

Summary Meeting Notes (Revised and approved 10.12.2011)
ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT PLAN WORK GROUP
Wednesday, September 28, 2011
8:00 – 11:00 AM
City Council Work Room

MEMBERS - Present

Christopher Ballard, At-Large Member. Principal at McWilliams/Ballard.

Bert Ely, At-Large Member. Head, Ely and Company; Board member, Citizens for an Alternative Alexandria Waterfront Plan and Old Town Civic Association.

Mindy Lyle, At-Large Member. Vice President Client Development, Haley & Aldrich, Inc.; and President, Cameron Station Homeowners Association.

Nathan Macek, Waterfront Committee Chair and Representative, and Transportation Consultant.

David Olinger, Old Town Civic Association Representative. Realtor; and Senior Foreign Service Officer (Ret.) with a background in urban planning.

Elliot Rhodeside, At-Large Member. Principal, Rhodeside & Harwell, a firm offering urban planning and landscape design with a focus on revitalization and sustainability.

Councilman Paul Smedberg, Non-voting City Council representative and Work Group Convener.

Lt. Gen. Bob Wood, (Ret.), (By conference call) At-Large Member. Alexandria resident and business owner.

CITY STAFF:

Faroll Hamer, Director, Planning and Zoning (P&Z); **James Banks**, City Attorney; **James Spengler**, Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs (RPCA); **Joanna Anderson**, Asst. City Attorney; **Karl Moritz**, Deputy Director, P&Z; **Tom Canfield**, City Architect, P&Z; **Ben Aiken**, Urban Planner, P&Z; **Emily Baker**, City Engineer, Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES); **Brian Rahal**, T&ES; **Lance Mallamo**, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria; and **Sharon Annear**, Aide to Councilmember Hughes.

PUBLIC ATTENDEES (list of those who signed in):

Van **Van Fleet**, Katy **Cannady**, Kathryn **Papp**, Janice **Magnuson**, K. **McVicker**, Hugh **Van Horn**, Gina **Baum**, Margaret **Wood**, Susan **Cohen**, Deena de **Montigny**, Al **Kalvaitis**, Boyd **Walker**, Christa **Watters**, Carl **Smith**.

I. Opening

A. Welcome - Councilman Smedberg convened the meeting at 8:05 a.m. and Waterfront Plan Work Group (Work Group) members introduced themselves.

B. Meeting Overview

- The two main agenda items for the meeting were (1) a discussion of the elements that the Work Group would like to include in its report to the Council and the approach it would

like to take to prepare that report, and (b) resume consideration of public realm elements, including flood mitigation and public spaces.

II. Organizational Items

A. Approval of 9/14/2011 and 9/21/2011 Meeting Notes – On a motion moved by Mr. Macek and seconded by Ms. Lyle, the meeting notes were approved by voice vote with Gen. Wood abstaining.

B. Comment Board Summary – It was noted that the comment board summary for the period September 22-23 had been included in the day's meeting packet.

C. Updated Meeting Schedule

It was announced that the next Work Group meeting would be on October 12 to be held in the Cameron Station Great Room at 200 Cameron Station Blvd. After that, the next Work Group meeting will be held on October 19 at City Hall at 8:00 AM followed by a Work Group meeting on October 26, 2011 at City Hall at 8:00 AM. No meeting for October 5 is planned.

III. WPWG Product and Approach - Discussion

- Councilman Smedberg reviewed City Council's expectations for the Work Group's report. These expectations include a review of the existing Plan's critical points, plan statements that can serve as a guide for evaluating the Plan's effectiveness in addressing issues of concern to the community and the Work Group, and a focus on reviewing the existing Plan rather than developing an entirely new plan.
- The Work Group's report is not expected to be a consensus document, but one that identifies points of agreement and disagreement, and includes within its sections dissenting views as needed.
- Members of the Work Group also discussed the importance of a shared understanding of baseline facts related to key elements of the Plan, such as what type of development would be permitted under by-right and SUP development, the default option for development in the absence of an approved Waterfront Plan.
- The Work Group indicated agreement with these approaches:
 - Defer detailed discussion and work on the Work Group's report until after technical briefings on all the private and public realm strategic elements have been completed;
 - Use the completed plan statements as reference points to evaluate how well the Plan's recommendations reflect the Work Group's positions – with analyses that include aspects of the Plan about which Work Group members agree and disagree; and
 - Identify areas of agreement and disagreement on issues that the Work Group may decide to consider that go beyond those within the current Plan.

- The process for developing the report was summarized:
 - A first step to developing their report to Council is a table of contents/outline identifying the key issues;
 - The current technical briefing process should be completed along with an outline to be developed by Mr. Wood and Mr. Macek for adoption by the Work Group, as it goes through the next weeks or months of its work; the outline should be specific not general;
 - The Work Group should finish its development of statements for each of the Plan's key elements; and
 - To prepare for in-depth discussions of issues, the Work Group will need to be advised by staff on the timing and availability of additional information that the Work Group may identify as needed or desirable.
 - Alternatives should be explored and competing goals identified.
- Several members stressed the importance of in-depth discussions to fully understand the Plan, to prepare the Work Group's findings and recommendations, and to develop and weigh constructive compromise positions. Some noted that they believe additional information will be required to complete this work. Mr. Macek noted that the proposed process is analogous to the Alexandria Waterfront Committee's two-year process, which began in 2009 with development of 91 principles against which the Waterfront Plan was evaluated by the Committee in 2011.
- After discussion, members reached a consensus that the Work Group's report to Council at the start of November is likely to be a status report that reflects where the Work Group is in its review process.
- **FOLLOW-UP:** Members of the Work Group asked that staff provide a sense of how/when the requested Union Street traffic study could be completed. *While a study of this kind is desirable, it cannot be completed within the timeframe set by the Council for the Work Group, and staff believes that it could be completed – and its recommendations implemented – following the adoption of the Plan. The Union Street traffic study would focus on how best to address congestion and manage the multiple modes of travel on Union Street.*

IV. Road Map – Public Realm II

A. Continuation from 9/7/2011: Statements on Flood Mitigation

The Work Group approved, with an understanding they can later be fine-tuned, the following statements as principles it recommends be reflected in a plan. **Note:** *Mr. Olinger supported all of the following statements but noted that, with the rare exception, he considers it hard to vote anything but 'yes' on these principles because of their general nature.*

1. A plan should include a proposal for flood mitigation.

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely

Note: Mr. Olinger agreed, but noted – because flood mitigation would be needed without the Waterfront Plan - that he opposes using the cost of flood mitigation to justify the increase density within the Waterfront Plan area as a way of increasing funds that are generated by the Plan’s elements to fund elements of the Waterfront Plan.

2. A study to improve drainage and minimize flooding in the low-lying portions of King, Union and The Strand should take into consideration: drainage impacts on existing buildings, storm sewers, vehicle and pedestrian access issues, visual and historic character.

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.

Notes:

- Mr. Ely agreed, with the reservation that he is concerned about the feasibility and impact of raising street elevation levels, about the need for more data about the proposed actions, and concern that elements of the Waterfront Plan may be based upon the assumed success of proposed flood mitigation actions that may eventually be proven unfeasible by engineering studies not yet done.
- Mr. Rhodeside agreed, noting he believes flood mitigation should be integral to the Plan’s public and private realm elements, but disagreed with the idea of raising street levels, and identified this issue as needing an engineering study to provide more details.
- Mr. Olinger noted he was aware of a paper done by two architects (his neighbors) examining the issue of development in a flood plain and recommended that this issue be returned to during private realm briefings.
- Mr. Ballard urged that Work Group discussions address public concerns about the viability of development within a flood plain and the impacts on visitors and visitor spending when nuisance flooding cuts off access to the waterfront.

3. The visual impact of flood mitigation should be minimized through incorporation of elements such as seating walls, berms and other features into the landscaping.

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.

Flood Mitigation Additional Discussion

During the discussion of flood mitigation, Work Group members raised the following issues (staff responses in italics):

- In light of FEMA’s current funding challenges and demands on its resources from more severe flood problems throughout the country, how likely is Alexandria to obtaining a FEMA grant to help fund nuisance flooding projects? *Fairly low since Alexandria’s project addresses a 10-year flood, not the 100-year flood which FEMA typically focuses on.*

- Is flood mitigation a significant enough issue to include in the Plan? *Significant public support for including flood mitigation in the Waterfront Plan was heard early in the planning process at community meetings. The Plan proposes measures that address elevation 6 flooding – a 10-year flood - since such flooding affects access to the waterfront, was found by the flood mitigation study to be cost-effective, and could be implemented while minimizing visual impacts to the waterfront area.*
- How many structures would be protected at elevation 6 – and to what extent are those flooded now? *19 structures, all of which are currently affected by flooding. City staff considered the consultant’s review of nuisance, elevation 4 and elevation 6 flooding, and decided to focus on elevation 6 flooding because of the issues cited above.*
- Could buildings be protected from flooding via flood-proofing? *Flood proofing in historic districts poses challenges since insuring that the structure is water-tight would require window and door replacement or providing a membrane around the building’s structure. Staff estimated it would cost \$15,000-40,000 per structure; materials used for flood-proofing are usually inconsistent with materials used within a historic district.*
- Why would it be appropriate for the costs of flood mitigation to be included within projections for the Waterfront Plan costs since flood mitigation would need to be pursued with or without the Waterfront Plan? *Staff suggested that the Work Group might chose to support a statement that flood mitigation is important, but that the funding source need not be linked to waterfront development.*
- Members identified how to consider flood mitigation costs as an issue to be considered during the Work Group’s budget discussions.
- Questions were raised on issues not covered by the URS study – such as how action would impact access to buildings, how hydrostatic pressure would be impacted, and how changes in that pressure would affect building foundations. *Those issues would be addressed in the next, more detailed phase of design and engineering.*
- Has a cost-benefit analysis of the Plan’s proposed modification of the 6-foot walkway been done? Is it possible to apply the approach recommended by T&ES staff to an evaluation of inland water that may need to be pumped out to provide some information about how that might affect cost considerations in the study? *A cost-benefit analysis was done as part of the URS study and the findings continue to be valid for the flood mitigation proposal in the Waterfront Plan because the changes in design are not ones that would materially change the overall cost. Both proposals, for example, include the same pumping features.*
- Is it possible to determine the likely size of the pump stations? *The stations would likely be below-ground with small facilities above ground, but this is not the time to size pumps and provide detailed information. This is a conceptual point in the planning process.*
- Members agreed that planners had significantly improved upon the flood mitigation concept offered by the URS study creating an innovative and creative approach that provides a foundation for many other Plan elements.

- Some members agreed that the Work Group’s focus should not be on flood mitigation details but on the principle that flood mitigation is integral to the Plan and needs to be incorporated within the public and private realms.
- Some members had an interest in extending the flood mitigation area to Ford’s Landing and Windmill Hill Park – not just for three blocks – because over the years the sea level will rise. *Staff focused on these four blocks because everything outside this is already elevated above level 6.*
- Members were interested in ordinances on building structures within a flood plain. *Sec. 6-300 of the zoning ordinance refers to this; it is consistent with FEMA regulations.*
- How much impervious versus pervious areas – is included? *The Waterfront Plan reduces the overall amount of impervious surface in the area covered by the flood mitigation project because it converts areas that are now impervious (such as parking lots and street ends) to parks and public spaces, but it does not pave areas that are now pervious.*
- Flood mitigation should be part of the Plan because there is a cost to the city of clean-ups after weather events, making it sensible to coordinate this planning with the Waterfront Plan.

B. Continuation from 9/21/2011 meeting: Statements on the Public Realm

The Work Group approved, with an understanding they can later be fine-tuned, the following statements as principles it recommends be reflected in a plan.

General Statements about the Public Realm

There was general support for the following General Plan Statements regarding the Public Realm with Mr. Ely expressing some concerns:

- 1. A design for the waterfront public realm should be of very high quality (world class).**
- 2. Implementation should respect and balance the rights of property owners with public benefits.**
- 3. The view of the waterfront from the river should be inviting and express the character of Alexandria.**
- 4. There should be citywide public participation in the design of major and minor park elements.**

Statements about the Public Realm – Foot of King Street/Pier

- 1. Where King Street meets the river, there should be a significant public space that acts as a gateway to the City from the river and offers a variety of activities for residents and visitors.**

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard.

Disagreed: Ely.

- 2. A plan should include a new pier extending from near the foot of King Street for uses such as water taxis, permanent or visiting ships of character, and for people to walk along. The view of the Potomac River from King Street should be preserved.**

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard.

Disagreed: Ely.

Foot of King Street/Pier Discussion Highlights

- The importance of preserving a public square/space at the foot of King Street: it was stated that the Waterfront Committee has highlighted this as a major priority after the idea of moving the proposed public space's location had been raised by the Planning Commission.
- The importance of ships docked at the pier not obstructing the view of the river from King Street.
- The need to understand the reasons for having a pier at this location, including the importance of having the water taxis dock near King Street.
- Concern about the advisability of separating water taxis, now docked near the Chart House, from other commercial boats which would remain at that location. It was noted the Potomac River Company had requested a location closer to King Street.
- The importance of having a designated location for commercial boat activities. (Example: Boston's Long Wharf).
- The importance of incorporating the view of the waterfront from outside the City – including those approaching from the river, the bridge and approaching National Airport by air.

Statements about the Public Realm – Parks and Public Spaces

The Work Group approved, with an understanding they can later be fine-tuned, the following statements as principles it recommends be reflected in a plan.

1. **A plan should improve the quality, design and programming of existing parks and public spaces.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.
2. **There should be continuous public access to the shoreline from Daingerfield Island to Jones Point Park.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard.
Disagreed: Wood, Ely.
Note: Olinger saw it as a vision and as an objective recognizing that continuous access along the shoreline may vary.
Ely disagreed with regard to the word “shoreline.”
Wood noted that he agreed with the vision and objective of continuous public access.
3. **There should be a meaningful increase in parks and public spaces along the waterfront.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.
4. **Parks and public spaces should support activities for a wide range of users including families and children.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.
5. **There should be both active and passive uses in the public spaces along the waterfront.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.
6. **Parks and public spaces should be respectful of Alexandria’s history.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.
7. **The City should consider its parks and open spaces as an integrated system. It needs to have a holistic design vision.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.
8. **There must be active, integrated management of the public spaces, both maintenance and programming.**
Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.

Parks and Public Spaces Discussion Highlights

- The importance of broad participation in the planning process for public parks and spaces.
- The importance of incorporating public art throughout the public spaces – an issue that will be returned to during discussion of the Plan’s history and art elements.
- Several members expressed concern (Ely, Lyle and Ballard) that private property rights be respected, which was addressed as a new statement.
- Differing opinions as to how the Plan’s long term vision for a public square at the foot of King Street should reflect the fact that a portion of the location is now occupied by the Old Dominion Boat Club’s (ODBC) parking lot.
- Importance of attention being paid to how public spaces are used, including integrated activities that are not random and with plans that are adjusted and refined over time to reflect how programming and community usage actually develops.
- The importance of holistic, integrated design for the waterfront with a design vision of a landscape whose parts all fit together to create a whole, for example, Manhattan’s East River Promenade, or the Minneapolis’ integrated parks system, and Olmstead’s Emerald Necklace. This principle was addressed in a new statement.
- The goal of having a “meaningful increase in park space” will be returned to when evaluating the current Plan.
- Members agreed that additional statements may/are likely to be added to this list of draft principles.
- Cited as an example of park activities for a wide range of users, Chinese parks where green areas are used by varied groups for activities such as children’s ball games and Tai Chi practiced by older members of the community.
- The Work Group declined to include a statement about the need to improve the public space around the Torpedo Factory Food Court and Chart House but noted that it is an important issue that they will address during the Work Group’s more detailed discussions of Plan elements.
- When considering the goal of continuous public access to the shoreline from Daingerfield Island to Jones Point Park, member perspectives varied: one member urged the importance of having the planning process respect private property along the waterfront, such as the ODBC clubhouse and its ownership of actual shoreline, and the privately-owned parcels across from Chadwick’s. Other members regarded this statement as a vision and goal reflecting an understanding that when continuous public access to the waterfront is broken up by private land parcels the waterfront’s marketing appeal and its availability for public enjoyment is lessened. A third perspective suggested there may be ways to facilitate continuous access to the shoreline despite having some privately owned parcels.

Statements about the Public Realm – Maintenance

The Work Group approved, with an understanding they can later be fine-tuned, the following statements as principles it recommends be reflected in a plan.

1. The waterfront should have a high level of maintenance, including the enhanced ability to minimize water-borne debris.

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.

Note: It was noted that, for example, RPCA staff had the previous spring taken the cost-effective action to prevent debris from accumulating in the marina area by installing a \$400 bubbler between the Torpedo Factory and the ODBC that has successfully kept debris from that part of the shoreline.

2. Facilities for park maintenance and operations should be located in proximity to the waterfront and sensitively designed.

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.

3. Pursue public-private alliances that maintain and promote top quality public spaces.

Agreed: Rhodeside, Wood, Olinger, Macek, Lyle, Ballard, and Ely.

V. Public Comment Period

Katy CANNADY- Noted as important issues the Robinson Terminal sites, the ODBC parking lot's implications for planning the public square, and recognizing the importance of history sites throughout the City.

Engin ARTEMEL- Advised that the Rivergate Homeowners Association president has requested that the Work Group consult with them as issues related to Rivergate Park are considered.

Gina BAUM – Expressed concern about the meeting time taken up by process issues, flooding's impact on waterfront businesses' operations, and parking lots being inappropriate for the waterfront. Referred to an article posted to waterfront4all's website regarding how Georgetown had created a waterfront park in place of a waterfront parking lot.

Boyd WALKER- Indicated support for public-private partnerships for parks maintenance, noting the Founders Park example, and suggested that the Work Group's eventual recommendations be presented at a separate public meeting.

VI. Meeting Summary

- Drafting of placeholder statements was completed for the public realm elements of flood mitigation, parks and public spaces, and waterfront maintenance.
- At the next Work Group Meeting, October 12, work will continue on statements regarding the marina, pier and shoreline public elements, and the history and art public elements.

VII. Next Meetings

- Wednesday, October 12, 2011, 5:30 – 8:30 PM, Cameron Station Great Room.
- Wednesday, October 19, 2011, 8:00 – 11:00 AM, City Council Work Room

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