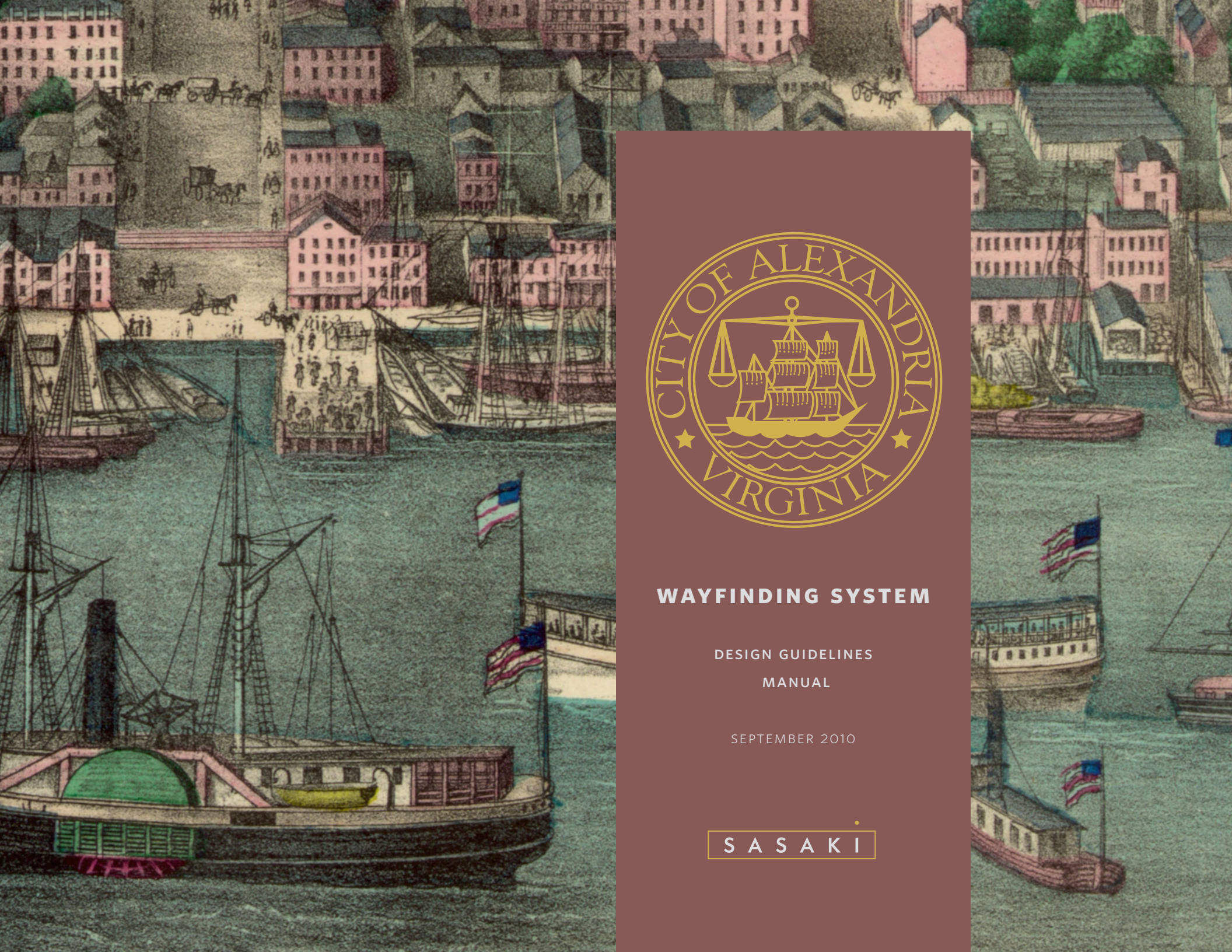

WAYFINDING SYSTEM

DESIGN GUIDELINES MANUAL

SEPTEMBER 2010

SASAKI

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HISTORIC
EARLY
BUILDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The Alexandria wayfinding program is borne of the acknowledgement that well-designed signs and information have a positive impact on the city—through increased comfort and awareness on the part of the user, and increased visibility for attractions and local businesses. Likewise, disorganized and uncoordinated signs serve to detract from their environment, leading to sign clutter and potential confusion for visitors and residents.

One of the key recommendations that emerged from the city's 2003 Visitor Center Study was to substantially improve or create a signage and wayfinding system. The study found that informational and directional signage is a critical city weakness, and that if visitors are to learn what Alexandria has to offer, lengthen their visits, as well as visit again, improvements are needed to make finding the visitors center, historic sites, transit, amenities and parking easier. The city itself is what should be highlighted—and the best way to do that is with a clear wayfinding system.

The program summarized in this document formalizes a family of signs that will enhance the city environment and improve wayfinding for visitors and citizens alike. The information content within the program has been carefully planned by taking a broad view of the city—studying circulation, taking stock of its offerings, and walking in the shoes of its audience. The program design is a response to the character of the city, drawing inspiration from its many distinct neighborhoods and districts. Components of the program are designed to enable flexible application to a variety of installation conditions, and are responsive to the capabilities of the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services for maintenance and updating over time.

What is Wayfinding?

Wayfinding is an experience: that of an individual attempting to make their way through an unfamiliar environment. When the information needed to access that environment is provided in a thoughtful, structured fashion, the unfamiliar quickly becomes comfortable, friendly, welcoming. A successful wayfinding system manages this experience, using signage as a communication tool to not only facilitate access, but also to reflect the civic culture and complement the environment of its setting.

Wayfinding in Alexandria: Today

Many signs exist in the city today that may help with wayfinding, but they are not a comprehensive system. Rather there are many layers of sign efforts that have evolved over time, with multiple designs and varying degrees of effectiveness. Together, they contribute to an overall impression of visual clutter and potential confusion. In addition, there are critical layers of a comprehensive system that are missing.

Wayfinding in Alexandria: the Future

The new Wayfinding System for Alexandria is designed to project a consistent image for the entire city—upon implementation, it will be a complete navigational system within the city's boundaries. The benefits of such a system are many and include:

AESTHETIC

- *Reduces visual clutter; allows historic fabric of the city to shine through*
- *Replaces multiple mismatched sign efforts with one comprehensive coordinated streamlined system that fits well with the city's historic character and distinctive neighborhoods.*

ENVIRONMENT AND SAFETY

- *Directs cars to garages, eliminates circling to look for parking or destination*
- *Promotes walking, biking, mass transit*
- *Reduces driver confusion*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- *Establishes a comprehensive multi-layer strategy to improve pedestrian/vehicular wayfinding to amenities such as shops, hotels, restaurants*
- *Addresses parking/traffic issues by directing cars quickly into garages and getting people out/oriented to enjoy city shops and restaurants*
- *Incorporates regional/city trails and historic sites, including the Alexandria Heritage Trail*
- *Dovetails with Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association's (ACVA) efforts to provide pre-trip visitor information*
- *Key component of King Street Retail Strategy (parking, pedestrians, and small business economic development - coordinated A-frame program) and related to economic development citywide*
- *Provides a more comfortable and informative visitor experience, another reason to return*

Design Process

The Alexandria wayfinding system was developed in collaborative fashion, with input from the city, a wide spectrum of stakeholders, and the overall community along with the consultant.

CITY WORKING GROUP

The City Working Group (CWG) included representatives from stakeholder city departments. The CWG was responsible for the project's preliminary mission statement and preliminary destination criteria. This group met regularly throughout the design process to coordinate on city related considerations and issues. Departments represented include the City Managers Office, General Services, Office of Historic Alexandria, Planning and Zoning, Transportation and Environmental Services, and Recreation Parks and Cultural Amenities.

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP

The Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), appointed by the City Manager, was made up of stakeholders representing the following interests: civic, business, tourism, economic development, seniors, pedestrian/bike, government, transit, arts, persons with disabilities, and historic. A list of the members of the SAG and their affiliations is provided in the acknowledgements section.

The SAG was responsible for establishing preliminary design criteria and providing ongoing guidance on all facets of the overall program including hierarchy of destinations to be signed, size, quantity, and types of signs, named districts and district header designs and the City emblem design. Their time and commitment to the process spanned nine SAG meetings over the course of two years. Guidance from the stakeholders was invaluable to the process and their final approval of the program on June 30, 2010 is testament to their collaboration and ultimate support for a Citywide Wayfinding program.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community meetings have been held at critical junctures during both the initial study phase and later design phases to gather community and citizen input while building consensus for the program. Community feedback has been factored back in to the design process and influenced a number of refinements to improve the system along the way.

- *Outreach and opportunities for involvement have included: updates to the Federation of Civic Associations, Beautification Commission, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, Civic Associations, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, online surveys, ongoing web and enews information, Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings, open houses and work shops*

OFFICIAL REVIEW

Multiple worksessions were held with both Boards of Architectural Review (BAR), the Planning Commission and City Council to provide periodic updates and elicit feedback on design development and srategy. The BAR endorsed the program as revised in May 2010, and approved building mounted parking signs in June 2010.

Staff also worked closely with the National Park Service (NPS) to solicit their comments on the signs proposed for Washington Street, holding two joint staff meetings and engaging in ongoing collaboration and review. An NPS representative also served on the SAG. In August 2010, NPS conducted a final review and provided their approval of the program.

Presenting signs at a public open house, January 2009.

Beyond wayfinding issues, the key design objective was to advance the City Council's 2015 vision for Alexandria:

"Alexandria is a vibrant, diverse, historic and beautiful city with unique neighborhoods and multiple urban villages where we take pride in our great community."

Project Objectives

The wayfinding system design team was charged with addressing a number of complex wayfinding issues in the city, and resolving them through a coordinated solution. Included among these objectives were to:

- *Develop a vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding system for destinations in the City of Alexandria with a focus on Old Town, but to include destinations in all areas of the city.*
- *Develop a wayfinding system that will create an overall identity for the city, that is compatible with its historic character, and that will also help to differentiate existing and emerging districts*
- *Provide signage that will direct visitors to and identify parking lots and garages in Old Town*
- *Provide trailblazer signage for interstate, state roads, and primary bicycle trails, as well as major destinations just outside city boundaries (Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, Mount Vernon)*
- *Reduce visual clutter and increase consistency of city signage*
- *Promote walking, bicycling, and use of mass transit (Metrorail, Metrobus, Dash)*
- *Support the developing regional interpretive trail system and reinforce historical and regional trail themes by incorporating regional trails and historic sites into city interpretive signage*
- *Integrate Alexandria Heritage Trail interpretive signage (designed previously and partially installed)*
- *Address ADA guidelines and considerations in the design of the program*

Program Administration

The Alexandria wayfinding program establishes standards for design, programming, implementation and upkeep of all wayfinding signs in the city, as well as guidelines for the appropriate use of streetscape banners, and guidelines for the design of neighborhood identification signs. These standards must be adhered to in order to promote a consistent and easily navigable environment for members of the community and guests alike.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Phased implementation of the wayfinding sign system is the responsibility of the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (TES) consulting with the Department of Planning and Zoning (PZ).

GENERAL PROCEDURE

Prior to fabrication, TES and PZ staff will field check and establish specific locations for each sign. At this time staff will also jointly decide which non-regulatory signs may be removed. Sign location and removal decisions will be documented. After contractor installation, TES will field check that new signs are installed properly and that old non-regulatory signs have been removed. After implementation of each phase TES staff will circulate a report detailing the signs that were installed and removed.

MAINTENANCE

Ongoing maintenance and repair of the wayfinding sign system is the responsibility of TES.

NEW SIGNS / NEW DESTINATIONS

As Alexandria evolves over time, new districts may emerge as a result of planning efforts, new destinations may be established, existing destinations may grow in prominence, or circulation may change for vehicles or pedestrians. The wayfinding program is designed to be easily expanded with existing signs cost-effectively updated. Changes to or expansion of the program is the responsibility of PZ, consulting with TES. All proposals or requests for installation of new wayfinding signs should be addressed to PZ which will consult with TES prior to approval or denial.

COORDINATION: ELECTRICAL/LIGHTING

Signs that call for lighting must have power provided at the installation site. Coordination of electrical service and hookup is the responsibility of TES, except in the case of parking identity signs where power shall be provided at the installation site by the facility owner.

COORDINATION: PLANTING

Many signs in the program, particularly gateway and identity signs, will be enhanced by planting surrounding the final installed sign. Design, installation and maintenance of these planting beds is the responsibility of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities (PRCA) in coordination with PZ and TES as appropriate.

Using the Manual

When special conditions arise which are not addressed in this manual, consult with the implementation team.

MANUAL COMPONENTS

The Sign Family section of the manual explains the design of each sign in the program, along with guidelines for its application and implementation. As such it should be consulted for information regarding the appropriate use for a given sign, standards for sign messages, and location and orientation in the environment. Consistent application of these guidelines over time will ensure a coherent, uncluttered and easily navigable sign system. The appendix provides extensive detail on development of the design and strategy of the program.

A separate Technical Manual will supplement the Design Guidelines Manual, to include a Details and Specifications section with dimensions and details for each sign type for use as project bid documents. As phased implementation of signs occurs, planners should request construction of prototypes in order to confirm design details and standardize fabrication methods. Design refinements as a result of prototype review should be incorporated into future revisions of this document. The Technical Manual will also include a sign location section indicating recommended messaging and location for signs citywide. Amendments to the technical manual should be documented and are the responsibility of the joint TES and PZ implementation team.

PHASING

Implementation is planned for multiple phases spread out over a number of years to accommodate budget constraints, economic development priorities, and to take advantage of "low hanging fruit." Phase 1 will focus on parking signs in Old Town. Detailed phasing recommendations will be found in the Planning Commission Staff Report regarding this Manual. Initial fabrication and installation of the system (in phases) will be competitively bid and completed by an outside contractor. Maintenance and updating will be the responsibility of TES.

BUDGET

A primary design goal of the system is to marry its unique image to a sound, cost-efficient maintenance strategy. While the City will need to enhance its sign shop capabilities in response to taking on this new facet of visitor and community service, the sign system was designed so as not to be an undue burden on City resources or staff. To this end, the design team worked in close coordination with TES to jointly create an enduring and readily maintained system of signs.

DESIGN FOR COST EFFICIENT MAINTENANCE

System-wide, the following maintenance-related strategies have been pursued:

- *With TES, identify items to be stockpiled as precut and pre-finished components. Most sign elements, including changeable elements, can be stocked or produced within TES in-house capability allowing for fast response*
- *With TES, identify components not stockpiled, and items to be serviced and replaced by third-party vendors*
- *Use modular and shared components*
- *Avoid use of proprietary sign systems*
- *Keep the stockpiled components inexpensive and simple as practicable*
- *Reduce the number of different components*
- *Use mechanical fasteners vs. welding or gluing*
- *Use industry-standard, readily-available, materials, graphics and finishes*
- *Use the most durable, vandal- and graffiti-resistant materials and coatings*
- *Build in flexibility for alternative techniques and new technology*
- *Conform to all applicable regulatory agencies and accessibility guidelines*
- *Allow for TES tracking and inventory markings*
- *Use flat black poles allowing for in-field touchup by TES*

SIGN POSTS

The system does not call for "Catalog item" poles, as they can be subject to product discontinuation and proprietary pricing. Instead the system calls for a limited set of custom sign poles made from readily available materials utilizing industry standard fabrication techniques and industry-standard fasteners. This will allow competitive bidding and the use of multiple and/or local vendors. Poles are finished in such a manner that TES can patch and repaint in the field or in-house as needed. A stockpile of poles should be prefabricated and stored at a TES facility for fast response.

SIGN PANELS

Custom sign panels have been designed to be made from readily available materials, using industry standard mill thicknesses, sheet size dimensions and finishes, fabrication techniques and fasteners. As with posts, the city should pre-fabricate a stockpile of precut, pre-finished and pre-painted blank sign panels that will most likely require change out and repair. TES will be provided with templates for computer cut graphics, to be cut on TES equipment, for application of vinyl graphics to replacement panels. The overall sign structure is designed such that the message panel itself is easily removed & replaced.

REPLACEMENT PROCEDURE

Updates, replacement, or new sign orders on a small scale will be implemented by TES from stock-on-hand. Requests which qualify will be released directly to the sign shop for implementation. Larger sign orders may be issued as contract documents for bidding by commercial sign fabricators. This process requires preparation of a full bid package, which will reference this and the technical manual and set explicit requirements for shop drawings, sample submittal, and performance specifications.