Executive Summary

Final Report from Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force

In passing Resolution 2188, City Council unanimously established the *Potomac Yard Fire Station and Affordable Housing Task Force* consisting of eleven members. Eight members remained active throughout the summer between July and September 15, 2006. The City Staff, at the direction of the Task Force, embarked on a public education outreach program consisting of Public Meetings, a web based information portal maintained on the City's website, distributing over 11,000 flyers door-to-door announcing the last three public meetings, holding press conferences with the media, and public announcements of the meetings via Alexandria's E-News. The Task Force met at several different locations throughout this timeframe to enable a variety of local opinions to be gathered and to reach a broader audience.

The Task Force and the Public have been critical of the timing of the proposal and the turn-around time required in reporting these findings and recommendations. The Task Force applauded the Planning Commission's and Developer's decision to defer the action until the October 2006 docket as it demonstrated that the parties involved were listening. The Task Force and the Public were critical of the lack of quantitative and qualitative data and unified message that the City Staff presented in the public meetings held early in the process.

The Task Force and the residents of Alexandria, through careful scrutiny and persistent questioning of all the facts, have received a magnitude of data. Review of this data in its totality included presentations, fiscal impacts, public safety and quality of life of both the employees of the Fire Department and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Task Force recommends, by majority vote, that the City and the Developer proceed with building the proposed Station 209 with 60 Affordable and Workforce Housing and relocation of the fire suppression and Hazmat trucks from Station 202.

Final Report from Potomac Yard Fire Station & Affordable Housing Task Force

Background

On June 13, 2006 by Resolution 2188 the members of City Council unanimously established the Ad hoc Community Task Force known as the: Potomac Yard Fire Station and Affordable Housing Task Force.

The Task Force shall consist of 11 members. The composition of the work group shall include representatives from affected residential and commercial areas and members with training and professional experience in affordable housing and in fire service. There will be seven representatives appointed by affected civic associations (Del Ray, Northeast, Mt. Jefferson, Lynhaven, Warwick Village, Inner City and Potomac Greens), two representatives of the area business community, one member with fire service expertise (not affiliated with the Alexandria Fire Department) and one member with affordable housing expertise. The term of the Task Force shall be one year with the ability to continue for an additional year if needed.

Members of the Task Force shall be appointed by the Mayor, with input from other members of the City Council; provided, that a member who is the representative of an organization shall be nominated by the organization. The members appointed shall serve until the expiration of the term of the task force; provided, that a member who is the representative of an organization shall cease to be a member at such time that such member shall cease to be a member in good standing of the organization for which such member serves as representative and may be replaced by another representative appointed by the Mayor.

The Task Force will:

- (1) Determine the pros and con of relocating the fire suppression units from Fire Station 202 in Del Ray to the new Potomac Yard development and the concept of including affordable housing in the building.
- (2) Solicit public input from the community about the relocation of the fire suppression unit and establishment of affordable housing units on the same site.
- (3) Report back to the Planning Commission and to the City Council in early September with their findings and recommendations.

The Task Force may adopt rules and regulations on procedure and other matters so long as same are not inconsistent with the City Code including, but not limited to, the establishment of sub-committees through which it may carry on its functions and purposes. The mayor shall appoint from among the members a convener, who shall serve as chairman. The city manager shall designate City staff as needed to provide administrative and logistical support to the work group.

Mission

The Task Force was comprised of the following active membership who guided the community outreach effort and accepted public comment and input, and produced this report for the Planning Commission, the Honorable Mayor, and the Members of City Council.

Andrew Hall, Del Ray Citizens Association & Chairman
John Starcher, Warwick Village Citizens Association
Melissa Watson, Lynhaven Citizens Association
Mariella Posey, NorthEast Citizens' Association
Patricia Schubert, Inner City Civic Association
Kate Rollins, Old Town Greens Townhome Owners Association
Tom Welsh, Potomac West Business Association
Jim Schwartz, Chief Arlington County Fire Department, Fire Representative

It also should be recognized that a tremendous amount of support by City Staff was received throughout the process and that level of support is commended!

Meeting Dates and Locations

It should be noted that attendance counts are not necessarily accurate. Although sign-in sheets were available, not everyone chose to utilize the sign-in sheets. The following meetings were Task Force work sessions; although the public was welcome to attend, no public comment was invited - August 2nd, September 7th, 10th, 14th. Two informative meetings not included in the table below were the Potomac West Business Association luncheon on August 21st and the Del Ray Citizens Association Meeting on September 11th.

Meeting Dates Locations and Attendees

Date	Location	Task Force Members	City Staff	Guests
July 18, 2006	Mt. Vernon Recreation Center	8	11	4
July 25, 2006	Mt. Vernon Community School - cafeteria	7	13	18
August 2, 2006	Mt. Vernon Recreation Center	6	8	0
August 8, 2006	Mt. Vernon Community School - cafeteria	6	11	9
August 15, 2006	Mt. Vernon Recreation Center	6	13	6
August 22, 2006	Cora Kelly School - cafeteria	6	19	16
August 29, 2006	GW Middle School - cafeteria	6	15	28
September 5, 2006	GW Middle School - auditorium	8	22	39
September 7, 2006	Mt. Vernon Recreation Center	6	5	1
September 10, 2006	Mt. Vernon Recreation Center	7	0	3
September 14, 2006	Mt. Vernon Recreation Center	7	4	2

Findings & Recommendations

The following are the Task Force findings and recommendations in no order of precedence. The information contained within this section, are the majority views of the Task Force.

The Task Force Findings Are:

- This Proposal, based on a poorly developed message, lack of content development and a lack of qualitative data, therefore, the initial reaction from City residents was negative. The City Staff, in response to the Task Force and citizen's request for data was able to respond with a unified message, and a fully developed theme that included both quantitative and qualitative data. A more positive response of the first time audience participants was noted by the Task Force in latter meetings that occurred in August and September Public Work Sessions.
- Lack of strategic planning by City Staff and the Fire Department was found to be unsettling. The City is experiencing unprecedented infill development throughout the City to include; Potomac Yard, Eisenhower Valley, Seminary Road, Old Town Alexandria, Del Ray and Inner City. The City needs to immediately take action to increase the coverage of EMS units and Fire Suppression units in the City with special attention being paid to Eisenhower Valley.
- It is imperative that facility upgrades as budgeted and planned for Station 202, immediately proceed in order to improve the overall quality of life for the Fire and EMS Staff working at Station 202. Station 202 will continue to operate for the next five to eight years with the same level of EMS staff.
- The proposed Station 209 is approximately four (4) blocks east and eight (8) blocks north of Station 202; approximately one mile. This station will provide the same four (4) minute response time as the current first due response unit for the areas in the communities known as Rosemont, Del Ray, Mt. Jefferson, Lynhaven, Arlandria, and Warwick Village and actually improve delivery of fire suppression services to the Alexandria and Arlington boundary.
- Affordable Housing combined with the fire station maximizes use of available space and is a positive footprint for future fire stations.
- Most of the eastern regions of Alexandria (east of I395) with the proposed Station 209 enjoy a redundant fire suppression system within a four (4) minute response time.
- The proposed Station 209 will provide better coverage for the city-wide fire protection and regional response systems.

- Moving Emergency Medical Services (EMS) from Station 202 without placing EMS Units in **both Stations 203 AND 209** would be detrimental to public safety.
- Even though the developer will provide funding for a three bay station, funding for the fourth bay of Station 209 is a fiscal issue and concern.
- The proposed Station 209 is a much needed improvement to quality of life for Fire Department personnel that will be transferred from Station 202.
- The economic advantage of co-locating Station 209 with approximately 60
 Workforce and Affordable Housing Units is one of the most fiscally
 responsible actions the City can achieve. The ability to maximize the number
 of housing units brought to market with an approximate \$6.5 million dollar
 investment will be unparalleled in the National Capital Region.
- Providing Alexandria City Service employees (i.e. Teachers, Police Officers and Fire Department employees) preferential consideration for the available workforce units. The more units set aside for qualifying City Staff the better. The Task Force sees the Preferential Workforce Housing as a very beneficial recruiting and retention tool.

The Task Force Recommendations Are:

For ease of reading, the recommendations have been categorized.

Affordable and Workforce Housing

- The City and the Developer shall provide assurances of quality of materials and workmanship used to build the units. The Developer shall provide a warranty equivalent to the industry standard for any new home construction project.
- The City shall ensure that a responsible and reputable company is selected to manage the property and that the property remains rental in perpetuity.
- The City shall set a target goal of mixed rental units affordable, 68% and workforce, 32%.
- The workforce units shall be allocated as a recruitment tool for City service providers (Teachers, Police and Fire Department personnel, etc) and be allotted priority placement whenever an opening occurs and within the legal scope of preferential placement.

Build Station 209 and Move Fire Suppression Functions from Station 202

- Potomac Yard LLC Developers shall design and build a four bay fire station (209) at no cost to the City.
- Any cost not borne by the Potomac Yard LLC in constructing a four bay fire station (209), the City shall allocate funds to design and build the fourth bay. In the event the City has to bear the costs associated with the fourth bay, public comment shall be required.
- All emergency vehicles in the Alexandria Fleet (i.e. Fire Engines, Fire Trucks, Ambulances, Advanced Life Support Units, Hazardous Materials Trucks, Police Department Vehicles, Sheriff Department Vehicles etc.) shall be fitted with "Mobile Infrared Transmitter for Emergency Vehicles" or equivalent technology that will interface with the traffic signals in Alexandria, Arlington County and the larger National Capital Region. This is an important mitigation strategy in placing three (3) of the City's eight (8) Fire Departments east of Route 1. This technology interfaces with the traffic signals in the "line of sight" of the emergency vehicles in order to traverse Route 1 and all of the major overcrowded roadways throughout the City and in order to fulfill the City obligations in the larger response system. Station 209 emergency vehicles shall be given priority installation of equipment should this acquisition not be completed prior to moving emergency vehicles to Station 209.
- The City and the Developer shall design and mitigate the sound and vibrations caused by engines from Fire Station 209 around the residences located above Station 209.

Pros & Cons

The following are the Task Force pros and cons in no order of precedence. The information contained within this section, are the majority views of the Task Force.

For ease of reading, the Pros & Cons have been categorized.

Affordable and Workforce Housing

Pros Cons

Provides an opportunity for additional affordable and workforce housing within the City.	It is not known who will manage the properties.
Affords an opportunity for Low Income Tax Credits.	It is not known if the units will be rental / for sale condos / combination of both.
Maximizes the return on investment on funds contributed by the developer and the City.	The quality of the affordable housing is unknown. Will the units be built as cheaply as possible or using mid-level or high-end quality products?
Additional land cost will not be incurred by the City for this project due to the developer's contribution and because the developer is donating a fire station.	A fear of a large, central concentration of affordable housing in one area often carries a stigma which the project must overcome.

Build Station 209 and Move Fire Suppression Functions from Station 202

Pros Cons

Locate new modern facility within a large population base both residential and business to better serve Potomac Yard, Arlandria, and the City of Alexandria's Fire system as well as the regional fire systems.	A dedication of funds for the fourth bay is not included in the City's budget. Anticipated cost is \$750,000 to \$1,250,000.
Instant "sense of Community" surrounds the new Station 209 and the adjacent community.	A sense of loss of security and a perception that the delivery of fire services will be substandard for Del Ray with the move to Potomac Yard. This perception results from an increase in response time to some Del Ray and Rosemont communities as measured from Station 209. However, because of redundant coverage, these areas are serviced by other stations to remain within the targeted 4 minute response time goal.
Provide more secure, environmentally controlled space within the fire system to store and operate fire suppression units, hazmat vehicles and reserve equipment within the City.	Loss of resource that is seen as a neighborhood asset (as opposed to a community resource).
Excellent use of both public & private funds providing excellent return on investment to the tax payers of Alexandria.	An unknown quality of life and economic impact that surrounds the loss of Station 202.
All communities remain within the Fire Department's targeted 4 minute response time providing better public safety.	The perception that the planning of Potomac Yard placed too much emphasis on urban design and lack of emphasis on the overall design.
Though capital funds have been budgeted to renovate Station 202, both the constraints of those funds and the land available at the site limits the ability to renovate the historic building or to expand the footprint and meet current fire department needs.	
The improved working environment for the fire and EMS personnel, their living quarters and meeting areas.	
The City's willingness to maintain the EMS function at Station 202 station ensures adequate EMS coverage at least until such time as additional units are added to the system and capital investments can be made to house them.	
Maintaining the Station 202 site affords a future opportunity to add a suppression function to return to that station should service demands exceed current projections.	

Dissenting Views

The following are the dissenting views which encompass both public and Task Force views in no order of precedence. This information is included to show the scope of information gathered and does not represent the majority views of either the Task Force or the general consensus for the residents of Alexandria.

- (Public Comment) Refer the matter back to the Developer, City Planning and PYDAC to redesign without any design flaws. Due to an article in the Washington Post many citizens were under the impression that there were flaws in the plan and design of the Potomac Yard project. A dissenting view was raised that because of a design flaw with the streets that would cause problems with the turning radius of fire engines. Further information in the Post also stated that the design flaw would continue to be prevalent out throughout each land bay design.
- (Public & Task Force Comment) Too much design emphasis was placed on Urban Design in Potomac Yard which brought the developer to suggest building Station 209.
- (Public & Task Force Comment) Residents and renters in the affordable and workforce housing should undergo criminal background checks prior to being issued a lease. Citizens attending the public sessions raised a concern that individuals applying for the affordable housing would not have a criminal background check performed. This dissenting view raised issues with public safety for those individuals living in the area.
- (Public & Task Force Comment) Residents and renters in the affordable and workforce housing should be of legal residency status in the United States under all Federal, State and local laws. Individuals were concerned that illegal aliens would be allowed to apply for the affordable housing.
- (Public Comment) Residents and renters in the affordable and workforce housing should not be able to use Housing Choice Vouchers / Section-8 Housing.
- (Public Comment) Build Station 209 and continue to Operate Station 202.
- (Public Comment) Revenue generated from the new tax base in Potomac Yard should be sufficient to operate Stations 202 & 209.
- (Public Comment) An emotional, deep rooted attachment to Fire Station 202, as it has been operated from the same location on Windsor Ave since 1924. Many Del Ray Citizens posed the question "What will become of the station in the future?"

- (Public & Task Force Comment) There is a perception that the "Quality of Life" for Del Ray residents will decrease due to the proposed move of fire suppression from Windsor Avenue. There is a perceived loss of "sense of community". A great deal of uncertainty surrounds the relocation of equipment and personnel and it is this apprehension that has the community in angst. Unknown quality of life and economic impact surrounds the future of Station 202.
- (Public Comment) There is a perception that public safety will be jeopardized for those living in Del Ray when the fire suppression unit is moved approximately one mile from Del Ray to Potomac Yard. A concern of if there is a fire in an older home in the Del Ray area that fire suppression will not be able to arrive in enough time to put out the fire or to prevent catastrophic damage to the structure.
- (Task Force Comment) More could be done to *visually* reduce the width of the alleys in Potomac Yard by placing four foot wide concrete walkways on both sides of the alley thoroughfare and then striping the alley for Emergency Vehicle Access No Parking. You would *visually* reduce the driving width of the alley from approximately 24 feet wide to 14 feet wide though the concrete walkway would be at street level with no curb. This can be achieved independent of all other actions without any repercussions.
- (Task Force Comment) This proposal by the City and the Developer will improve Fire Suppression Response facilities in the City by building the first new Fire Station in over 30 years. The state-of-the-art station will help to improve both the City and the Regions Fire Suppression capabilities well into the future at little or no cost to the taxpayers.

Open Items that Require City Remediation

The Task Force noted for the record that the following items will need to be addressed by City Staff or City Council action and are in no order of precedence.

- The Task Force noted that the citizens of Del Ray asked several questions out of the purview of the scope of the City Staff and the Task Force to include:
 - "What are City Council and the City Staff going to do for us if you take our fire station?"
 - "Some citizens in Del Ray feel that they have already given away so many things that they are wondering what will they get in return for giving up their fire station."
 - "Should EMS services be slated to be removed from Station 202, the City is to create a commission to decide the future use of Station 202 if all current uses are vacated."
- The Task Force noted that if the station is vacated the diesel refueling capacity at Station 202 should be removed and the site appropriately excavated in accordance with applicable environmental laws.
- The Task Force noted that at such time that a decision is made to move EMS from Station 202, public comment should be sought to determine the next use for this space to minimize the economic impact and the uncertainty that impacts the neighbors that are directly adjacent to the property. The Historic Nature of the Town Hall of the Town of Potomac (Station 202) and the fact that office space is not allowed in the R-2-5 zone is also noted.
- The Task Force noted that Station 202 should not become a storage yard for excess equipment, city parking for vehicles or other uses not conducive with residential environment in which it is located.