

## Summary Minutes

### Alexandria Waterfront Committee Marina Subcommittee Meeting

April 8, 2010  
Lee Center, Gold Room #2

**Members:** Mike Geissinger  
Doug Gosnell  
Linda Hafer  
Nathan Macek  
Van Van Fleet

**City Staff:** Laura Seidler, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Activities  
Nancy Williams, Department of Planning and Zoning (P&Z)

**Guests:** Bert Ely, Old Town Civic Association  
Deborah Feldman, National Park Service  
Charlotte Hall, Potomac Riverboat Company  
Willem Polak, Potomac Riverboat Company

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

#### **Facilitation of Additional Commercial Users at the Alexandria City Marina**

Macek stated that the issue for the Waterfront Committee to address is how to accommodate additional commercial users of the Alexandria City Marina. He said that that the issue was prompted in part by a start-up water taxi company's interest in serving Alexandria, but that the policy question for the Committee to answer was broader in terms of how best to serve any additional commercial users, apart from the specific concept presented at the Waterfront Committee's March meeting.

Seidler provided an overview of the City Marina's current commercial usage. She stated that there are six commercial docking spaces (berths) and agreements for six vessels to dock overnight at the marina, but the water taxi actually allows for three vessels docking at one berth. In addition, there are agreements with the Seaport Foundation for its floating house near Founders Park and floating dock and sailboat off Waterfront Park. Seidler stated that the City has a lot of flexibility to accommodate another commercial boat at the marina, but that would need to offset by reducing the amount of leased or transient slips. She said that the Marina's design can accommodate a boat of up to 210 feet using its largest dock, but that could foreclose the opportunity to host tall ships or other large visiting vessels in that berth. She said that any given slip in the marina could be used as a commercial slip, subject to the physical limits of each slip's design. Hall noted that commercial operations are subject to the requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, which could impact how a new a commercial service is sited.

Seidler said the City's lease agreements with existing operators such as the Potomac Riverboat Company (PRC) give them the opportunity to offer new services at the City

Marina from their existing lease agreement berths with the permission of the City Manager (such as boat to Nationals ballgames). PRC and the City are currently negotiating a lease renewal. There is, however, a clause in the City's code that permits other firms to dock at the Alexandria City Marina up to four times per month for special events or services.

Seidler said the City would need to conduct a competitive procurement process for any new berth services from the City Marina. At a minimum, the City would require at least three months to develop and circulate a Request for Proposals, review and select a proposal, and approve an agreement with a new operator. In addition, the facilities required to serve a new commercial operator are currently leased or available for rental by transient pleasure boats.

Seidler said that there are some limits on where commercial users may be accommodated along the waterfront. The City's settlement agreement with the National Park Service for the City's 25-foot wide waterfront easement along Waterfront Park prohibits commercial operations there, and would need to be renegotiated before any commercial operations could be located there.

Macek urged the Subcommittee to develop a recommendation for the full Committee. Gosnell said that it could take 1 to 2 years to issue an RFP, especially if new facilities were required. Secondly, he said that since the Waterfront Plan is still in development, that process should be completed before planning to serve additional commercial users.

The Subcommittee resolved to recommend to the full Waterfront Committee that it recommend that the City Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Activities respond to American River Taxi as follows:

- The marina cannot accommodate additional commercial boats on a full-time basis at this time, as slips are currently committed and the Waterfront Planning process is ongoing
- Commercial boats may be accommodated at the Alexandria City Marina up to 4 times per month without a lease, and American River Taxi is welcome to exercise that option
- Encourage the firm's involvement in the Waterfront Plan process, where their suggestions may best be incorporated at this time
- The City of Alexandria looks forward to working with them in the future, and may at some point following completion of Waterfront Planning process engage in a competitive process to select additional commercial services for the Alexandria City Marina

### **Speed Restrictions for High-Speed Commuter Vessels on the Potomac River**

Polak stated that the City has been approached by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding a proposed federal administrative change in speed restrictions for high-speed commuter vessels on the Potomac and Anacostia rivers. Current regulations adopted in the early 1980s allow high-speed hovercrafts and hydrofoils operating in revenue transit service to run at unlimited speed 300 yards or more from the pier line (while all other vessels must obey speed restrictions between the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and Buoy 6, near the Alexandria City Public Schools rowing facility in Oronoco Bay Park). The administrative change would remove speed restrictions for other types of commuter

vessels, such as catamarans. This would facilitate emergency evacuation by water as well as commuter ferry services by commercial operators.

The City Manager had asked Polak to approach relevant City bodies such as the Waterfront Committee and the Parks and Recreation Commission to inform the City's response to DHS.

Polak stated that the regulation would permit an increase in speed but not wake, given the design of the watercraft that would be eligible for an exemption from the speed restriction. In general, qualifying vessels would travel about 30 knots, but the wake generated would be comparable to that made by a conventional vessel at 6 knots. High-speed traffic would generally occur during the morning and afternoon commute hours, when there is generally little pleasure traffic on the river. The Coast Guard may establish a 100-foot wide corridor, defined by buoys, which would be the zone where designated commercial boats could run.

Seidler said the biggest issues from the standpoint of the City Marina are education and enforcement, which becomes a bigger issue as boating traffic increases. Gosnell suggested installing a jetty to protect the City Marina. Polak stated that floats on the boats could mitigate the impact of wake.

The Subcommittee resolved to recommend to the full Waterfront Committee that it urge the City to support the proposed federal administrative change in speed restrictions for high-speed commuter vessels on the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, with the caveat that it be coupled with education and enforcement campaigns if and when regular service begins on the rivers.

### **Other Discussion Items**

Ely commented on the floodwall proposal outlined in the Potomac Waterfront Flood Mitigation Study. He said the design as presented in the study report could impact access to commercial and pleasure vessels at the City Marina. Williams noted that the concept could create visual and physical barriers, and said a barrier could instead be implemented with a tiered "wedding cake"-type design that was gradually stepped up and would not impede access. She said that P&Z staff was working with the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services to mitigate impacts of the design. Macek said he would invite TES to address this concern during a presentation on the flood mitigation study scheduled for the April Waterfront Committee meeting.