

City of Alexandria
Waterfront Commission & Park and Recreation Commission Meeting
Briefing by Robinson Terminals' Contract Purchasers
Lee Center
1108 Jefferson St.
Thursday, October 17, 2013
7 p.m.

Waterfront Commission Members

Present: Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association (FPCA)
Suzanne Bethel, Old Town Business and Professional Association (OTBPA)
Stewart Dunn, Alexandria Planning Commission
Art Fox, Citizen 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 Archaeological Commission
Mari Lou Livingood, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
Stephen Mutty, Citizen Park Planning District I
David Speck, Citizen Park Planning District III
Steven Thayer III, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St., and Chair,
Marina Committee
Townsend A. (Van) Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association
Christa Watters, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.

Excused: Paul Smedberg, Member, Alexandria City Council

Absent: Dennis Auld, Citizen Park Planning District II
John Bordner, Citizen west of Washington St.
Morgan Delaney, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Allison Nance, Alexandria Arts Commission
Ryan Wojtanowski, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission

Park and Recreation Commission Members

Present: Judy Guse-Noritake, Planning District 1, Chair
Gina Baum, Planning District I
Rich Brune, Planning District III
William Cromley, Planning District I
Brian McPherson, Planning District III

Absent: Jennifer Atkins, Planning District II
Stephen Beggs, Planning District II
Judith Coleman, Planning District III
Ripley Forbes, Planning District II

Emma Schutzius

City Staff: Jack Browand, Division Chief, Marketing, Special Events and Waterfront Operations, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Al Cox, Historic Preservation Manager, Planning and Zoning, P&Z
Robin DeShields, Executive Administrative Assistant, RPCA
Laura Durham, Open Space Planner, Park Planning, RPCA
Faroll Hamer, Director, Planning and Zoning (P&Z)
Richard Lawrence, Urban Planner I, P&Z
Catherine Miliaros, Urban Planner III, P&Z
Iris Portny, Commission Recording Secretary, RPCA
Brian Rahaz, P&Z
James Spengler, Director, RPCA
Nancy Williams, Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests: On file

Welcome Hall called the meeting to Order at 7:15 P.M. and introduced Judy Guse Noritake, Park and Recreation Chair Noritake and meeting co-chair, and Jonathan Rak. Hall said the two Commissions' joint discussion of development plans for Robinson Terminal North (RTN) and Robinson Terminal South (RTS), was one of many to be held to discuss Waterfront development.

Presentation – McGuire Woods LLC

Note: The full presentation is posted to the City website.

Rak said EYA, chosen by the Washington Post Company (Post) three weeks earlier as the buyer to develop the Washington Post property Robinson Terminal South (RTS), was eager to introduce to the public the two teams, including owners and designers, for RTN and RTS. Rak said no decisions had yet been made about its development plans for RTS and their objective for the evening was to begin their community outreach process and listen to the community interests and preferences about the property's development. Rak said the Waterfront Small Area Plan (Waterfront Plan) is the guidepost for the teams' planning, but they are particularly interested in inputs on issues not entirely determined by the Waterfront Plan, such as community preferences regarding styles of architecture and passive versus active uses for the public spaces.

He reviewed the timeline planned for moving the RTN and RTS process forward between fall 2013 and winter 2013/2014: to develop concept plans during fall 2013, develop architecture during winter/spring 2014, submit applications for Development Special Use permits (DSUP) and Board of Architectural Review (BAR) approval during summer/fall 2014, and work towards Planning Commission and City Council hearings in fall/winter 2014).

Robinson Terminal South (RTS)

Youngentob said EYA recognizes the great importance of RTS to the City as a whole and to the Waterfront and its nearby neighborhoods. He said all of the communities EYA has developed since it began in 1992 in Alexandria are within the Washington D.C. region and EYA has

developed 11 communities within Alexandria to date, including Ford's Landing. He said EYA's process is heavily focused on community input, its developments have won many design awards and the company has been recognized as an industry leader for its focus on environmentally conscious and walkable urban neighborhoods. Youngentob said the EYA process begins with public outreach before any work is begun on design planning. Youngentob said the Fords Landing development process included many technical complexities similar to those that will be involved in redeveloping the RTS site, including working with multiple jurisdictional authorities and incorporating into the process environmental, marine engineering and other factors related to Waterfront sites.

Youngentob introduced EYA's development team: Shalom Baranes Architects, an award-winning firm whose experience includes master planning, mixed use developments, historic preservation and new infill construction, and M. Paul Friedberg and Partners (landscape architects). He said JBG is EYA's financial partner on the RTS project. Youngentob said EYA's redevelopment of The Oronoco, also designed by Shalom Baranes, is an example of EYA's experience with "adaptive reuse", a design that redevelops an existing building.

Baranes introduced Burkhart, also with his firm, said Shalom Baranes and Associates (SBA) had been in the area since the 1980s, and has designed two projects in Old Town to date. He said the firm's local projects include historic preservation and redevelopment projects, mixed use, residential, and commercial projects, including several in Georgetown that include projects south of M Street along the Potomac waterfront that build upon the industrial character of neighborhood and its former warehouses.

Parisi reviewed some of the landscape architecture projects on which M. Paul Friedberg and Partners has worked, including waterfront projects such as the master plan for New York City's Battery Park, and said private/public partnerships such as RTS where a private developer will incorporate public open space into the design, are a specialty of the firm.

Robinson Terminal North (RTN) – CityInterests

Farrell introduced CityInterests' team and said the RTN project will be his firm's first Virginia project. He said they are experienced working with waterfront redevelopment, boutique residential projects, and complex development projects in locations that have multiple jurisdictional authorities that include local and federal authorities. He said their Parkside project on the Anacostia Trail had included over 100 community meetings.

Caudle said Hickok Cole, has been in business for 25 years, and its architecture experience includes projects throughout the region such as mixed-use urban waterfront development and revitalization projects that include D.C.'s southwest waterfront, Georgetown and Shaw neighborhoods. He said their projects are each unique and create meaningful connections to their neighborhoods.

Hoover, with Oculus, the RTN team's landscape architects, said the firm started in D.C. in 1993, has offices in D.C., Charlottesville and Australia and their work includes larger projects such as Alexandria's South Carlyle master plan; numerous waterfront projects in the U.S. and Australia, and small projects such as Arlington's Pembroke Square.

Rak said the questions about which the RTN and RTS teams are particularly interested in receiving inputs on include, preferences regarding architectural style (e.g. traditional or contemporary) and whether active or passive uses for public spaces are preferred; and, for RTS, how the public pier should be used and what types of civic uses people are most interested in having there.

Commission Discussion

Hall opened the discussion by members of the Waterfront Commission and Park and Recreation Commission. Commissioners introduced themselves and their constituencies and geographic areas they represent on each commission.

OVERVIEW

Commissioners said they are very excited by the award-winning teams of landscape architects and who will be working on both the City's landscape design for the Waterfront's public spaces (the Olin Studio team) and on the RTN and RTS sites. Commissioners' priorities discussed included:

- a Waterfront that is welcoming and accessible to all City residents
- the Waterfront's key role in the City's urban parks and recreation
- the unique opportunity presented by designs for the City's public Waterfront spaces being created at the same time RTN and RTS planning begins
- designs that minimize potential conflicts between Waterfront residential, and park and public open space users.
- the need for a permanent Waterfront location for the non-profit Seaport Foundation, now located at RTS
- the importance of a building's view as seen from the river.

Building designs should consider how open space for parks and recreation will be used

Noritake (#1) said the Park and Recreation Commission (P&RC) continues to focus on the importance of considering how neighboring parks and open space are likely to be used when designing buildings and said the fact that the Olin team is designing the Waterfront's public open spaces at the same time as the RTN and RTS planning begins offers a rare opportunity to dovetail the planning.

She said that, for example, planning for the buildings and their ground floor spaces should account for the neighboring open spaces and parks rather than having the City's parks designed to respond to the neighboring buildings. She said that, for instance, RTN planners should consider how Oronoco Park, located across Pendleton Street, might be used and whether the City might want to use Pendleton Street as a plaza for certain events. She said it's important for RTN and RTS planners to coordinate their ideas with those being developed for the public Waterfront areas and said the philosophy of landscape architect Laurie Olin, hired by the City to design the Waterfront public spaces, should be kept in mind: design for the people who live here, not for visitors. Noritake said that when planners consider options for small scale active and passive uses of open spaces they should remember that "active" and "passive" are not either/or but exist along a spectrum. Bernstein said she and the Founders Park Civic Association, neighbors to RTN, will be an active presence as the RTN design develops.

Accessibility: the importance of the Waterfront to urban parks and recreation

Cromley said the designs should reflect the importance of the Waterfront's role to the City's urban parks and recreation and should learn from past mistakes that produced buildings that "don't interact with the parks, streetscapes and people who live here at all." He said cafes and things that make the spaces between the buildings and the parks should interact and make each other and be vibrant.

Cromley said planners should create designs to minimize the "inherent hostility that residential and park land use creates". He said new developments should engage these urban parks and address the special challenges posed by residential development: it tends to be "bunker-like". He said he hopes the world-class designers will create some bold ideas.

Brune said ensuring access to the Waterfront and its activities for all City residents, not just those who live or work near the waterfront, is especially important for West End residents. He said private Waterfront space design should avoid creating a perception for Waterfront visitors that they are imposing on a private space e.g. Fords Landing is an example of a design that feels like a private Waterfront area even though public access is provided. Bethel said the design should incorporate the Waterfront Small Area Plan's emphasis on connectivity. Livingood said it is important to remember that access to the water is key for boats, for children, especially in the West End, and for people throughout Northern Virginia.

Manor said Waterfront accessibility should be integral to both sites because the current Waterfront feels like "forbidden territory", hard to find, broken-up, fenced off and lined with rip rap. He said this is a moment of historic opportunity to redress these problems.

Bernstein said that if residential units rather than a hotel are placed on the east side of RTN's mixed use plan it would make the site feel more exclusive than the Waterfront Plan's original concept which had a hotel on the site's east side.

Keeping the Seaport Foundation on the Waterfront

Hoogland and Muttu said a permanent Waterfront home for the Seaport Foundation, now on the RTS site, needs to be found. Muttu said that because the Seaport Foundation serves community needs and reflects the community's history as a port the need to provide a permanent home for the Seaport Foundation is a priority. Hall said the developers must understand the importance Commissioners attach to the need to find a permanent Waterfront home for the Seaport Foundation.

Architectural style and incorporating history and art

Cromley said the challenge will be how to preserve an artistic vision while accommodating a great variety of community (is a word missing here). Speck said if designers try to satisfy everyone they will end up "exciting no one" and said that although he loves the City's history and character, "we have a lot of brick, and this is an opportunity to do some things that will excite people, though not everyone. He said it is "the buildings that look a little different" that a person remembers about a city and this is an opportunity for a design that maintains the scale, mass and character of the area but does not look like everything else."

Thayer said developers should consult early with the Waterfront and other City commissions to ensure that their insights can be received as design concepts are being developed, not after decisions have been made.

Hoogland said the Waterfront should incorporate the City's history and pre-history into its development and offer "teachable experiences" that show the range of the City's history, including its roles in the tobacco and slave trades. He said the design should reflect the City's historic architecture, including its industrial and commercial nature, but not necessarily "mimic" it and developers will need to be prepared to recognize any archeological remains that may be uncovered on the site. Bernstein and Watters said that art and history should be integrated into the design concepts from the start and Bernstein said RTN planners should incorporate West's Point as a site of historic significance to the City. Gosnell said the City's role as an historic seaport, having been one of the eastern seaboard's busiest, should be reflected. Watters said Alexandria's historic nature should be respected but "don't fear straying from the historic pattern". Mutty said the architecture should not be limited to brick. Manor said he favors creating a unique world-class architectural statement, one that could be a beacon for the City, especially at RTN.

Bernstein said developers should work with the City to ensure their site designs do not exceed the capacity of the City's infrastructure.

Community concerns about potential impacts on density

Van Fleet said the City's historic nature makes it especially important to minimize the mass and scale of the developments because the Waterfront is already crowded and dense. Dunn said that, although he strongly supports the Waterfront Plan, and does not think the area is currently too crowded or dense, there are a number of able, thoughtful, caring and concerned Alexandrians who have "grave concerns" about the Plan's potential impacts. He said developers should consider their decisions within the context of the overall plan and "not push at the edges" of what is allowed, an approach he often sees on the Planning Commission. He said Old Town is a very unusual area, especially within the Washington region, and that the RTN and RTS developers should consider their own site choices in the broader context of the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

Watters said developers should work to create a process and outcome that helps those residents who fear the development's impact instead to experience it as a way to improve the City's quality of life for everyone.

The importance the Waterfront view from the water

Baum said the developers should remember that the view from the water is as important as from the street. Gosnell said the conspicuousness of the Waterfront should be remembered: it is viewed from the air, by boat and from the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and he hopes the Waterfront can become a gateway attraction for yachts.

Contract purchasers are within their 45 day contract reassessment period

In response to Baum's question about the status of the developers' 45 day reassessment period, Rak said the contract purchasers were still within this time available to review information

affecting a site's feasibility, including environmental and structural information and inputs about site expectations from initial consultations with the public and City planners. Both EYA and City Interests said the review is ongoing and there is "every indication at this point" they will move forward with their projects.

Public Comment/Announcements

Keeping the Seaport Foundation, now in RTN, on the Waterfront

Hall asked the speakers if finding a place for the Seaport Foundation is one of the factors they will incorporate within their planning. She said four audience members had asked developers to commit to finding such a location in addition to the Commissioners' support for finding a Waterfront location to preserve the Alexandria Seaport Foundation's vibrant Waterfront presence.

Rak said it is too early in the process for developers to be able to offer any details about what may be located where on the sites. He said their goal for the evening was to listen and this was the first of what would be many public engagement meetings discussing their plans.

Q: How are you taking climate change's impact on sea level into account?

A: Rak said water levels, the flood plain, and related engineering challenges are issues foremost in the minds of both teams and they have engaged engineering firms to examine how this should be incorporated into the plans.

Q: How will the arts and artists be integrated into the plan?

A: Youngentob said EYA and CityInterests both consider integrating art and the arts into their design planning to be a serious factor that affects the waterfront experience and EYA incorporated this into their other projects as well.

Q: What restrictions exist on the site vis a vis the flood plain?

A: Rak said the EYA and CityInterests teams will work closely with the City and the Department of Project Implementation to consider how the designs should integrate the City's flood mitigation actions and plans. Youngentob said one of the unique and more costly challenges of the RTN site will be the complexities of dealing effectively with the underground parking, flood plain and related structural issues.

Q: How will EYA's planning for the RTS site design relate to and be integrated with planning for the Carr hotel on the Cummings site?

A: Youngentob said EYA has been studying the Carr hotel's design and its garage access, its grading and other aspects closely and the RTS architecture will related to its eventual design and scale once it has been finalized. He said he'd been very excited to hear the evening's comments about there being some interest in the possibility of a design being created that might be less traditional because EYA's initial thoughts about the RTS site design had been that the location presented unique opportunities to create a statement from all four sides, potentially incorporating glass and steel.

Q: Is there toxic material on either of the sites?

Youngentob said there is toxic material on the RTS site and that will likely be dealt with during the excavation for the underground garage structure. He said EYA dealt with the same problems when building Fords Landing.

Q: Carr Hospitality's proposal for a hotel on South Union Street seeks to max out the zoning to make their financial model work. To what extent does your financial model require greater density in order to be feasible?

A: Youngentob and Farrell Hamer? , City's Planning Director, both said they believe they can work within the density, height and scale specified by the City's Waterfront Plan.

Q: How will you mitigate the creosote and arsenic in the soil? Are there any EPA obstacles?

A: Rak said the question of how to quantify the costs of addressing the RTN and RTS sites' environmental issues is being very carefully considered during the due diligence period.

Q: What meaningful connection to the community do you see for the RTS site?

A: Youngentob said they do not have a plan yet, but their landscape architect specializes in creating such connectivity but given the elements of the Waterfront Plan they believe there are tremendous opportunities to create a connection that will always be accessible to the public.

Q: Does EYA consider a marina off the pier of RTS to be practical?

A: Youngentob said they had hired Moffet and Nichols, marine engineers, to examine the pier and create a feasibility cost estimate for creating a marina there. He said EYA's goal is to create, at a minimum, active day slips for boats to tie up along the pier to access restaurants, but putting a pier out into the channel can be very challenging because of factors such as strong currents and water flows. He said the types of breakwaters that would be needed to protect boats might not be something the City would want to have.

Q: What plans do you have to minimize and eliminate the impact of additional parking demands on the already congested neighborhood streets nearby for parking, by for retail, restaurants and the hotel?

Rak said it is too early to have specific strategies but EYA and CityInterests understand that this will be a significant issue to address.

Q: (Katherine Papp): Regarding climate change, the context over the next 30 years will be totally changed from that today, posing enormous challenges, and some of the various solutions posed by engineering firms and architectural solutions that are diametrically opposed to each other. If we learn from the Dutch experience, there will need to be close coordination among the various landscape architect and engineering firms. Because Alexandria was built on a mini-watershed it will require enormous absorptive capacity from both the river-and land-side. Energy efficiency will also be very important.

Comment: (To the Commissioners) I have no doubt you will look after the aesthetics of the project but I also expect you to set expectations for traffic and parking impacts, issues of real concern to the neighborhoods.

A: (No response)

Q: How do the developers intend to unify their ideas to create a sense of place while using so many different architects and landscape architects?

A: Rak said they assume the City will ensure the RTN and RTS developments will fit within their immediate environments and their broader Waterfront context as the projects go forward.

Q: Why is another dock for business craft being envisioned for RTN?

A: Gosnell, Waterfront Commission member, said the original idea of adding such a dock at RTN was driven by the fact that the City Marina cannot accommodate the docking of small cruise lines or larger yachts but the RTN terminal's wharf would be able to do so.

Q: Regarding RTN, the City's model has a building on the west side of Union Street that has no connection to the historic heritage of Old Town. Will your RTN buildings be more consistent with that heritage? Red brick is good.

A: Rak said the developers recognize that there are a diversity of community opinions about the style of the architecture and this will have to be worked out over time based on community inputs, discussions with the Board of Architecture Review and other stakeholders.

Q: Will you support reserved on-street parking for residents in Old Town residents?

A: Rak said they would follow the City's decisions.

Q: If you put cafes on the pier – there will need to be room to walk around them to access to water. (A: Everyone agreed.)

Q: Since public space at Ford's Landing is uninviting, will you do better at RTS?

A: Youngentob said he takes this concern seriously, including the importance of ensuring access to the Waterfront for all, and was surprised to hear that people don't feel welcome there. He said EYA had at the time worked closely on Ford's Landing with City planners and other jurisdictional entities such as the National Park Service, but he said no commercial uses had been permitted as part of Ford's Landing. He said the RTS commercial uses planned for the ground floor should activate the area and make it publicly accessible and welcoming.

Q: What steps will the developers take to mitigate the impact on the community during construction?

Youngentob said EYA works hard to minimize the impact of its construction on the community and both the RTS and RTN teams have the finances that will let them proceed uninterrupted with the construction and removal of materials from the site.

Q: Does EYA intend to put a marina at RTS?

A: The feasibility of a marina is being evaluated.

Q: What architectural style is planned?

A: Rather than "replicating" historical buildings, they work with materials and other elements to reflect the historic area.

Q: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA)

A: Deputy City Manager Jinks said the City had held generic discussions with VMFA about the possibility of establishing a City Waterfront location for a museum, that VMFA has been interested, as a state agency, in establishing a northern Virginia museum to serve the whole state better than its Richmond-only museums can do, but VMFA lacks access to the financial resources needed to make this happen.

Jinks said the City will continue to discuss VMFA other options for creating a presence in Alexandria although a bricks and mortar museum is not currently in the works.

Q: Will the RTN hotel be on the east or west side?

A: There has been no decision yet. The current focus is on completing the necessary due diligence research.

Q: The Waterfront Plan calls for two hotels. Are hotels being considered for both RTN and RTS?

A: Rak said there will be a hotel either at RTN or RTS.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 P.M.