

Summary Minutes
ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMISSION MEETING
Tuesday, October 21, 2014
City Hall
Sister Cities Conference Room

Commission Members

Present

Dennis Auld, Citizen Park Planning District II
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Howard Bergman, Founders Park Community Association (FPCA)
John Bordner, Citizen west of Washington St.
Shirley Downs, Alexandria Commission for the Arts
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
Jacob Hoogland, Alexandria Archeological Commission
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.
Ryan Wojtanowski, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission

Absent:

Suzanne Bethel, Old Town Business and Professional Association (OTBPA)
Morgan Delaney, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Stewart Dunn, Alexandria Planning Commission

Vacancy:

Citizen Park Planning District III

City Staff:

Emily Baker, Director, Department of Project Implementation (DPI)
Jack Browand, Commission Staff Liaison and Division Chief, Public Relations, Special Events & Waterfront Operations, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Al Cox, Historic Preservation Manager, Architect, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Lt. Don Hayes, Alexandria Police Department (APD)
Pete Mensinger, Code Administration
Iris Portny, Commission Recording Secretary, RPCA
Jim Roberts, Development Division, Planning & Zoning
Nancy Williams, DPI, and Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests:

Christine Bernstein, resident
Yuri Blazar, CityInterests (500/501 N. Union Street project)
Susan Cohen, Public Art Committee;

Bert Ely, Old Town Civic Association and Friends of the Alexandria Waterfront
Frank Fannon, Old Dominion Boat Club
Peter Farrell, CityInterests (500/501 N. Union Street project)
Mel Garbow, Harborside HOA
Mary Catherine Gibbs, Old Dominion Boat Club land use attorney
Jim Lee, Rooney Properties (500/501 N. Union Street project)
Mindy Lyle, resident
Ruth McKenty, Beautification Committee and Member, Oronoco Board of Directors
Liz Milner - Chesapeake Bay Magazine
Alan Novak, CityInterests (500/501 N. Union Street project)
Devon Perkins, Hickok Cole Architects (500/501 N. Union Street project)
Kathryn Papp, resident
Dan Straub, Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC)
Michael Winstanley, Michael Winstanley Architects & Planners (ODBC architect)
Ken Wire, McGuire Woods (500/501 N. Union Street project)

Welcome and Introductions

Hall called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. and Commissioners and staff introduced themselves. Hall reminded Commissioners of the City requirement that Commissioners attend at least 75% of Commission meetings. She said a Commissioner's role as a two-way liaison between their constituencies and the Commission is especially important as the Commission moves forward with its ongoing oversight of implementation of the Waterfront Small Area Plan's components.

Approval of Minutes from September 18, 2014

Bergman moved and Watters seconded that the September 18, 2014 minutes be approved. The motion was approved by voice vote.

Old Dominion Boat Club Design – Applicant Update

Note: ODBC presentation is found at:

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/ODBC21Oct2014WC.pdf>

Gibbs introduced Winstanley, architect for the new ODBC clubhouse, and said the ODBC team expects this meeting with the Commission to be the first of several as the ODBC project moves forward. Winstanley reviewed how the new design and location will fit into the Olin landscape design plan for the Waterfront public spaces and noted that traditionally boat club architecture reflects the architecture of the time in which it is built. He noted the ODBC clubhouse had relocated four times over the course of its history in the City.

Overview

Winstanley's presentation covered several aspects of ODBC's planning for its new clubhouse: boat club typologies (the nature of boat clubs), the history of ODBC, the Beachcomber, the Site and the Waterfront Plan, the City-ODBC Agreement, and first thoughts about the new clubhouse. Winstanley said it is ODBC members' intent for their new clubhouse to present an appealing image when viewed from the Strand as well as the water. He said among the ODBC design goals is to reconstruct the Beachcomber building in a manner similar to its original design. Winstanley

said the design elements developed so far address only the ODBC clubhouse's land-based elements. Elements related to the water, waterfront, or boat ramp have not yet been addressed.

Parking

Winstanley said the design incorporates the 45 parking spaces promised by the City and currently has proposed a plan that includes two curb cuts, one driveway, and valet parking. Winstanley said 47 parking spaces would be accommodated at peak times,

Design concept

Winstanley said the design concept has been inspired by the Beachcomber building, the piers originally on its site, and reflects ODBC's roots as a rowing club. He said that ODBC's roots would be reflected in the building by using boat-building materials and boat construction techniques and structure to create a design heavily reliant on wood and/or wood-like materials that creates the impression of having been designed by boat builders rather than architects. He said a revised version of the design is expected to be finished within a few weeks. Winstanley said the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) has reacted to the proposed design positively.

Commission Discussion

In response to Smedberg's comment that the proposed contemporary design appears to have no connection to the Waterfront warehouse history, Winstanley said the proposed design emphasizes ODBC's image as a 120-year old historical entity in the City. Van Fleet asked Cox how well the proposed design relates to the historic Waterfront. Cox said the design effectively reflects ODBC's own historic Waterfront roots and the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) response to the design concept had been "fairly effusive".

Environmental aspects

In response to Wojtanowski's question of how the footprint size of the new ODBC site will compare to that of the current ODBC site, Winstanley said it would be smaller.

Bordner asked if the parking lot would be repaved with a semi-impervious surface. Winstanley said the ODBC design would use the same paving materials that Olin's Waterfront landscape design proposes for public spaces. He said the original idea had been to use a pervious parking lot surface, but there are safety concerns about walking on the surface with high heels. In response to some ideas offered by Wojtanowski, Winstanley invited suggestions for how a walkable pervious surface might be used that addresses these concerns. He said the design goal is to use the same materials as those used in the Olin design plan to integrate the ODBC site within the Olin design for the public spaces that surround the Beachcomber site.

Design concept and materials

Mutty said the design concept reflects Waterfront history well, including its variety of architectural styles over the years. In response to Mutty's question, Winstanley said the design team is working on a revised design that balances the influence of the site's historic pier aesthetic with the smoother aesthetic of boatbuilding techniques. In response to Bergman's question about the balance of wood and glass, Winstanley said the building will be predominantly wood or synthetic wood.

Parking

In response to Livingood's question, Winstanley said ODBC does not expect to need additional parking spaces beyond those planned since the new building's net internal square footage will be same and ODBC has no plans to expand its membership.

City will coordinate construction timelines to minimize neighborhood impacts

Auld asked how the ODBC construction's impact on the neighborhood would be minimized since several major Waterfront projects are planned within the same timeframe. Van Fleet said a plan is needed to coordinate construction on upcoming development projects to avoid freezing lower Old Town traffic. Baker said that because coordination is critical to avoiding conflicts between work on the ODBC clubhouse, the flood mitigation project's components, and other Waterfront projects, the City Manager's office is putting together a work group to discuss how to stage the various projects. She said the Department of Project Implementation would be soliciting public input on how to phase the public improvements that reflects public priorities.

Smedberg said that, at Council's October 18, 2014 public hearing, considerable public concern was voiced about the potential impacts of upcoming construction and the Mayor and he had asked staff to create a Waterfront work schedule to minimize the neighborhood impacts.

Public comments:

Transporting construction materials by barge

Bernstein said that Founders Park Community Association members support using barges rather than trucks to move the construction materials for the upcoming projects.

Design Update: 500 and 501 N. Union Street (formerly Robinson Terminal North) Note: briefing is posted at:

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/RTN21Oct2014WC.pdf>

Wire said the Commission's briefing of the updated presentation was the first of five City regulatory bodies that would receive it: the Board of Architectural Review (BAR), Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC), the Planning Commission, and City Council. He said the project team expects to brief the BAR in November 2014 and UDAC in either November or December 2014. Wire said the request for a Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) would probably be submitted by the end of October 2014.

Wire reviewed the design team's vision for the site, their development goals, the designs and site plan. He said designs provided were not final but designs-in-process.

The 28-slide presentation covered details for 500 and 501 N. Union Street. He said the west building currently plans to have 113 hotel rooms and approximately 15 condominium units on either side of the building and the east building site will include about 46 residential units, ground floor retail space, parking, and public amenities and open space. He said the design concept being developed for the east building would be consistent with the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

Design Updates since the last briefing on 500/501 N. Union Street

Wire reviewed changes to the design previously provided: (1) substituting, as a way to access Founders park, a pedestrian walkway through green space for the previously proposed overpass at West's Point, required by the location of the City's below-grade environmental remediation equipment; and (2) moving the east building's loading dock from Oronoco Street, facing Founders Park, to North Union Street. Wire said the east building's design now has an active use public space area on its side facing Founders Park.

Wire said the buildings' street setback would be almost double, what is there now and will effectively open up the view shed of the river and avoid the near-tunnel effect at the corner currently created by the Robinson Terminal North warehouses being almost flush with the property line.

Design

Wire reviewed the historic inspiration for the site design, including West's Point. He said that because the east and west building sites lay outside the Old and Historic Area the design team has been guided by the Waterfront Plan's guidance that its architecture should be "modern design inspired by historic precedent". He said their design priorities include having a project that looks good from every angle and creates a design that will be attractive when viewed from North Old Town.

Materials

Wire said the west building would primarily be a mix of red brick with glass in the middle, with color pattern similar to that of the nearby Oronoco. He said the east building's design concept is to resemble the Torpedo Factory with, for example, its masonry frames. He said the design team is developing a way to use design and materials to create both warm daytime and nighttime appearances for the building since glass can appear warm at night but cold during the day.

Deliveries

Wire said there will be one garage door for each of the buildings and the design team has discussed at length with staff ideas to minimize the impact of deliveries on street traffic.

Parking

Wire said about two spaces per residential unit will be provided, more than the City code requires, and 1.5 spaces per hotel unit. Wire said that, to comply with the Waterfront Plan's requirement to provide all needed parking on-site, the east building will have attendant-assisted self-parking and the west building, with condominiums and the project's hotel, will have valet parking and use a stacked parking system in the garage.

Public amenities: public art and open space

Wire said ideas for how to use the public space along the building's east and south sides include the possibility of having a functional space for public performances but details for the east building's public art have not yet been developed and will be included with a future design submission. Wire said the site design includes almost an acre of open space and the design team recognizes the need to have the area function comfortably year-round.

Commission Discussion

River debris

Auld asked if the design team had considered how to address debris that collects at West's Point. Wire said a pier and water debris team is considering how to address this.

Relationship to Waterfront Landscape Architectural and Flood Mitigation Design Project

Wire said the east and west building designs will be consistent with the materials planned for the public spaces by the Olin team's Waterfront landscape architecture design even though 500 and 501 N. Union Street are outside the area of the Landscape Architectural and Flood Mitigation Project. He said the site's grading will not be determined by the City's flood mitigation design project.

In response to Wojtanowski's question, Wire said the east building will have an almost totally green roof, and a portion of the west building's roof will be green. He said hard scaping is needed for a part of the west building's roof planned as an overlook.

A design that improves pedestrian safety

Watters said there were many good aspects to the design and commended the design team for expanding the buildings' setback from the street since the current absence of a safe space for pedestrians to walk near the Oronoco/N. Union Street corner is made worse by the current blind corner for those approaching the Oronoco/N. Union.

Mutty said the design as proposed effectively satisfies the goal of having a modern design inspired by historic precedent, but he said the view between the buildings has too much uninterrupted hardscape. Bergman said he liked many of the design components but the east building design does not pay adequate homage to West's Point.

The importance of having active public space on the east building's eastern side

Bergman said it is important to ensure an active public space on the eastern side to avoid creating dead space there. Wire said retail and community space is planned for this area but the City has not yet indicated the purpose for which the community space would be used. Wire said the public space along the east building will be about 8,000 square feet. Livingood said that, for reference, 8,000 square feet is only slightly smaller than the Seaport Foundation's current boatbuilding shop.

Potential for incorporating a performance space

Smedberg said public discussions during the Waterfront Plan's development had included many requests for community space that could host activities such as theatrical and music performances, and historic events and displays. Watters said a way should be considered for how to accommodate those needs while keeping the public space active day and evening.

Downs said the Arts Commission favors incorporating a performance space into the area to activate it. She said the designers should use the Waterfront Art and History Plan's recommendations for how to incorporate artistic and historic elements into the paths and walkways.

Timeline for action

In response to Downs' question, Wire said the project team hopes that Council would be able to approve the DSUP by the first quarter of 2015, after the plan has been reviewed by the Waterfront Commission, UDAC, Planning Commission, and BAR.

Public comments

In response to Bert Ely's question, Wire said the amount of soil to be removed from the site would be a little less than that removed from the Harris Teeter site. He said the current plan is to move the soil by truck but the project team would consider the feasibility of barges.

In response to Ely's question about types of retail planned for the project, Wire said it would likely include higher end restaurants and retail that is planned in a way that does not just encourage Thursday through Sunday patronage.

Kathryn Papp provided as a reference an image she'd found from an art magazine that illustrated the concept of combining contemporary design with historical inspiration, a 2012 image by a Dutch artist, titled "Aluminum" that was of a classic Dutch portrait of a woman wearing a bonnet made of aluminum.

Ruth McKenty said there should be more focus on the view from Oronoco Park and she agreed the hardscape needs to be softened on North Union Street, between the buildings, and along the north sides of both the east and west buildings.

Christine Bernstein said barges should be used to transport the project's soil.

Christine Bernstein said it is a mistake for the project team not to decide early in the process what type of use is planned for the 8,000 square feet of public space at the east building. She said there has been substantial interest in attracting a cultural entity such as the Virginia Fine Arts Museum to the North Old Town Waterfront area. Wire said they recognize the importance of finding such a tenant. He said they have already been actively engaged in discussions with a number of entities but no agreement has been reached yet.

Dan Straub said the uniform cornice line for both buildings is disappointing. Wire said the even building line was intentional but the team welcomed ideas for how to mitigate its visual impact by using color or other measures.

Susan Cohen said it would be very important to identify a suitable location for a cultural space.

Next steps for the Commission

Wire said the development team welcomed the opportunity to have a follow-up meeting with the Commission to discuss how the design meets each of the Waterfront Plan's 21 goals and guidelines.

Hall proposed, and the Commission agreed, that a Robinson Terminal North study group be created to evaluate 500 and 501 N. Union Street design proposals for how they meeting the Waterfront Plan's guidelines. Hall appointed Watters to chair the study group.

Carr Hotel (Hotel Indigo) Schedule & Status Update

Deferred to November 2014.

FY 2016 Budget Civic Engagement

Browand said Council would like to receive public input on budget priorities for the upcoming year earlier in the budget development process than has been done in previous years.

City on-line spending priorities survey

Browand said a survey for the public to take on City spending priorities is posted to the City website and the results of the survey will be presented to Council in November 2014. Browand said Hall and other Commission chairs will also be meeting with the Council in an early November workshop on FY16 budget & FY16-25 CIP budget priorities. Hall asked Commissioners to publicize the City's online budget priorities survey to their constituencies and encourage them to take it.

Smedberg said he has long supported bringing the public into City discussions on spending priorities earlier in the process. He said factors such as continuing cuts in state and federal funding and upcoming expenses related to the City needing to meet state mandates make it especially important to identify public spending priorities.

Livingood said the City should expand its efforts to identify and follow up on potential federal funding opportunities for Waterfront and parks and recreation activities. She said she had recently provided some suggestions to Williams.

Van Fleet said Commissioners should encourage their constituencies to make the City's safety-related services a priority, including the need to increase the number of police dedicated to Old Town. When asked, Hayes said robberies in Old Town were up 140%.

Agency Reports

Hall invited comments regarding the staff reports provided prior to the meeting.

Wharf strengthening

In response to Hall's question, Browand said all Marina projects, including the wharf strengthening, would be scheduled to avoid a potential conflict with the Parade of Lights.

Backflow Preventer for King Street/The Strand

In response to Auld's question, Gammon said that repairs and testing were complete and the equipment is working as planned. He said the City plans to extend its current one-year warranty to two years.

Updated study of Old Town garage capacity

Hall asked for the status of the City's plan to update its study of Old Town garage capacity since the Commission continues to be concerned about the adequacy of available parking along the Waterfront. She noted the issue had been raised at the Old Town Civic Association meeting in August 2014. Williams said Council had, at its June 14, 2014 public hearing on Phase I of the Landscape Design and Flood Mitigation Plan, asked Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) to provide a schedule for when they plan to update their garage capacity numbers. Williams said she would ask T&ES for the information.

Lower King Street Multi-modal Feasibility Study

Hall asked that the Commission be updated by T&ES on the Lower King Street Multi-Modal Feasibility Study at its November 2014 meeting.

Blackwall Hitch restaurant update

Williams reported that Blackwall Hitch has been working on interior demolition work at the Torpedo Factory Food Pavilion site since August 2014 and construction is expected to start shortly. She said Blackwall Hitch is working to complete the construction by March 15, 2015. Williams said that, in unrelated work, the Charthouse repairs to its roof would likely be done in about a week.

Marina Committee

Thayer reported that Council had put on its October 28, 2014 meeting docket consideration of the Commission's September 16, 2014 letter to Council asking that Council reaffirm its commitment to seek to maintain an active publicly accessible recreational boat marina and direct staff to complete a planned feasibility study to support that commitment.

Thayer reported that Mutty and Livingood have begun compiling information for the River Debris Subcommittee to review on options available for addressing river debris.

Reports from Commissioners

No additional reports.

Report from Police

Lt. Hayes provided information about recent crimes committed in Old Town, and said there had been a 140% increase in robberies. In response to questions about whether additional officers could be assigned to patrol the area on foot or by bike, Hayes said funding is not available to expand the current number, particularly with the increased demand created by the population growth the Potomac Yards area.

Announcements / Public Comments - No additional comments.

Adjournment

Hall adjourned the meeting at 9:45 A.M.