

ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, May 20, 2008

Lee Center

1108 Jefferson Street

7:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Doug Gosnell, Vice-Chair

Jay Atkinson

Henry Brooks

Mel Fortney

Michael Geissinger

Chuck Hamel

Nathan Macek

Peter Pennington

Pete Petersen

Willem Polak

John Renner

Councilman Paul Smedberg

Robert W. Taylor

MEMBERS ABSENT

Engin Artemel (excused)

Susan Pettey, Chair (excused)

STAFF

Roger Blakeley (RPCA)

Kathleen Beeton (P & Z)

Donald Dodson (General Services)

Lt. Dianne Gittins, (Police)

James Hixon

Paul Lombardi (RPCA)

Laura Seidler, (RPCA)

GUESTS

Kent Barnekov (Robinson Terminal)

Carolyn Dabney Bell

Brian Buzzell

Susan Cohen (Public Art Committee)

Linda Couture (Old Town Civic Assoc.)

James Evan

Linda Hafer (Art League)

Harry Harrington

Stephen Jordan (Land Design/Robinson Terminal)

Jesse Jennings

Sean McCabe (NPS)

Joanne Platt

Donald Simpson, Jr.

“Van” Van Fleet

Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet

Matthew Whitestone

1. Welcome and Introductions - Vice-Chair Gosnell

Member Gosnell opened the meeting and advised Members he would be chairing this month’s and next month’s meeting on Chair Pettey’s behalf due to a family emergency that the Chair was attending to.

- **Committee’s annual Waterfront Walk** will take place at the next month’s meeting time, with members to meet up at Canal Center near the miniature monument.
- **The recent passing of Ellen Pickering, former City Council Member and City activist, was noted with sadness.**
 - Members discussed their recollections, affection and appreciation for her lifetime of work on behalf of the City, summing up, “there won’t be another one like her.”

- A moment of silence was observed in he Mrs. Pickering’s honor.
- Vice Chair **Gosnell** recalled Mrs. Pickering’s presentation a year earlier reviewing the Waterfront’s history as “quite overwhelming”, and members remembered her leadership of many successful conservation and environmental efforts enhancing quality of life in the City, including her actions to block high-rise development in Founders Park. Member **Hamel** remembered her leadership in encouraging the City to build the waterfront Mount Vernon Trail between Washington and Alexandria.
- **City Budget Update – Roger Blakeley (RPCA)**
 - City Council passed the FY09 budget, including a number of RPCA cuts, several of which relate to the Waterfront Committee:
 - All Committee communications will be conducted electronically as of July 1.
 - Committee scribe services provided by RPCA contract likely to be cut.
 - Some RPCA services will be decreased, but Waterfront funds were preserved.
 - Mowing at Holmes Run Park will be changed to 30-day mowing cycle.
 - Budget is viewable on the City’s web site.
- **Follow-Up Action:** Members to consider how to keep Committee meeting notes.
- **Founders Park Community Association Contribution**
 - **Member Hamel** reported that Founders Park Community Association (FPCA) will contribute \$2500 to the City to fund flowerbed enhancements at the park’s southeast entrance, the location where Water Taxi riders disembark. FPCA is working with RPCA on the plan.
 - Committee members thanked FPCA for its contribution.

2. **Approval of Summary Minutes from the April Meeting**

- Minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote, with the correction that Mr. Brooks’ absence be noted as an excused absence. It was noted that Committee members are required to attend at least 75 per cent of Committee members, excused absences not counting.
- **Follow-up Action:** Mr. Brooks’ April meeting absence to be recorded as “excused”.

3. **Robinson Terminal, Looking to the Future - Kent Barnekov (Robinson Terminal) and Steve Jordan (Land Design)**

Attachment: PDF of Robinson’s presentation accompanies the meeting minutes.

- Robinson Terminal’s business, no longer needing two large Waterfront complexes, plans to continue its operations only at its south site, on Duke Street.
- Background:
 - Robinson Terminal Corp. has put a series of development specs together.
 - Conceptual ideas were presented - as opposed to a development plan - showing how the site could be developed consistent with zoning requirements and language of Robinson’s settlement agreement with the Federal Government.

- Land Design (a local urban planning and landscape architecture and design firm) has created for Robinson Terminal a visual picture of how redevelopment of Robinson Terminal's north site could be done.
- Federal Government's lawsuit against individual Waterfront landowners, filed in the 1970s, was reviewed.
- In 1983, Robinson Terminal reached a settlement with the Federal Government.
- W-1 zoning was created in 1982.
- Railroad operations, on the south site, likely to be discontinued.

- **Highlights of North site conceptual development - as presented by Mr. Jordan.**
 - 1983 settlement agreement guidelines were reviewed.
 - A current GIS view of the Waterfront, highlighting commercial, residential and office locations was shown.
 - Land Design had used the 1982 Waterfront Plan to guide its development options.
 - Robinson family's Waterfront warehouse activities dating to 1853 were noted.
 - Guiding principles used for the conceptual development ideas included:
 - Creating a destination point of vibrancy, activity and energy on the Waterfront, noting the potential symbiosis between Alexandria and National Harbor via the Water Taxi ferrying people between the two locations.
 - Public being guaranteed access and use along the Waterfront.
 - Potential for contiguous open space promenade between Oronoco Bay and Founders Parks
 - Maximum heights on lots vary, as do the Floor Area Ratios (FAR).
 - Maximum heights vary between 66 feet and 30 feet.
 - The most restrictive features of both the 1982 zoning ordinance and Robinson's 1983 settlement were used.
 - Open Space: 1983 settlement did not require existing wharf and pier as public.
 - Robinson Terminal Corp.'s illustrative concept plan anticipates keeping area for public use, accommodating, for example, cruise ships, ferries, etc.
 - Reviewed "North Terminal Proto-Architecture Study", combining open space and buildings, with potential development of a Waterfront hospitality complex and continuing existing Old Town patterns of wide sidewalks, outdoor seating, etc.
 - Parking
 - Not required by zoning, but illustrative design concept anticipates it.
 - Design concept presented included aboveground parking; preliminary engineering study showed one feasible level of underground parking.
 - South site plan reviewed, including
 - Proposed development concept putting townhouses on the south side
 - Options include an extension of hospitality uses, e.g., executive suites.

- **Discussion Highlights:**
 - **Overview: Main Committee concerns:**
 - **Building heights**, noting that residential owner had signed covenants restricting home heights to not more than 50 feet. (**Hamel**)
 - **Noise from commercial truck deliveries** to business in area, etc.
 - **Traffic and Environment Study: (Barnekov)** A preliminary assessment for the area has been ongoing for about the past six months.
 - Soil studies to date indicate minimal environmental soil contamination.

- **Robinson's presentation described an "illustrative concept" of what development on the site might look like.** (Robinson reps.)
 - Robinson Corp. will not make the decisions re development since Robinson will be selling the North Terminal's site for development.
 - Buyers of Robinson property will need to adhere to same development restrictions as those used as guidelines for Robinson's development concept.
 - Site is a relatively low-density development site, with an FAR around 2.0.
 - Robinson is only beginning to pursue feelers with possible buyers.
- **Noise from delivery trucks a concern (Hamel):** Existing noise from Union Street night truck deliveries is a current problem; development concept presented would likely increase truck deliveries/noise.
 - **Jordan:** Anticipated loading on buildings' north sides, facing Bay and open space, with perhaps internal loading docks. Future buildings might have a smaller footprint than buildings currently on the site.
- Robinson's development concept goal: To extend existing Old Town fabric guaranteeing public access and open space, and meet prescriptions of the Robinson Corp.'s 1983 settlement with the Federal Government.
- Pier footprint would remain the same.
 - Pier ownership: Would probably convey with property when sold; anything past the property line is owned by the Federal Government. (**Barnekov**)
 - Design concept has been shown to National Park Service and received a favorable NPS response. (**Jordan**)
- Transient marina slips being considered to bring business traffic into Old Town.

4. Waterfront District PD Report - Update: Lt. Dianne Gittins

- **Update:**
 - No new information on car thefts in southeast quadrant.
 - No larcenies reported since the last Waterfront Committee meeting.
 - Parking complaints predominate, with some disorderly conduct reports.
 - Four-officer police details continue on Friday and Saturday nights until 2 a.m.
- **Discussion:**
 - **Committee members** reported that as weather warms up drug activity has increased on Duke and Strand Streets, related both to vagrants and general public in the area; especially on Fridays through Sundays, people tend to congregate and leave trash on Union Street after restaurants close at 2 a.m.

5. National Harbor Task Force: Update - Kathleen Beeton

- Task Force continues to meet, considering unitary block parking problems
- **New issues:** Committee members were invited to forward any needing attention.
- **Discussion:**

- **Signage**
 - City's signage focus to date is on National Harbor visitors arriving in Alexandria. (Pennington)
 - Urged an increased reverse signage - drawing people from King Street to the Water Taxi as a tourist attraction, noting that Potomac River Boat Company is willing to invest in such signage.
 - A: Interim signs are in place; Task Force will be working with Potomac River Boat Company to facilitate City action. (**Beeton** response.)
 - Members **Geissenger** and **Polak** urged that increased signage and print information be available to people disembarking from the Water Taxi.
 - **Beeton** noted that the City-wide Wayfinding program, including kiosks, is being further developed to expand information for visitors.
 - **Maps currently available** - from Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA), Potomac River Boat Company (on Water Taxi), and King Street Trolley.
 - Member **Polak** noted that City officials and Potomac River Boat are discussing measures to make it easier for pedestrians to navigate to and from the Water Taxi on the Alexandria side.
- **Increases in Waterfront Visitors**
 - Member **Polak**: Water Taxi usage has had a 'feast or famine' business pattern.
 - Gaylord's convention business is increasing Alexandria's Waterfront visitor traffic Sundays – Thursdays, especially in the evenings.
- **Increases in street vendors/performers.**
 - **Councilman Smedberg**: City Council has received complaints that increased street vendors/performers numbers are beginning to crowd sidewalk access.
 - Members discussed the need for the City to institute a permitting requirement for sidewalk vendors as a way to ease overcrowding of sidewalks.
 - Visitors Center underneath The Charthouse - to be done within a couple weeks.
 - Completion of restrooms expected to take longer.
- **Follow-Up Action:** Vice-Chair **Gosnell** invited Member **Hamel** to submit to Mr. Blakeley items needing RPCA attention in the Founder's Park area so that they can be put on the Committee's Fall Agenda for follow-up.

6. Marina Operation: Security and Gates - Update: Roger Blakeley & Paul Lombardi (Architect, RPCA)

Attachment: RPCA PPT presentation re: Marina gates' proposed design.

- **Highlights of Lombardi's Gates presentation:**
 - Short presentation of the design of RPCA's proposed Marina security gates to be presented to BAR at its June 4 meeting.
 - Gates on all piers are open to public during Marina's operating hours.
 - Pier security problems addressed by installation of gates occur after RPCA staff at Marina leaves.

- Gate design - in Torpedo Factory's Art Deco style - presented informally to the BAR has been well-received.
- Gates description:
 - Automatic gates, with planters atop pillars and illuminated glass.
 - ADA and fire code-compliant.
 - Will meet Fire Department accessibility requirements while guarding against pier accidents with wheelchairs or baby strollers,
 - Will swing in direction of pier egress, facilitating quick emergency exit.
 - Keys: Whole system being planned to be wireless with key swipes; keys to be available for a variety of scenarios, including transient/ seasonal slip users.
 - All three gates to have a uniform design while responding to each pier's specific design requirements.
 - Gates won't have an emergency power source; code requires that any power loss will trigger the gates going into an automatic open position.
 - A variety of views of the proposed gates were presented.

7. Alexandria Eco-City Summit Update - Peter Pennington

- May 10 Eco-City Summit was held at TC Williams High School, following up on City Council's request the previous year for the Environmental Policy Council (EPC) to produce a 5-page Environmental Charter and related Environmental Action Plan.
 - Note: Waterfront Committee had previously sent EPC comments for the draft.
- Between 95 and 125 participants took part in the day-long meeting held for public to discuss and vote upon sections of the draft Eco-City Charter.
 - About 70% of those voting supported the Charter, 25% had reservations, and about 2 percent didn't like anything.
 - All comments were noted, and Charter has been revised to reflect inputs from the Summit, e.g. strengthening the Charter's references to open space.
 - EPC has approved Charter draft, and will present it to City Council June 14..
 - Sample Impact: New Police HQ will be a green building. EPC will encourage that the building's internals (e.g., communications, computer servers and other Information Technology) also be green.
 - Member **Pennington** anticipates EPC will finalize Action Plan by February 2009.
- Process re Environmental Charter & Action Plan:
 - EPC created the Charter.
 - City Council to vote on proposed Charter.
 - Once Council approves Charter it will apply to all City actions.
 - EPC's goal:
 - For Council to consider environmental issues with other factors (budget constraints, state/federal regulations, etc.) when actions are considered.
 - EPC anticipates
 - Assessing each year extent to which Council actions reflect Eco-City goals.
 - The possibility of expanding EPC role as a conduit for citizen input to the City on environmental issues.

- EPC-drafted Action Plan discussed at Eco-Summit will charge the City to “lead by example and educate citizens”, a goal widely supported at Summit.

Follow-up Action: Information about the Alexandria Eco-City Summit and Charter is found on the City’s home page: <http://www.alexandriava.gov>.

8. Announcements

- A guest thanked Mr. Blakeley for RPCA’s rehabbing of the wooden picnic benches in Windmill Hill Park.
- **June 17 Meeting: Waterfront Walk - Gosnell announcement**
 - To convene 7:30 a.m. at Canal Place – to the north of the lock, near the amphitheater seating, at the water level, not the parking lot.
 - June meeting announcement to include Gosnell’s cell phone so that Members arriving late can contact Committee members on the walk.
 - Walk will go from the Waterfront’s north end southward, ending at Ford’s Landing.
 - Walk likely to be postponed for rain.
 - Walk takes approximately an hour and a half.

9. Adjournment – 9:10 a.m.

ATTACHMENTS:

Agenda Item 3: Robinson Terminal presentation
Agenda Item 6: Marina Security Gated Design - RPCA presentation.