



Alexandria Waterfront Commission

Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

1108 Jefferson Street

Alexandria, Virginia 22314

November 1, 2024

James F. Parajon, City Manager City of Alexandria
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: FY 2026 Operating and Capital Improvement Budget Planning

Mr. Parajon,

This letter summarizes the Waterfront Commission's FY 2026 budget priorities, in response to your recent request for recommendations from commissions to help inform City of Alexandria budget priorities and decision making. Our recommendations address the stated priorities of building economic strength as well as community connection and employee attraction and retention.

The Waterfront Commission is charged with overseeing implementation of the Waterfront Small Area Plan, and continues to focus on analysis, planning and implementation of the capital improvements necessary to implement park improvements and flood mitigation projects, as well as ongoing maintenance and operation of high-quality parks and public spaces along the waterfront. The citizens of Alexandria made clear during the Waterfront planning process and ongoing implementation period, that they supported private development efforts but valued most the improvement and maintenance of waterfront public areas. In addition, an attractive Waterfront—from Jones Point Park, through the core area of the Waterfront, northward to Old Town North and Daingerfield Island—supports the City's aims to be a tourist destination, which sustains the economic health of the City.

In another challenging fiscal year, focusing on expenditures that move us closer to a sound future seems most appropriate. The Waterfront Commission recommends prioritizing investments in the long-term viability of the waterfront that have a positive economic impact by encouraging visitation and helping local businesses thrive.

Capital Improvement Program

Waterfront Small Area Plan Implementation Project – Flood Mitigation and Park Improvements

Given the rapid advancement of climate change and the amount of flooding along our waterfront, the Waterfront Commission continues to support significant investment in waterfront flood mitigation efforts through the Waterfront Small Area Plan Implementation Project which is expected to be in the final stages of design and beginning the construction phase in FY 2026. We recommend consideration of additional funding for the project to address bulkhead repair and to responsibly minimize the footprint of the pump station while maximizing park amenities. We continue to encourage the City to consider additional designs and technologies that will further the City's climate change goals, which can maximize recreational opportunities, and optimize our capital investment. We also look forward to planning and implementation of park uses on lands affected by the flood mitigation project.

Operating and Maintenance Budget

Priority Waterfront Operations

The City's FY 2026 Operating Budget should sustain funding for priority waterfront operations and maintenance functions, inclusive of , parks, pathways, policing/security, public restrooms and debris removal. The City should commit necessary funding for operations and maintenance as public spaces along the waterfront continue to be activated and improved. We encourage investment in the Torpedo Factory, to ensure it remains a welcoming place for visitors and residents. The budget should also support special events—including plans for the celebration of the 250th year of American independence in 2026. Alexandria is an official Affiliate of Harbor of Sail VirginiaSM 2026, the largest 250th event in the Commonwealth as part of Sail250® Virginia, and will host several visiting ships from June 12 to 15, 2026.

Mitigating Waterfront Construction Impacts

The multi-year period of flood mitigation construction will be disruptive to visitors, businesses and residents. The City should fund and resource robust communications efforts to help the public and businesses navigate the impacts. Additionally, we recommend funding to implement City staff to develop temporary public art and programming to mitigate the unappealing visual landscape, create vibrancy and draw foot traffic toward adjacent local businesses during the construction period. This can be in the form of murals covering construction fencing, pop-up events and more. Alexandria's USA 250th celebration hosting ships will coincide with construction at both the waterfront (including nearby streets) and City Hall which will require a robust communication plan for a positive attendee experience related to transportation, parking and more.

Arts Investment

In addition to funding temporary art and events related to waterfront construction projects, the Waterfront Commission supports the investment in public art and art experiences as a key to waterfront vitality and visitor attraction. The Site See: New Views in Old Town temporary public art series in Waterfront Park has been highly successful at providing visitors a reason to return to

the waterfront. The series is presently scheduled to pause beginning in 2026 due to planned construction of the Waterfront Small Area Plan Implementation Project in Waterfront Park. We recommend funding a 2026 installation as an alternative public space art endeavor instead. Potential alternate locations along the waterfront could include the Torpedo Plaza behind the Torpedo Factory, Founders Park, Oronoco Bay Park or Windmill Hill Park.

In addition, there is interest in public art or playgrounds in Old Town North which is a designated Arts District. Furthermore, the Waterfront Commission recommends renewed attention to delivering on the Waterfront Small Area Plan, Appendix 5, the Waterfront Art Plan, which advises the development of an Art Walk with the installation of public art pieces in each of our waterfront parks, establishing the area as an arts and culture anchor.

Staffing And Employee Compensation

We note that improving the City's competitive position in attracting and retaining employees will be an ongoing focus of the City budget in FY26. Continuing to improve compensation of hourly and salaried employees across City government will help to improve the competitiveness of the City in attracting and retaining employees key to supporting waterfront maintenance and operations, inclusive of public safety (police and fire), marina, and waterfront parks and recreation positions.

Waterfront Transportation Access

We continue to encourage investment in transit, bicycling, pedestrian and disabled access along the waterfront. Including continued support of the King Street Trolley to Old Town and fare-free DASH bus service throughout Alexandria. And we look forward to the continued support of the water taxi. This mitigates the impact of changes in parking supply and helps to provide green and healthy means of transportation to enjoy the Waterfront.

Waterfront Funding Streams

The Commission continues to encourage the City to find long-term and sustainable ways to fund investment in waterfront infrastructure, maintenance, and management through mechanisms such as a business improvement service district, public/private partnerships, bonding, or application of incremental revenue from the waterfront's completed new private development. Programs that address equitability like the Seaport Foundation's program for at risk and disadvantaged youth should continue to be supported.

Conclusions

In summary, the Waterfront Commission recommends that the City Manager's proposed FY 2026 Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Plan reaffirm the City's commitment to funding planned capital expenditures, operations, and maintenance of the waterfront, and consider creative funding to ensure the future and continued success of the implementation of the Waterfront Plan.

We look forward to providing constructive feedback on the City's budget proposals over the coming months.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. K. Reid', written over a horizontal line.

Lebaron K. Reid, Chair

Alexandria Waterfront Commission

cc: Alexandria Waterfront Commission members
Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager
James Spengler, Director, Recreation Parks & Cultural Activities
Rami Chehade, P.E., Acting Director, Project Implementation
Jack Browand, Deputy Director, Commission Staff Liaison