

Summary Minutes - DRAFT
ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMISSION MEETING
Tuesday, July 15, 2014
City Hall
Sister Cities Conference Room

Commission Members

Present

Dennis Auld, Citizen Park Planning District II
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Suzanne Bethel, Old Town Business and Professional Association (OTBPA)
Howard Bergman, Founders Park Community Association (FPCA)
Morgan Delaney, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Stewart Dunn, Alexandria Planning Commission
Arthur Fox, east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina Pleasure Boat Leaseholder
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and Chair
Mari Lou Livingood, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
Stephen Mutty, Citizen Park Planning District I
Paul Smedberg, Member, Alexandria City Council
Stephen Thayer, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.
Townsend A. (Van) Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association
Christa Watters, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.

Excused

John Bordner, Citizen west of Washington St.
Jacob Hoogland, Alexandria Archeological Commission

Absent:

Shirley Downs, Alexandria Commission for the Arts
Ryan Wojtanowski, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission

Vacancy:

Citizen Park Planning District III

City Staff:

Emily Baker, Director, Department of Project Implementation (DPI)
Fran Bromberg, Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA)/ Archeology
Jack Browand, Commission Staff Liaison and Division Chief, Public Relations, Special
Events & Waterfront Operations, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Tony Gammon, Civil Engineer IV, DPI
Lt. Monica Lisle, Alexandria Police Department (APD)
James Hixon, Dockmaster, RPCA
Dan Imig Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES)
Karl Moritz, Acting Director, Planning and Zoning (P&Z)
Iris Portny, Commission Recording Secretary, RPCA
Nancy Williams, DPI and Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests:

Engin Artemel, resident
Christine Bernstein, resident
Ignacio Bunster, landscape architect, WRT (CityInterests team)
Jon Carr, CityInterests, LLC (RTN team)

Susan Cohen, Public Art Committee
Bert Ely, Friends of the Waterfront, Old Town Civic Association
Peter Farrell, CityInterests (RTN team)
Val Hawkins, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership
Mike Hickok, Hickok Cole Architects (RTN team)
James Lee, Rooney Properties, LLC (RTN team)
Alan Novak, CityInterests, LLC (RTN team)
Jonathan Novak, CityInterests (RTN team)
Kathryn Papp, resident
Dan Straub, Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)
Ken Wire, McGuire Woods LLC (RTN team)

Welcome and Introductions

Hall called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. and Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes from June 17, 2014

The minutes were approved after the Robinson Terminal North briefing. At that time, Thayer moved and Fox seconded that the June 17, 2014 minutes be approved. The motion was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

Robinson Terminal North (RTN) Update (500 & 501 N. Union Street)

Wire introduced the project team members for the RTN/500 & 501 N. Union Street project site, one of the three private redevelopment sites included in the City's Waterfront Small Area Plan. He said they now refer to the site by address rather than its former name, Robinson Terminal North (RTN), to emphasize the site's future not its past. He said the project team had submitted its set of Concept 2 plans to Planning and Zoning (P&Z) a month earlier and was awaiting City comments. Wire said the illustrative model presented at the Commission meeting had been created unusually early in the design process to offer an idea as early as possible of what the team is considering.

Building architecture

Note: *The architecture presentation at the meeting is posted to:*

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/RTNIWC15July2014.pdf>

Mike Hickok reviewed the design concepts and site layout for the west building (500 N. Union St.) and the east building (501 N. Union St.). He said the goal is to have distinctively different designs that relate to each other. His briefing covered design aspects such as building layout, materials, architectural vocabulary, and relationship to the Waterfront and neighboring buildings, streets and parks. Hickok said the west building's site is regarded as within the Old Town grid, though it is outside the historic district, while the east building's site, set between Founders Park and Oronoco Bay, is considered as being of the waterfront.

Hickok said the design concepts reflect the Olin team's ongoing design for the Waterfront public realm and the Waterfront Small Area Plan's goals for the site, e.g. maintaining the scale of existing buildings, maximizing water views, enhancing the streetscape, adding a new pleasure boat marina, providing public open space, and activating the Waterfront through commercial and cultural uses.

West building (500 N. Union)

Hickok said the west building would have a hotel at its center, with its entrance on North Union Street, two blocks of condominiums on each side of the hotel with separate entrances on the side

streets and the building's Union Street frontage to be dedicated primarily to retail shops and the hotel. He said the northeast corner of the west building would be set back from the street further than the current building to add green space and to give pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers along Pendleton and Union Streets a better view as they approach the Pendleton/Union Street corner.

East building (501 N. Union St.)

Hickok said the early-stage design concept of the east building, with its residential units and commercial space, is tied into the site's Waterfront location with parks and the water on either side. He said the goal is to open up views and vistas of the river and Oronoco Bay and to enhance the public spaces and pedestrian connections between Oronoco Park and the new public pier and pleasure boat marina that are planned. He said the site's ground floor would be dedicated to retail and cultural uses.

Hickok said that, although at an early stage, the concept envisions a modern design compatible with the neighboring historic neighborhood that incorporates stone, glass and brick in ways that minimize the building's visual impact. He said native plantings, a bio retention pond, and open space would be among the project site's features. Hickok said the building would fit within the zoning district's allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR).

Landscape Architecture briefing - Bunster

Note: *The landscape architecture presentation is posted to:*

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/RTN2WC15July2014.pdf>

Bunster reviewed the site's public realm design concepts, including north and south garden spaces along the Waterfront, a floating public pier, a bio retention garden, and site celebrating West's Point at a location that facilitates an interpretative space. He said the concept currently includes a public Waterfront passage from Pendleton Street to Founders Park, many opportunities for public art and historic interpretative inscriptions, and a lawn on the pier that would include a performance space.

Next steps

Wire said the project team's next step would be to present this concept plan to the City's Urban Design Advisory Commission (UDAC) at its July 16, 2014 morning meeting and to the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) at its July 16, 2014 evening meeting. He said the BAR's recommendations to Council and the Planning Commission would be advisory since the project site is outside the Old and Historic District. He said the project team expects receive staff comments on the current Concept 2 design in the next few weeks and plans to hold another series of community meetings and briefings in the fall 2014 timeframe.

Commission Comments

Decision to move the hotel from the east to the west-building site

In response to Dunn's question, Wire said the concept complies with all the goals and guidelines of the Waterfront Small Area Plan. He said the only deviation from the original concept is locating the hotel on the west site rather than the east site to ensure the site generates sufficient revenue to cover the site's planned public amenities.

Parking

Wire said the buildings' parking plan is still being developed but will include shared parking, one floor of below-grade parking for each building (due to the water table), and valet parking. He said the

west building would likely have about 120 hotel rooms and 15 condominium units on either side of the building and roughly 89 parking spaces below the building. Wire said the east building would be a shorter building with a larger below-grade parking garage that will have roughly 129 below-grade parking garage spaces.

River debris

In response to Auld's question, Wire said the project team still needs to devise a plan to address the problem of river debris.

Possible changes as the east building's design evolves

In response to Smedberg's question, Hickok said any changes to the east building's design would likely be relatively subtle. He said, for example, he is working with staff on ideas for how to bring the brick in the building design closer to the ground without adding more brick to the overall building.

Roles of City review bodies overseeing the project

Wire said the Waterfront Commission is the only City review body that will make a formal finding to Council as to whether the project design meets the Waterfront Plan's goals and guidelines. He said the project team will be consulting in an advisory capacity with the Board of Architectural Review (BAR), since the project site is outside the historic district, and with the Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC) since the site used to be included within Old Town North.

Public Spaces

In response to Manor's question, Wire said the site owner had not yet discussed with the City whether the project's public space will be owned by the City or site owner or who will be responsible for public area operating expenses. Moritz said Planning and Zoning will work with all the interested parties in the coming months to develop a plan for covering operations, maintenance and other issues.

In response to Auld's question, Wire said options for the east building ground floor uses include a mix of open space, retail, two restaurants and a possible cultural use. In response to Bethel's question, Wire said it is too early in the process to have details about types of retail that might be located there.

East building too modern?

Van Fleet and Bergman said the east building's design concept, including its glass and stone materials, was inappropriate for Old Town's historic architecture. Wire said he expects this question to discuss at length as the public review process moves ahead. Hickok said the east building materials would likely include, but not be dominated by, brick since the east site's unique relationship to the neighborhood and water let it accept a more innovative design concept than would be suitable for other Waterfront sites. Baum said she likes the design concept's ability to minimize the impact of its size.

Watters said brick is not the only material that can tie the east building into Old Town's design concept. She said the Torpedo Factory is primarily concrete, the proposed east building will replace a noticeably ugly corrugated metal-sided warehouse, and if brick is a dominant material on the west building, it might become less important to have brick dominate the east building.

In response to Baum's question, Wire said the design team has not yet addressed what might be the most effective way to use Oronoco Street's unit block to facilitate public interaction between

Founders Park and the east building because the design team had decided the Waterfront Plan idea to put the building's loading dock there would make it too visible from the park.

East building marina plans

Thayer asked if the project team would be open to including long-term lease slips for pleasure boats at the east building's marina. Wire said the current marina concept included use, primarily, by kayaks and transient pleasure boats, plus occasional tie-ups of larger vessels visiting the City. He said the site currently does not have the infrastructure to support longer-term stays but they are open to discussing it.

Livingood asked if an additional floating pier could be added to accommodate more tie-ups of smaller boats, kayaks and canoes in light of the shallow water at this point. Wire said adding an additional pier might conflict with the Army Corps of Engineers guidance that it would be inappropriate for the site design to cover any more water than is currently planned.

Wire asked if there were a community consensus exists about types of boats that a new marina should serve. Hall asked Thayer, Marina Subcommittee chair, to review the Subcommittee's recent meeting that considered pleasure boats. Thayer said the Marina Subcommittee is considering options for addressing the needs of pleasure boat owners who lease slips at the City Marina and will lose them, at least temporarily, because of the City's recent agreement with the Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC). He said these slip leaseholders are looking for a new marina home somewhere in Old Town and to date have been satisfied with the City Marina's offering only water, electricity, and a pump-out station. Gosnell said having a clear governance concept for the east building's pier and marina will be important. Wire agreed.

Public Comments

Artemel, the City's P&Z director when the City's 1981 waterfront plan was completed, said the project's designers had effectively provided public access to these sites and created a building design concept with a nice "lightness". He said, as an Old Town North Rivergate resident, he thought the west building was too high and both buildings' need more attention paid to their northern facades. Artemel said the project team should meeting with Rivergate Townhouse residents. Wire said public art and landscaping for the northern facades will be important.

In response to Ely's questions, Wire said there would be about 20,000 square feet and 8,000 square feet of retail in the west and east buildings respectively, but it was too early to know the seating capacity of any restaurants that might be on the site.

Christine Bernstein said the design concepts appear to offer some architectural harmony looking northward and with the nearby Oronoco condominiums, but a transition is needed between the architectural styles of the townhomes on Union Street and the east and west buildings' very modern design. In response to a second Bernstein question, Wire said it would be several years before the project would be completed because of the many steps to the process.

Parking

In response to Bernstein's question, Wire said a parking study will be done to show how parking needs for the 200 combined units and hotel rooms would be met by options that would cover peak demands at different times of day. A Founders Park townhome resident said she was concerned the

expense of a valet parking option might encourage some visitors to seek on-street parking in an already-congested parking area.

Performance area

Susan Cohen said that, consistent with the Waterfront Plan's consideration of a black box theater, the project team should consider including a cultural performance area.

Kathryn Papp said incorporating the water and river elements effectively into the design could tie the concept into Old Town's authenticity in an iconic way, blending Old Town's historic elements with the modernity of the evolving Waterfront redevelopment. She said the east building's design should have more of an emphasis on naturalistic materials and less on glass. She said attention to environmental issues will be very important.

Traffic impact

Dan Bernstein asked how the risk of vehicles lining up on the street to access the hotel entrance will be minimized. Wire said the development team will work with P&Z, Transportation, and Environmental Services (T&ES) to create a design that avoids this.

Blackwall Hitch Update

Williams reviewed highlights of Waterfront Plan implementation milestones that have been reached, e.g., Council's unanimous approval of the Phase 1 Waterfront landscape architectural and flood mitigation design; Council's approval the property exchange and settlement agreement between the City and Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC); and the City purchase of parking lot properties at 204 and 208 Strand that will make possible Point Lumley Park's expansion.

Blackwall Hitch Restaurant

Williams reported that City permits were approved for the Blackwall Hitch restaurant that will replace the former Torpedo Factory Food Court at the Marina. She said construction is expected to start in August 2014 and finish in January 2015. She said a new Marina public restroom facility will be included in the Blackwall Hitch redevelopment and she commended the Commission for its long-time advocacy for the City's providing a public Marina restroom and for finding a new tenant for the vacant food court site.

Oronoco Street Outfall Project Update

Note: The information is posted to

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/WC15July2014OronocoDredging.pdf>

Imig reported that Phase 2 of the City's dredging and remediation of sediment in the vicinity of the Oronoco Street storm sewer pipeline, undertaken to remove tar-related substances that had migrated from the former adjacent Alexandria Town Gas Plant, was about to be bid. He said Phase 1 was completed in 2013 and Phase 2, to dredge the area adjacent to the outfall, will be put out for bid simultaneously with the City's bid for Marina dredging. He said the outfall dredging is expected to be finished by February 2015. In response to Van Fleet's question, Imig said Phase 1 had effectively addressed the leeching into the river and Phase 2 would eliminate any odor that remains.

Agency Reports

Note: Reports posted to City website with meeting information

package. <http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/WCMeetingInfo15July2014.pdf>

Update: Backflow Valve Project for King Street/The Strand (Backflow Preventer)

Emily Baker (Department of Project Implementation) said testing was completed for the Backflow Preventer installed recently in the manhole at the foot of King Street to lessen nuisance flooding. She said the operational problems were created by an improper installation, the contractor will correct it and staff will provide updates as needed.

Marina Subcommittee

Thayer announced the Marina Subcommittee is investigating potential sites that may be options for replacing the pleasure boat leaseholder slips at the City Marina that will be lost due to the City/ODBC agreement. He said nine sites are being considered and the results of its review will be presented at the Commission's September 2014 meeting.

Report from Commissioners - No additional reports.

Announcements / Public Comments

There were no public comments on additional topics.

Hall said the Commission would receive a Robinson Terminal South redevelopment update on July 24, 2014 and the Commission's August 6, 2014 boat tour to review current and planned Waterfront projects would leave the Marina at 8 a.m.

Adjournment

The Commission adjourned at 9:15 a.m.