible, adaptable, and universal design; and a PowerPoint presentation that showed elements of Universal Design in different facilities. Chairman Lusk commented that Universal Design housing was applicable to everyone and not necessarily those who were physically disabled or challenged and the County should consider as a practice including Universal Design principles in all structures. He then asked each person to introduce him or herself. (A copy of the package is in the date file.)

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James Patteson, Director, Land Development Services (LDS), Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES), stated that the staff members in attendance were part of a committee, which was also composed of industry representatives, to review options for Universal Design and determine how to promote the construction of such housing in the County. He indicated that the Board of Supervisors had asked staff and the Planning Commission to examine the recommendations by John Thillmann, with Landmark Property Development LLC, based on his experiences with Universal Design, and evaluate the incentives and disincentives of such housing. Mr. Patteson said the Board also requested a study group, composed of staff and industry representatives, to review Mr. Thillmann's proposal to Supervisor Bulova and develop possible Policy Plan language regarding Universal Design housing.

Audrey Clark, Building Plan Review Division, LDS, DPWES, delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the background and visual examples of Universal Design elements and differences between accessible and Universal Design housing. She noted the technical definition of Universal Design: "The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design." She said the terms "Aging-in-Place," "Easy Living," and "Visitability" all applied to the concept of Universal Design. Ms. Clark explained that Ron Mace, an architect who had polio as a child and was confined to a wheelchair, coined the phrase in the 1980s after he realized that architectural designs for people with disabilities helped everyone. She indicated that Mr. Mace, along with a group of designers and consumers, developed the seven principles that became the Universal Design concept. She showed photographs of the front of houses built to Universal Design, including one constructed by Centex Homes in Prince William County. Ms. Clark described and presented photographs of the unique features of Universal Design:

- Leveled front entrance with no steps, three-foot wide doors, and four-foot wide hallways.
- Bathrooms that provide blocking in the walls instead of grab bars, knee space underneath the sink, a big roll-in shower, and ample space.
- Kitchens that offer sufficient knee room underneath the sinks and stoves, lower shelving, accessible cabinetry devices, and abundant space.

- Laundry facilities that are positioned low enough to be accessible.
- Optional elevators.
- Open floor plan with ample space.
- Special stair elements that include a width of at least four feet, different colored treads and risers, and hand rails on both sides of the staircase.
- Levered hardware on doors, tile or hardwood flooring, and lowered switches and raised outlets.
- A wide and open bedroom that is located on the first floor.

Ms. Clark commented that people of all ages and abilities could benefit from Universal Design housing. She outlined the distinctions between accessible design and Universal Design:

- Accessible design required all elements to be used, meaning that the entire structure must be accessible.
- Universal Design elements were versatile. For example, the concept of Universal Design was met if the structure had three-foot wide doors, four-foot wide hallways and stairs, and at least one five-foot turnaround in the bathrooms. She noted that only the first floor of the Centex house was totally accessible and met all Universal Design elements and the house was framed for a future elevator.
- Accessible design features were sometimes considered too institutional-looking and not as attractive as Universal Design elements because of grab bars in the bathrooms and elaborate ramps to the front door.
- Universal Design was not currently part of any code or standard, but more of a concept.
- Detached single-family dwellings were not subject to accessibility requirements in the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC), which was enforced by LDS. However, a new development of four or more townhouses three stories or more tall that provided elevators was subject to the USBC accessibility requirements.

In response to a question from Commissioner de la Fe, Ms. Clark said if an owner decided to install an elevator in his or her townhouse, he or she would be required to perform other improvements that equated to 20 percent of the total cost of the elevator. Mr. Patteson noted, for example, that if an owner spent \$50,000 on an elevator, he or she would have to spend \$10,000 on other improvements to make the dwelling more accessible, but would not have to bring the entire dwelling into compliance.

Responding to another question from Commissioner de la Fe, Ms. Clark said multi-family residential buildings were subject to different accessibility regulations. Mr. Patteson explained that a challenge faced by owners who install an elevator in their townhouse was the requirement to provide an accessible front entrance to the elevator separate from the garage.

Concluding her presentation, Ms. Clark said Fairfax County did not have the authority to modify the USBC to incorporate the Universal Design concept. She then asked if Committee members had any questions of staff.

In response to a question from Commissioner Flanagan, Ms. Clark said a house built to Universal Design could be childproof since the concept was to make living easier for people, such as accessibility to move a stroller to and through the front door.

Responding to a question from Chairman Lusk, Eta Davis, LDS, DPWES, noted that the increased cost for Centex to develop its Universal Design house was 15 to 20 percent mainly due to the zero threshold and grading. Ms. Clark pointed out that the biggest cost in the Landmark project was the elevators. John Payne, Acting Deputy Director, Real Estate and Development, Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), indicated that many of the products used in Universal Design were not readily available and were typically from small marketing runs. He said if more people became educated about the desirability of Universal Design elements, the associated costs would be driven down by demand and the supply would increase.

In response to a question from Commissioner Sargeant, Ms. Clark noted that the size of the Centex house was 3,300 to 3,500 square feet.

Commissioner Sargeant said the County should provide accompanying language regarding the transportation needs of residents who decide to age in place. He suggested that the Universal Design concept apply to houses of a smaller scale than the Centex house. He commented that people who opted to age in place typically did not want to take care of a giant home, noting that senior living developments usually offered small units that were more comfortable and convenient. Ms. Clark agreed and pointed out that houses built to Universal Design could be small and comfortable. Commissioner Sargeant questioned whether there should be further discussion on the size of a Universal Design house and how to ensure that it was livable in terms of transportation, especially with regard to Aging-in-Place.

Chairman Lusk commented that people would have the option to stay in their home if it had been pre-designed to accommodate them over time and they would not be obligated to move to an age-restricted community, which could present transportation issues.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Flanagan, Ms. Clark explained that developers were able to provide Universal Design elements as long as they met the minimum residential code and applicable accessibility standards.

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Mr. Patteson reviewed the current efforts and next steps to encourage Universal Design housing in the County. He indicated that an advocacy committee, composed of Ms. Clark and representatives from the Fairfax - Falls Church Community Services Board (FFCCSB), AARP, and DHCD, had been examining options on how to encourage the market to acquire more Universal Design elements in all construction in the County. Mr. Patteson explained that the Smart Design Task Force, a multi-agency endeavor to improve the facility planning process, had incorporated in the architectural and engineering guidelines specific guidance on how to build Universal Design elements in County facilities. He noted that the RHA had also adopted a

policy to build Universal Design elements in its developments and redevelopments. He said Mr. Thillmann had experienced problems with his Landmark project because after site plan approval, additional Universal Design elements required changes to the floor plan, setbacks, and Final Development Plan. Mr. Patteson explained that based on initial discussions with industry representatives, they recommended that the County advocate, not regulate, Universal Design; allow this concept to be market-driven; develop a density credit to provide Universal Design housing; and establish a Policy in the Comprehensive Plan to encourage such housing. He pointed out that Heidi Merkel, Senior Planner, Planning Division, Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ), had been reviewing current Policy language to determine how it could address Universal Design housing. He stated that staff would explore ways to advocate for Universal Design through outreach efforts. Mr. Patteson said staff would present Committee members with draft Policy Plan language and advocacy options for their review and feedback.

In response to a question from Chairman Lusk, Ms. Davis said in general the industry had not experienced a large demand for Universal Design from larger builders. She explained that a major re-modeler had indicated to her that there was a demand to retrofit homes to Universal Design and that it would be easier and cheaper if the house was designed this way initially. Ms. Clark commented that builders had also mentioned that it was inappropriate at this time to advocate Universal Design due to the current real estate market.

Commissioner Flanagan suggested that the County reserve the higher end of every density range for developers that provide elements that exceeded ordinary construction or design, such as green building and Universal Design, instead of providing them with a density bonus.

Commissioner Sargeant commented that if a Universal Design house was built smaller, it would help reduce costs associated with flooring and utilities and be affordable for people to live in for a longer period of time. He agreed with Commissioner Flanagan, noting that it made more land use sense if the County awarded an increase in density for projects that incorporated Universal Design, green building, and energy-efficient elements instead of for infill developments of giant houses that were incompatible with the surrounding area.

Commissioner Alcorn recommended that staff evaluate possible downsides to Universal Design housing, such as larger floor plan, use of more land, increased impervious surface, and higher energy and construction costs. He expressed support for encouraging the construction of such housing, but said he was not sure if it would be appropriate in all areas of the County.

Responding to a question from Commissioner de la Fe, Ms. Clark noted that there had been some effort to incorporate Universal Design concepts into the International Residential Code but none had been successful.

In response to a question from Chairman Lusk, Ms. Merkel explained that staff had started exploring where to appropriately incorporate language in the Policy Plan to encourage the construction of Universal Design housing. She noted that staff would also evaluate the benefits

and potential downsides of such housing. She said staff did not have an immediate timeframe to develop its recommendations, but she would keep the Committee updated on staff's progress.

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Chairman Lusk noted that the Planning Commission had deferred decision on the proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment (ZOA) for Workforce Housing to the Commission meeting tonight. He requested that DPZ staff brief Committee members on where this decision stood relative to the Board of Supervisors' action on September 24, 2007 to adopt the proposed Policy Plan amendments regarding workforce housing.

Donna Pesto, Senior Planner, Zoning Administration Division (ZAD), DPZ, stated that the decision on the ZOA had been deferred to allow staff to consider comments made during the Commission public hearing held on September 19, 2007 and also comments made from the Board's Housing Committee meeting held on September 14, 2007. She explained that based on these comments and others received from various sources, staff proposed to move the administrative provisions from the Ordinance to a separate guideline document to be adopted by the Board as a policy for the administration and implementation of the provision of proffered workforce dwelling units. (A memorandum dated September 27, 2007 from Eileen McLane, Zoning Administrator, ZAD, DPZ, with the following attachments: proposed policy document, proposed staff changes to the ZOA, and the adopted Plan amendment was distributed to the Commission, a copy of which is in the date file.)

Responding to a question from Commissioner de la Fe, Ms. Pesto pointed out that the only elements that would remain in the Ordinance related to the accommodation of additional density provided by the Comprehensive Plan. She said the proposed changes satisfied most if not all of the concerns received. Ms. McLane noted that staff had only restructured the language in the amended ZOA. Ms. Pesto further noted that staff added a few lead-in paragraphs in the separate Board policy document.

In response to another question from Commissioner de la Fe, Ms. Pesto stated that the County Attorney's Office had determined that the proposed changes were within the scope of the current public advertisement for the ZOA.

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The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.
Rodney L. Lusk, Chairman

CLOSING

September 27, 2007

For a verbatim record of this meeting, reference may be made to the audio recording which can be found in the Planning Commission Office, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 330, Fairfax, Virginia 22035.

Minutes by: Kara A. DeArrastia

Approved: January 23, 2008

Linda B. Rodeffer, Clerk
Fairfax County Planning Commission