

# Del Ray Citizens Association

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July 26, 2006

Chairman Andrew Hall  
Alexandria Potomac Yard Fire Station and Affordable Housing Task Force  
c/o City of Alexandria  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

VIA EMAIL

Subject: Future of Windsor Fire House

Dear Chairman Hall,

The Del Ray Citizens Association Executive Board and Land Use Committee strongly opposes the proposed reduction of fire suppression services currently housed at Fire Station 202 on East Windsor Avenue; of an informal survey of members and other residents, a clear majority concur. The Windsor Station provides essential services to the Del Ray community. Moreover, the historically important building and its location are a vital part of the fabric of Del Ray. There are several reasons that the Association opposes the proposal.

First, and most importantly, the Windsor Station provides critical fire and rescue services to Del Ray homes, businesses, public and private schools, and daycare facilities from a central location that provides excellent response time to the community. In any fire emergency, mere seconds can mean the difference between life and death. This is particularly important for Del Ray, with its large number of older frame homes in close proximity to one another and low water pressure and fire flow. Since statistically, a fire doubles in size every 60 seconds it is left to burn, the city's proposal puts Del Ray's older structures at significant risk.

Moreover, Del Ray is home to a significant number of both older life-long residents and very young children for whom emergency response times and proximity of emergency professionals are particularly critical. Forcing Del Ray to rely on a firehouse outside the community—potentially increasing response times by critical minutes—is an unacceptable course that could result in significant property damage, injury, and even death for residents of Del Ray in the event of a fire emergency.

In light of the need for centrally located fire protection given Del Ray's housing stock and citizenry, it is troubling that the city would consider relocating fire services from the station when there is no professional empirical study of Alexandria's fire stations and service areas to support such a decision. That the Department would recommend such a proposal documented evidence providing solid support for the recommendation demonstrates a worrisome lack of concern for the safety of Del Ray residents.

*Celebrating 100 years of the Town of Potomac  
1908 - 2008*

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The Windsor Station is an anchor of the Del Ray community. It is a place where those in fear can go for shelter. Our children know the firemen and know that the firehouse is a place where they can seek care, comfort, and protection. Our many community events would not be the same without the wonderful openness of the Windsor Station. The historic town hall building reminds us of why we choose to live in this close-knit community. In addition to the potential losses of property and even lives, the closure of the firehouse, which has served this community for 80 years, will no doubt leave a gaping hole in the Del Ray community.

With the high-density development along Route 1 in both Arlington and Alexandria, we expect that a station in Potomac Yard will be a necessity—if not today, then certainly at some point in the future. However, despite the merits of the addition of a new firehouse in Potomac Yard, it should not be a zero sum game in which Del Ray loses while the new community in Potomac Yard wins. The cost of a new station should not be the destruction of a neighboring community's long-standing and much needed institution; rather, the cost of the additional station should be borne by the developer and the newfound Potomac Yard tax base.

While we applaud the creation of the Alexandria Potomac Yard Fire Station and Affordable Housing Task Force, the lack of an open and public process in the decision about the future of the Windsor Station so far is a disappointment for residents of a city that prides itself on careful, thoughtful decision making with extensive civic involvement. Our understanding is that the issue will go to the Planning Commission in September, before most civic associations will have an opportunity to meet and discuss the proposal. The urgent need to deal with this proposal, directly following City Council elections and the shutting down of civic associations over the summer break, seems like a “done deal” with citizens being asked to “participate” in a decision that has already been made. Even in our discussion with city staff, it seems as though they are already acting as if the decision has been made to relocate services to Potomac Yard.

We believe that the approach taken by the city—consolidating all of the issues into one overall decision—is improper. We urge the city to take on the various issues separately and on their own merits while also evaluating the overall impact of any decisions. We see three significant issues facing the city: (1) whether Potomac Yard requires a new fire station, and if so, when; (2) the appropriate deployment of fire suppression and emergency response services throughout the entire city; and, (3) the need and source for additional affordable housing stock. Each of these three major issues should be addressed through significant and measured evaluation, rather than forced through without adequate public participation. We also feel that city staff, including the Fire Department, should explore and present additional options for consideration rather than the one option presented at your most recent meetings.

The Del Ray Citizens Association strongly opposes any reduction in fire suppression and emergency services at the Windsor Station. The city should not rush to obtain a new fire station at the expense of disrupting our community. At the very least, a more extensive professional

empirical study and public process to examine the need and funding implications of such a change are essential. The city should not jump to accept the proposal without seeking both community and professional input regarding its impact and evaluating other options in a full open public process—rather than one expedited under pressure from the Potomac Yard developers. Further, it clearly should not seek to create community in one neighborhood by destroying it in another.

Although we anticipate that the process currently in motion will continue, especially in light of the attractive offer by the developer to the City to build a new fire station that includes a significant amount of affordable housing, we hereby ask that the distribution of fire suppression resources and emergency services throughout the City be considered separately from the acceptance of a new station. We encourage your Task Force to make as much information available to the public as soon as possible. Additionally, we request that empirical data documenting no statistically significant degradation in either fire suppression or emergency services be provided to the DRCA and to the public through at least one community meeting. Finally, we ask you to press the city to address the issues outlined above in as measured an approach as was taken with the Potomac Yard Concept Plan with adequate time for full public participation.

Sincerely,

Larry Altenburg  
President

cc: Mayor, Vice-Mayor, and Council Members  
City Manager  
Editor, *Alexandria Times*  
Editor, *Alexandria Gazette Packet*  
Editor, *Del Ray Sun*