

## **Approved Summary Minutes**

### **Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting April 21, 2009**

**Members:** Engin Artemel  
Jay Atkinson  
Christine Bernstein  
Henry Brooks  
Mel Fortney  
Mike Geissinger  
Doug Gosnell  
Linda Hafer  
Nathan Macek  
Peter Pennington  
Pete Peterson  
Susan Pettey  
John Renner  
Paul Smedberg

**City Staff:** Andrea Barlow, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)  
Richard Baier, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)  
Leslie Clark, RPCA  
Jim Hixon, RPCA  
Capt. Dianne Gittens, Police Department  
Laura Seidler, RPCA

**Guests:** Lissette Bishins  
Dana Brunson  
Susan Cohen  
Harry Harrington  
Van Van Fleet

#### **Welcome and introductions**

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

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

Macek noted that the draft March minutes should be corrected to state that committee member Robert Taylor, rather than John Taylor, was in attendance. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the March meeting as amended.

#### **Discussion of Draft Waterfront Principles**

Pettey presented the Draft Waterfront Committee Principles for the new Waterfront Plan, which were produced by an ad-hoc subcommittee. Pettey introduced each of the proposed friendly amendments to the document. Brooks

asked for clarification of Environmental Constraints/Impacts recommendation #9, to avoid planting trees that obscure views of the river. Pettey moved this item from the consent agenda and held it over for further discussion.

Pettey offered a friendly amendment to replace the words “George Washington Memorial Parkway Trail” with the bike trail’s actual name, the Mount Vernon Trail. Artemel proposed that Parks and Open Space recommendation #10 regarding waterfront gathering spaces and Waterfront Attractions recommendation #3 regarding children’s attractions should be amended to read “where appropriate.” There was consensus amongst Committee members that this amendment should be made.

**Moved by Pennington Second by Macek to approve the proposed friendly amendments, except as noted in the discussion above, and to carry over other recommendations for future discussion. Motion carried on a voice vote.**

The committee then discussed other amendments to the waterfront plan principles.

Hafer proposed that General Vision recommendation #9 regarding waterfront attractiveness add the words “and accessible”. There was sentiment that this concept was captured elsewhere, so the amendment was held over for further discussion.

Hafer proposed that Transportation recommendation #8 regarding well-marked waterfront pathways include the words “and well lighted.” There was opposition to this amendment so it was held over for further discussion.

Hafer proposed that Marina recommendation #4 include the words “All docks should be floating, with appropriate ladders and sufficient pilings (by number and size) to accommodate a variety of craft, be they pleasure or commercial.” Smedberg commented that this amendment was better captured by an additional General Vision recommendation that an open and accessible waterfront be maintained, so it was held over for further discussion.

Hafer proposed that Waterfront Attractions recommendation #3 regarding children’s attractions be amended to include a place to fish and touch the water, with steps to the water (the Watergate concept). This amendment was held over for further discussion.

Hafer proposed that an additional Waterfront Attractions recommendation be added reading, “the City needs to commit both funds and equipment to keep the waterfront free of debris (man made and natural), address flood control issues and other related matters pertaining to the upkeep and attractiveness of both the water and adjoining land.” There was brief discussion regarding this

recommendation, and the committee reached consensus that additional recommendations regarding control of litter and debris, and engineering waterfront features to limit accumulation of litter and debris, be added. The following recommendations were added under Environmental Constraints/Impact:

- The waterfront shall be kept clean and free of manmade and natural debris.
- To the extent possible, waterfront features shall be engineered to limit the accumulation of debris.

Pennington proposed that Parks and Open Space recommendation #7 regarding the setback of development from the waterfront include the preamble, "In accordance with the Environmental Action Plan and the very stringent requirements of the Virginia Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.". There was consensus amongst Committee members that this amendment should be made.

Artemel proposed that a recommendation be added under Transportation regarding the provision of adequate parking for existing businesses. There was discussion over whether this amendment was required since Transportation recommendation #2 stated that transportation and parking are required to promote commerce. This amendment was held over for further discussion.

**Moved by Artemel, second by Bernstein to accept the two friendly amendments noted in the discussion above, and to carry over other amendments for future discussion. Motion carried on a voice vote.**

#### Discussion regarding waterfront security

Petty noted that there had been several incidents at the marina, including trash fires in Founders Park and a break-in on board a marina boat. Petty noted that the committee had expressed concerns with the elimination of security at the marina and the delay in installing gates at the marina.

Baier was introduced as acting director of RPCA. Gosnell noted problems he has on his boat as of late, and suggested that the City reimburse costs incurred due to vandalism and theft from his boat at the marina, and suggested that legal action could be warranted if the City doesn't take action itself. Baier said he's happy to entertain a reasonable suggestion such as Gosnell's to ensure proper security. Seidler said the City would proceed with installing the gates, but will be using a design-build approach in which pre-approved companies already under contract to the City will be requested to provide proposals on how to cost-effectively construct gates within the City's budget.

Baier stated that these improvements would not occur within the next several weeks, but would take months. He said that he was open to cost-effective suggestions that could be implemented in the interim.

Gosnell stated that issues at the Marina have been ongoing for years. He said that the Marina gates would only address part of the issue.

Baier state that a security officer patrols the marina overnight until 5:00 a.m., including the food court, art center, and piers. The officer was on duty during the last two boat break-ins and fires in Founders Park.

Atkinson said he would like to see the records of where security had patrolled on the nights of recent incidents. He said that if break-ins were happening to homes, there would be action. He said that the current situation is not acceptable. He said that some transient boaters feel that the Alexandria Marina is not safe.

Baier stated that the gates project is funded and will proceed. He said he understood the concerns of transient boaters as one himself. He said a lot of parks are having issues similar to the Marina and Founders Park. The boat issue is different, but the parks issues are the same.

Gittens stated that it is important to report offenses at the marina, because police records indicate a 50 percent decrease in incidents along the dock area. Crime statistics are a key determinant of which areas are patrolled. She said that there is a waterfront detail on the weekends in which officers walk the dock area. Officers on patrol have been directed to make contact with the marina security officer to make sure the officer is walking the area, and have instituted a "beat check" that requires an officer to walk along the water every hour every night, to the extent that officer is available to do so. Baier suggested that RPCA could provide this in writing to share with civic associations and other organizations.

Gosnell stated that the issues were not unique to Alexandria and are in part due to the economy. He said he believes this would be a problem for a while and suggested the installation of an inexpensive security system such as wireless video cameras that record on a 24-hour loop, or decoy cameras to deter crime. Cameras would provide a record in the event of vandalism or a fire. He also suggested motion activated lights, but added that the neighborhood might not appreciate that approach. He also suggested the addition of monitors at the marina to detect when electrical power has been cut. Baier notes that such a system would be somewhat more expensive.

Smedberg asked whether there had been a rise in homelessness along the river. Gittens stated there is limited number of homeless residents the City has been consistently dealing with, and there has not been a rise.

Pennington asked about the budget for the gates. Seidler said the previous design would have cost about \$100,000 before access controls were added. The new design is expected to cost about \$50,000. The revised design would be less

decorative but would still achieve the security objectives. Atkinson requested clarification regarding the project budget and whether Board of Architectural Review (BAR) approval would be required of the re-designed gates.

Seidler said that funding was approved prior to the city's budget difficulties, but the project budget was re-evaluated at City Manager's request. She said the project budget is commensurate with being a temporary fix since the long-term disposition of Marina's needs will be studied as part of the waterfront planning process. She said she didn't know whether BAR approval would be needed for the new design, adding that the hope is that BAR staff will approve the re-designed gates as an acceptable substitute for the original design.

Atkinson asked at what point BAR approval would be required, because some changes on the waterfront have been installed without their apparent approval. Baier offered to look into the issue and report back to the committee within a week.

Hixon noted that issues reported to the dockmaster are reported to the Police Department the same day. There's also a dockmaster's log, but it's best for boaters to call the police directly when they have an incident. Hixon stated that he reports to Seidler.

#### Discussion of Proposal for Waterfront Festival Expansion

Bishins, the Executive Director of the Alexandria Chapter of the American Red Cross, responded to questions regarding the chapter's proposal to expand the Waterfront Festival to Founders Park, where new activities would be provided for unpaid attendees.

Bernstein stated that she represents Founders Park Community Association, and notes that Founder's is a passive park and is not to be used for the proposed activities. She said the Founders Park Community Association approached City Council regarding issues associated with the Jamestown Birthday celebration proposed for the park in 2007. She said that the association supports the American Red Cross, but suggested that the community music stage and volleyball tournament be moved to other parks to spread out the event and reduce congestion.

Bishins responded that the organization had been recently made aware of the memorandum of understanding in place between the Founders Park Community Association and the City regarding use of the park. She said the expansion of the event was intended to connect the festival to businesses along King Street. She said the festival organizers want to be good neighbors by encouraging King Street business and giving the festival a community feel. She said it would be difficult at this point to use alternate parks for the activities proposed for Founders Park.

Bernstein said her organization was not in favor of using the park for any events other than volleyball.

Bishins responded that the Red Cross will consider holding its dog show in Union Street, which will be closed for a craft fair, and moving entertainment to the pier. She said the festival would be paring down the entertainment offerings to smaller venues featuring local bands.

Artemel stated that the Waterfront Festival used to be at Founders Park and had been moved to Oronoco Bay Park. He said he has had problems in the past with noise, traffic, and vandalism due to the festival. He said he believed the Red Cross could be more responsive to the community, and suggested a debrief after the event to discuss the community's issues.

Bishins responded that the Red Cross had worked with the City to go through all of the processes required to hold the event. She said that the organization is interested in sponsoring a community event, and said that visibility for the city and the tourism it generates is important. She said she would be happy to meet with residents and could provide phone numbers of Red Cross staff to be contacted before and after the event.

Geissinger stated that as a resident of Alexandria he has a problem with the designation of Founders as a passive park. He said he's never heard any complaints regarding the annual Alexandria Birthday Celebration. Artemel said it was a smaller event of shorter duration. Geissinger said to provide the greatest good for the greatest number, he thought both festivals were fine and the Red Cross should proceed with expansion of its festival to Founders Park.

Baier noted that at the previous evening's City Council meeting the special events budget for next year had been cut by \$100,000. He said that would change the way the city funds and sponsors special events such as this.

Brooks stated that people talk as though the waterfront belongs just to them, when it belongs to everyone in the city. He said the Parks and Recreation Commission had been discussing putting more active recreation facilities along the waterfront as a "string of pearls". He said there's a huge impact from this festival on everyone in the city, and even he makes sacrifice as far away as he lives from festival grounds.

Bernstein said that she speaks as representative of Founders Park, and her organization believes that expansion of festival could be a slippery slope and wants to preserve the park for public use.

Fortney said that the Waterfront Festival was the largest fundraiser for the *Alexandria* Red Cross chapter, and noted that although they put up a small bond to pay for any necessary repairs, in the past they have repaid the city of all of the

expenses it incurs, including trash collection, police and fire protection, and repair of any damage to parks. He said the amount of the bond doesn't mean anything relative to what the Red Cross covers.

Artemel said that as Alexandria's former planning director, he viewed the waterfront as belonging to everyone. He said he supports the Red Cross Waterfront Festival and has been able to live with it in his neighborhood. He said he wanted to ensure open lines of communication with the Red Cross regarding any issues.

Renner suggested that the Committee's discussion return the question at hand regarding expansion of the Waterfront Festival to Founder's Park.

Gosnell stated that he believed that the amount of the bonds covered by the Red Cross should be increased because it creates the perception that the organization isn't paying enough to mitigate any costs created for the city.

Pettey stated that the waterfront parks had suffered the loss of two staff members so the bodies might not be in place to keep the park clean during the festival and restore the park afterwards. She was concerned that the City's park maintenance resources had been reduced and the City wouldn't have adequate resources to respond.

Seidler stated that RPCA knows that it's working with reduced resources, but that staff will be pulled citywide to the Festival while it is ongoing. She said the department would pull together to make the happen, but there may be impact on resources dedicated elsewhere.

Geissinger stated that he endorsed the proposal to expand the Waterfront Festival, especially given the current economic climate.

Atkinson agreed and supported the addition of free elements to the festival.

**Motion by Pennington, second by Renner, to endorse expansion of the Alexandria Red Cross Waterfront Festival into Founders Park. The motion carried on a voice vote.**

### **Announcements**

Barlow announced that the initial waterfront plan meeting would be on April 23 at City Hall. She stated that both meetings would start at 6:30. Twenty groups had asked to speak, and each will have five minutes for a presentation. Other upcoming waterfront plan meetings include:

- April 30 from 6:30-9:00 p.m. at the Lyceum: Presentations from an expert panel on waterfront best practices from other cities

- May 30, 9:00 a.m.: Boat tour of the Waterfront, including a presentation by the Waterfront Center while traveling from Alexandria waterfront up to D.C.
- June 27, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., waterfront planning workshop

Pennington stated that the City's Earth Day celebration would be Saturday, April 25 at Ben Brenman Park.

Hixon stated that the waterfront clean-up would be on May 1 beginning at 9:00 a.m., beginning at the Dockmaster hut at the Marina.

Seidler stated that the Tall Ship Peacemaker would be docked in Alexandria May 8 through 20. Hafer noted that the Peacemaker visit coincides with The Art League's Paint Alexandria event on May 16 and 17.

**Adjournment**

The Committee adjourned at 9:20a.m.