

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting Wednesday, June 29, 2011

Room 2000, Alexandria City Hall

Members

Present:

Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association (FPCA)
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business Association
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen and Chair
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
Peter Pennington, Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)
Van Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association (OTCA)

Excused:

Engin Artemel, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.
William Cromley, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Mel Fortney, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat lease holder
Pete Peterson, Alexandria Archaeological Commission
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council

Vacancies:

Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.

City Staff:

Sharon Annear, Administrative Aide to Councilwoman Alicia Hughes
Jack Browand, Recreation, Parks, Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Pam Cressey, City Archaeologist
Jim Hixon, Dockmaster, RPCA
Cheryl Lawrence, RPCA
Rodney Masser, Fire Department
Nancy Williams, Planning and Zoning (P&Z)

Guests:

Henry Brooks, Chair, Friends of Windmill Hill Park
Peter Farnham, Old Town Alexandria Patch
John Gosling, OTCA
Harry Harrington, Old Dominion Boat Club
Jim Mackay, The Lyceum
Ted Pulliam, Alexandria Archaeology Committee
Julie Van Fleet, resident
Mike Young, 6 Prince Street

Welcome and Introductions

The Committee was called to order at 4:05 p.m. and members and guests introduced themselves.

Bernstein said that the Waterfront Committee brings an important perspective to the Waterfront planning process because its members represent a unique diversity of Waterfront-related City stakeholders. As both a Waterfront property owner and a Founders Park Civic Association (FPCA) Board Member she said that when her personal opinion differs from that of the FPCA she chooses to represent the FPCA position during Committee considerations.

At Van Fleet's urging, members briefly discussed how comments by members of the public in attendance might be incorporated more effectively into Committee meetings. For example, should the Committee invite public comments during meetings at the beginning or end of each agenda item or at the end of the meeting? How should the Committee balance its desire to facilitate timely citizen inputs into meeting discussions with the Committee's need to address all meeting agenda items in a way keeps meetings a reasonable length? Members agreed to accept public discussion prior to voting on any motions at this meeting, and discuss the question further at the Committee's next meeting in September.

Discussion of the Work Session Goals

The Committee work session was called to discuss the three supplementary Waterfront development options presented by P&Z to City Council at the Council's June 11 meeting. The Committee had previously sent Council a letter conveying its positions on Plan elements that had been presented prior to June 11.

Macek reported that the Council had at its June 28 meeting voted to establish a Waterfront Small Area Plan Work Group that would meet over the summer and develop possible modifications to the draft Plan that address elements about which stakeholder disagreements exist. Macek said Council members recognize the importance of moving the process forward to facilitate a Council vote on the Plan soon and see the summer Work Group as an opportunity to bring new people with fresh perspectives into the City's Waterfront planning process who will help make this outcome possible.

The Work Group will include 7 voting members, including Macek representing the Waterfront Committee, and one non-voting member of the City Council. Its meetings will be advertised and open to the public. The Work Group is expected to make its recommendations during the fall.

Macek asked the Committee to consider several questions about the new alternatives: What, if any, actions should the Committee take in response to the new options? Are there elements in the three options that Committee members want to flag for the Chair as either potentially suitable for compromise or needing a firm defense by the Chair during Work Group discussions?

Discussion of Waterfront Plan Alternatives

Alternative 1: Parks and Museums

Van Fleet said Alternative 1 was the alternative closest to the vision of Waterfront development that many people support and recommended it be used as a baseline for developing a modified Waterfront Plan. The City's estimate for this Alternative includes projected costs of \$220 million and projected tax revenues of \$164,000 annually, but Van Fleet questioned P&Z's \$60 million cost estimate to build a Waterfront performing arts center. Van Fleet and Bernstein

said the \$60 million estimate was more appropriate for a Kennedy Center-sized performing arts center than for the more modest facility that City advocates of a Waterfront performing arts center were suggesting. Van Fleet strongly rejected the idea that the City should expect Waterfront civic investments to be funded primarily by revenues generated by Waterfront private development. He said the City has recently spent \$220 million on four City civic buildings without requiring their activities to generate revenues to cover their costs. Bernstein said that the City also is not requiring the new Metro stop it is funding to generate revenues to cover its construction costs.

Bernstein said City budgeters need to revisit their cost estimates for each of the three new alternatives if the Work Group is to have realistic estimates while developing its recommendations to City Council. Williams said P&Z had not costed out elements of each of three alternatives individually, but instead had developed projections for each land parcel to be included in the Waterfront Plan. Macek said City Council members expect the Work Group to review a cost-benefit analysis for each of the new alternatives.

Committee members agreed that the Work Group will need to address the policy question of whether Waterfront development needs to be self-financing before the Group can consider the costs and benefits of each alternative. Pennington said that, for example, if Waterfront development does not need to be self-financing then few stakeholders other than the property owners of sites being developed would like to see hotels put on these Waterfront land parcels.

Committee members agreed that the City needs to develop more detailed figures for how much the City might have to pay to acquire the Robinson Terminal North site if it were to be acquired for the parks and museum alternative. Bernstein suggested a compromise on the Robinson Terminal North site might include developing the terminal's west side for commercial use while using its east side as a park and museum site.

Committee members did not reach a consensus on the extent to which Waterfront development elements should be paid for by revenues generated by Waterfront activities.

There was consensus among Committee members that the parks and museum alternative needs to include ongoing commercial and recreational elements that will generate activity in its public spaces. Bernstein said the Founders Park Community Association would support having continuous parks integrated into the Waterfront Plan.

Committee members said they were concerned that new Waterfront development does not repeat the failure of the City's existing commercial Waterfront elements to draw people to use them. Manor said it's important for Macek to ensure that the Work Group understands that the end result of limited Waterfront programming and a Torpedo Factory Food Pavilion that attracts few businesses or customers is that the City's Waterfront is primarily used only three months a year by tourists. Bernstein offered Rappahannock's modest history museum as an example of programming that successfully attracts people to a public area.

Members said the City needs to prioritize which land parcels the City should acquire first if parks and museum alternative plan were adopted.

Committee members said addressing the neighborhood's parking and pedestrian difficulties is crucial. Van Fleet said weekend gridlock already exists at Union and King Streets and is made worse by pedestrians needing to use the streets in those areas where sidewalks are being used for outside dining tables. Pennington said a way should be created to redirect people away from this King Street hub.

Members agreed that Alexandria's brand as an authentic historical and commercial maritime experience must be preserved and said the City should investigate potential funding sources for the Plan's public elements such as foundations and state and federal funding. Pennington suggested that museum professionals be consulted to identify a costing formula to estimate realistic operational costs for museums of varying sizes. Mackay said a museum's likely operational costs reflect both museum size and the type of museum activities planned.

Macek reviewed Committee positions on elements of Alternative 1:

- The economic value of preserving Alexandria's brand as an authentic marine seaport with significant historic elements needs to be recognized.
- A revised City estimate is needed for a more modest performing arts site.
- The policy question of whether Waterfront development needs to generate funds to pay for Waterfront improvements must be addressed.
- The logic supporting new hotels along the Waterfront would be undercut if City Council determines Waterfront development does not need to break even.
- Estimates of the City's likely land acquisition costs need to be verified as realistic.
- There is no Committee consensus on an appropriate level of public investment along the Waterfront.
- Without additional funding to develop Waterfront public areas, the only choice left will be to use current zoning to make the best possible use of Waterfront areas.
- The Work Group will need significantly more information about both the likely timing of the Washington Post Company's interest in developing the Robinson Terminal sites and the realistic acquisition and development costs for the sites.
- The City's experience with an earlier Waterfront museum that was poorly located and staffed underscores the need for programming within parks and museums that can attract attendees to a conveniently located site. Cressey recalled the earlier museum as being very active when suitable programs had been located there.
- Choices need to be made regarding which land parcels the City should acquire first for use as parks and public space.

Alternative 2: Current Zoning – no SUP (by-right development) and

Alternative 3: Current Zoning with Special Use Permit (SUP):

Committee members did not see any advantage to Alternative 2's by-right Waterfront development.

Committee members agreed that Alternatives 2 and 3 both include less Waterfront public space than does Alternative 1 and that by-right development would leave the Waterfront the most vulnerable to uninspired development choices that would likely include few if any of the Plan's elements emphasizing historical and arts-related themes.

Committee members said an advantage of Alternative 3 is that it offers the City a way to end current stakeholder disagreements about the Waterfront Plan's elements since no Plan would

be approved. However, development that would probably result under Alternative 3's 'by-right with SUP' process would result in choices that most Waterfront stakeholders would not like.

Members agreed that Alternative 2's requirement for developers to obtain an SUP would give the City some control over developers' plans but it is unclear how much impact the City could have on development choices if it needed to rely only on the SUP process.

Williams said that under current terms of by-right development, the existing public space along Robinson Terminal's public easement could not be reduced, the walkway would have to stay at least 25 feet wide, and in those places where the public easement is now greater than the required 25-foot width future development could not reduce the existing public space.

Macek said an additional disadvantage of Alternative 2's by-right development option would be that there is no requirement for its public space to be maritime-related. For example, Robinson Terminal North had just barely been able to accommodate the recent mooring of Colombia's Tall Ship.

Julie Van Fleet said the Committee needs to start thinking 'outside the box' about Waterfront Plan options, to focus on Waterfront development that preserves Alexandria's identity, to avoid paying too much attention to developers' preferences for how to develop their properties, and to work to preserve public access to the Waterfront. She said children are unlikely to access the Waterfront if they have to reach it by walking through a hotel's grounds.

Gosling said the Plan lacks clarity about how its elements would be implemented and in what order. Young, the owner of 6 Prince Street in the Cummings/Turner block, said planners should not assume that property owners would wish to sell their property to the City and that he has no interest in doing so. Goslin also said incorporating commercial uses within Waterfront development should be tempered since the City's crown jewel is King Street and potential commercial activities along the Waterfront should not undermine King Street's vitality.

Cressey said the Work Group needs to preserve the Plan's history elements

Committee members agreed that Macek should draft a statement to be shared with the Work Group that conveys the Committee's consensus positions on Options 1, 2 and 3 and reiterates Committee positions previously conveyed to City Council about other Plan elements.

Macek reviewed Committee concerns about Alternatives 2 and 3 to be highlighted in a statement to the Work Group:

- The Committee would be very concerned about either Alternative 2 or 3 materializing because the City had been unable to reach a planning decision.
- Alternatives 2 and 3 do not protect the community interests.
- Alternatives 2 and 3 provide relatively limited benefits, including relatively limited additional revenue.
- By-right development without an SUP provides only limited design control.
- By-right development with an SUP would offer the City more design control but City actions would be reactive and could not shape a Waterfront plan within an overall design vision.

- Because the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) jurisdiction does not include Robinson Terminal North (north of Oronoco Street) private development at that location under Alternatives 2 and 3 would be subject to few outside design controls.
- Alternatives 2 and 3 offer limited opportunities to fund either improvements benefiting the art and history elements that are included within the Waterfront Plan or other City Waterfront goals such as flood mitigation.
- Waterfront public space under Alternatives 2 and 3 would be limited compared to that envisioned in Alternative 1.
- Alternative 2 would provide only the absolute minimum public space with a limited public pathway to the Waterfront.
- Alternatives 2 and 3 would lead to uninspired development choices and would have no requirement that development would have any bearing to the waterfront without SUP.
- Alternative 3 would let the City end the intense stakeholder disagreements about what elements should be included within the Waterfront Plan, but the end result would be development decisions likely to be unacceptable to most stakeholders.

Moved by Bernstein, seconded by Hafer, to approve these statements as read by the Chair and document in a position statement that includes other relevant Waterfront Committee stances taken to date that will be presented by the Chair to the Work Group at the appropriate time. Motion carried on a unanimous voice vote.

Announcements

Macek reminded members that the next regular monthly Committee meeting is scheduled for September.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned without objection at 6:36 p.m.