

Alexandria Waterfront Committee
DRAFT Marina Vision Statement and Briefing Paper
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Vision Statement

The Alexandria Waterfront Committee envisions an Alexandria City Marina that facilitates the recreational, commercial, historical, transportation, public service, and public safety objectives of the City's residents, businesses, visitors, non-profit organizations, and government.

The Marina will facilitate activities that promote and preserve Alexandria's maritime heritage.

This will be accomplished through such enhancements as:

- A central gathering place that preserves open vistas of the Potomac River and attracts residents and visitors alike
- A modern, well-maintained facility for docking boats that meets the technical specifications and market demands of recreational boaters
- Sufficient dock space and other facilities required to support commercial vessels, including tour boats
- An inviting permanent portal to the City for visitors arriving via ferry services such as the water taxi
- Continued space for river-oriented public service organizations such as the Alexandria Seaport Foundation
- Landside and dock facilities required to meet the needs of the Alexandria Fire and Police Departments
- A dock suitable for the permanent or temporary mooring of historic watercraft such as tall ships
- A berth adequate for visiting large ships such as cruise ships and warships

Marina improvements shall be compatible with the historic character of the Waterfront and surrounding neighborhoods, and preserve the scale of the current Waterfront area.

Marina improvements shall apply environmentally friendly design and construction, and meet the objectives of the City's Environmental Action Plan.

The City shall fund policing, security patrols, and capital investments required to ensure that the Waterfront and Marina remain a safe and secure place to recreate.

The City, in tandem with other government entities, shall ensure that Potomac River waterways remain accessible to watercraft eligible to use the Marina and other docking facilities.

The Marina shall be a self-sufficient enterprise, with user fees covering the cost of operations, maintenance, and capital improvements that primarily benefit boaters.

Briefing Paper

This briefing paper summarizes the existing status of the Alexandria City Marina, including its deficiencies, and outlines a series of phased improvements for achieving the Committee's vision for the Marina.

Current Status of Marina

At present, the Alexandria City Marina docking facilities include 57 annual pleasure boat lease slips, 4 transient slips, 17 T-Head, seawall, and gazebo docking locations for transient boaters, and 6 commercial lease berths. The Marina's recreational slips are between 30 and 40 feet in length. The Marina has one berth capable of hosting a ship vessel up to 220 feet in length with a maximum draft of 15 feet.

The needs served by the existing Marina include:

- A tourist attraction and central gathering place for residents and visitors to enjoy a maritime ambience,
- An anchor that supports and enhances the City's Old Town business district
- Leased docking facilities for Alexandria's resident boat owners, as well as boaters residing in surrounding jurisdictions
- Short-term and overnight docking facilities for transient boaters
- Piers for commercial tour boats
- A landing place for water taxis at a temporary dock location
- The home base of the Alexandria Seaport Foundation, a local non-profit that motivates and educates at-risk youth through the building and use of wooden boats
- A berth for the Alexandria Fire Department's fire boat
- One "deep" water berth for visiting cruise ships, tall ships, and warships
- Location for weddings and special events

In addition to the Marina's primary facilities behind the Torpedo Factory Art Center at 0 Cameron Street, the City also offers short term docking of pleasure boats for up to 4 hours from sunup to sundown along the Waterfront Park seawall at 1A Prince Street. In addition, one commercial boat company operates from facilities leased from the City along the 200 block of The Strand.

The Marina's major challenges include the following:

Physical Plant

- Routine major maintenance of marine facilities, including Marina dredging, piling, waterline, electrical, fire suppression repairs, and other elements of the Marina primarily related to its use by boaters
- Routine maintenance of non-marine facilities, including bulkhead, decking, benches, lighting, railings, and other elements of the Marina primarily related to its use by residents, visitors, and other non-boater pedestrians
- Failing facilities due to original construction that was not of high quality
- Antiquated dockmaster hut that does not meet present operational or administrative requirements
- No storage or maintenance area
- No trash disposal area (must truck bags of trash to the west end of the City)
- Limited emergency access
- Inadequate wayfinding

Navigational

- Area open to floating debris and wake from easterly winds and speeding river vessels
- Downstream river depths are not maintained
- Low-lying upstream bridges

Recreational Boating Amenities

- Fixed docks rather than floating docks, which are subject to regular flooding and do not compensate for tidal variation in river levels
- Insufficient power supply for larger boats (especially for air conditioning)
- Insufficient berths for boats larger than 35 feet, which are limited by structural limitations and amenities at existing piers
- Docking facilities insufficient to provide safe harbor to boats and structures during large storms
- Limited access for persons with disabilities
- Limited facility amenities, including no boater store, limited showers, no laundry, no wifi, no parking, and limited security.

Commercial Boating Amenities

- Poor amenities (including homeland security) for visiting cruise vessels
- Limited work and storage space to support commercial vessels
- Close proximity of commercial and recreational docks
- Temporary water taxi dock
- Limited access for persons with disabilities
- No public restrooms
- No trash disposal
- Tight docking accommodations requiring vessels to back out of Marina
- No space for future expansion of service
- Limited security

Historical

- Only one berth suitable to host tall ships or other historic vessels
- No berth suitable to permanently host a tall ship

Security

- Limited security for docked boats
- Multijurisdictional police authority over landside and waterside elements of the Marina

Financial

- Limited ability of the City to fund major upgrades and/or expansion
- No marketing of facilities to encourage visiting boaters
- Multiple ownership of river frontage, raising problems that include sovereignty issues that hampers changes or expansion

While the Marina faces several challenges, overall it is an asset that adds to the Alexandria experience for residents and visitors alike. Therefore, this asset should be strengthened by phased improvements implemented over time. The Marina shall improve its offerings to boat owners while maintaining its multi-role purpose.

Recommendations

The Alexandria Waterfront Committee recommends a phased approach to improving the City Marina. The key steps include maintaining existing assets; developing a master plan for the Marina; and implementing a master plan for the Marina.

Stage 1: Maintain Existing Assets

Immediate steps to be taken to reverse the decline of existing assets by repairing and upgrading facilities:

- Repair damaged slips and maintain slips in good condition as and when need arises
- Keep Marina water areas free of debris and trash
- Improve security through physical barriers and resolution of police jurisdictional matters
- Repair bulkheads
- Improve electrical supply to recreational boat slips
- Provide permanent facilities to facilitate and expand water taxi trade
- Provide facilities for tour operators and other commercial users as required
- Develop a positive strategy to invite visiting boats and enhance access to City facilities such as restaurants and provide a berthing dock for visitors
- Maintain dredging around Marina
- Press for federal authorities to meet their responsibilities for dredging of river downstream.

Stage 2: Develop Marina Master Plan

Develop and adopt a plan for the expansion of the Marina that meets the needs of all its users. This action will:

- Design a physical layout that will allow improvement to existing facilities and allow for growth, acknowledging both physical issues such as wave effects and jurisdictional problems resulting from the complex land ownership issues
- Identify land to be set aside for Marina uses, as and when such property becomes available
- Plan for utilities, workforce requirements, traffic and pedestrian access, and structures as needed by each expansion stage
- Develop a financial structure to meet the needs of the Marina. This might include the creation of an agency to manage the Marina, perhaps one able to raise capital in its own right for expansion and major capital improvements

Stage 3: Implement Marina Master Plan

Implement the master plan developed in Stage 2, including:

- To minimize the risk of accidents, separate the commercial vessels such as tour boats and taxis from the pleasure users. Acquire land when it becomes available and carry out expansion in stages
- Provide new and upgrade existing structures that can withstand flooding (such as floating pontoons) and provide good amenities to boaters such as toilets, electrical supplies and pump out facilities
- Change the financial structure of the Marina so that it becomes an enterprise entity in its own right