

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 5, 2012

TO: CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE  
OHAD BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

FROM: AL COX, FAIA, HISTORIC PRESERVATION MANAGER

SUBJECT: SHORT TERM SAFETY FENCE AT THE WINDMILL HILL PARK BULKHEAD  
500A & 501 SOUTH UNION STREET, BAR CASE #2012-0187

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At the June 20, 2012 hearing, the Board deferred the application and directed Staff to work with the community to devise an appropriate design which minimized public risk at the decayed bulkhead.

### **ANALYSIS**

Following public comment and BAR recommendations, staff developed five design options for additional community review that met the City's safety criteria. The public was notified of these via eNews and had the opportunity to review and register a preferred design option for the safety fence on the City's web site from August 9 - 22 and in a Community Open House held on August 15, 2012.

In total, 59 votes were received (56 electronic and 3 handwritten). The overwhelming majority of the respondents, 46%, preferred the Nautical Post & Rope (Option #3), while approximately 22% preferred the Ornamental Aluminum (Option #2) and 20% preferred the Split Rail (Option #4). The remaining 12% of the votes were for options #1 and #5.

Staff has no objection to any of the proposed designs for this short term safety fence and supports the Nautical Post and Rope design option favored by the survey respondents.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION, SEPTEMBER 5, 2012**

Staff recommends approval of the Nautical Post and Rope, Option #3.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

*1 – Updated Supporting Materials*

*2 – June 20, 2012 Staff Report for BAR2012-0187, with minutes and original application materials*



EXAMPLE OF FENCE IN PLACE IN BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK, BROOKLYN, NY



DEMOCRATIZATION PROJECT AT WINDMILL HILL PARK

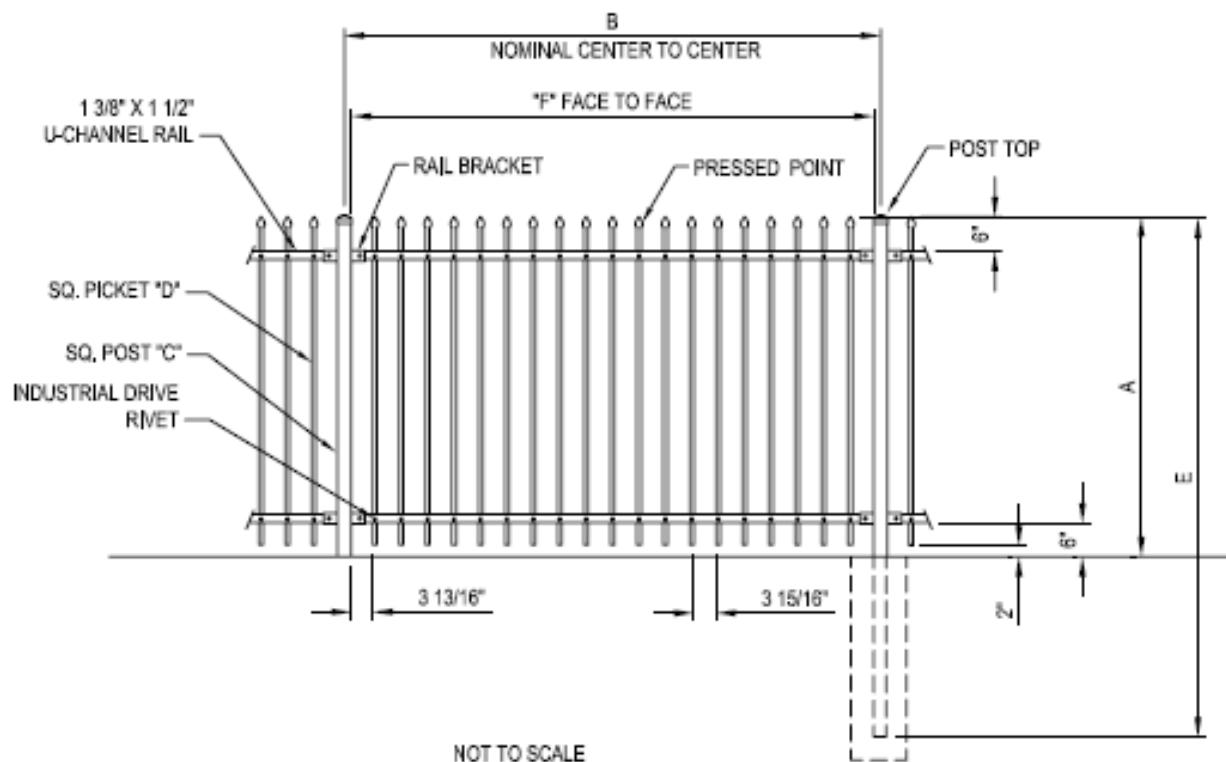
### Option #1: Post and Wire

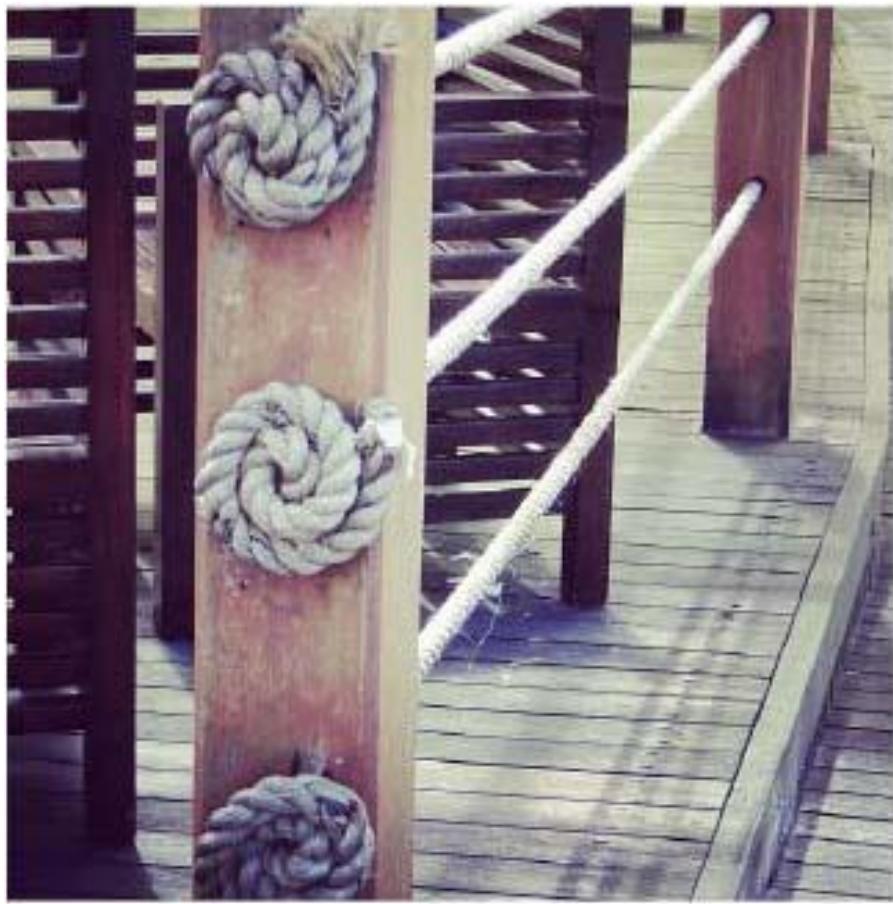
Estimated Cost: \$16,000



## Option #2: Ornamental Aluminum

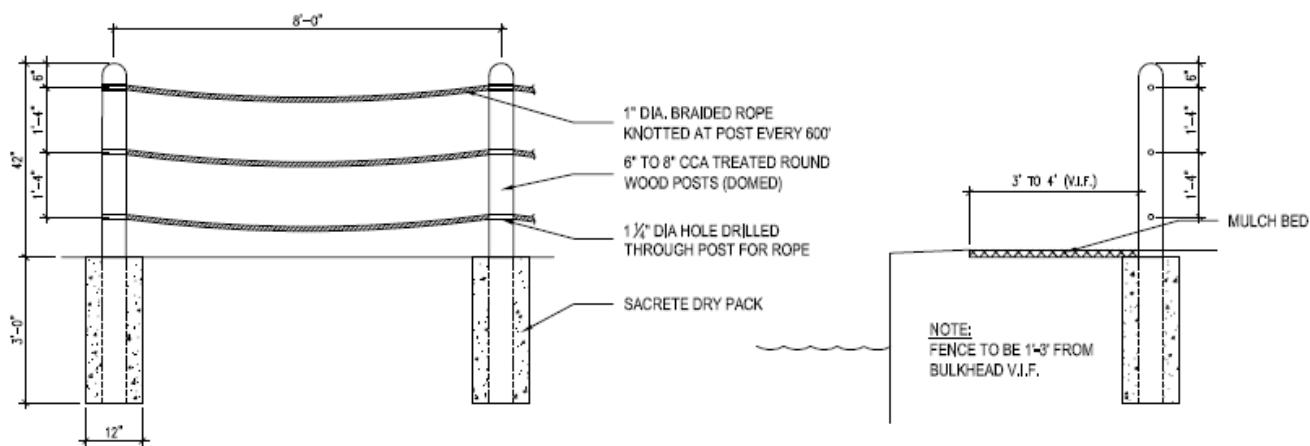
Estimated Cost: \$34,000





### Option #3: Nautical Post and Rope

Estimated Cost: \$32,000

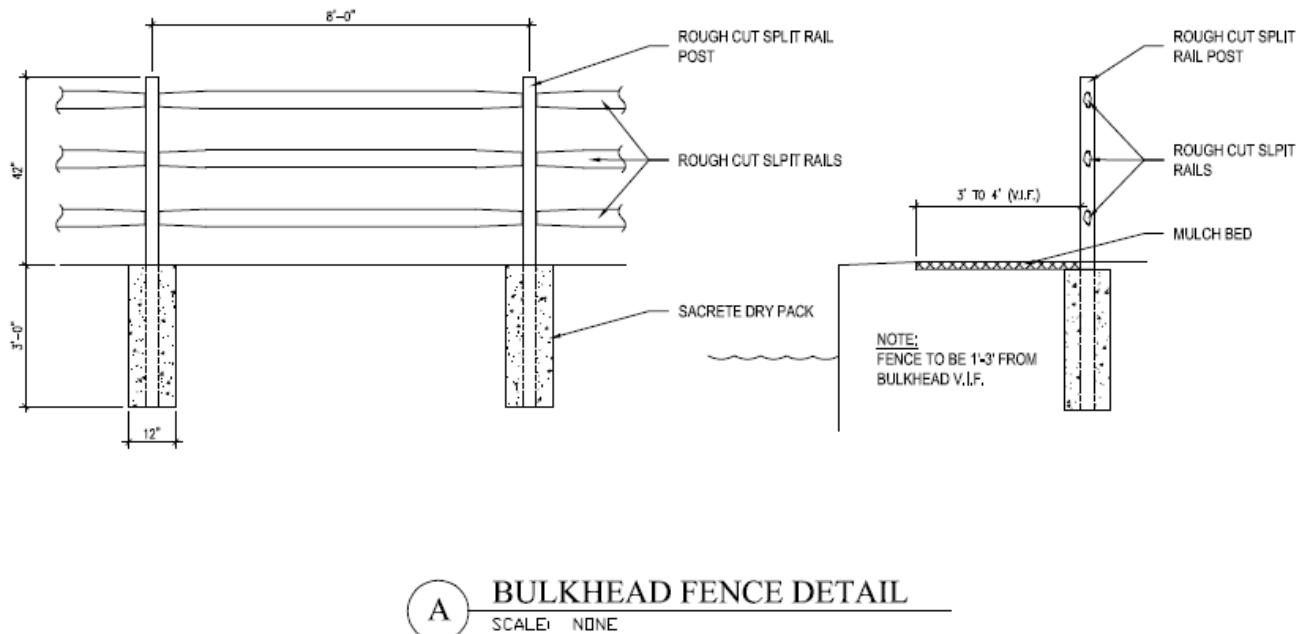


**A** BULKHEAD FENCE DETAIL  
SCALE: NONE



## Option #4: Three Rail, Split Rail

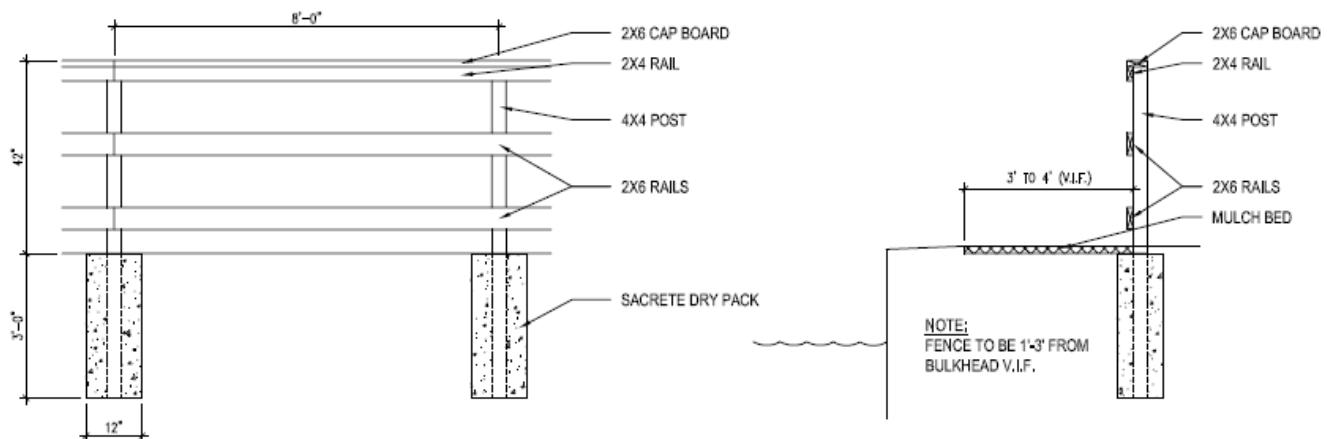
Estimated cost: \$8,400





## Option #5: Kentucky Board Rail

Estimated cost: \$15,800



A BULKHEAD FENCE DETAIL  
SCALE: NONE

Docket Item # 3  
BAR CASE # 2012-0187

BAR Meeting  
June 20, 2012

**ISSUE:** Request for alterations (fence)

**APPLICANT:** City of Alexandria

**LOCATION:** 500A and 501 South Union Street

**ZONE:** WPR / Waterfront park and recreation zone

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**BOARD ACTION JUNE 20, 2012: Deferral, 5-0.**

This item was removed from the Consent Calendar.

**SPEAKERS**

Jack Browand, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, spoke in support of the application and outlined the scope of the project. He stated that the fence was needed to ensure public safety and restrict access to the failing bulkhead. It was noted that the fence was temporary until the bulkhead can be adequately repaired as part of future Windmill Hill Park improvements.

Emily Baker, City Engineer, Transportation & Environmental Services, spoke in support of the application and noted that it is not the City's long-term intention to implement permanent fencing in this location. She also clarified that the proposed fence would not be utilized in the future for a construction safety fence.

Murney Keleher, property owner at 208 North Royal Street, spoke against the proposed fence design and requested that this issue be further studied.

Linda Couture, property owner at 505 Duke Street, spoke against the proposed fence design and requested that this issue be further studied.

Van Van Fleet, property owner at 26 Wolfe Street, spoke against the proposed fence design and noted that it would not be temporary once installed.

Mark Mueller, property owner at 414 South Royal Street, spoke against the proposed fence design and requested that this issue be further studied.

Graeme Bannerman, property owner at 3 Wilkes Street, spoke against the proposed fence design and requested that this issue be further studied, noting that neighbors typically cleaned up the bulkhead area

on a regular basis.

John Hynan, representing the Historic Alexandria Foundation, agreed with the comments already made speaking against the proposed fence design and requested that this issue be further studied.

Poul Hertel spoke against the proposed fence design and asked that this issue be further studied. He recommended that City Staff and the Board look for appropriate examples in other historic districts in maritime/nautical areas. He provided examples of possible designs to the Board.

Yvonne Waight, representing Old Town Civic Association, requested a deferral to study alternatives, finding the proposed fence to be inappropriate. She expressed concern about constructing barriers to the waterfront that block access.

Bert Ely, property owner at 200 South Pitt Street and director of the Old Town Civic Association Waterfront Work Group, requested a deferral for further study.

## **BOARD DISCUSSION**

Mr. Neale expressed concern about lack of access to the waterfront, though acknowledged that some access areas were clearly not safe. He asked whether some areas could be left open and others fenced. He understood the intention of a minimalist design but thought that at night it could potentially be harmful and suggested adding a top rail or reflective element. He asked whether bollards could be used for the temporary fence and then reused later. He suggested a deferral stating that he was not satisfied with the current design.

Mr. Keleher stated that he agreed with the comments made by the community. He questioned whether the fence was necessary and also supported a deferral for an improved design.

Mr. von Senden noted that when an engineer or risk manager advises that something must be replaced or secured, that it should be done. He accepted that a fence must be located here. He advised calling it “short-term” fencing rather than “temporary.” He asked whether a guardrail would be required when the bulkhead is replaced and how the bulkhead would be maintained/cleaned? He noted that the minimalist design was not popular but that it looked better in person. He suggested a fence that could also be used permanently. He also suggested a more nautical design, such as the use of sailing life lines and turnbuckles.

Mr. Carlin thought the proposal could be successfully resolved and requested a deferral. He suggested parameters for Staff to address: 1) Maintenance issues and 2) Cost, since it is a short-term fence.

Dr. Fitzgerald noted that the BAR was not the Board of Safety and found an invisible temporary fence to be acceptable. He stated that as a taxpayer he did not want an expensive fence. He also requested that the City restudy the risk associated with the existing bulkhead.

On a motion by Mr. Carlin, seconded by Mr. Neale, the Board voted to defer the application for further study and for Staff and the community to work together on an appropriate scheme. The motion passed, 5-0.

**REASON**

The Board was concerned about the design the fence. The Board requested that the applicant work with the community to devise an appropriate design which minimized public risk.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION JUNE 20, 2012:** Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

**\*\*EXPIRATION OF APPROVALS NOTE:** In accordance with Sections 10-106(B) and 10-206(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, any official Board of Architectural Review approval will expire 12 months from the date of issuance if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period.

**\*\*BUILDING PERMIT NOTE:** Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the issuance of one or more construction permits by Building and Fire Code Administration (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Administration, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-838-4360 for further information.



**CASE BAR2012-0187**



## **I. ISSUE:**

The applicant, the City of Alexandria, is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to install a new safety fence along the bulkhead at Windmill Hill Park in the southeast quadrant of the City. The existing bulkhead is in disrepair and therefore hazardous to the public. The proposed safety fence is temporary (approximately five years) until the bulkhead can be adequately repaired in the future as part of waterfront park improvements. The four foot tall treated wood fence posts will be 6 or 8 inches in diameter and installed at 10' on center. Horizontal 12½ gage high tensile wire will be twisted on itself and crimped, attaching to the wood posts. The fence will be located approximately 1-3 feet behind the concrete bulkhead to accommodate existing trees and this area will be filled with mulch.



**Figure 1: Mock-up of the proposed fence.**

## **II. HISTORY:**

Windmill Hill derives its name from a wind-powered mill constructed on the steep banks overlooking the Potomac River in this location in the 1840s. The area comprising Windmill Hill Park was an important Civil War logistics and railroad center, linking with the existing Wilkes Street Tunnel. The land where the dog park and Ford's Landing townhouse development now sit was used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a shipbuilding site known as Keith's Wharf and later as a Ford automobile dealer make-ready facility. Today, the park occupies land on both the east and west sides of South Union Street and features a basketball court, volleyball courts, a playground, a dog park and open lawn.

## **III. ANALYSIS:**

The proposed alterations comply with Zoning Ordinance requirements.

At the request of the City, an engineering consultant (RK&K) inspected the bulkhead around the former Old Town Yacht Basin in February 2012 and provided an assessment report in March 2012. Findings indicated that the concrete bulkhead remains are in “critical” condition. Recommendations stated that the bulkhead should be removed and replaced in the near future. In the meantime, a fence should be placed around the perimeter of the structure for public safety.

The BAR’s *Design Guidelines* state that “fences, garden walls and gates should be appropriate in materials, design and scale to the period and character of the structure they surround.” As fences were not typically installed around bulkheads in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Staff could find no historically appropriate design precedents. Staff, therefore, proposes a fence with heavy steel wire which is visually unobtrusive and will not obscure views of the water for residents or users of the park. The wire is supported by treated wood posts which reference the pilings used at marinas, and which existed in this Yacht Basin until recently.

The City is proposing a fence option that is minimally visible and will ensure safety along the bulkhead. The temporary safety fence will remain in place until FY 2016/2017 when funding is available through the CIP for bulkhead improvements. In the interim, Staff has presented project options to the community from the approved 2003 Windmill Hill Park master plan that can be implemented immediately with existing funding. Park projects implemented will be located in areas of the park not affected by future bulkhead construction activities.

**STAFF:**

Al Cox, FAIA, Historic Preservation Manager, Planning & Zoning

**IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS**

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F- finding

**Code Administration**

C-1 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

C-2 Fences less than 6’ in height do not require a building permit.

**Transportation & Environmental Services**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

R1. Applicant shall be responsible for repairs to the adjacent city right-of-way if damaged during construction activity. (T&ES)

**FINDINGS**

F1. These parcels are located in both a Resource Protection Area and the Flood Plain 2011. However, the proposed work will not cause any ground disturbance or obstruction to water flow. It is understood that this is for temporary protection, prior to installation of any permanent fencing or protection methods, T&ES shall be included in the review for the effect of the final

design. (T&ES)

#### **CITY CODE REQUIREMENTS**

- C-1 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Noise Control Code, Title 11, Chapter 5, which sets the maximum permissible noise level as measured at the property line. (T&ES)
- C-2 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Solid Waste Control, Title 5, Chapter 1, which sets forth the requirements for the recycling of materials (Sec. 5-1-99). (T&ES)
- C3. Any work within or performed from the right-of-way requires a separate permit from T&ES. (Sec. 5-2) (T&ES)

#### **V. ATTACHMENTS**

- 1 – Supporting Materials*
- 2 – Letter to the BAR*
- 3 – Application for BAR2012-00187 at 500A and 501 South Union Street*