



Alexandria Waterfront Commission

Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

1108 Jefferson Street

Alexandria, Virginia 22314

February 19, 2015

Mayor William D. Euille
Vice Mayor Allison Silberberg
Councilman John Taylor Chapman
Councilman Timothy B. Lovain
Councilwoman Redella S. Pepper
Councilman Paul C. Smedberg
Councilman Justin M. Wilson

Re: Robinson Terminal South Development Proposal

Honorable Mayor and members of City Council:

At the Alexandria Waterfront Commission's December 16 meeting, The Commission established an ad hoc subcommittee to review the development proposal for the Robinson Terminal South Plan. The subcommittee was tasked with drafting a position to be forwarded to the full Commission at its next regular meeting. Following is the report submitted to the Commission on, February 19, 2015.

The Committee reviewed the proposal in light of the eight Development Goals and fourteen Development Guidelines set forth for that area in the Alexandria Waterfront Small Area Plan (see attached document stating those goals and guidelines). In comparing the proposal to the plan, we encountered the following problem: The goals and guidelines for the Robinson Terminal South site were drawn up with the expectation that the site's major tenants would include a hotel, which would by its very nature invite and encourage public use and activity on the site and its adjacent public spaces. In its final vote on the Waterfront Plan, the Council approved two hotels for the waterfront rather than the three originally envisioned, ultimately resulting in the elimination of any hotel on the RTS site. Thus, an exact comparison is inherently impossible, because the goals and guidelines were not rewritten subsequent to the approval of the plan and the decision not to locate a hotel on RTS.

Finding that there is currently little market for additional office space in that part of Alexandria, the developer proceeded with a plan for predominantly residential development. Because predominantly residential use was not envisioned, and in fact was specifically discouraged by the plan for the RTS site, some of the goals and guidelines of the Waterfront Plan for this site are not in line with the uses proposed by the developer.

The proposal meets the goals and guidelines of the plan in many respects. The following points are areas where the committee found significant disparities with regard to meeting the goals:

1. Goal 1 clearly states that the site should employ mixed land use and a design that invites the public and encourages activity within the proposed development and in the adjacent public spaces. While the proposal is for mixed use, including plans for a ground level restaurant in the large building facing the water and for lifestyle retail or a specialty food market in the preserved and renovated 2 Duke Street Building, the remainder of the “public” uses of the buildings will be as residential lobbies, which the committee did not believe qualify as “inviting to the public” in the same way that hotel lobbies, for example, would. The plan specifically said the site should not be primarily residential, yet the elimination of the hotel left little in the way of economically feasible alternatives for the site in the current economy. Some members believe there could be more planned commercial use of first floor spaces, perhaps including useful small retail or professional offices. Other members pointed out these spaces would be largely dead at night.
2. Whether Goal 6, maintaining a building scale compatible with the existing fabric across South Union Street and Wolfe Street, was attained was controversial. The mass and density, as well as the height of the buildings, are below or at the limits set in the Waterfront Plan, so the proposal is in compliance in that respect. However, some members of the committee and of the neighborhood residents in attendance at the meeting said they believed there needed to be more setbacks of upper stories on the corners adjacent to existing homes and more modulations to the rooflines. Several said the modern designs and heavy use of glass have little relationship to the historic context. The committee believes that architectural design and details are the province of the Board of Architectural Review, and leaves further consideration of such matters to that body. In addition, the proposed building designs do not adequately meet the plan’s broader guidance for building styles that refer to 18th century warehouse style architecture.
3. With regard to whether Goal 7, maximizing water views from buildings, streets and rooftop open spaces, has been achieved, there will be public views from the restaurant and the outdoor public spaces. However, the only usable rooftop space is for the private use of townhouse owners and is internal, not on the water.
4. Goal 8, the inclusion of a public marina, was found to be infeasible by the developer, who instead has included floating piers where transient boaters may tie up during visits to the City. Staff said this decision would avoid providing such marina services as fueling, parking, waste removal, and security. Some commission members believe that it is not feasible to have transient tie-ups without providing those services, which would come at a cost to the City or the new site’s governing association. Day use, however, is provided at other locations like Georgetown and Washington’s Southwest waterfront and our own current marina without offering full marina services such as fueling. The proposal also suggests providing space at the existing piers for visiting tall ships to dock. Committee members pointed out tall ships generally stay more than a day, so questioned the feasibility of their using this pier.

We found that the goals of improving water access, providing public amenities, extending streets and providing an additional east-west alley have been met. Pedestrian connectivity is much improved over current conditions.

Meeting the guidelines:

- Guidelines 1 and 2 regarding the encouragement of active public spaces are, as discussed above with regard to Goal 1, impacted by the major change of use resulting from the decision not to build a hotel on the site. Further, Guideline 2, which refers to an emphasis on arts, history and culture, including a museum, as well as “vibrant commercial uses,” is essentially moot in this proposal for largely residential uses, except that it meets the requirement to facilitate the vision for the Strand.
- Guideline 3: Residential use is only partly away from the water and while the developer says the lobbies of the multifamily building will be open to the public, we do not believe this access genuinely encourages public use.
- Guideline 4 is not met, as the town house portion of the complex does have ground floor residential use.
- Guidelines 5, 6, and 7 are met.
- Guideline 8, encouraging historic interpretation consistent with the recommendations of the History Plan, is partially met. However, there is little reference in the architectural design or proposed uses to Alexandria’s maritime history. Several participants said that the tall poles in the designs do not really suggest ships’ masts to most viewers. The developer team said it would continue to work with relevant City bodies, including the History, Art, and Archaeology Commissions, to develop necessary additions and detail. The committee did not find that the design adequately reflects the maritime heritage of the City and the site. Height requirements were met.
- Guideline 9 was met.
- Guideline 10 with regard to parking: City staff said the proposal meets the guidelines for residential parking spaces. They have not yet determined whether the proposal meets the requirements for commercial parking spaces. Again, the guidelines have been superseded by the deletion of the hotel from the Plan.
- Guideline 11 is met.
- Guideline 12 is moot, the developer having determined a marina is not feasible as part of their plan.

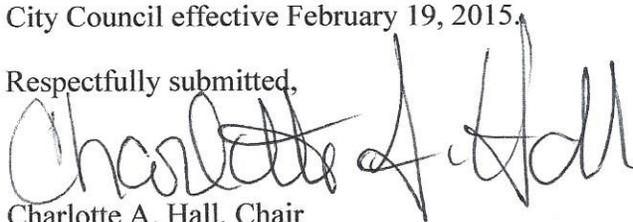
- Guideline 13 for public amenities has been met in the sense that public art, with historical interpretive information, is planned for the site. The open space requirements and improvements to street end green spaces have been met. The intended kayak launch will not be included at this site. The pier will be retained and improved for public gathering space, tall ship docking, and to provide access to floating piers for transient use. Environmental amenities beyond the minimum are included.
- Guideline 14 is met.

We note that there remains significant public concern over adequate parking provisions and we recommend that the City consider revisiting that issue with affected neighborhood residents.

Lastly, we are concerned that the Olin Plan for the public areas should promptly come up with Second Phase designs that address the common elements of the Plan. As private development proceeds apace, and the developers construct the portions of public space that they have committed to, it is only sensible that they know what materials and designs will be used for common areas along the full length of the waterfront. These are what Olin earlier referred to as the common language of design elements such as pavers, lamps, benches, historic markers, etc. We strongly recommend that such a unified design be finalized soon, and that it incorporate best environmental practices.

The Alexandria Waterfront Commission voted to accept the above report and is forwarding it to City Council effective February 19, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,



Charlotte A. Hall, Chair
Alexandria Waterfront Commission

Attached: Robinson Terminal South Development Goals and Guidelines

cc: Planning Commission
Board of Architectural Review
Waterfront Commission members
Mark Jinks, Acting City Manager
Emily Baker, Acting Deputy City Manager
James Spengler, Director, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Karl Moritz, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning
Mitchell Bernstein, Acting Director, Department of Project Implementation
Jack Browand, Division Chief, Staff Liaison to the Waterfront Commission

Robinson Terminal South

DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

1. Employ a land use mix and design which invites the public and encourages activity within the proposed development and in the adjacent public spaces.
2. Provide extensive public amenities and free access to and along the water's edge.
3. Improve access by extending neighboring streets and creating new east-west alleys.
4. Create improved pedestrian connections to an improved and expanded public pier.
5. Pay homage to historic Point Lumley through public space design and interpretive features.
6. Maintain a building scale compatible with existing fabric across South Union Street and Wolfe Street.
7. Maximize water views from buildings, streets and rooftop open spaces.
8. Redevelopment that includes a new pleasure boat marina is encouraged.

Figure 33: Robinson Terminal South Conceptual Massing Model



Robinson Terminal South

DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES:

1. Active uses which welcome the public should be part of any development, and constitute the predominant ground floor uses. Active ground floor uses shall be located as generally depicted in the Public Space and Active Frontages Diagram (Figure 34), and shall consist of uses that are open and welcoming to the public during normal business hours, such as lobbies, restaurants, retail, civic or cultural uses. There shall be adequate and reasonable buffering of the existing residential uses facing the site on Wolfe Street and South Union from the active uses in the new development.
2. The preferred use on the site is mixed use, emphasizing arts, history and culture (including a museum) and including vibrant commercial uses (such as hotel). In particular, facilitate the vision for The Strand and its uses.
3. Residential use and design should be compatible with a high level of public activity and located away from the water.
4. Residential use should not be the primary use of the site. The location, design and specific type of residential use proposed must coexist well with the other planned uses on the site and planned public activity in the public spaces adjacent to the residential development. Ground floor residential units are not permitted.
5. The streetscape and pedestrian experience along South Union Street, The Strand, Duke Street and Wolfe Street should be enhanced; in addition to special pavement, undergrounding utilities, street trees and appropriate light fixtures, and design should enhance the views of the water, pedestrian access and porosity and reflect the historic orientation of buildings and alleyways.
6. A new east west connection north of Wolfe Street between South Union Street and the pier is strongly encouraged.
7. An extension of The Strand from Duke Street is strongly encouraged, with a pedestrian-only connection at the The Strand/Wolfe Street intersection to buffer the Harborside community.
8. Historic interpretation, consistent with the recommendations of History Plan, should inform every aspect of the design of the redevelopment and adjacent public spaces, including recognition of the southern point of the original shoreline.
 - Buildings and open space should reflect Alexandria's maritime history.
 - The Plan encourages modern design inspired by historic precedent (such as 18th century Alexandria warehouse architecture) while maintaining compatibility with nearby residential neighborhoods and ensuring compliance with the Potomac River Vicinity Height District regulations.
 - Architecture should reflect historic east-west orientation of buildings, alleys and wharves.
 - The historic 2 Duke Street warehouse shall be preserved and adaptively reused.
9. Curb cuts should not be located on any building and/or block frontages facing the water or South Union Street, and should be minimized if facing residences along Wolfe Street.

DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES CONTINUED:

10. Parking for new buildings should be accommodated on site and below grade. Although the Plan anticipates low parking ratios, the applied ratio must be consistent with industry norms for similar hotels.
11. Shoreline treatment at Robinson Terminal South should include native plantings and naturalization where possible.
12. Robinson Terminal South is a potential location for a new and expanded pleasure boat marina. The proposed marina is conceived to be financially self-supporting as either a publicly or privately built and operated marina, and may be developed and operated in conjunction with the landside redevelopment of Robinson Terminal South. If the developer of the Robinson Terminal South development site does not develop the marina, it shall cooperate with the City and others to allow its development by others.
13. As part of redevelopment, on and off site public amenities shall be provided by the developer of the site. The specific amenities to be provided will be determined during the development review process. Desirable public amenities include:
 - Public art as a prominent feature of the public realm, both on public and private property. The recommendations of the Art Plan should be incorporated, to the greatest extent possible, in the design for the redeveloped warehouses, pier, and public spaces.
 - Open spaces with public access easements and/or dedications, provided as generally reflected in the Proposed Public Space and Active Frontages (Figure 34). The Plan encourages new open space to be provided on an improved pier, consistent with the federal settlement agreement. The Plan encourages the use of Parcel E for park, civic, or cultural activities. Riverside open space widths of less than 100 feet are acceptable only if it is found that an alternative site design better meets the objectives of this Plan.
 - Significant improvements shall be designed for Duke, Wolfe and additional street ends with green, pedestrian areas extending from The Strand to the water to expand the waterfront open space area.
 - A new kayak launching area at the foot of Duke.
 - Retention of the Robinson Terminal pier, repaired and expanded to be used as a public space and incorporated into the public space/pedestrian concept for the Plan as a whole. The Plan recommends that connections be provided at both the northern and southern ends of the pier, and improvements made to ensure the safety of users. Examples of potential uses on the pier area include water features, river watching, bocce, horseshoes, shuffleboard, plant and sculpture gardens, or outdoor cafes. Until or unless a pleasure boat marina is constructed adjacent to the Robinson Terminal South pier, the use of the pier as a docking location for larger vessels should be maintained.
 - Environmental amenities, above and beyond the minimum required.
14. The maximum FAR and floor area allowed is included on the chart at page 105.