City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2009

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #8: WAYFINDING PROGRAM UPDATE ON OPTIONS

ISSUE: (1) Phasing the wayfinding program, and (2) crafting a $250,000 Phase I option for consideration for funding in the FY 2010 CIP.

BACKGROUND: The Wayfinding program as contemplated would be a coordinated system of sign elements that serves to identify, direct and inform visitors and residents. Its estimated capital cost is $2.3 million with none of the Wayfinding project funded in the proposed CIP. However, Council may wish to consider funding Phase I at a CIP cost of $250,000 for FY 2010.

The public process for this program commenced in February 2008 with the first of a series of seven Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meetings. The SAG is comprised of representatives from civic organizations, business associations, Alexandria Ped/Bike, National Park Service, ACVA, AEDP, Chamber of Commerce, WMATA, Dash and City commissions (Arts, ACDP, Aging and HARC). Three of the SAG meeting were expanded to the wider community and included a collaborative workshop and open house.

In tandem, a City Working Group met on a regular basis to work with the consultants (Sasaki) to follow up and develop feedback received from the SAG and community meetings. This group comprises representatives from Planning & Zoning, Transportation & Environmental Services, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, Office of Historic Alexandria, General Services and City Manager's Office.

A worksession was held with the Planning Commission and both Boards of Architectural Review on January 5, 2009. A further worksession was held with City Council on February 2, 2009. A subsequent work session was held with both Boards of Architectural Review on February 18, 2009. Staff intends to go back to the BAR in March for further review of the final Phase I proposals before taking the Phase I program to Planning Commission on April 7 for their approval.

The feedback from these sessions was generally positive and the sign program is being further refined to reflect the feedback from these meetings. However, some elements of the program

have received a mixed response and require further design input and refinement. These are discussed below.

One of the concerns expressed related to potential sign clutter, particularly on King Street. To address this concern, it is proposed that all signs within the historic districts be referred back to the respective BAR at the time of proposed installation for a more detailed assessment of sign location and the signs that they are to replace.

The proposed City gateway signs have also received a mixed response, but in general there seems to be a preference for using a ship as the emblem in recognition of the City's founding on the waterfront as a seaport. The general consensus is that the currently proposed design should be revised to include a more symbolic ship icon and more vibrant colors. It should also be noted, however, that some members of the community have expressed strong opposition to the ship as not being representative of all of Alexandria. Staff will work with Sasaki, the SAG, and the city work group to refine the gateway sign and will forward the refinements for your review. It should be noted that Phase I does not include the City gateway signs.

The other area of concern relates to the proposed mini kiosks. While many prefer the generic identification of shops and restaurants, others, notably the retailers off King Street, prefer the individual listing of business names. There are pros and cons to each option. The identification of individual businesses gives greater prominence to the retailers on the side street. The level of detail on this sign would also obviate the need for the temporary A-frame signs, which would reduce clutter at the street corners. Conversely, the on-going maintenance required to remove the names of businesses that close and to add the names of new businesses would be onerous. There may be inequity for other businesses, such as offices, that would not be individually identified on the mini kiosk. Finally, concern was also expressed about the clutter that would be created by the need to install multiple mini kiosks at every intersection, as would be required with this option.

TEMPORARY PORTABLE SIGN PROGRAM: On November 25, 2008 the Alexandria City Council voted to adopt an ordinance to establish a pilot program to allow temporary portable signs alerting King Street pedestrians to restaurant and retail-oriented businesses in the Central Business District (Old Town) but not located on King Street. The program establishes parameters for acceptable "A-frame" signs. Businesses are responsible for coordinating among the other businesses on the block to create an acceptable sign, and otherwise comply with the ordinance.

Participating businesses off King Street report that the signs have had measurable positive impacts on sales during an extremely difficult retail period. Thirteen A-frame permits have been issued to date and many others have expressed an interest, though are reluctant to participate until they have more certainty regarding the program's longevity. Over the duration of the program, the City has received few complaints from residents and pedestrians, although when residents are asked directly, the response is more mixed. Resident objections have focused on a lack of uniformity of design, the image that A-frame signs convey, and concerns about barriers to pedestrian movement. These objections can be addressed by the Wayfinding Program either through the proposed mini-kiosks or through a more standardized A-frame design and program consistent with the citywide Wayfinding system.

The pilot program is effective through March 15, 2009. Because the A-frame signs have been demonstrated to be very effective for the participating businesses, City staff recommends that a public hearing be held in March to review an extension of the temporary sign program until fall 2009, and how it may be improved. This would provide the opportunity to assess the impact of the signs in regard to the concern by some about sidewalk clutter during the busier summer months.

WAYFINDING PHASING: The Wayfinding program would be a comprehensive signage system for the entire City that it funded would be intended to be implemented over a number of years through the City's Capital Improvement Program at an estimated capital cost of $2.3 million. Phase I of the program could be focused on Old Town and could include only those elements that are essential for the effective functioning of the system within this geographical area. Planning Commission will review Phase I only on April 7, 2009 and it is Phase I funding of $250,000 plus to-be-determined T&ES operating costs only that are at issue for the FY 2010 budget.

The sign types proposed in Phase I are focused on getting visitors and residents out of their cars to explore Old Town on foot, with a view to the associated economic development benefits for the City and its businesses. The system elements for Phase 1 include parking and pedestrian directionals, large visitor kiosks and two commercial district identity signs. Later phases will feature City Gateways, vehicular directional signs, destination identification signs and interpretive signs for trails. Attachment 1 identifies the elements and associated costs proposed for Phase I. Based on the median cost derived from three vendors' estimates, the total funding required to implement Phase I would be $250,000. The current proposed budget for Phase I includes unit costs for fabrication, assembly and installation (by contractor) of the approximately 116 proposed signs. This amount does not include subsequent maintenance costs, although it should be noted that these signs would replace many signs already being maintained by the City, and they have an expected lifetime of 15-20 years, barring graffiti or other similar damage.

Planning and Zoning staff and Sasaki have worked closely with T&ES to ensure that the design of the system is cost-effective both in terms of original design and ongoing maintenance and replacement, using standard components and factoring in the cost of pre-finished replacement panels to facilitate T&ES' maintenance of the system subsequent to its original installation.

All aspects of Phase I of the Wayfinding program have been received favorably by all who have reviewed the system, with the exception of the strategy for the mini kiosks on King Street. The issue with the mini-kiosks centers around whether or not (and to what degree) this element of the system should function as a replacement to the A-frames with a focus on specifically listing retail and restaurants off King Street. The two main implications of the different options for the mini-kiosks are the quantity of signs required (and the resulting cost as well as perceived visual clutter) and the level of maintenance and updating required. The alternatives that staff has investigated and the resulting implications are detailed in Attachment III.

REMAINING PROGRAM SCHEDULE:

The remaining schedule for the Wayfinding program is planned as follows:

February 18:
- Joint BAR work session review/refinement

March:
- Portable Sign Program Public Hearing/Decision on extending pilot program
- Stakeholder Advisory Group review/refinement (meeting date TBD - probably mid March).
- BAR review/refinement (Potential dates: O&H March 18, PG March 25).
- Mockup review.

April:
- BAR review of Phase I designs (Potential dates: O&H April 1 and 15, PG April 22)

April 7:
- Planning Commission review of Phase I designs.

April 27:
- City Council decision on Phase I funding.

April-June:
- Finalize design (additional SAG/BAR meetings as needed), complete sign guidelines manual.

If funded, Phase I could be ready for bid in June and Sasaki estimates that the bid and selection process will take one month and fabrication/installation will take 3 months. Planning Commission will review the program for the entire Wayfinding system once design is complete in Fall 2009.

CONCLUSION: While there is no funding in the CIP for any phase of the Wayfinding program, in order to complete the planning for a program (which might be funded in the future), it is recommended that the above schedule be continued, and if Council determines to add $250,000 to the FY 2010 CIP then Phase I could be implemented in FY 2010. A second budget memo will be written to discuss needed FY 2010 and beyond T&ES costs to manage and operate the Wayfinding program (staffing, equipment, etc.).

ATTACHMENTS:
Attachment I: Phase I costs for Wayfinding Program
Attachment II: Matrix of alternative mini kiosks options
Attachment III. Phase I options

Attachment I

Phase I costs for Wayfinding Program

	QTY	AVG. UNIT COST*	AVG. INST. COST*	AVG. TOTAL COST*
DM.1 **Commercial District** District identity sign (ex. Carlyle, Del Ray, Arlandria) non-illuminated	2	$1,300.00	$450.00	$3,500.00
PK.1 **Parking Identity: Structure** Parking lot identity, mounted to building façade internally Illuminated	6	$3,000.00	$760.00	$22,560.00
PK.2 **Parking Identity: Surface lot** Parking lot identity, freestanding for surface lot	5	$2,800.00	$600.00	$17,000.00
PK.3b **Parking Trailblazer: small vertical** Panel attached to lightpoles	50	$350.00	$95.00	$22,250.00
PK.3a **Parking Trailblazer: large horizontal** Panel attached to signal crossarms	20	$680.00	$260.00	$18,800.00
PD.1 **Pedestrian Directional: pointer**	5	$2,400.00	$770.00	$15,850.00
PD.2 **Pedestrian Directional: mini kiosk** Pedestrian corridor orientation	20	$1,500.00	$300.00	$36,000.00
IK.1 **Visitor Kiosk (freestanding)** Pedestrian information display	2	$15,000.00	$3,000.00	$36,000.00
IK.2 **Visitor Kiosk (wall mounted)** Pedestrian information display	6	$5,500.00	$900.00	$38,400.00
SUB-TOTAL PHASE I ESTIMATE				**$210,360.00**
Project Management, Shop Drwgs, Structural Eng., etc				$40,000.00
TOTAL PHASE I ESTIMATE				**$250,360.00**

NOTES:
* Average cost is based on three vendor quotes.

Attachment II

MATRIX OF ALTERNATIVE MINI KIOSK OPTIONS

	Value of the Option	Implications for Temporary A-frame Sign Program	Frequency of Signs	Management Implications	Cost implications	Other Issues
Option 1:						
A retail panel with generic symbols or terms (e.g. shops and restaurants).	Reinforces the wayfinding information provided by the larger kiosks with only a few additional signs, thereby reducing sign clutter on King Street.	This option probably will not satisfy the needs for increased visibility for retailers off King Street and would probably require a permanent A-frame sign solution to supplement the mini-kiosks.	At a few strategic locations along King Street where there are major visitor attractions (approx 10-14 signs).	1. These signs have a normal life span of 10-15 years and will only have to be replaced when they deteriorate. 2. This option will require staff hours to process the permits for the A-frame signs.	1. The costs for sign production and installation of this option are included in the Phase 1 estimate. 2. There are minimal costs associated with the permitting process for the A-frame signs. This could be addressed by a modest application fee.	The A-frames will increase visual and physical clutter on King Street.
Option 2:						
A retail panel with embellished generic terms (e.g. boutiques, arts & antiques, restaurants & cafes, salons & spas).	Reinforces the wayfinding information provided by the larger kiosks and provides greater visibility to retailers off King Street.	This option may still be considered too generic by the retailers off King Street and there may be pressure for a permanent A-frame sign solution to supplement the mini-kiosks.	As these signs provide more specific business information, a sign will be required on both sides of the street at *every* intersection along King Street (approx 30 signs on King Street).	1. It is possible that these signs will need to be replaced more frequently, perhaps every 2-3 years, if there is a major change in the business composition on individual streets off King Street. 2. Staffing needs for the A-frame sign permitting process if needed.	1. The initial costs will be higher due to the additional number of signs. This is not covered by the Phase I budget. 2. There will be some additional operational and maintenance costs associated with the potential need for occasional sign replacement. 3. If the A-frame signs are required, there will be minimal costs associated with the permitting process.	1. The A-frames will increase visual and physical clutter on King Street. 2. The additional mini-kiosks will increase visual clutter on King Street due to the greater number and frequency of signs.
Option 3:						
A retail panel identifying specific businesses by name.	Reinforces the wayfinding information provided by the larger kiosks and it should satisfy the need for heightened visibility for retailers off King Street.	For this option, the continuation of the A-frame signs would not be appropriate.	As these signs provide very specific business information, a sign will be required on both sides of the street at *every* intersection along King Street (approx 30 signs on King Street).	1. It is likely that these signs will need to be replaced on a frequent basis, possibly 2-3 times a year, as businesses come and go.	1. The initial costs will be higher due to the additional number of signs. This is not covered by the Phase I budget. 2. There will be significant additional operational and maintenance costs associated with the need for frequent sign replacement (approx. ½ FTE).	1. This option will eliminate the visual and physical clutter on King Street associated with the A-frame signs. 2. The additional mini-kiosks will increase visual clutter on King Street due to the greater number and frequency of signs and the increased information on the signs themselves.

Attachment III

PHASE I OPTIONS

Option 1: ***A retail panel with generic symbols or terms (e.g. shops and restaurants).***
In this scenario, the primary purpose of the mini-kiosks is to reinforce the wayfinding information provided by the large visitor kiosks, with placement at strategic intervals along King Street. This would result in fewer signs and less potential sign clutter on King Street. This option probably will not satisfy the needs for increased visibility for retailers off King Street and would probably require a permanent A-frame sign solution to supplement the mini-kiosks.

Frequency of Signs:

- At strategic intervals on King Street (approx 10-14 signs).

Management Implications:

- These signs have a normal life span of 15-20 years.
- This option will require staff hours to process the permits for the A-frame signs.

Cost implications:

- The costs for sign production and installation of this option are included in the Phase 1 estimate.
- There are minimal costs associated with the permitting process for the A-frame signs. This could be addressed by a modest application fee.

Other Issues:

- The A-frames could increase visual and physical clutter on King Street.

Option 2: ***A retail panel with embellished generic terms (e.g. boutiques, arts & antiques, restaurants & cafes, salons & spas).***
The value of this option is that it serves to reinforce the wayfinding information provided by the larger kiosks *and* provides slightly better visibility for retailers off King Street. This option may still be considered too generic by the retailers off King Street and there may be pressure for a permanent A-frame sign solution to supplement the mini-kiosks.

Frequency of Signs:

- As these signs provide more specific business information, a sign will be required on both sides of the street at *every* intersection along King Street (approx 30 signs on King Street).

Management Implications:

- It is possible that these signs will need to be replaced more frequently, perhaps every 2-3 years, if there is a major change in the business composition on individual streets off King Street.

- Staffing needs for the A-frame sign permitting process if needed.

Cost implications:

- The initial costs will be higher due to the additional number of signs. This is not covered by the Phase I budget.
- There will also be some additional operational and maintenance costs associated with the potential need for occasional sign replacement.
- If the A-frame signs are required to supplement the mini-kiosks, there will be minimal costs associated with the permitting process. This could be addressed by a modest application fee.

Other Issues:

- If A-frames are still perceived as necessary, then there will be increased visual and physical clutter on King Street.
- The additional mini-kiosks will increase visual clutter on King Street due to the greater number and frequency of signs.

Option 3: ***A retail panel identifying specific businesses by name.***

The value of this option is that it serves to reinforce the wayfinding information provided by the larger kiosks and it should satisfy the need for heightened visibility for retailers off King Street. For this option, the continuation of the A-frame signs would not be appropriate. (However, some businesses might express a strong preference for the A-frames over even the detailed mini-kiosks because they provide better visibility).

Frequency of Signs:

- As these signs provide very specific business information, a sign will be required on both sides of the street at *every* intersection along King Street (approx 30 signs on King Street).

Management Implications:

- It is likely that these signs will need to be replaced on a frequent basis, possibly 2-3 times a year, as businesses come and go. For example, since staff surveyed the businesses on S. Royal Street in August 2008, one new business has opened, one has closed and one is currently closing down.

Cost implications:

- The initial costs will be higher due to the additional number of signs. This is not covered by the Phase I budget.
- There will also be significant additional operational and maintenance costs associated with the need for frequent sign replacement (additional staff time, potentially up to ½ FTE for management and maintenance).

Other Issues:

- This option will eliminate the visual and physical clutter on King Street associated with the A-frame signs.
- The additional mini-kiosks will increase visual clutter on King Street due to the greater number and frequency of signs and due to the increased information on the signs themselves.

Option 4: Eliminate the mini-kiosks from Phase I and defer to a later phase when agreement has been reached regarding the most appropriate way to address this issue.

The cost and management implications associated with these three options are also summarized in the matrix at Attachment 2. The budget for Phase I only includes installation of the basic Option 1 mini kiosk as originally recommended by Sasaki. A total of 20 mini kiosks are proposed at a cost of $36,000 (10- 14 of these will be on King Street). Under normal circumstances, this basic mini kiosk would have a life span of about 15-20 years before it would need to be replaced. Option 2 would probably require occasional updating if there are significant changes in retail mix, whereas Option 3 would require more frequent updating in the order of 3-4 times a year as business come and go, both of which have cost and management implications. The budget does not include any funding for equipment or materials for future updates (such as fabricating replacement parts or signs) or staff time for operation and management of Options 2 and 3. Additional staff time in the order ¼ to ½ FTE will be required to update and maintain the signs as proposed in Options 2 and 3.

It should be noted that the existing A-frame signs are funded by the businesses themselves and only involve minimal staff time to process the required permits. In reviewing the continuation of the temporary portable sign program, consideration could be given to a modest application fee to cover this staffing cost.