

# WATERFRONT PLAN

City of Alexandria, Department of Planning and Zoning

## Meeting Minutes

### Alexandria Waterfront Boat Tour (5/30/2009)

Prepared by

Department of Planning and Zoning and

Office of Historic Alexandria

---

Below is a summary of speaking points and comments from the Alexandria Waterfront Boat Tour:

#### History

- Alexandria has a long history as a seaport (trading in commodities, tobacco, fur, slaves, etc.)
  - One of the top ten busiest ports in the U.S
  - Largest tobacco port and warehousing site on the Potomac
  - Second largest slave trade port (New Orleans was the first).
- 1791-1847: Alexandria was included within the District of Columbia (Jones Point was the southern corner of DC's 10 mile boundary)
- 1847: Alexandria was retroceded back to Virginia and the District was reduced in size to exclude the southern portion of the Potomac
- 1800s: Slaves were put in Bruin Slave Jail (1701 Duke Street) now Edmonson Plaza
- From 1828 to 1836: Alexandria was home to the Franklin & Armfield Slave Market, one of the largest slave trading companies in the country (1315 Duke Street)
- Alexandria was re-chartered in 1852
- Union troops occupied Alexandria. On May 24, 1861 troops landed at the base of Cameron Street on the Potomac River on May 1861
  - Troops marched up King Street to the Marshall House
  - 1/3 of original residents remained after the Civil War although the City was in shambles.
  - The City's population probably doubled from Pre Civil War to post Civil War.
- Union troop presence and the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment, prompted a significant increase in Alexandria's black population
- January 1864-establishment of Freedman Cemetery (over 1,800 burials)
- 19<sup>th</sup> century- the use of the Potomac for waterfront transport minimized- focused shifted to railroad transport. Port and rails worked together.
- Growth shifted to the western end of the City and more industrial uses surfaced (lumberyards, plants, etc). Not a lot of growth until 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 1930 the Little Stone Bridge was under construction as part of the George Washington Parkway
- 1970s and 1980s -urban renewal movement started on King Street and removal of processing activities from the waterfront
- 1980s-Alexandria's waterfront joint land use plan & various city improvements

- 91 years ago today at 10 AM, Woodrow Wilson put first rivet in keel of boat built at Gunston Hall, built at Jones Point

### **Boundary Issues**

- After the city was ceded back to VA, jurisdictional issues became more clouded
- Supreme Court ruled that the 1791 high water mark was the legal boundary between DC and VA
- Land along the shoreline in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was filled; maps don't accurately depict where the high water mark existed in 1791
- 1974: 50 acres were added to the George Washington Parkway
- 1980s: the City and National Park Service (NPS) completed a joint land use plan to protect and enhance the waterfront
  - Federal government agreed to retain no fee ownership for waterfront property
  - Granted access and scenic easements
- 2000 Plan restricted playgrounds under the Woodrow Wilson Bridge

### **Hunting Towers**

- Hunting Creek was huge and designated this area prior to founding of town. This area was so deep that ships sailed up to 1<sup>st</sup> Ford (Telegraph Road today) to Cameron.
- Hunting Creek was historically a point of land
  - Broomilawn Point that did not continue over Hunting Creek
  - After the Civil War the area was used for brickyards
- Freeman's Cemetery which was created to accommodate former slaves
  - Almost 1800 people were buried there
- Recent proposal to renovate the current Hunting Towers apartments
  - luxury condominium community on the Hunting Terrace
- Proposal was rejected by the city due to height restrictions
- 50 feet height restriction

### **Jones Point**

- The JP plan consists of improvements to the park, shoreline, and historic elements
  - Bulkhead extension
  - Landscaping
  - Trails and park amenities
  - Historic markers for the light house and DC cornerstones; additional interpretive sign detailing full history
- Restriction of parking under the existing bridge (security issue)
- The park is owned by NPS and managed under a 25-year agreement with the City. Permit will need to be renegotiated in September 2011
- Zoned waterfront mixed use-30 feet max height, 50 feet with special use permit (SUP)

### **Ford's Landing**

- 1986: U.S. and Cook Inlet Region Inc. (CIRI) exchanged easements to protect the Old Ford Plant and ensure public access along the shoreline. This plant was torn down and replaced with townhomes. Archaeological resources include 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century wharf bulkheads, 350 ft long section of a 19<sup>th</sup> century shipway, 7 boat hulls, and marine railway
- CIRI agreed to improve and maintain public access areas and bike trail

### **Pomander Walk/Old Town Yacht Basin**

- It is unknown who Pomander Walk was named after.
- Pomander park-primarily used as a dog park
  - City granted the U.S. a scenic easement (Parcel A and subject to restrictions)
  - This was filled land formed around the hull of the ship "Young Hero" to create a wharf in 1820s.
- Old Town Yacht Basin
  - Both the U.S. and Alexandria have claimed right to the property

### **Robinson Terminal North & South**

- Robinson Terminal North and South were original points to Crescent Bay around which Alexandria laid out.
- The South terminal was originally called Point Lumley, was major shipyard in 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- North and South have a high potential for archaeological resources.
- 1853: Robinson Payne was a general grocery business
  - Terminal was used to store grain, tobacco, coal and fuel
- 1939: the green building with the point was the original warehouse in Petersburg, VA and then constructed on-site. Other warehouses were built later
- 1960s-1990s: the terminal handled newsprint
- 1980s: Washington Post purchased the terminals.
- The southern end is used more than the northern terminal
- No longer a business need for the North-Robinson terminal. Waterfront transport needs have diminished. Previously, 300+ tons of newsprint by year were delivered not most product arrives by truck or rail.
- South – original warehouse structure still on-site
- South – about 60% utilized.
- North - site was downzoned in 1992
  - Washington Post disagrees with the City about the heights and densities. The downsize could limit the redevelopment potential
- Washington Post had plans to put the North Terminal on the market to accommodate a boutique hotel, but then the market changed. Willing to work with the City to develop a plan for the site
- North Terminal is in the original first tobacco port which led to founding of the City in 1749
  - West warehouse was built here because of opportunity for trade
  - North was originally called West Point and continued into 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Alexandria Marine (Parcel E) is designated for development
  - Uses include restaurant, cafes, commercial shops, office space, museums, outdoor farmer's market, public park etc. (restricted to 30 feet)

### **Old Dominion Boat Club**

- Old Dominion Boat Club was founded in July 1880 by 15 young men who wanted to pursue physical fitness and enjoy water activities such as sailing and rowing.
- 1883: the club purchased part of the Strand property between Duke and Prince Streets
- 1921: purchased Alexandria Ferry Co
- 1922: Original building was destroyed by fire. Building that is there today was the replacement
- Currently has 56 slips and over 700 members
- Approximately 50 people on the wait list
- 25-foot boat is minimum size accommodated
- Alexandria residents have priority over non-residents on the waitlist
- Oldest structure directly on the water; oldest continuous organization on the waterfront

### **Potomac channel depth**

- 15-20 feet, typically
- 5-6 feet near Marina Towers
- DC owns the water, but NPS owns the land at the bottom of the river
- In some places Alexandria has 0 feet of useable water and it goes to 300 feet in other places
- Channel has been dredged many times through the years. Major dredging by Army Corps of Engineers in 1911-1912. It added nearly 50 acres of land to Jones Point by filling to Battery Cover with dredge spoil and 13 vessels removed from the channel.

### **Founder's Park**

- Originally in the Bay; wharves were created end of the 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Filled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Parts of areas to the West called "Fishtown" where fish would be processed seasonally
- Smoot Family later acquired the plan. The property stayed in the family until 1960s

### **Oronoco Bay Park**

- Allowed facilities for rowing
- Restrictions do not allow for additional plazas or enclosed covered storage
- This was Ralph's Gut – all that remains of a very large marsh that extended farther west
- Archaeological resources such as shipwrecks, probably under fill.

### **Marina Towers**

- Former tank farm owned by Texaco. Oil and gas was shipped here.
- 282 condo apartments built in 1970
- 100' height limit; only location along the waterfront
- As part of the settlement agreement the Mt Vernon trail was built

### **Rivergate Park**

- The area in front of Rivergate was the former location of Norton rendering Plant; ceased operations in 1970-1980s.
- Public park maintained by Condo Association
- Alex Canal Tide Lock stones in park

**Canal Center**

- First area to be settled during the title dispute
- The Canal Tide lock was restored through archaeological investigation and developer recreated part of lock and gate
- The area by the water is required to stay open space
- All parking is underground

**Mirant Plant**

- 1949: Time Magazine article stated that the Pentagon believe it was being overcharged for power by the plant.
- 1981: an agreement between the United States and PEPCO led to the cooperation of the construction of the Mount Vernon trail along the Waterfront in front of the plant

**Daingerfield Island**

- It was an island at one point. It was a farm owned by the Alexander Family.
- It was acquired by Bathurst Daingerfield
- It's approximately 150 acres and currently owned by the National Park Service

**Public comments**

- Oronoco Bay : creosote and sediments surrounding the outfall
- Wilson Bridge is 90 miles away from Chesapeake Bay. Water taxi from National Airport to Old Town and National Harbor being pursued
- 150 slips make a viable marina; need more slips

**Envisioned Project Challenges**

- Ownership constraints, settlement and land use agreements, conflicting views of the waterfront, funding