

## Summary Minutes

### Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting December 16, 2008

**Members:** Jay Atkinson  
Christine Bernstein  
Henry Brooks  
Mel Fortney  
Doug Gosnell  
Nathan Macek  
Peter Pennington  
Pete Petersen  
Susan Pettey  
John J. Renner II  
Paul Smedberg  
Robert Taylor

**City Staff:** Andrea Barlow, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)  
Kathleen Beeton, P&Z  
Roger Blakeley, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)  
Dianne Gittens, Police Department  
Faroll Hamer, P&Z  
Jim Hixon, RPCA  
John North, Fire Department  
Laura Seidler, RPCA

**Guests:** Brian V. Buzzell  
Susan Cohen  
Harry Harrington  
Joanne Platt  
Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet  
Van Van Fleet

#### **Welcome and introductions**

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

#### **Approval of minutes from the November meeting**

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the November meeting.

#### **Update on security at Marina**

Since the November meeting, RPCA has been asked by the City Manager's office to stop with procurement of the security gates for the marina. Blakeley has had meetings with the City Manager regarding this matter. Presently, there's no security at the marina at night. In response to Committee members' expressions of concern, Blakeley noted that the next level of appeal would be to city officials.

Gosnell asked whether the City would reconsider its pricing for slip rental since overnight security would no longer be offered. He added that this is not only a security issue but also a liability issue. Seidler said that slip rental rates are scheduled to increase by about \$1.00 per foot in 2009. Fees are still scheduled to go up during the next lease cycle despite the elimination of security. Gosnell responded that there is an implied set of services being offered in the lease agreement, including security, and asked whether the City Manager would entertain a rebate since security is not being offered.

Blakeley noted that the money has been budgeted for the gates, but the procurement is on hold. He said that when the City decides to remove the hold, RPCA is ready to use its existing contract vehicle to procure the gates.

Fortney asked whether the hold would create any issues with the contracts in place. Blakeley responded that the City has a tiered contract under which RPCA can issue a request for task order proposals from approved, pre-qualified vendors to perform the work when the hold is removed.

Bernstein asked whether the hold was due to the hiring of an ethicist to determine City budget cuts. Blakeley responded that he was not aware of that, and noted that many departments' budgets have been frozen. Smedberg stated that the ethicist is limited to budgets under the purview of the Community Services Board and some mental health services and is not a citywide analysis of budget priorities.

Atkinson said that the Committee had previously discussed the gates and the process involved. He asked whether the Potomac Riverboat Company applied to the Board of Architectural Review for its gates. Blakeley responded that he was not certain whether it did.

Petty asked how much of a concern the issue is to the Committee, and how should the Committee respond.

Fortney stated that he understood the concerns of boaters, and said that boat owners have a liability concern if people are on their boats, and the City does too. Gosnell offered to approach the City Manager as a representative of boat slip owners to express concern that the gates be installed, and report back to the Committee.

Petty stated that pursuant to the Committee's last meeting, she sent a letter to the City Manager asking that security be retained until the gates are installed. She reported that no reply to the letter has been received.

Blakeley reported that the RPCA budget had been cut by \$2.6 million. A total of \$1.3 million would be cut from the parks, marina, and planning section budget,

including \$500,000 in first-tier cuts, which would be addressed through employee attrition. The second tier is another \$500,000 in cuts, requiring the elimination of services including \$200,000 in horticultural, \$200,000 in trees, and \$100,000 in operations. The final \$300,000 in cuts would be through staffing cuts.

Blakeley noted that there is presently no backlog of service requests for trees. The budget cuts will cause the backlog to grow as service is reduced. A guest inquired regarding the replacement of seven trees that died due to the drought last year at Harborside. Blakeley responded that replacement of the trees is not a City priority, but that Harborside is welcome to replace the trees itself.

### **Update on Waterfront Planning Process**

Hamer provided an update on the waterfront planning process. She stated that she had initially planned to involve an advisory group or blue-ribbon panel. She said that there's a lot of interest in the waterfront, so the process wouldn't work well if driven by a steering committee. She said that P&Z had therefore decided to conduct the process as a series of open meetings. She noted that there are a lot of boards and commissions involved in addition to the Waterfront Committee, including RPCA, Transportation and Environmental Services, the Board of Architectural Review, and the Commission for the Arts. Hamer said she would write a letter to each of these commissions to ensure they have representatives at waterfront planning meetings.

Instead of holding monthly meetings, she envisions a series of "bunched up" meetings. The process may start with a waterfront tour, then receive a presentation from the waterfront center on waterfront design, then a meeting on design principals, and then host a charrette. Then, staff and consultants would return several months later for a series of meetings on a draft plan.

Hamer said that it would be helpful to go to the City Council in January and have them discuss their general goals for the waterfront. She stated that she would like the Waterfront Committee to serve as a focus group to provide input on the draft goals, in addition to comments from the public and Council members ahead of time. The goals would be adopted by Council.

Pennington asked the financial status the waterfront planning process, and how much had been budgeted for FY09. Hamer said that P&Z was beginning its discussions with the City Manager about the FY09 budget, and hadn't risen to the Council level yet. She said that there's sufficient budget for this year through June, but the budget will be limited in FY10, which means the process may take longer than originally scheduled. She stated that her department was trying to keep the consultant costs down, and could get the same amount of work for less money. The consultant's budget could be anywhere from \$300,000 to \$600,000. She said that a consultant would be required for marina engineering services, the navigation channel, and other specialized issues. She stated that P&Z is looking

to hire a consultant that has international waterfront design experience, but it won't be cheap.

Pennington noted that the Environmental Action Plan's final draft was approved last night, and asks for a climate change risk analysis of such issues as storm damage, persistent flooding, and public health. He said that this was not a hugely expensive exercise, but provides important information. He suggested that the waterfront planning process be delayed by six months in order to perform the risk assessment up front, in exchange for immediate installation of the marina gates. Hamer stated that a flood study is currently underway. Pennington responded that the ongoing study is for current flood hazards, and is not a long-term risk analysis. Hamer stated that waterfront planning process would be a comprehensive. It would consider issues such as "hard" and "soft" (vegetated) waterfront, but also consider how to connect pedestrian pathways. She said that Pennington's suggested risk analysis considers climate change, and she's not sure how much data will be available on rising sea levels, but the issue would need to be considered as part of the planning process.

Hamer said that waterfront planning meetings would be open to the public at large. She had originally thought there would be problems with such an approach in Alexandria due to revolving participation by the public, but found that it worked well for the Braddock planning process. A guest stated that at the beginning stages of the study, the planners should talk to landowners. Hamer said that the City Manager's office has been in touch with landowners for a number of years.

A guest commented that a Pew Center on Global Climate Change study forecast sea level rise of 4.5 inches in the Chesapeake Bay. The guest stated that it would be worthwhile for the Committee to gather information on the impact of climate change on the waterfront.

A guest commented that ten years ago there was a Windmill Hill Park planning process. Citizens with the most at stake in the park formed the Waterfront Alliance that tapped into pro-bono local expertise. The City's process cost thousands of dollars, and the pro-bono citizen's plan looked much like City's plan. The guest stated that talent exists in Alexandria, and the City need not pay for it.

A guest commented that it was incomprehensible that the City would proceed with a waterfront plan at a time when the City must cut social services. In the end, the waterfront is mostly untouchable except for Robinson Terminal and The Strand. The guest stated to accomplish something constructive in the near-term, the city should fix the bulkheads.

Hamer said that the issue is whether the City would do a waterfront plan or not. The City had not been able to get this planning effort off the ground. Many of

P&Z planning projects are based on land use and redevelopment. The waterfront plan is based on environmental, recreational, and tourist issues besides land development issues. Tourists will come whether the City does nothing or does something, and there are lost opportunities on the waterfront without a plan. She said that the waterfront plan has been on Council's work program for well over a year.

Gosnell asked whether it makes sense to move to a staged approach, in which emergency needs, such as bulkheads and environmental issues are considered first, with consideration of other issues as budget permits. Secondly, he stated that in his work designing warships, he has found that the public forum concept doesn't work as well. He suggested using a series of committee groups to advise the Council, with the Waterfront Committee imbedded in these committees.

Hamer responded that there will be a lot of technical issues that will require consulting expertise. She added that the City could stage the plan, but to be comprehensive, the planning process needs to bring a lot of pieces together at the same time. She said that there was time to do the plan correctly since there are no active development proposals on the table. In response to Gosnell's second point, she stated that P&Z would keep an active record of decision-making that would be posted online.

Brooks stated that he was not in favor of delaying the planning process.

Smedberg noted that the City is working to get federal money for the Windmill Hill Park project, and stated that Congressman Moran has it on his radar screen.

Petty stated that she would like to proceed with Hamer's suggestion that the Committee offer comments on waterfront vision at its next meeting.

### **Announcements**

Macek announced that the Wayfinding Initiative would have an open house on Monday, Jan. 5 at City Hall.

### **Rescheduling of January Meeting**

**Moved by Pennington, second by Atkinson, to reschedule the January meeting for Tuesday, January 13, 2009 at 7:30 a.m. due to the Presidential Inauguration scheduled for the Committee's regular meeting day, January 20, 2009. Motion carried on a voice vote.**

### **Adjournment**

The Committee adjourned at 8:38 a.m.