

# Alexandria Waterfront History Plan, 2010

## Summary of Principles and Core Recommendations

*The full Waterfront History Plan can be found on the City's website at:  
<http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/Waterfront/AACWaterfrontHistoryPlan.pdf>*

From the conclusion:

Alexandria embodies the sweep of American history and experience. It can capture and showcase the nation's maritime past, its ambitions, the tragedies of its wars, its struggle with slavery, the promise of civil rights, and the daily lives of people from all walks of life in all eras. Both as witness to this history and for its impressive, precious inventory of surviving structures, streetscapes, and fabric, Alexandria offers a compelling story and destination. Interpretation of Alexandria's history should bring to life that story, and the people and places within it in the context of the American experience. Yet, the waterfront must be a place for residents, not just visitors. The Alexandrian waterfront belongs first to Alexandrians, and it should be an authentic expression of their city and personal to them, not a theme park or planned development.

This History Plan is not intended as a final guideline for the Waterfront Plan to interpret the city's past, but as a framework and reference from which to write an Art and History Master Plan as a next step. For this the City will need professional guidance in interpretation and for the arts, as well as professional fundraising. Nevertheless, the History Plan does offer the City a strategy to immediately begin to improve and interpret the Alexandrian waterfront through art and history, in a series of stages and at reasonable cost. It is a plan which can be implemented in part now, not decades away, and which both celebrates and protects the city for future generations.

## II. Principles

A short set of principles guide and inform this plan:

- 1) **The plan reflects the full complexity of Alexandria's rich history, its place within the American story, and reconciles it with contemporary America.** The plan provides an inclusive and relevant account of the city's evolution, and marks social, economic/commercial, political, cultural, and military history spanning the full sweep of the city. It underscores the appeal of the history of, and on, the waterfront as a draw for residents and visitors, beyond general charm and ambiance.
- 2) **The plan respects the diversity of uses and approaches to the waterfront.**
- 3) **The plan seeks to connect people and places through historical reality and meaning, and draws people to explore and experience the city beyond the waterfront.**

- 4) **The plan responds to the City’s current outline for the waterfront plan** including recommendations and comment about specific locations, content, historic fabric and planned development on each area of the waterfront, as well as vistas and alleys. The plan also offers constructive suggestions for the July 2010 Concept Plan, identifying what works, and what might be further amplified, refined, or altered.
- 5) **The plan identifies existing historic buildings and fabric on the waterfront which should be preserved and interpreted. At the same time, it recalls and places lost sites and historic events which should be marked or interpreted.** It will provide substantive reasons why these sites are important, and examples of interpretive options and text. (See also Appendix 1, *Preservation Perspective on Alexandria Waterfront Planning*.)
- 6) **The plan offers guidelines for a stewardship and preservation plan** for the Waterfront area, to include buildings, historic views, and specific sites. These guidelines can also apply to the city’s entire historic fabric. (See also Appendix 2, *Historic Structures on the Waterfront*.)
- 7) **The plan offers suggestions for funding** to help implement this aspect of the overall Waterfront Plan.
- 8) **The plan envisions an ongoing collaborative planning effort with arts and history to showcase Alexandria within the American experience.**
- 9) **The plan includes suggestions for year-round arts and history programming to bring the waterfront alive as more than a passive destination.**

**Note:** The principles and recommendations set forth as a whole in this plan are based upon those contained in *Preservation Perspective on Alexandria Waterfront Planning, March, 2007*, written by several City preservation commissions and organizations (See Appendix 1).

### **III. Core Recommendations to the 2010 Concept Plan and Implementation Strategy**

#### **A Phased Strategy**

The July 2010 Concept Plan calls for a phased approach to implement changes to the waterfront. Both the History and Arts plans should follow the same path based on opportunity, finances, and the sequence necessary in any development.

The History Plan proposes this outline for a phased strategy, with more details offered below, which implements the plan almost from the time of approval:

- 1) Organizational (immediate):
  - a. Establish Arts and History joint planning group to produce an art and history master plan.
  - b. Establish History organization (possibly non-profit, see below) to begin fundraising strategy.
  - c. These groups should establish an art and history master plan and guidelines with priorities and opportunities. They would advise the management of the waterfront.
  - d. Explore and, select, if beneficial, a structure such as a special district, authority or group to raise revenue, program, and integrate efforts and spearhead waterfront improvements.
  
- 2) Implement low or no cost aspects of the plan (immediate):
  - a. The City begins a “Brand the Strand” effort.
  - b. Restore the historic names of existing sites, alleys, and wharves.
  - c. Adjust existing interpretive signs or artwork; give historic names to parks without such titles, e.g. Waterfront Park.
  - d. Tie more events to the waterfront and waterfront programming, especially around the annual city celebrations, and integrate a calendar and promotion.
  - e. Identify and launch Cultural Anchor and Theme Areas, even if all planned elements are not ready.
  - f. Establish basic north-south and east-west circulation patterns (described below).
  - g. Identify sites needed for acquisition for elements of the plan, begin staff work.
  - h. Create archaeological plan for the phases of development on the waterfront.
  - i. Bring the Potomac Riverboat Company skipjack to Alexandria from National Harbor as already planned, as soon as possible.
  
- 3) Implement aspects of the plan based on opportunity (near term):
  - a. Civil War Sesquicentennial celebration can be tied to some aspects of the waterfront, and some grants specific to interpreting the Civil War will be available. There will be some donor opportunities as well.
  - b. Implement elements as aspects of the waterfront are repaired and upgraded, such as signs, streetscape elements, parks, and alleys.
  - c. Public Art donation opportunities. The city can redirect some public art tied to development to the waterfront.
  - d. Grow programming schedules.
  
- 4) Implement elements that do not require major changes (near term):
  - a. Interpretive artwork, flags, signage
  - b. New programming and tours
  
- 5) Implement non-development aspects of the plan which require moderate investment (near term):
  - a. The Strand pedestrian area
  - b. Streetscape work (paving, lighting, signage, etc.)

- c. Major interpretive signs and artwork
  - d. Establish Waterfront Concierge (see below).
  - e. Commission study of best location for Archaeology Museum/History Center.
- 6) Implement major aspects of the plan (intermediate to long term). Some portions will depend on fundraising efforts.
- a. Opportunistic acquisition of historic buildings and their adaptive reuse for City use such as the History Center
  - b. Redevelopment of West's Point and Point Lumley
  - c. Full implementation of the Cultural Anchors
  - d. Berthing of ships
  - e. Self-supporting waterfront

### Summary of Core Recommendations

These ideas are described in more detail, and in regards to specific locations, in subsequent sections of the History Plan. *Additional suggestions and recommendations will also be discussed elsewhere.*

- 1) In keeping with Goals 1 and 7 of Alexandria's 2010 Strategic Plan, the city should create a joint Arts and History Planning Group from the existing commissions to develop a coordinated Art and History Master Plan and Cultural Guidelines for the waterfront. This plan will inform waterfront design guidelines, as well as interpretive history, art and programming for the waterfront area. It will also lay the groundwork for future collaboration across the city.
- 2) The City should explore a special Art, Historic and Cultural area to help administer the waterfront and to develop financial opportunities for it. The city should study further how to take advantage of existing state and federal laws for funding opportunities for such an area.
- 3) The City should encourage existing History non-profits to contribute financially to aspects of the Waterfront related to their work. The City should also encourage the establishment of an umbrella, non-profit organization to assist in planning, programming and fundraising for Alexandria history, and particularly for the waterfront. Outlining the details of such an organization is beyond the scope of this plan: however, it should be independent of the City, be self-supporting, and be able to develop a professional fundraising presence with national reach. It should also develop events and revenue opportunities for the waterfront.
- 4) The waterfront should not appear to be an appendage to the city, rather it should reflect that the city grew from it. The waterfront should be an *authentic expression* of the city and its organic, fitful, and uneven past and development. To enhance this authenticity, the specific physical aspects of the plan should avoid creating an artificial or "planned" appearance in favor of an "organic" one. Stagger wharf lines, vary building style and

period, materials and rooflines, and bring back historic opportunities to create new alleys and vistas. Avoid an overall “identity” mimicking a planned development, or trying to recreate another Williamsburg.

- 5) Alexandria should be understood as an expression of the American Story. Interpretation of Alexandria’s history should bring to life people, places, and stories in the context of the American experience. Real people and their daily lives, as well as witnesses to history, should form the core of the physical representation of history and programming. Paradoxes and struggles should provoke curiosity, comment and thought.
- 6) The City should create a dynamic, north-south pedestrian circulation pattern, focusing on a series of Cultural Anchors and Theme Areas. The anchors will act much like the anchor stores in a commercial mall and provide draws for pedestrians to move along the waterfront and visit both businesses and cultural destinations. Pedestrians could circulate, for example, along The Strand south to Duke Street/Point Lumley, and return north along Union Street and its shops and restaurants continuing northwards to Founders Park and beyond to Oronoco Park and the north end of the waterfront.

- Anchors: There should be three principal Cultural Anchors in the central waterfront:

The **Northern Cultural Anchor** should be at West’s Point (now Robinson Terminal, North)/Oronoco Bay Park. With performance areas, and a historic backdrop, this area will also be an important local draw.

The **Central Cultural Anchor** should be the Torpedo Factory Arts Center, which sits at the intersection of water arrivals and the King and Union Streets pedestrian core, as well as the north south axis of Union Street. It offers authentic artwork, and an opportunity to experience and watch artists at work and the Archaeology Museum.

The **Southern Cultural Anchor** should be the 200 Block of The Strand, including a series of buildings containing both arts and history destinations, docks for historic ships, and the Seaport Foundation.

- Theme Areas: Theme Areas coincide with the existing planning “character areas” in the July 2010 Concept Plan (see Part IV in this plan) with a few additions. Each area would emphasize a special aspect and time period of the city’s history and its experience, yet would link to sites elsewhere along the waterfront or in the city. The areas will combine history and art, and are described below.

The themes are true to their locations and represent most major periods of Alexandria’s history. They provide for distinct character, thus providing a diverse set of environments and experiences. The Themes and Character Areas are:

**Ambitions – Rivergate and Tidlock Parks**  
**Transformations – Oronoco Bay Park**

**Origins – Robinson Terminal North / West’s Point**  
**Foundations – Founders Park**  
**Witness to War – Marina to Queen Streets**  
**Gateway – King and Union Streets**  
**The Working Seaport – The Strand**

- 7) The City should “Brand the Strand” as the key waterfront destination of the central waterfront. Treating the entire Strand as a whole and marketing it as an authentic Alexandria experience which sets the city apart regionally, and nationally. The Strand should be the Waterfront’s King Street—the key north-south axis for pedestrians. The Strand should be returned to its historic use and character. It should link the waterfront areas, be continuous and have a physical identity from Wolfe Street to Queen Street.

Key features should be:

- a. Create the feel of the historic, working waterfront in the 100–200 South blocks of The Strand, the area bounded by the river, Robinson Terminal South/Point Lumley, Union Street, and King Street. It contains all the surviving 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century historic fabric of the working waterfront. This area should be highlighted to create what was once its character. The scale and positioning (perpendicular to the river) of any new construction and park improvements should also be consistent with and echo the wharves, warehouses, and businesses that were there in the past.
- b. Make The Strand a pedestrian zone, from King Street to the proposed walk through at Point Lumley (Robinson Terminal South). Link the zone to the pedestrian area at the 0 block of King Street, and also to the Marina boardwalk and Queen St/Thompsons’s Alley. With the exception of the trolley and appropriate overnight deliveries, and access to the proposed parking lot for the Old Dominion Boat Club, the area would be limited to foot traffic and carriages. Make sure the 100 block of The Strand does not just become a garage entry and restaurant maintenance area, with dumpsters and crates.
- c. Eliminate the proposed hard surface promenade in Waterfront Park and Point Lumley in favor of a gravel path as exists in Oronoco and Founders parks. The planned promenade is sterile, and creates a hard edged, artificial, and uninviting barrier. This path should be set back slightly from the water, and shaded. These parks should be informed by the wharves and linear designs perpendicular to the river, while providing intimate-feeling spaces for sitting.
- d. Permit horse drawn carriages and carts along the waterfront, based in the Strand. These carriages should be allowed to move up and down the Strand and beyond, and to the interior of Old Town.
- e. Union Street should be activated and associated again with the waterfront. It is the natural link to the rest of the urban grid and has interesting retail on the 100 and 200 South blocks. Establishment of a history center in the 200 South Union

Street warehouses and mill. The Art League can help this effort.

- f. Reuse all existing historic warehouses in the 200 block of South Union Street to create a showcase History Center for Alexandria. The City should take advantage of: Wattles Corn Mill, Fowle's Warehouse, and the building at the southeast corner of Union and Prince. All the City's various museums, archives, and history programs can use space here to promote themselves, along with rotating special exhibit space. In addition, private and non-profit history organizations in the city should be given access to exhibit space on a temporary basis. A portion of the first floor should also be used for the History Shop and perhaps additional, related retail, and a cafe.

This area can also be grouped with the Art League and Seaport Foundation to create the Southern Cultural Anchor, to reinforce key and enduring themes a "working Seaport" and "Made in Alexandria."

- g. Use the History Center as the starting point for an Alexandria's history experience. The Center should include an introduction to the city's history, deeper interpretation of major themes and events across the waterfront and city in context, and offer rotating exhibits. By introducing such material here, themes can be interconnected along the waterfront and lessen the need for signage and interpretive materials elsewhere. The center should act as the starting point for historical destinations across Old Town and the greater city.
- h. The History Center might also include permanent space for the Archaeology Museum, if it is found to be the best location for the museum. The AAC has not determined the needs of the Archaeology museum and office or where it ought to be housed. If, after careful study by AAC and the City, it is found that those needs would be better met if the offices and museum moved from the Torpedo Factory Art Center, their archaeological materials and reconstructions of finds such as wharves, ships, and factories could help form the core of the Southern Cultural Anchor.
- i. The City should explore with the Seaport Foundation a permanent site in the redeveloped and repurposed Southern Cultural Anchor in The Strand/Point Lumley area. This area was associated with shipbuilding from the earliest time in the city.
- j. The City should attract sailing ships and other historic vessels as permanently berthed attractions in The Strand/Point Lumley area. These could range from the skipjack currently at National Harbor to a recreation of Washington's brig, *Farmer*, to examples of the steam-driven ships that served the waterfront. These should be privately supported, but the City should make space to accommodate them.
- k. The City should explore with the Art League what its needs and preferences are

and consider finding them space in the Strand area/Southern Cultural Anchor.

- l. If the proposed restaurant building on the 100 Block of the Strand in Waterfront Park, and above the possible ODBC parking is approved, it should appear as a pair of traditional Alexandrian taverns. Union Street was lined with taverns, and this is an ideal theme to follow, even if they are not replicas. They should be named after historic taverns, and use traditional signage and interior design.
  - m. If the Strand Restaurant use is approved, the outdoor seating should be expanded to more of a plaza or town square, possibly terraced closer to the water. It should be bordered with trees for shade, and should be envisioned as the “go to” place for visitors and residents alike. It should have the feel of a broad boulevard seating area as in Paris but with a sense of the wharves.
  - n. Beachcombers at 0 Prince Street should be restored as an operating restaurant, retaining its original design and name, with dining on the rooftop. This building has been a treasured part of the Alexandria waterfront in the recent past and should be again.
- 8) Preserve and enhance period streetscapes and pedestrian circulation in the waterfront area (not just the waterside) in their variety. The principle “first do no harm” is important to the authenticity of the Alexandria waterfront. Much of the historic fabric directly adjacent to the river, and even a block away, has been lost. What remains does still echo the city’s past in different periods and offers visitors a unique experience to “travel back.” New development and planned recreation areas should be minimized. The 100 and 200 blocks of North Union Street should be an integral part of planning so they retain significant historic structures and businesses.
- 9) Use historic names. To reinforce the authentic historic waterfront, use historic names for places, parks, buildings, and alleys. Rename “generic” sites or places with historic names, and connect past names with new sites. (See Appendices 4, *Historical Place Names & Interpretive Ideas*, and 5, *Chart of Historic Wharf Owners and Selected Activities and Products*).
- 10) Use historic materials in pavement and wharves, and new construction. Choose unifying elements (historic gas lamps, street signage, paving, trash barrels, etc.) across the waterfront. Materials can also be modern adaptations closely resembling historic materials.
- 11) Mark the original shoreline in the pavement at key public points. Recommendations for exact locations by street are provided in an appendix map.
- 12) Save the existing, underused and threatened historic buildings in The Strand/Union/Lumley area and preserve them intact for adaptive reuse. In particular, the City should ensure that the three warehouses in the 200 block of South Union Street be restored to



19<sup>th</sup>-century appearance and adaptively reused. The surviving historic structure at Robinson Terminal South (0 Duke Street) should also be protected in any redevelopment.

- 13) Restore and or create east-west corridors. Alleys allow a more porous pedestrian connection, and open waterfront vistas from Union Street and to the interior. New development with alleys will feel “open” rather than restrictive. In addition, any future redevelopment at Robinson Terminal South or in the proposed redevelopment where the Art League and Strand shops are now should include alley passages reminiscent of historic ones.
- 14) The Waterfront Plan should encourage pedestrian movement in an east-west manner into the city and neighboring cultural sites not just north and south. Many waterfront sites have direct connections to museums, buildings, places, and events just a few blocks from the water. Good examples are the relationships between the homes of merchants and their wharves and warehouses, as well as the Civil War experience and fires.
- 15) Beautify alleys. Make alleys a draw as experiences in themselves, inviting, safe, and paved in a manner to evoke historic materials and their historic names.
- 16) New construction should be compatible with the historic district, but be genuine contemporary works. The plan should encourage visionary, and potentially iconic, additions to the waterfront, but conform to existing Old and Historic District requirements. These additions should be in harmony with the existing character and features of surrounding structures and the historic fabric of Old Town. They should not overwhelm the surrounding historic fabric or distract from the general authenticity of the waterfront and its neighborhoods. They should draw their inspiration from the variety of waterfront structures and activities for periods here by character areas.
- 17) New construction should avoid large, monolithic buildings in favor of facades which appear to be multiple structures. For example, the building which might replace the current Art League and Strand structures should be of a scale similar to surrounding buildings, with a facade broken up to appear as more than one building, and oriented much like old warehouses with varying roof lines and heights. This History Plan provides historic photographs of that area as well as examples of successful “varied” facades and appropriate mass and scale from elsewhere in the city.
- 18) The City should create a set of preservation and design guidelines specific to the waterfront. These guidelines should be consistent with the Board of Architectural Review guidelines, but should also reflect the need to preserve street and waterscapes, as well as historic vistas. It should echo the historic reality of different time periods and styles.
- 19) The City should recreate a historic gateway area at the foot of King Street. This plan recommends that the historic ferry arch could become the iconic symbol of arrival. This

gateway should include a permanent concierge site to assist visitors with planning their visit to Alexandria. It would be located near the intersection of King and Union, possibly in the space now occupied by the History Store in the arcade by the Torpedo Factory. The concierge would be staffed and would help visitors not only plan destinations, but book entertainment, hotel rooms, and restaurants. It would also offer directions to destinations throughout the city. The Strand and King Streets vista of Fitzgerald's Warehouse and the Roberts Grain Warehouse should not be obstructed by any new construction such as a tall, roofed pavilion or Strand restaurant. The 100 block of The Strand should reinforce the historic character for all those arriving by water.

- 20) The history and arts elements of the Windmill Park plan should be more closely reconciled with and connected to the Waterfront Plan, both in continuation of the plan's themes and in treatment and materials for implementation. Such reconciliation need not reopen the Windmill plan, but may address additional elements or altering some treatments (or markers) to unify them with the final Waterfront Plan. This includes historic interpretations of Wilkes Street Tunnel.
  
- 21) The Waterfront Plan should not duplicate the history elements already present in the Jones Point Interpretative Plan (National Park Service), but instead complement them.

