

ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMITTEE

Lee Center

Tuesday, January 15, 2008

7:30 a.m.

Summary Minutes - Approved

MEMBERS PRESENT

Susan Pettey, Chair
Jay Atkinson
Henry Brooks
Mel Fortney
Michael Geissinger
Doug Gosnell
Nathan Macek
Pete Petersen
Willem Polak
John Renner
Councilman Paul Smedberg Jr.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Engin Artemel
Charles Hamel
Peter Pennington
Robert Taylor

STAFF

Roger Blakeley, RPCA
Aimee Vosper, RPCA
Jeffrey Farmer, P & Z
Jim Hixon, RPCA
Craig Perl, TES
Julie Rasmussen, RPCA
Laura Seidler, RPCA

GUESTS

Brian Buzzell
Carolyn Dabney Bell
Susan Cohen
Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet
Van Van Fleet
Joanne Platt
Doris Eiler

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m, and reported that a quorum was present. Committee members, Department staff and meeting guests introduced themselves.

2. Approval of Minutes from the December Meeting

- The minutes were approved by voice vote, on a motion by Mr. Polak seconded by Mr. Renner, with the following additions:
 - Alexandria resident Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet's comments:
 - That sidewalk pots behind the Torpedo Factory should be replaced with those having a more permanent feel;
 - That fuller details about waterfront dredging should be provided;
 - That a detailed description of development being considered at Hunting Terrace/Hunting Towers should be included,
 - That Ms. Crenshaw Van Fleet questioned whether the portion of the proposed development on the far side of Washington Street was germane to the Committee's waterfront jurisdiction, and

- That Committee minutes should provide more detail of positive and negative comments by Committee members and public guests at meetings. Ms. Crenshaw Van Fleet stated she believed that Committee summary notes include positive, but not negative, comments made during discussions.
- **Committee Member Brooks** requested that the December minutes include his statement that Waterfront beautification planning should be more organic, rather than following the current “peanut brittle” approach: a comparison of Alexandria’s waterfront and National Harbor’s is “like comparing a condemned property and Versailles.”
- **Discussion of minutes format:**
 - **Committee Member Brooks** noted the minutes’ value to Committee members as a reference of previous discussions and requested his comments made during meetings be included with greater detail;
 - Mr. Blakeley (RPCA), in response to comments, noted that staff had made an effort to streamline the minutes while preserving highlights of Committee discussions and briefings at the meeting.
 - Note: After the meeting, Mr. Blakeley affirmed for the record that the minutes are intended as summary highlights of discussions and actions taken, not as a transcription of proceedings.
 - Ms. Rasmussen (RPCA) mentioned that no comments had been intentionally left out, and reminded Committee members that during the previous month’s meeting the laptop ordinarily used for note-taking had been used for a briefing to the Committee. Therefore, handwritten notes were taken.

3. Alexandria Environmental Action Plan - Sharing of Ideas, Discussion and Recommendations

- Responding to the Environmental Policy Commission’s request for Waterfront Committee comments, the Committee discussed Members’ suggestions for recommendations of waterfront-related environmental issues that should be included in the City’s environmental action plan being developed.
- **The Chair** circulated a working draft listing Committee Members’ suggestions that had been e-mailed to her for discussion.
- **Discussion Highlights:**
 - Issues discussed included
 - Erosion of the shoreline by wakes from boats
 - River water quality, referencing pollution and human waste and discharge into the River at Oronoco Street
 - Trash and refuse in the river and along shoreline
 - Odors
 - The need for open space
 - Preservation of historic resources
 - Flooding

- Potential light pollution from National Harbor, and
- A green pedestrian walkway by the River
- It was noted that it might be difficult to distinguish between boat wakes and natural erosion, suggesting using “erosion of shore line” to cover both.
- **Councilman Smedberg** proposed adding “enhancing vegetation along the waterfront.”
- **Committee Member Brooks:** Recommended protecting and providing additional habitat for wildlife, noting the lack of swallows in his neighborhood since the destruction of piers where swallows had previously nested, an absence leading to an increase in mosquitoes in the area.
 - Urged the City to do a better job tracking wildlife of a variety of sorts - example a place where ospreys nest. It might be of interest to both tourists and residents to have a more environmentally friendly towards wildlife.
 - Recommended insuring that recyclable materials and trash go where they are supposed to go
 - **Committee Member Brooks:** suggested making Waterfront more wildlife-friendly”, suggesting several City actions:
 - o When putting in a structure along the Pier - put in an extra strut across the pier to induce the nesting of barn swallows;
 - o Be cognizant that dredging removes underwater plants on which wildlife feed
 - o Be aware of the wildlife currently found along the waterfront, and
 - o Initiate compensatory actions when existing wildlife habitat is damaged or removed by City actions.
- **Committee Member Gosnell** recommended “improvements to land habitat”, with actions to be considered how to improve the habitat on land as well as in the water.
 - Noting that no specific options are being included but suggested the Committee recommend that environmental consultants be approached for ideas. (Example: In creeks with slow water-flow rates south of the City, oyster beds could be put in some places as a means to aid filtering the water.
- In response to **Committee Member Polak’s** question, Mr. Perl reported that Waterfront Study is expected to get underway within the next six month.
- **Committee Member Gosnell** recommended that the Environmental Study Commission be included as a participant in the City’s Waterfront Study, and that environmental issues be addressed in the Waterfront Study.
- Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet recommended that to improve land habitat, a first step would be for an inventory of changes, including determination of why changes had occurred, and how those changes might be redressed.
- **Councilman Smedberg** recommended that two items on the discussion list should be kept separate, since passive and active open space use can be considered separately, noting open space along the river could be like Founders Park but without a trail; a “pedestrian walkway” would be similar to a bike path or trail.
- **Committee Member Gosnell** recommended considering the option of extending the no-wake zone all the way to National Harbor in light of the anticipated traffic

- increase related to National Harbor and noted boat owners' tendency to push the limits of the no-wake zone.
- **Committee Member Polak** noted extending the No-Wake Zone would require:
 - A formal process to request from US Coast Guard to extend the No Wake Zone; then
 - Once approved, DC would contract for patrol of the No-Wake Zone.
 - Mr. Gosnell noted that safety, wildlife, and erosion are all factors justifying a request to extend the no-wake zone.
 - It was agreed issue could be addressed by suggesting addition of a breakwater or extending the no-wake zone.
 - Issues added to the list, topics included:
 - Protecting vegetation along Waterfront
 - Protecting existing and adding additional habitat
 - The need for recycling bins along the marina.
 - Including Wildlife elements in planning
 - Revision of the Waterfront Plan should consult experts on habitat
 - Upcoming Waterfront study should include Environmental issues.
 - **Action taken** - Committee passed unanimously, by voice vote, that the issues identified be forwarded to the Environmental Policy Council.

**4. Waterfront Dredging Project Update:
Transportation and Environmental Services, Craig Perl**

- A brief summary of Mr. Perl's update included:
 - Reported that dredging work had been ongoing daily since Christmas
 - Presented Committee members a chart showing "Status of dredging as Jan 14, 2008" and pointed out areas of current and upcoming work.
- **Committee Questions:**
 - In response to Mr. Brooks question regarding the reason for 21-foot dredging depth, Mr. Perl stated it was to accommodate large vessels such as tall ships and cruise ships.
 - Dredging depth - In response to **Committee Member Brooks'** question, Mr. Perl advised that sediment from dredging is being moving to Possum Point in Dumfries.
 - **Flood abatement study** -
 - In response to the Chair's question, Mr. Perl advised that the flood abatement plan being developed includes in its planning assumptions anticipated longer-range changes in the river level.
 - Study considers several elevations, starting with plans to address the "nuisance" flooding level of 4-feet initially, then moving to the 8-12-foot flood levels.
 - 4-foot flooding currently occurs three to four times a year.
 - Mr. Perl noted that if predictions of a rise in sea level related to global warming hold, 4-foot flooding could be expected more frequently.

- Study's next phase will consider:
 - Whether the elevation used for planning should be moved up or down;
- Costs and benefits of desirable life spans of flood abatement measures (Example: a bridge might have a 50-plus- year life span, a levy perhaps a 100-year lifespan.)
- Good sources for civil engineering guidance re how to address potential flooding impacts related to global climate change has been sought - but without success.
- Potential for cutting edge civil engineering planning:
 - Alexandria's flood abatement study might be able to set some trends in planning for flood abatement related to global climate change's impact on sea level.
- Finish date for dredging:
 - In response to a question from Alexandria resident, Van Van Fleet, Mr. Perl reported that work is likely to finish close to the cut-off date of February 15.

5. **Proposal for Hunting Towers/Terrace - Discussion**

- Jeffrey Farmer, Chief, Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Development Division, updated Committee members, noting that this is a gateway entrance to the Old Town Historic District.
- Highlights re: Checchi Group's development proposal.
 - Additional density and height are being requested for the development on the Hunting Terrace site. The request 150 foot height is three times the current limit. Floor area ratio density being requested is 25% greater than current limits. Proposal calls for construction of 361 condominiums at Hunting Terrace.
 - The Checchi Group is proposing to acquire the Hunting Towers site and commit its 530 units to affordable housing as part of their proposed development project.
 - City Council will review the proposal after the Planning Commission.
 - Checchi Group has chosen not to request the Planning & Zoning conceptual review of its project which P & Z usually recommends.
 - BAR review will follow presentation to the Planning Commission.
 - Planning Commission and City Council are considering the option of removing a sound wall previously built as part of Hunting Terrace to increase access to the waterfront.
 - Proposal will be presented to Planning Commission 02/05/08, then to City Council.
- **Discussion and Questions:**
 - **Committee Member Brooks** raised a question about whether actions to increase public access are needed since access is already available; and
 - Noted that the VA Chapter of Virginia Society of Ornithology reviews the area regularly, particularly in the fall; and
 - Expressed concern that modifications being considered might be a marina or boardwalks.

- Mr. Perl advised that since the wetland area is now private property, City residents need owners' approval for waterfront access via the property; and the City's goal is to ensure long-term physical access.
- In response to **Committee Chair Pettey's** question whether developer owns land below the project wetlands, it was reported that their lot of record extends into the water, including some wetlands area.
 - The full piece is subject to the same zoning
 - Applicant is asking to increase height allowed from 50 feet to 150 feet, and
 - Amend the zoning ordinance.
- **Committee Member Gosnell**
 - Asked if the City could request that the wetlands area be donated to the City in exchange for an increase in the height allowed under zoning regulations?
 - Mr. Farmer reported that it depends whether there is a public access easement or a dedicated portion of land.
- **Committee Member Fortney:**
 - Noted that City staff hasn't recommended approving the project and City civic associations are not supporting this and asked, "Is anyone other than the developer in favor of Checchi's development proposal?" Answer: Affordable housing proponents.
 - The stakeholders' group has discussed increasing the height restriction somewhat, but not to the 150 foot height requested.
 - City has suggested that the developer modify its original design – but the applicant has not yet done that.
 - Developer argues that, in light of the affordable housing to be included, the property's value to them is in the upper levels.
 - **Committee Member Fortney** stated that with Checchi offering \$20 million to the City, they are de facto trying to buy the City's approval of their proposed development.
 - Ms. Crenshaw Van Fleet expressed several concerns: Sightings of rare birds in the neighborhood's wetlands area should be factored into consideration of the Checchi development proposal; because water flows into the river, the proposed development would affect the Potomac River; and the proposed condo development would eliminate over 500 affordable housing rental units and replace them with "a handful".
- Mr. Van Fleet added that there are currently 530 affordable rental units. **Committee Member Brooks** suggested that since the birds are found at water's edge within the wetlands, not in the wetlands area further inland, the development would likely not affected the birds.
- **Follow-Up Action:** Mr. Farmer reported that the P&Z staff report on the proposed development should be (a) finished by week's end, and (b) posted to City Web site early the following week.

6. **RPCA Update** – Roger Blakeley

- **Highlights of Mr. Blakeley’s briefing and discussion**
 - Railing planned for Marina:
 - Provided a Photoshop visualization of the marina railing discussed at the December 2007 Committee meeting.
 - Stated the railing addresses a “health and safety issue” in the Marina.
 - Discussion of the railing material:
 - o **Councilman Smedberg** asked whether a material other than steel might be used, wondering if a composite material might be available to reduce maintenance.
 - o Mr. Blakely indicated another color or finish as possible.
 - **Councilman Smedberg** stated the importance of improving the lawn area.
 - Ms. Vosper (RPCA) reported that RPCA staff is reviewing how to improve the area between the Charthouse down towards the Seaport Foundation)
 - o a plan should be available for review in two to three weeks regarding how to improve the area
 - o Three areas of key interest: area of proposed railing; area behind the Charthouse where dumpsters are, and area near the propeller.
 - In response to **Committee Member Polak’s** question, Ms. Vosper reported that signage at the water taxi loading area will direct people towards King Street rather than the Seaport Foundation, with a small kiosk with directional information.
 - Mr. Blakely reported that
 - o The railing will have a gate
 - o A ladder will be put in to assist those climbing to the pier from the water.
 - **Committee Member Gosnell** questioned the advisability of an iron gate, rather than perhaps aluminum, noting that the proposed railing area is under water almost every night, also noting this makes the walking surface slick and deposits trash from the water.
 - **BAR presentation the next day:**
 - o Ms. Vosper reported that RPCA would bring the railing proposal before BAR the next night when National Harbor issues are being presented, emphasizing the safety aspect of the planned railing.
 - BAR has requested to review all Waterfront-related elements.
 - Department is emphasizing the railing’s safety aspect.
- **Follow-up Action:** Department to prepare a five-year cost analysis for maintenance of the railing.
 - Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet stated her concern that money is spent on “tacky” items along the Waterfront and was concerned that the proposed white railing would be installed in an area where there are currently black metal benches.
 - Suggested that current black metal benches are uncomfortable, cold in winter and hot in summer, and should be replaced with wood ones
 - Ms. Vosper reported that new section of railing would extend only from the Seaport Foundation to the Marina, an area without the black benches.

- In response to Ms. Van Fleet's question, Mr. Blakely reported that no photoshop had been created to present the waterfront area with all proposed changes.
- Ms. Vosper reported that lights planned will match existing lights, and benches will match existing benches, the rest of the Marina remaining the same.
- In response to Susan Cohen's **concern the railing's white color would be too prominent; Mr. Blakeley** advised the railing would match white railings already in place.
- **Committee Member Fortney** commended the Department for the railing design as proposed, noting that this railing would be easily seen.
- Dockmaster Hickson noted that the railing design would be unique to the Marina, as the ropes have been, but addressed risk related to the ropes created by their rotting and needing to be regularly replaced.

- **Action Taken:**
 - Committee passed by unanimous voice vote a motion proposed by Mr. Fortney and seconded by Mr. Polak stating that it is the sense of the Committee that the Department should submit the proposed railing design as is to the BAR (Board of Architectural Review).

- **2007 Marina Leaseholder Survey**
 - Copies were distributed.
 - Highlights:
 - Problem of loud people at night is being addressed.
 - Pump-out has been replaced, addressing the sewage problem.
 - 2,400 feet of rope used as railing was replaced (an annual need).
 - Professional of staff was rated at over 80 percent.
 - Maintenance rating has gone from 61 percent to 72 percent.
 - Restroom and shower facility: 58 percent to 69 percent (noting that restrooms are old, and improvements are being researched.)
 - Boardwalk and pier cleanliness received improved ratings.
 - Has addressed the suggestions raised in 2006 survey.
 - Suggestion of floating docks "cannot be addressed at the moment".
 - An increase in waterfront utilities' amperage needs to be addressed.
 - Restrooms, including the showers, will be upgraded.
 - Pier security at night is being addressed.

Follow-up Action: Survey will be posted to City's Web site.

Follow-up Action: Mr. Blakeley asked Committee Members to review the waterfront area and identify maintenance issues needing to be addressed, advising that some items will need to be addressed as part of the Waterfront Study; but some smaller items might be able to be addressed sooner.

- Maintenance issue was placed on the February agenda.

7. Announcement

- **The Chair** advised members that **Committee Member Hamel** is ill and would welcome hearing from people.
- Alexandria resident Joanne Platt raised a question about whether Robinson's north terminal had been sold. No one could answer the question.

8. Adjournment

- Next meeting was set for 7:30 a.m., Tuesday, February 19, 2008.
- Meeting adjourned at 9:10 a.m.