



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA WAYFINDING INITIATIVE

Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting April 24, 2008

Meeting Summary

ATTENDEES

Consultant Team

Brian Pearce, Sasaki Associates

City Staff

Kathleen Beeton, Carrie Beach, Andrew Spurgin, Steve Milone (P&Z); Lance Mallamo, Pamela Cressy (Office of Historic Alexandria), Aimee Vosper, Beth Carton (RPCA)

Stakeholder Advisory Group Members:

Wendy Albert
Dusty Amadio
Kate Barrett
Christy Blake
Stephanie Brown
Lisa Capobianco
Joe Egerton
Stacy Langsdale
David Martin
Michael McBride
Pat Miller
Sandy Modell
Amy Slack
Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet
John Varghese
Jennifer Walker
Tara Zimnick-Calico

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.

SAG Meeting #2 presented an analysis of the input from the advisory group, combined with field observations and data collection. Key issues were highlighted, and responses sought on each issue, along with proposed solutions.

Following the consultant's presentation, group members held a discussion covering the various topics presented. The discussion points are summarized below. Sasaki will incorporate the comments as part of the Initial Design Concepts and refined Wayfinding Strategy presentation scheduled for May 29.

A request was made for a visual "flow chart" of sign hierarchy and intended audience. Sasaki will explore this strategy for use in the next meeting

After the discussion (summarized below), City Staff urged members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group to provide further input to staff and consultants regarding two topics in particular that need further consideration.

1. How best to handle wayfinding for retail off of King Street, and
2. Which districts in the City should the wayfinding system identify as destinations? Is there an easily utilized set of criteria for determining what the districts should be? (All strictly residential neighborhoods will be offered a sign palette for neighborhood gateway identification).

A driving tour after the meeting was conducted by Pamela Cressey for the consultant. A wide variety of historic sites, trails, neighborhoods and overall context areas were viewed in person and discussed, along with ideas for sign placement, design and content. Many of the (58) sites along the Heritage Trail were visited. The notes from this meeting will follow under a separate cover.

Discussion Points -- Comments from SAG members:

BALANCE VISITOR AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

- Courthouse is a big community destination. Many people who live in Alexandria get lost looking for it.
- Washington Street is also an important community destination – not just King Street
- One common visitor question is: "Where is Old Town?"
- Torpedo Factory is a major destination – must be signed
- Metro Stations are major destinations – need to be on both Vehicular and Pedestrian signs – many people will use them for basic orientation
- Consider all nodes and entry points (motor coaches, Bus nodes)
- Re-emphasized the need to trail blaze to AND from Metro stations
- Public art or arts/cultural items should be highlighted in the wayfinding system
- Jones Point Park needs to be directed to and included as a destination. Its Alexandria's only NPS site.
- Parks and dog parks are very important destinations that need wayfinding – many people ask where they can take their dog
- Running trails another common question

PEDESTRIANS

- Not comfortable with names of King Street sectors shown on Slide 17 map. (eg - "Transitional") Do not use the names in the King Street Retail Strategy. Need alternative names.
- Consider "Uptown – Midtown – Wharf Area" as King Street sections.
- Hotels are another important "launching point" for pedestrians (ex. Westin and its connection to Metro), and so there should be wayfinding paths that start (and end) there.
- Transit users should be considered. Important to consider the other transit nodes in the City in addition to Metro Stations -- such as the intersection of King and Washington Streets and Landmark Mall. Also, need directionals to get people back to Metro.
- Also, transit in Old Town is not just the trolley – DASH is also a good option, especially for getting to other districts.

CARS

- Vehicular signs should be "streamlined," but it's important to take the following into account:
 - There is no parking at the Visitor Center
 - Don't want to wayfind vehicles to the Visitor Center, only for visitors to find out they have to backtrack or get back in the car
 - In many cases, the system may still need to way-find drivers to individual destinations
- Gateway signs and highway signs should always read "CITY OF ALEXANDRIA," so as to avoid confusion with Alexandria Fairfax County
- Need vehicular directionals from West side, such as Telegraph Road and Mill Road
- Some kind of "10 Minute" visitor parking at various points of interest would be great
- Gateway signs need to be larger
- The City should provide information to motorcoaches to direct them to ideal loading, unloading, and parking locations.
- Route 1 is a gateway into the City, but there are no gateway signs saying you have arrived.
- City needs other signs to direct drivers into the City shopping district.
- Slide 30 is a good example of showing how the wayfinding system would get a visitor to a district and then provide specifics once a visitor is there.
- Brochures/maps should be available at parking garages as part of an overall wayfinding strategy.
- Emphasize a robust pre-trip planning experience – ACVA website -- so people already know what their plan is when they get here.

BICYCLES

- Bike racks are important to encourage stopping and shopping. We need more bike racks, and locations for bike parking should be indicated on signs and on maps

DISTINCTIVE AREAS

- West End is categorized as a District in the presentation – but there are many distinct areas within West End. For example, Cameron Station has its own distinct identity and will want to be recognized as a unique section of the West End
- Banners can help distinguish an area or district
- There are many distinctive neighborhoods and sub-areas within Old Town itself. This could be highlighted
- Much review and discussion will be required to arrive at the "final list" of Districts (ie. which areas will be on a way finding sign)
- In Baltimore, the wayfinding system takes you everywhere without noticing district boundaries
- Carlyle: pedestrians need more directional wayfinding to and from Carlyle, eg through concourse, from hotels as launching points, to/from the Metro
- Important to have a map that shows how areas relate to one another, not just directions from point A to point B.

HERITAGE

- Everyone should see the "Betty Ward" video –provides an excellent historical background – and helps us to remember that people come to Alexandria for its history

- African American history in Alexandria is a central story – one that it will become an increasingly important visitor draw
- ACVA video is also a good summary of why people should come to Alexandria
- History in Alexandria is not just Colonial – there is Native American, Civil War, Black and Women's History, pre-historic, etc.
- History can be about the "now" – Alexandria is "living history" – unique from a place like Williamsburg which is not a living dynamic City
- Del Ray has already developed and installed interpretive signs for the Town of Potomac centennial – these are good examples of what's needed. They will be folded into the citywide plan.
- "The Old Port City" is an excellent book of Alexandria history – useful to see the flavor of what the City was like.
- Would be nice to have signs on location showing images of historic buildings that have been torn down.
- Pam Cressey's Heritage trails book is a valuable resource and starting point for thinking about a wayfinding system. Organizes sites/trails by theme, ie, civil war, women's history, black history, etc., using icons – valuable organizational tools that could be carried through a wayfinding system.
- Cressey's book also demonstrates the connectivity and natural links to the natural environment, (parks and waterfront)
- Also useful to provide a hierarchy of most notable sites – 1 hour walk, 3 hour walk, 2 days, etc.
- Important to emphasize the "authenticity" of Alexandria. The City has one of the highest percentages of National Register properties.

RETAIL OFF (and on) KING STREET

- Review the King Street Retail Strategy – today's presentation hits nearly all the points, but good to review and coordinate
- Shops off King really are invisible – even residents don't know they are there
- Understand desire to not clutter sidewalk with sandwich boards and signs – but a small map is insufficient – people will just blow by it. Need shop names listed – possibly on side of lamppost in strips that could slide in and out. Visibility is crucial to business
- At the same time, need to avoid the shopping mall experience
- Maybe Old Town needs both a color coded map and signs with shop names (2 levels of information)
- North and South Washington is a major corridor, for pedestrians and shops – we need to make it prominent at the crossroads
- Confusing to have signs with arrows every which way. Maybe use banners to tie signs to local areas.
- Baltimore provided distinctive signage with a map – did not call out a side street with shops
- Like the idea of color coding on kiosk maps – easy way to translate to people what is there.

GENERAL NOTES + COMMENTS on DESIGN FLAVOR

- The old AAA signs (eg for Friendship Firehouse) are still the nicest simplest existing signs
- Worry that (looking at precedent images in the presentation) the new signs will be too "Hollywood", ie., lacking the charm and authenticity of Old Town
- At the same time, the goal of standardizing and simplifying the signs is key.
- Signs should be simple and not flashy
- Williamsburg's signs are closest to what we are talking about

- We need to blend the look of history with the look of art (ex. Old Town and Del Ray) and the purpose of the signs – which can be modern.
- The city also needs to coordinate street signs – consistent design throughout the City with different symbols for different areas (ex. Ship & Scales for Old Town, caboose for DelRay, rose for Rosemont)
- We need to express the vibrancy – unique shops and culinary options
- History need not be "sepia" or "tan" – vibrant colors were used in the 18-19th century too – and Alexandria's history is colorful. Highlight history in color.
- People also come for the charm and shopping and epicurean delights – not just history
- Alexandria's palette is a mix of history and nature
- The right color palette is key – can be strong colors (terra cotta is a relevant color) without being flashy
- Consider waterfront in the color palette
- Color coding is useful on maps
- Signage should be simple but with Alexandria flavor; (the new interim kiosks are beautiful but don't have an Alexandria flavor. Kiosks are too black, map is too futuristic.)
- Others like the new kiosks – the dark background allows the images to stand out better. The terracotta palette is strong. Outside, the black works to ensure that people actually see the kiosks.
- People need to be drawn to the signs – and in that way, the kiosks do work.
- One constraint the City had in creating the interim kiosks was the availability of high quality large format photographs
- Important for ACVA's branding/marketing materials to be consistent with the flavor of the new wayfinding program

Reminders:

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will be a joint meeting with the community, and will be held on May 29, 2008 at 7pm at the GW Masonic Memorial.

The 4th Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will be held June 19, 2008 at 7pm, location to be determined.

Meeting materials and background information on the Wayfinding Initiative can always be found at:
www.alexandriava.gov/wayfinding

Please contact Carrie Beach, Wayfinding Project Manager, with any additional input or questions by email at carrie.beach@alexandriava.gov or by phone at 703-838-4666 X325.