



JOINT COMMUNITY/STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP MEETING SUMMARY

MAY 29, 2008 7PM

GW MASONIC TEMPLE

WELCOME

Mayor William Euille welcomed attendees and thanked them for participating in the Wayfinding process. He recounted several firsthand examples of encounters with lost tourists to emphasize the importance of Wayfinding in Alexandria.

Deputy City Manager Mark Jinks provided background on how the Wayfinding Initiative came about as a result of the Visitor Center study many years ago. That study found that rather than creating a new larger visitor center, the City should promote its strongest asset, which is really its authentic urban historic fabric. The City **is** the museum, and as a result, visitors should be encouraged to get out into the City and enjoy it. A strong Wayfinding system will facilitate a better visitor and resident experience with the ability to tie the City together in an integrated and consistent manner.

PRESENTATION

The Sasaki consultant team summarized their work to date in a presentation that can be found on the City's website at:

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/SAG3052908.pdf>

Or by requesting a hard copy by calling 703-838-4666.

DISCUSSION/INPUT FROM ATTENDEES

Comments have been grouped by topic, as shown below:

Arrival/Parking

Alexandria tourism – generally has a day trip audience

Arriving by car, first item people look for is parking: "where to dispose of the car"

Parking garages – note municipal vs. private on signs – consistent identity desired

Current scheme feels too "visitor center" favored - real destination is PARKING, and then finding information

A: Wayfinding system will reinforce the ease of parking by using a unifying logo/identity that people can follow.

Visitor/Information centers

Finding your way in Europe is not difficult -- consider using European model - "center of town" rather than visitor center

First objective after parking: find an info center, get a map

A: kiosks could serve as remote, supplemental information centers
Parking garage exits could serve as remote information kiosks to provide maps/info
Consider a change in terminology: Visitor Center vs. Information Center
Consider arrival points, including "transit nodes"
Current visitor center is small -- overcrowded if 20 people are there
Maybe other businesses could distribute some of the literature/maps available in the visitor center
Will the system incorporate digital content?

A: Additional layers of accessibility are great, but the costs associated with creating and maintaining are quite high.
Information and a consistent map should also be available on the web and PDA's
Important to balance residents and visitors information needs (not just "visitors")
Are the consultants coordinating a website presence? they should – important
Motor coaches need to find visitor center

Maps

Map is crucial – available as many places as possible
Trolley stops are a good location for map information, including information about shops and restaurants
Be consistent with map information available on the web

Transit

Not just Metro – should show Transit centers to include major bus transfer points as well and reflect visitors, residents and commuters

- King & Washington = major bus transfer point
- Bradlee shopping center
- Landmark

King Street

Like the idea of segmenting King street – organizationally helpful
Too much emphasis on King street – city has many many facets – need to be fair to other districts

Banners

Consider using banners on side streets off of retail corridors to emphasize activity, quickly reinforce presence of other shops/attractions

A: The new maps could reinforce the visibility of these additional retail areas

Banners in Barcelona – wonderful

Friendly, warm, inviting

Del Ray attempt to install banners

- Told that Del Ray has the "wrong light fixtures" which makes banners impossible
- Can't we work around this? -- Infrastructure limitation as an excuse
- City can't leave other districts beyond Old Town out

Accessibility/Visibility

Mounting heights – need to take great caution to ensure accessibility but not create obstacles in sidewalk

Carlyle signs put up before Spring are now blocked by tree leaves

A lot of signs are mandated by DOT, creating clutter – how to handle?

A: Regulatory signs are not in the purview of this Wayfinding initiative, but will coordinate with legal requirements and suggest any potential streamlining.

Digital information creates accessibility complexity – captioning, audio descriptions, etc.

What is the thinking on technology use in signage (ie., use of audio, or "rfi hot spot", touch screens, interactivity) and its application for disabled users?

Good night time visibility is crucial

Retail

The existing More Shops signs – too general, need specificity of stores?

Not practical to identify individual stores

Complexity of defining content – what is business protocol for inclusion? Application?

Message?

Are we going to start advertising individual private businesses? Principal issue

Retailers: we want specific identity

Not just Retailers off King - we need to think about retail off Mt Vernon also (and other main avenues)

Areas of commercial concentration – Clusters of businesses off of King Street need interim help
Importance of visitors/citizens finding their way to shopping – desire for immediate help

- Bike shop example – ticketing of sandwich boards – amenity services (first aid, repair)

Many businesses desire interim solution (ie., cant really wait until wayfinding project develops)

Implementation

Frustration over delay of implementing retail strategy program

Let's get Wayfinding system done quickly, and make it happen – state what the timeframe will be and then stick to it.

A: Phasing is not determined yet, but in general, will begin with the elements that will have the most impact.

Coordination with Transportation & Environmental Services is key – Who will handle:

- Fabrication
- Installation
- Ongoing maintenance concerns – not wise to be dependent on an outside entity for servicing

A: T&ES is a part of the City Working Group managing the Wayfinding Initiative – so very involved in the process. Fabrication, installation and maintenance will be determined over the coming months. It's possible that an outside fabricator will do the initial fabrication but the City will increase internal capabilities in order to maintain the system.

Sign Design

Like historical, understated look

Neighborhoods

Rosemont neighborhood

- Pleased by neighborhood identification opportunity
- Historic interpretation possible in residential areas (trolley line on Commonwealth)

Design character

Like understated, kind of historic design

More color, more inviting!

Audience

concerned there is not enough focus in the presentation on Community needs / destinations

The information above will stand as recorded unless the City of Alexandria receives written comments within five days of the distribution date from a recipient requesting an amendment.

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