

Summary of Presentation and Comments:

Presentation:

- David Ball, President of Union Station Redevelopment Corporation introduced the project and presenters. David also welcomed Beverley Swaim-Staley who will become the new USRC President and CEO on Sept 11, 2012.
- Emily Eig, historic preservation consultant from EHT Tracerics, began the presentation by explaining the previous efforts taken to prevent an adverse effect; this design exercise has identified and attempted to avoid and minimize the adverse effects arising from the project.
- DRAFT Assessment of Effects Report and this September 10, 2012 presentation are available on the USRC website for review. Comment section also available, and comments will be received from anyone interested in the project until October 25th.
- Emily discussed the various design alternatives which led to the preferred design alternative presented (Scheme 12e) in July 2011.
- Comments on Scheme 12e were received by email, by direct postings to the USRC website and by U.S. Mail following the July 2011 presentation. Responses were included in the DRAFT Assessment of Effects Report.
- As part of the consideration of the comments received following the July 2011 presentation, USRC retained Wyman/Whitehouse to study and provide recommendations on: a) how to unify and reduce the amount of signage – especially confusing signs that create visual distraction in the historic spaces in the station, and b) how to provide signage that will adequately alert visitors to the station of shops and businesses in the lower level spaces of the Main Hall without causing the level of visual intrusion posed in Scheme 12e.
- A Letter of Adverse Effects (including the DRAFT Assessment of Effects Report) was submitted by the Federal Railroad Administration (the project's official government agency sponsor – and the Owner of Union Station) to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on June 25, 2012; it is posted on the USRC website.
- Where we are today (September 2012): Proposed refinements resulting from comments received on Scheme 12e (the preferred alternative):
 - Removal of Luxury Merchandising Units (LMUs) from the center of the Main Hall,
 - Simplified floor openings with no overhead structure and containing only glass railings,
 - New pylon-like signage identifying shops below.
- Barry Lustig, Senior Vice President of Development & Leasing at Ashkenazy Acquisition Corp., discussed the many compromises made to the design over the past 4.5 years of design and consultation. He stressed that the design must be relevant to the retail, food and beverage providers that have proven to be what the users want in the Station.
- Rick Conrath, GTM Architects, explained how the various consultation meetings, public comments and consultation with Amtrak and Wyman/Whitehouse regarding Main Hall circulation drove the preferred design alternative (Scheme 12e, including the proposed refinements, listed above).
- Rick discussed the floor space that will be gained by the removal of the Center Café and existing fountains (which currently function as planters). About half of the lost square footage will be gained back with the new plan.

- Rick mentioned that the lengths of the new openings were dictated by required head height clearances for the escalators, and the width being dictated by code-mandated clearances to prevent pinch hazards.
- Ben Whitehouse of Wyman/Whitehouse presented the proposed pylon-like signage:
 - There will be two pylons total (one per opening)
 - They will be placed between the escalators –the exact width of the pylons will be studied
 - There are currently three potential designs: using flat surfaces (with sharp corners); surfaces containing rounded corners; and a hybrid of the two. Each utilizes slightly different light-emitting-diode (LED) technology, and hence will have varying degrees of brightness and resolution (crispness of image).
 - At present, the pylons are shown on the drawings to rise 30' above the floor of the Main Hall.
 - All of these ideas are subject to refinement based on the installation of a mock-up (date not set yet, but will be posted) and the preparation of Design Standards to govern message content and other technical issues (brightness, how much flashing is allowed [if any], images moving on the signboard, etc.). USRC will manage pylon maintenance and programming.
- Ben described the new simplified Main Hall space without the restaurant kiosk as being defined by the grand open space; two escalators leading into the lower theater area on the lower level; and monumental pylons identifying the retail below while forming no barrier to sight lines of the Main Hall, Amtrak schedule board or ticket desk. A proposed information desk will be centrally located on axis with the building.

Comments:

Below is the summary of questions and comments received at the September 10, 2012 meeting. The questions below and those received by U.S. Mail, email and posted to the USRC website, will be considered after the end of the 45 day review period, close-of-business October 25, 2012:

- *Charles McMillion, Resident:* How important are the LED light columns to the developer? Concern the signs will read as bright billboards and compete with the efforts to reduce clutter. Who will manage the sign design and what is allowable?
- *Andrew Lewis, DC State Historic Preservation Office:* Ongoing design review will include signage.
- *Shauna Holmes, Capitol Hill Restoration Society:* Explain in detail the information desk signage and/or lighting as shown in the renderings. What is the composition, size, etc.?
- *Nell Ziehl, National Trust for Historic Preservation:* Design is much improved from original design. Regarding the pylons, will we (consulting parties) have the opportunity to review signage and wayfinding schemes as a whole?
- *Tom Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts:* In favor and see tremendous improvement in the design. Elements have quality to be reversible. Openings are minimal. Suggest the pylon signage: 1.) should pursue a physical mock-up (option 3 is not preferred); and 2.) develop guidelines with interested parties for display of information and come to an agreement that all would sign off on.
- *Drury Tallant, Capitol Hill Restoration Society:* Big positive. The Amtrak sign is absent from rendering (slide 35). Amtrak sign's scale is of concern, more so than the light pylons.

- *Charles Allen, Councilmember Tommy Wells:* Design complements the Main Hall and the lights will draw the eye down to lower level. The neon colors make it appear much more billboard-like, attention to light and colors will be critical.
 - *Shauna Holmes, Capitol Hill Restoration Society:* Encouraging words should not be taken as acceptance from consulting parties. This is a preliminary scheme and should not be interpreted as “everyone in the room likes/agrees with it.”
 - *Rebecca Miller, DC Preservation League:* Economic viability is referred to in Assessment of Effect Report. Information has been previously requested (from July 2011 meeting) without an adequate response. Is it just about AAC making more money? Is the Station currently losing money? (Subsequent to this question being raised, DCPL and NTHP will provide written questions regarding economic viability for USRC and USI to respond.)
 - *Steve Strauss, District Department of Transportation:* Point is public sector is trying to develop a world-class center and the Station is an economic driver. It should not be underestimated the expenses to successfully operate the Station and consider the 5 year capital plan. Economic development of sales tax revenue as well as employment and sales tax should also be included in the ‘economic viability’ discussion/study. Also, need to continue to discuss the proposed signage, particularly the electronic signage regarding trains.
 - *Nell Ziehl, National Trust for Historic Preservation:* Everyone wants a successful Station and for people to make money – specific changes to increase viability should be addressed. Can AAC provide information on how this proposed effort will continue to preserve the Station?
 - *David Glendenning, Resident:* Is restoration of ceiling part of the Section 106? (Answer: No)
 - *Louise Brodnitz, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation:* Mitigation suggestions; Re-do of existing, outdated Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). A Programmatic Agreement (PA) would replace the MOA for the short term Section 106 process, while a new MOA is altogether redeveloped/rewritten.
 - *Andrew Lewis, DC State Historic Preservation Office:* Agree with mitigation identified in the Letter of Adverse Effects – but only as a minimum. What other creative forms of mitigation can be suggested to truly make up for the loss of the historical character associated with the uncluttered (and wide-open) grandness of the Main Hall space?
 - Perhaps prepare a list of restoration projects not related to the building’s day-to-day maintenance or scheduled long-term maintenance that could be used to complete restoration activity anticipated in the 1985 project – but which could not be afforded at the time, such as:
 - Restoration of portions of the gold-leafed coffered ceiling in the Main Hall that could not be afforded in 1985
 - Improvement of the lighting above the laylights in the Concourse – can the original skylights be restored to allow daylight in?
- Whatever mitigation is proposed, it should be physically tangible – “Bricks and Mortar” projects. Real opportunities to significantly improve the character of the Station’s interior and exterior.
- *Drury Tallant, Capitol Hill Restoration Society:* Assuming the development of the 35,000 square feet in the lower level proceeds will there be any public review of this space? Will there be other access points to the lower level; particular interest is the connection to Metro.
 - *Nell Ziehl, National Trust for Historic Preservation:* Long standing concern of coordination of planning. Happy to see potential for fill-in of penetrations in the future. Would like to be included in any agreements. Would like the opportunity to comment on the DRAFT MOA.

- *Bill Wright, Committee of 100:* There are several versions of the Master Plan. Which one are we referring to and will it involve public participation? (*Answer: Master Plan will be properly identified and yes, public will be involved/participating – one repository for comments needs to be made available.*)
- *Shauna Holmes, Capitol Hill Restoration Society:* Specifically will the DRAFT MOA be circulated amongst the consulting parties; is there a procedure in place? (*Answer: The DRAFT will be posted on USRC website and all consulting parties will be notified via email with any updates.*)
- There was discussion on the pylon mock-up. Amtrak requested it not be done during the holidays between Thanksgiving and Christmas. AAC believes the netting should be down with openings in the floor complete to accurately model the space. Louise Brodnitz stated it should be discussed if the mock-up is part of post agreement design and who will have ultimate say on approval of design.
- *Nell Ziehl, National Trust for Historic Preservation:* To adequately comment on the design an answer on the financial/economic viability should be addressed.
- Was agreed that DCPL and NTHP will provide written questions regarding economic viability for USRC, FRA and AAC to respond to.