

Ramsey Homes Community Meeting
Verbatim Comments Submitted by Participants
Thursday, May 26, 2016 – 7 p.m.
Charles Houston Recreation Center, 901 Wythe Street

1. Proposed and Alternate Concepts and Permutations

Proposed (Generally)

- Don't understand the desire to preserve. One speaker said the building would be transformed to be very liveable with new façade, etc. If it's all new what historical significance is there?
 - I believe city funds can be put to better use in other affordable housing projects than on preserving a 1950s building.
 - 1 larger building looks more dense and less eye appealing than the proposed 2 buildings.
- I like the new proposed concept. I prefer 2 units vs. 4 if used for housing.
- I don't want my tax payer dollars used to preserve a building that causes hurt to its residents. If the second option must happen – since only these options costs the City money – those advocating for it should have to pay, NOT the City. Please resolve this issue quickly so the residents will have closure.
- Prefer massing of original proposal – long 3-story streetfront less ominous than 4 stories for ¾ of length
- I prefer the proposed concept. It is the most efficient way to provide affordable housing that fits with the community. I don't think the single building is worth preserving and I'd support a plaque or monument.
- I was at the table with two 'BAR' representatives. It was clear they were the only two in the conversation that were favoring the Alternative concept. All others that I talked with favored the proposed concept (5 including myself)
- Proposed. No thank you [*to Alternate Concepts*] – put people first!
- Proposed concept will better serve the purpose because alternative concept has no added value, create isolation and stigma. Cost for alternative is too much.
- Do not see value of preserving one unit when the resources for the rehab of the building could be better spent on more affordable housing. I do like the design of Alternate concept and would like to see something like it on whole block with even more affordable/workforce units.
- Seems like the unknown purpose of the 'preserved' building is a risk element. I prefer the original/proposed plan.
- I favor the proposed concept because it provides more units (not counting a potential number of units in the preserved buildings) and provides more total open space. Also, the expanded percentage of ground open space for the alternatives seems to be more attached to the preserved unit than the other building and its residents. I also question if the additional funding needed to preserve one unit is cost effective and the best use of funds. Additionally, if preserve the building for 2 families, how closely will the building adhere to its historic structure.

Alternate (Generally)

- Prefer the alternate concept. It is the best of worlds, more affordable housing and open space, along with preserving Alexandria's history.
- Alternate – like more ground level open space. Would prefer an alternative that preserves both corner historic units and shifts a single new 4 story building in between the two. Consider shifting the 4 story portion a few feet east.
- Alternative is a very good compromise. Yields more greenspace, larger setbacks, and preservation goals – all for a very modest increase in height. Would like to flip buildings – keep southern original building and put new building on northern side of block.
- Maximize the affordable housing units – like the aesthetics of the alternative building design. Use the entire site for affordable housing even with the 4 story on the first proposal.
- I prefer the 4 story option. My yard is right under the proposed. I'd rather a 4th floor slope than a roof deck noise. (neither is good for me but that's the better.). Best would be to preserve the Pendletons building.
- Alternate concept
- Alternate is much the better concept
- Alternate is best
- I love the alternate concept for housing

Other

- Cost of the alternate is a concern, as the age and condition of the existing Ramsey Homes are probably going to require more funding for renovation. Both alternatives are fine, however. Architecture could be a little sexier, but so it goes.
- Neither. No more affordable housing in this area or the least amount as possible.
- Long term costs may be less for one building vs two.

Comments compiled by one table facilitator

- Alternative – shift building to north to save 2 buildings
- Alternative – green space is a plus
- Alternative – not crazy about 4 floors
- Alternative – preserves character, would like to save 2 buildings
- I like all of the uses proposed, but really like the idea of preserving
- Whether two or 4 houses, or the other uses, I like the preservation initiative
- How preservation is going to be paid for is the big issue
- In terms of height, the concepts are about the same: the proposed is 39', plus a guardrail and the alternative is only 44
- I like the alternate. I don't think buildings are historic, but the community does. My question is why is the house to the left of the multifamily building being preserved, rather than one to the right – that is closer to neighbors?
- I like the alternate, especially the ground level open space, however, I'd prefer we go even further and save one building on either end. I suggest that we move the fourth story back further.
- I like that there is more ground level open space, but I think roof top space is great in the urban environment.

- I prefer the alternate as well. I really like the civic open space across from the rec center. I would like to see the massing developed further.
- I like the alternative. I got involved in following this project because of preservation. I'm not crazy about the 4th story, but know there has to be a certain number of units to make the project feasible. Architecture is the key - reduce the massing; break it up and create depth and different textures between brick and wood materials. The site needs trees to provide noise, vibration and sound barriers to Route 1.
- The alternate is preferred. Keep the preserved building as a residential use so current tenants have a choice between a two story home and MF. Use as a day care will change the feel of the building and the neighborhood entirely.
- I don't know enough about the project to have an opinion yet. I'm a new city employee but here as private citizen, representing my church which is in the neighborhood.
- I represent a committee that wants preservation. The alternate plan is good in terms of preserving historic character. I would like to have a building preserved on either end of the site. ([Name redacted]: we tried but couldn't get there in terms of the number of units needed. The yield was around 30).
- I also like preserving one on each end. Could you connect the existing structures with the new to maximize the open space?
- I think additional cost analysis needs to be done... why isn't one building less expensive? It seems you would save significantly on systems, etc.
- Have micro units been explored in the new building? It seems you could get a lot of units and these are being built everywhere.
- Why is City paying for the rehabilitation? I find that the financing of every ARHA project is confusing. Maybe it is intentionally impossible to understand.
- City staff can help augment ARHA staff's work on the financials. They have the knowledge.
- I love the alternative being residential. I love it being preserved. I knew that preserving it as part of the Black History Museum would be an issue, so this is a good solution, and what it was meant for.

2. Potential Use of the Preserved Building

- If there is a preserved building I would prefer to see it retained for residential housing
- If the preserved space is used for commercial use I would like for ARHA to generate income.
- Seems extremely expensive, in total and per unit. What is opportunity cost to other potential affordable housing projects?
- Housing is a great option, but a support use would also be great. Something like a daycare or some other income-generating use that would also be for the residents.
- Residential is good 2 or 4 units as well as daycare or other community type use compatible and complementary to Black History Museum and Watson Reading Room.
- Housing – absolutely!
- None. Proposed Concept.
- None.
- Use it to house people who need it.

- Residential only – 2 units maximize larger units for larger families
- Concerned that any use would not be good or appeal to the community
- Housing seems to make the most sense to both preserve affordable stock and avoid HUD complications.
- Possible uses of renovated building – income generating services for residents and neighbors, such as sliding scale daycare for children or seniors; assisted living (affordable)
- Irrelevant? – It would ‘potentially’ be all sorts of things, but what is it likely to be? This seems like a distraction to me.
- The area desperately needs more daycare so I suggest a day care center. Spaces could be reserved with a subsidy for building residents, while others generate income.
- Market rate residential or mixed-use
- If this is chosen, I think it should be used for a community center to help build a strong sense of community among all the neighbors. Plus this could provide alternative activities for children and youth in the neighborhood.
- (4) 750sf units
- 1st priority – more units, 3 bedroom good; 2nd priority – use for ancillary Black History
- Use as residential to give people a choice – where would funding come from for day care
- For housing or museum

Comments compiled by one table facilitator

- Prefer residential use for this building / other uses may require more funding
- Use for 2 units
- Residential use provides more choices
- With regard to the use, ARHA should make the best decision, the best business decision.

3. Open Space and Use of the Alley Ends

- Don’t know enough about alley use to effectively comment
- I like the idea of a closed alley. A traffic pattern will need to be created. Green and open space is important. I also like the idea of utilizing rooftop space for maybe a garden and or a barbeque location.
- Prefer open space in mid-block; feels like a yard for the historic building in the second alternative. Close alleys to maximize – yes.
- The idea of more open space is also great, but really need to think about the traffic patterns and access for trash, snow removal, etc.
- Like ground level increased open space with alternative plan; would be good to add rooftop green space to get to basic 40% common open space requirements; would like alleys to remain functional while being greened with porous pavers and plant large trees adjacent to the north alley. If only one alley closed make it north.
- Old design did not have enough open space. Alternative has good open space. “Greening” both alley entrances is a great idea.
- I don’t have strong feelings on this. I’d just like to see the project move forward to provide housing we can be proud of as city residents. I’d defer to City zoning on the open space and alley ends.

- I'm ambivalent on this topic.
- Maximize safety and open space (in that order); use 4 stories to maximize housing while preserving open space
- If it will work, take the space for open space.
- The more open space, the better alley ends should wide enough for traffic (movers, trash, vehicles, etc.)
- I like the increase in ground-level green space in the alternate, as it becomes more of a public good and could definitely see the value in closing alley ends, assuming it's not a problem for vehicle egress. Closing at least the north alley end would also increase safety for pedestrians on Wythe, given that the current driveway is a little blind.
- Alley way – importance of safe access by neighbors, fire and rescue, trash and garbage removal, move-in and move-outs by residents and neighbors.
- I question the priority of open space on this site. 1) the site is small, so an open space priority limits the development potential; 2) the site is adjacent to an entire block of a community center; 3) the site is on Route 1, which is far too noisy to allow open space to be enjoyed ... particularly by children or pets.
- Alley-end re-think is interesting! Keep at it. I like it.
- Traffic and loitering should be addressed in revised alley. Drug activity is already a problem...I suggest improved lighting and sidewalks and speed bumps. Thank you!
- The more, the better.
- I would like to get a better understanding of how the alley could be closed and still provide access to the underground parking
- North end of alley should be turned into civic open space (410 sf)
- Like the alley open space concept.
- Pavers that drain
- Look into the purchase of the garages to better make more green space

Comments compiled by one table facilitator

- Keep one end open but make it green
- Soften southern end of building
- Key is to work on scale/breaking up the alternative building design
- Need green – trees, etc.
- Look at it as one-way
- Great idea to purchase garages for increased open space – more options
- Persons most impacted should be involved
- Keep them functional but make it more green
- Look at garages as an option re: purchase
- Fire/trash access
- Check easements in alley
- Articulate rear façade
- Shift building back from alley
- Expanded green space and the closed alley is a good ideal. It will make the site it much more beautiful, including environmentally beautiful.
- The alleys are great, and highly functional. But, we can make them green and preserve their function. Making them greener is environmentally friendly.

- Please continue to look at turning radii. Make sure it will work with trash and other types of trucks. However, it looks like the garage has been improved in both options.
- The alleys should stay functional, but be as green as possible?
- What is the cost for closing the alleys and, if so, who will pay? Those impacted need to be contacted if the City is serious about pursuing this idea.
- I like the idea of closing down the alley.

4. Other

- Look at potential for open space on the 4th floor in the alternate concept, hybrid concept.
- Architecture still needs to be majorly redesigned. Need to visibly break up massing on building.
- The primary take-away from discussion at my table was speed to completion.

Comments compiled by one table facilitator

- Street setbacks could be larger
- No rear setback
- Could you save 2 end buildings?
- Could there be more open space?
- Use of a co-op for preserving building
- Use of preserved building could be other uses
- Reduce elevation/height
- Alleys will add to visual open space
- Add trees to absorb noise
- Why 50 or more units?
- Why cost of alternative building is more as it compares to the preservation building?