

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA WAYFINDING INITIATIVE
Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting February 27, 2008
Meeting Summary

ATTENDEES

Consultant Team

Alistair McIntosh, Brian Pearce, Jonathan Bryant (Sasaki Associates)

City Staff

Faroll Hamer, Richard Josephson, Kathleen Beeton, Carrie Beach, Andrew Spurgin
Steve Milone (P&Z); Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager; Lance Mallamo, Office of
Historic Alexandria

Stakeholder Advisory Group Members:

Wendy Albert
Kate Barrett
Stephanie Brown
Lisa Capobianco
Janet Gregor
Bill Harris
Stacy Langsdale
Christy Blake
Michael McBride
Cindy McCartney
Pat Miller
Sandy Modell
Ellen Stanton
Wilson Thompson
John Varghese
Jennifer Walker
Tara Zimnick-Calico

Members of the Public

Amy Slack

SUMMARY

SAG Meeting #1 served to introduce the advisory group members to the objectives and methodology of the wayfinding project, gather reactions to preliminary findings, and solicit input on key issues. Topics of discussion are summarized below. Sasaki will incorporate these interests and concerns into the next draft of wayfinding analysis to be submitted to the City by the end of March.

DISCUSSION POINTS

PROJECT ORIGINS – MARK JINKS:

Mark Jinks provided an introduction and background on how the Wayfinding project began. The initial project began in 2002-2003 with a study addressing a potential new visitor center, when it became clear that "the city *is* the museum," and a fancy new visitor center not needed.

Visitors to the Old Town area can theoretically "slingshot" to other attractions, but the biggest missing link is wayfinding

Economic sustainability workgroup:

Commercial activity and tourism help keep residential taxes low

More and more competition, with ersatz versions of ourselves

- Old Town square as model for Reston
- Other waterfronts in area coming online: National Harbor, DC ballpark, etc.

INTRODUCTION – SASAKI ASSOCIATES

The Sasaki team was introduced and gave a presentation on the importance of Wayfinding, how the City can benefit from a comprehensive system, and the schedule for the project going forward. A Wayfinding system should be an integral part of a livable city – both comprehensible and imaginative, practical, interesting, memorable, beautiful, part of the economic strategy, coordinated to identify, direct and inform – and comprehensive, based on collective input from the full cross-section of stakeholders.

The presentation can be found at:

http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedfiles/planning/info/wayfinding/SAG_presentation.pdf

USER GROUPS & DESTINATIONS – SASAKI ASSOCIATES

The stakeholder group discussed questions posed by the consultant team and provided the following input for the future system.

Audience

Regional shoppers are an important audience

Business travelers also an important audience

Visitor experience: shopping and dining are integral/critical attractions

Public Transportation emphasis

Tourists: assume arrival via other means of transport rather than cars

Include Amtrak and VRE on map

Utilize other transit services: DASH, Amtrak, and VRE.

Metro stations: pay particular attention to divergent/convergent direction – from station & back to

Make it easy to find the Metro

Walking & Biking emphasis

Don't assume a narrow walkable range

Park service – Mount Vernon Trail disconnect as it passes through the city
Bike riders on trails look for bicycle services
NPS is sending trail users to Old Town destinations
Consider amenities along trail

Regional Access

Important to connect dots from 395 to the visitor center
Look at Telegraph Road as an important access point
East/West corridors: It's unclear that exits off of 395 are into Alexandria
Signs along 395 can be confusing – signs call out Fort Ward and Visitors Center – often visitors interpret this as Fort Ward's visitor center
Terminology on state highway signs is inconsistent
Re-messaging of signs is easier now, more privatized – about \$6,000 for new guide sign
State highway signs are faster/easier to get approved today in local experience
Consider: An "Alexandria: Next 4 Exits" concept

Cross-city circulation

Consider: Edsall Road as important connector
Consider: Route 1 South as important connector, from Crystal City to Alexandria
Parking issue: Direction to garages
Carlyle visibility coming in Duke is an issue

Vehicular concerns

Amount of traffic is a concern
Consideration for brevity/visibility

Attractions outside Old Town

West End has megablocks
Calls to restaurant: people assume they're located in Old Town & can walk there (Old Town is the "whole city")
Signs to Del Ray from Route 1

NEIGHBORHOODS

True to all neighborhoods: there is a value placed on the independent sense of place
Some have neighborhood retail/restaurants/gathering spots but are not destinations
Some have commercial centers
Some areas are "aspirational," should be signed b/c there are plans in place for future redevelopment – Queen Street corridor, Braddock metro, Arlandria
Sometimes neighborhoods have history – interpretive opportunities – proud heritage
Some are on the historic register

People from regional markets know they will find "King Street" and "Old Town": pre-trip understanding
Change VDOT signs? There is confusion about "King Street" out west. "this is it!?"

Del Ray

Mainly commercial corridor, ½ block back becomes residential

North Ridge

Residential

Potomac Yard

Mixed Use

Eisenhower West

In the midst of a re-branding effort

Duke Street is a very hostile pedestrian environment

Arlandria

Arlandria is a cultural center

The Birchmere is a destination

Carlyle

Efforts underway to make it more vibrant

Can't see it from Duke Street

Mixed use makes it a destination clearly unto itself

Duke Street: Mixed use / condos, major movie theater, Patent and Trademark office

Themes: Design, and intellectual capital

Most visitors won't use the tunnel – must follow Diagonal Street

Neighborhood distinctions

Unique Characteristics citywide: icon opportunity?

Carlyle = innovative, brain trust

Del Ray = arts

INDIVIDUAL CONCERNS

Eisenhower Valley loves their geese crossing sign!

Visibility

DMV signs are the most well done, easy to follow, visible trail

Hard to find the right sign amidst the clutter (too many signs)

Many signs are blocked by trees

Street signs: hard to see, height, visibility, maintenance

Pedestrian crossings, some unsafe, not in right locations

Metro

Westin has two nearby Metro stations, yet hard to find (both ways)

DC has signs: "Metro 2 blocks"

Orientation for visitors exiting Metro, VRE, Amtrak

Consider the return trip/path back to Metro

Access to Carlyle is confusing

Hotel guests go from Carlyle to King Street – difficult pedestrian path

Tunnel from Carlyle to the Metro – feels unsafe, is sometimes closed!

Westin customers go biking, jogging

Carlyle Development Corp has wayfinding signs--pretty good

Parking is not clear in Old Town, Carlyle

Why don't people use garages? They have to pull in to see what they cost!

Need a consistent, visible standard for display of Rates

"Park Alexandria" – a way to distinguish "participating lots"

Pre-trip information

ACVA is rebuilding the website, relaunch in September

(Will try to create a better sense of place)

"Metro Opens Doors" website provides community info

Events

East end of King Street in the Summer is like an event every day... lots of people

Consider: First Night, Red Cross anniversary, Geo Washington Birthday

Consider: Gaylord Convention Center, Baseball Games, ferry

Color coding would be very helpful

Love the idea of community identification – good for spirit

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