City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 6, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: FAROLL HAMER, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & ZONING FH

SUBJECT: GUIDE TO RECOMMENDED CHANGES FOR THE WATERFRONT SMALL AREA PLAN

At its meeting on May 3, 2011, the Planning Commission approved the Waterfront Plan with a series of recommended changes, including changes to the plan language proposed by staff. This memorandum provides a guide to all of the changes, including one new change proposed by staff on the last page, so that Council members and members of the general public are able to easily see what is being proposed.

Highlighted Recommendations

- Old Dominion Boat Club Options
- The Hotel/Restaurant Policy
- Clarifying that the Plan recommends "Boutique" Hotels

Additional Recommended Changes

- Eliminate Waterfront Park building
- Rivergate observation area/Oronoco Bay Park play are location
- Sheetmetal Workers Building
- Windmill Hill Park cost added to plan's cost estimates
- Stronger history text
- Flexibility in spending funds for civic building
- Pier design flexibility
- Restaurants assumed in revenues estimates
- Hotel parking ratio

HIGHLIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Potential changes based on discussions with ODBC, including the potential that the parking lot will not completely move but may be reconfigured or reduced to improve public access to the river and to Waterfront Park.** These discussions will affect the placement of the King Street pier, which could, for example, move south to be centered on Waterfront Park. The Planning Commission recommends that the Plan's proposal for a relocated parking lot, Fitzgerald Square, the King Street Pier, and Waterfront Park be retained as the optimal design but that the Plan also acknowledge that there is value to coming to an interim agreement with ODBC in the near term.

  The following paragraph shows the Planning Commission's adjustment to staff's recommended language in the form of a new paragraph on page 62, just prior to the recommendations:

  The King Street Pier/Fitzgerald Square concept is the optimal design for this very important location on the waterfront. To the extent this design is not possible, the Plan acknowledges the value of reaching an interim agreement with the ODBC that would improve public access to the Potomac River and/or Waterfront Park, prior to relocation of the ODBC parking lot. Options under discussion include one which would add a public path along the river from King Street to Waterfront Park and one which widens the Strand into a public plaza between King Street and Waterfront Park. Other interim options may be considered.

- **Add language detailing how restaurants and hotels would be reviewed during the SUP process to determine if they have unacceptable off-site impacts.**

  The following language, in the form of a Policy for Restaurant/Hotel/Commercial Uses, was recommended by staff in response to concerns about the impact of these land uses in the Waterfront area raised at the April 5 public hearing. The language provides clear guidelines for the review of these uses during the SUP process to ensure that issues of impact and concern to the neighborhood are addressed. Members of the Old Town Civic Association board provided comments and suggestions to staff, many of which were included in staff's recommendation presented to the Planning Commission on May 3. The Planning Commission made no changes to staff's proposal, recommending that Council add the language shown on the next two pages to the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

WATERFRONT SMALL AREA PLAN
POLICY FOR RESTAURANT/HOTEL/COMMERCIAL USES

The cultural and historic ambience of Old Town provides the primary attraction for visitors and for residents. Restaurants, hotels, entertainment venues, marinas and other commercial establishments along the waterfront will provide activity and destinations for residents and visitors, allowing enjoyment of the City's Potomac River location. Such uses, however, must be sited in appropriate locations and designed in such a way to ensure that goals of the Waterfront Plan are achieved, including:

- Enhancing enjoyment of the waterfront for residents and visitors alike;
- Appropriately locating uses consonant with public open spaces, development sites, and the Potomac River; and
- Maintaining compatibility with both the historical and residential character of the adjacent neighborhood.

Restaurants, hotels, farmers' markets, retail, personal service, private recreational facilities, and marinas each require SUP approval in the Waterfront area. The SUP process is designed so that each use is reviewed and assessed for its appropriateness at a specific location and for its ability to coexist with adjacent and nearby uses without impacts to the character of the area, the plan goals as a whole, and the enjoyment of nearby property.

The Small Area Plan for the adjacent area of Old Town states the City's policy that the fragile balance between the residential and commercial areas "must be preserved if both are to remain strong and if the ambience of Old Town is to be preserved. Further, the commercial areas contain a mix of activities that is unique within the metropolitan area, and that mix needs to be protected if the character of Old Town is to be preserved."

The Old Town Small Area Plan (and the King Street Retail Strategy by reference) includes the City's policy with regard to restaurants, establishing guidelines to assist in SUP decision-making. The Old Town Restaurant Policy requires that Council review each restaurant application for its impacts on noise, late night hours, alcohol, parking, litter and the balance of retail and restaurant uses. A similar approach should be taken to protect the Waterfront, King Street and the nearby residential areas as to future uses and SUP review.

WATERFRONT RESTAURANT/HOTEL POLICY

Each SUP for a restaurant, hotel, entertainment, or other commercial use on the Waterfront must be reviewed, and appropriate findings made, according to the following guidelines:

1. City Council shall not approve an SUP for a use on the Waterfront unless it finds that the use does not create significant negative impacts on the vitality and character of King Street or the character and enjoyment of nearby residential neighborhoods
2. City Council shall consider the cumulative effect of the proposal and the number of already established uses in the nearby area.

3. In the case of an expansion or other intensification, the entire operation shall be taken into account in determining the impact on King Street and nearby residential neighborhoods.

4. In making its determination, City Council shall consider the following factors as applied to the proposed use:

   a. *Restaurant*

      i. The potential for undue congestion of pedestrians or vehicles;

      ii. The extent to which the use is open in the late night hours and situated so as to potentially disturb residential areas;

      iii. The extent to which alcohol consumption will predominate over food consumption and situated so as to potentially disturb residential areas;

      iv. The availability of parking;

      v. The predicted extent of litter generated;

      vi. The potential for loud or otherwise inappropriate noise; and

      vii. The extent to which other restaurants already exist in the same area. Restaurant uses should not located in such proximity as to detract from the character and authenticity of the Waterfront by creating a monoculture similar to a food court or "restaurant row" environment.

   b. *Hotel*

      i. The potential for undue congestion of pedestrians or vehicles;

      ii. The type and size of hotel, and whether it is designed to attract ~~large~~ conventions, banquets, or other functions (such as trade shows);

      iii. The ability of the hotel to accommodate, and screen all of its service needs on site, including loading and delivery operations.

      iv. Parking for visitors, customers and employees must be provided on site. Although the Plan anticipates low parking ratios, the applied ratio must be consistent with industry standards.

      v. Parking garages must be operated so that they are open to the public at least at peak times.

      vi. A restaurant within a hotel that is open to the public shall be the subject of a separate SUP and the same requirements as other restaurants.

      vii. The location of the hotel and whether its layout is designed to produce the least impact on nearby residential areas and on the lower King Street area.

   c. *Other commercial uses:* Factors from the above lists shall be applied as relevant to the specific SUP under consideration.

- **Clarify that the Plan recommends "boutique" hotels.** The Planning Commission received testimony expressing concern by some waterfront-area residents of the impact of hotels on their neighborhoods in such areas as traffic congestion, parking, and loading. The Planning Commission also received comments from Upper King Street residents, including residents of Harvard Street who are within a block of three hotels, that hotels make excellent neighbors.

  The Planning Commission strongly endorsed hotels as a preferred waterfront land use because of their compatibility with public activity, their ability to contribute to the daily activities and public amenities that residents have requested, and their relatively low impact on adjacent neighborhoods. Noting that some of the concern about hotels was related to concerns about conventions or large meetings, the Planning Commission recommends adding the word "boutique" as a qualifier whenever the Plan recommends hotels and that the Plan define a "boutique" hotel as one having 150 rooms or less, no ballrooms, and meeting space for no more than 50 people.

  The Plan expresses a preference for hotel, or explains the attributes of hotels, in a number of locations throughout the Plan. The Planning Commission's recommendation would define "boutique hotel and add the "boutique" modifier.

  - On page X, paragraph 4 of the Executive Summary. "Non-residential development, including boutique hotels, would be encouraged on parcels immediately adjacent to the water…"
  - On page 46: Active, publicly-welcoming uses include restaurant, retail, hotel and cultural institutions. Of these a boutique hotel is preferred because it is most compatible with the Plan's goals for Oronoco Bay Park, the active use of the adjacent pier, and its relatively low parking requirement."
  - On page 77: "This goal is accomplished through public-welcoming uses such as boutique hotels and active ground floor uses in strategic locations, and by orienting privacy-seeking uses, such as residential, away from the water and the new park."
  - On page 85: "Within the Development Guidelines, a stated preferred use is a boutique hotel in certain locations. The typical characteristics of boutique hotels – small, unique, and offering limited meeting space but high levels of guest services – are compatible with the waterfront area. The Plan considers a "boutique" hotel to be one with 150 rooms or less, no ballroom, and meeting rooms for no more than 50 people."
  - On page 90 (Robinson Terminal North): "The preferred use on the site east of Union Street above the first floor is boutique hotel."
  - On page 94 (Robinson Terminal South): "The preferred use on the site east of The Strand above the first floor is boutique hotel."
  - On page 99 (Cummings/Turner block): "On this block, the required use facing the Strand above the first floor is boutique hotel."

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED CHANGES

The following series of language changes for the Plan were recommended by Staff and included in the Planning Commission recommendation without change:

- **Eliminate the Waterfront Park restaurant building and add language supporting an active park through other means (page 66).**

  Delete recommendation 3.71 and add to recommendation 3.72:

  Implement a redesigned Waterfront Park to include a new landscaped lawn framed by the existing willow oaks and new tree plantings. ~~which create shaded areas that could serve as reading rooms or contain other small scale activities such as outdoor ping pong or billiards. Moveable tables and chairs should be incorporated into the design of the park.~~ Encourage the active enjoyment of Waterfront Park with elements such as:

  - *Food and other carts, tables and chairs, small scale recreation activities, and programming of events, displays or performances providing entertainment, culture, history and the arts.*
  - *Kiosks and other temporary or seasonal structures serving as outdoor cafes, unique retail (such as made in Alexandria items), cultural or history-themed displays.*
  - *An open-air market structure or pergola, suitable for farmer's markets, art shows, and the like, possibly glass enclosed in winter to support ice skating and other winter recreation activities.*
  - *A new public pier, which will serve both to bring park users out onto the water as well as a location for water taxis and other boats to bring visitors to Alexandria.*
  - *Permanent and/or visiting historic ships and other ships of character.*
  - *A stage supporting performances, movies, and other entertainment or cultural events, using the natural slope of Waterfront Park and the low berms or seating walls of the flood mitigation strategy to allow park users to view the stage.*

  Delete references to the restaurant building from the Implementation chapter.

- **Minor changes to the language for Rivergate and Oronoco Bay Parks** regarding potential designs for the observation area at the foot of Montgomery Street and the location of the children's play area (response to public input from Rivergate homeowner's association) (page 43).

  Revise recommendation 3.17: *At the end of Montgomery Street, consider low-impact hardscape options and enhance the observation area at the point, possibly with a set of steps leading down to the river and vertical elements to frame the view, and possibly angled to the north to better capture views of the nation's capital.*

Revise recommendation 3.31 to separate the discussion of a children's play area into a new recommendation and delete the reference to a location. The new recommendation would read:

~~Within the emerging forest,~~ A small children's play area is proposed, with recreation and water features – uniquely designed by artists – perhaps comprised of recycled materials or carefully screened flotsam from the river so children will see a direct relationship to natural and cultural cycles.

- **Add the language about redevelopment of the Sheetmetal Worker's Union building** requested at the public hearing by a representative of the building's owners, regarding the importance of the connection to the public spaces if redevelopment takes place (page 44). The new recommendation would read:

  If the Sheet Metal Workers building were to be redeveloped, such redevelopment shall provide a high level of pedestrian and visual connectivity between the redeveloped property and Oronoco Bay Park. Provided that the redevelopment is compatible with the uses in Oronoco Bay Park, a rezoning may be considered.

- **Add the cost of Windmill Hill Park implementation to the overall cost of the plan**, as requested by the Waterfront Committee in their public testimony.

  Add a new paragraph to the Implementation chapter (page 131):

  Windmill Hill Park: *This phase includes the improvements to Windmill Hill Park contained in the approved park plan, including the bulkhead repair and shoreline improvement projects.*

- **Make a series of editorial changes designed to strengthen the connection of plan recommendations to the History Plan.** These changes do not raise new ideas, but give more emphasis to ideas in the History Plan appendix by bringing them into the main body of the plan, and by reordering some paragraphs, etc. This responds to testimony from the history community.

  The language changes are detailed on pages 32-27 of the staff memorandum for the May 3 Planning Commission meeting.

- **Add language providing flexibility in the spending of the $3.6 million included in the plan budget for a civic/cultural building.** The overall goal is the creation of a history and/or cultural "anchor" in The Strand, and these funds are intended to implement that vision – which could be implemented in a variety of ways, only one of which is a civic building in Point Lumley Park. This responds to testimony from the history community.

Add a sentence to the discussion of the Civic Building on page 140: *The funds identified for the construction of a civic building are intended to be used to implement the southern cultural anchor recommended by both the Art and History Plans as well as the Waterfront Plan itself – even if that implementation does not include a new building.*

- **Add language clarifying that the proposed piers can be of a different length or design** from those shown in the plan illustratives (responding to several expressions of concern over the pier length).

  Amend recommendation 3.75:

  Construct a new pier, centered on the new public park between King Street and Wales Alley, ~~extending from the shore to the pierhead line~~. Expanded docking locations for commercial boats may also be provided ~~within the pierhead line~~ in the marina immediately upriver from the current water taxi stop in front of the Chart House. Pier designs shown in this plan are illustrative; the ultimate design will be determined during the implementation phase and may be of a different length, width or location from that shown in the Plan.

- **Further reduce the square footage of restaurants assumed for the revenue estimates – initially 109,000 square feet in the draft plan – to 50,000 square feet**, in response to several expressions of concern about the amount in the assumption.

  Amend the paragraph at the top of page 126 of the Plan to read:

  For the purposes of estimating revenue, the Plan anticipates ~~109,000~~ 50,000 square feet of restaurant space, including ~~60,000 square feet~~ restaurants in three hotels, ~~a 33,000 square foot restaurant building facing Waterfront Park,~~ and an operating Beachcomber.~~,~~ ~~and increased outdoor dining in the Strand and in the vicinity of the Foot Court.~~

- **Added language to the development guidelines noting that consideration should be given to hotel parking ratios of 0.5/room.**

  The development guidelines would be amended to read: Parking for new buildings should be accommodated on site and below grade. Although the Plan anticipates low parking ratios, the applied ratio must be consistent with industry norms for similar hotels.

  The same language would be included in the Restaurant/Hotel/Commercial Uses Policy (in the hotel section).

STAFF RECOMMENDED CHANGE:

Staff proposes that the following change, not presented at the Planning Commission, be added as a Development Guideline for each Development Site, in order to clarify the density limits for each site and to dispel some belief in the community that a 3.0 FAR is permitted on the two Robinson Terminal sites. The Plan includes, in the chart at p. 101, the maximum density for each site and that chart can easily be incorporated into the Development Guidelines specifically. Therefore, the following simple language should be included as a Development Guidelines for each Development site: "The maximum FAR and floor area allowed is included on the chart at p. 101."