

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Alexandria City Hall

Members:

Present: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation,
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Arthur Fox, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat lease holder
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business and Professional Association
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen and Chair
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC)
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council
Stephen Thayer, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.
Townsend A. (Van) Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association

Excused: Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Peter Pennington, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)
Christa Watters, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.

City Staff: Emily Baker, City Engineer, Transportation and Engineering Services
(T&ES)
Jack Browand, Acting Deputy Director, Parks Operations, Department of
Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Jim Hixon, Dockmaster, RPCA
Sandra Marks Division Chief, Transportation Planning (T&ES)
Karl Moritz, Deputy Director, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Lt. Juan Torres, Alexandria Police Department (APD)
Nancy Williams, Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests: Brian Buzzell
Susan Cohen, Public Art Committee
Harry Harrington, Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC)
Tony Kupersmith
David Olinger
Joanne Platt
Priscila Izar, Virginia Tech

Welcome and Introductions

The Committee was called to order at 7:30 a.m. and members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes from February 21, 2012 and March 1, 2012 Meetings

Moved by Fox, seconded by Hall, to approve the summary minutes of the February 21, 2012 meeting as drafted. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Moved by Thayer, seconded by Fox, to approve the summary minutes of the March 1, 2012 meeting with a correction deleting Harry Harrington's name from the list of guest attendees. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Report from Police Department

Torres reviewed the previous 60 days' events along the Waterfront, including a few larcenies and several alcohol-related offenses between Duke Street and The Strand. Torres said police patrols in this area have been enhanced during the 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. time period on weekends. Hall commended APD for expanding the patrols.

Report from Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Marina Pilings

Browand reported that actions for repairing and/or replacing the nine pilings continue to proceed and a contractor has been selected. Completion of the work is anticipated within the next two months.

Minnie V

Browand reported that the Minnie V will begin operating from the Marina this spring. In response to a question, Hall said the Potomac Riverboat Company (PRC) no longer plans to build a dock for the Minnie V. Instead, the historic vessel will rest alongside the Cherry Blossom, its crew will board from the Cherry Blossom, and the Minnie V will pick up excursion passengers from the T piers. PRC is considering three daily trips on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Browand provided the Committee a copy of the license agreement and its conditions. The docking agreement is a pilot program that will be evaluated after one year. Browand said the City had not submitted its application to the National Park Service (NPS) requesting approval to construct pilings for the dock originally planned for the Minnie V.

Torpedo Factory Food Pavilion Public Restrooms

Browand reported that the City Manager's office and Food Pavilion management continue to work on an agreement for making the Pavilion restrooms available to the public. Issues being worked out include design elements, security, and responsibility for restroom maintenance. There will be signage directing Marina visitors to the restrooms. Browand reported that the City hopes to have an agreement by late spring/early summer. The Committee asked that the City set a specific target date for having the new public restrooms in service, particularly since warm weather had already begun to bring many visitors to the Marina area.

Browand reported that images from the Marina security cameras are now viewable online.

Discussion: Marina Historic Vessel Fees

Browand reviewed RPCA Director Spengler's revised memo clarifying the fee structure proposed for historic vessels. The goal is to establish a fee structure for historic vessels that would attract ships of character to the Marina, increase the frequency of such visits, and provide predictable pricing that can be managed administratively and avoid delays of up to three months that result when staff has to forward fee waiver requests to City Council for approval. Browand said most visits from vessels affected by this new administrative category range from seven to 10 days.

Macek pointed out that although the Committee had previously advocated including visits from educational vessels within the historic vessel category, the revised fee memo only covers historic vessels. Browand said that because educational vessel visits are infrequent, they are considered on a case-by-case basis. If such visits become more frequent the Department will revisit the idea of adding them to the historic fee category.

Macek asked if the definition proposed for "historic vessel" would exclude educational reconstructions and noted that the Committee favors including vessels such as Captain John Smith's Godspeed. Browand will consult the City Attorney's office to insure that the Department's proposed language for ships in the historic category covers educational reproductions.

Hixon said there are currently no visits from historic vessels scheduled, but several ships have expressed an interest in visiting Alexandria this year. Committee members expressed disappointment that no Tall Ship visits to the City could be arranged as part of the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the War of 1812. Hall said Tall Ships visiting Norfolk are reluctant to travel up the Potomac for visits when they sail from Norfolk to Baltimore because of the time added to their busy port visit schedules. They typically request high fees to cover the time required for Potomac River visits and the City had not budgeted funds to cover these costs, which range around \$25,000. Committee members agreed to revisit the question of how the City could attract more Tall Ships to Alexandria when they return to the Eastern Seaboard in three years.

In response to a question, staff said if the Godspeed, as an example, wanted to visit the Marina for a month or longer, such a visit would not be included within the proposed historic category.

The Committee requested clarification of "short-term" docking. Browand said if a commercial vessel wished to visit for three months, the Marina does not offer a three-month commercial lease, and when a waiver request is received from a non-profit it is brought to Council. Committee members agreed that the issues of short-term docking and the fee structure need further review.

Moved by McCall and seconded by Barnekov that the Committee in general endorse the fee structure recommendations and ask staff to develop language making clear that reproductions and reconstructions be included in this category, and recommend that a 15-day limit be set for "short-term docking"

The motion carried by a unanimous voice vote.

Discussion: Waterfront Committee Role in Waterfront Small Area Plan

Implementation

Macek reviewed the Committee's discussion at its March 1 special meeting regarding proposed changes to Section 2-4-54 of the Alexandria City Code, establishing the Committee's functions and membership and adding oversight responsibilities for actions to implement the Waterfront Small Area Plan. He reported that he had sent a letter to City Council conveying Committee positions taken at the meeting.

Moritz advised the Committee that because the proposal would modify the City Code it requires a first and second reading and public hearing before Council. The staff memo would be on the docket for Council's March 27 meeting, have its first reading at Council's April 10 meeting, and its second reading and public hearing at Council's April 14 meeting.

Moritz said the staff memo for Council regarding the proposal to expand the Committee's jurisdiction and membership was being finalized and that it incorporated all of the Committee's recommendations, including expansion of the Committee's mission, changing its name from Committee to Commission, modifying the description jurisdictional boundaries, and expanding membership to include representatives of the Commission for the Arts and citizen representatives from Park Planning Districts I, II and III. Moritz said staff would also recommend to Council that Waterfront Commission members be added from the Planning Commission and the Traffic and Parking Board.

Moritz said it was staff's judgment that including these two additional representatives would give the Waterfront Commission a liaison with other bodies responsible for implementing the Waterfront Small Area Plan and noted that both had requested representation on the Waterfront Small Area Plan implementation advisory group. There was Committee consensus during discussion that the responsibilities of the Traffic and Parking Board were too limited to justify membership on the Waterfront Commission.

Van Fleet objected to adding a Planning Commission member to the Waterfront Commission and noted that at the March 1 Committee meeting this proposal had been rejected by a 7-1-1 vote. At that time Macek had supported the proposal.

Macek said he disagreed with some members' concern that having a Planning Commission member on the Waterfront Commission would create a conflict of interest when the Planning Commission takes up issues about which the Waterfront Commission had submitted recommendations. He said having a Planning Commission member on the Waterfront Commission would facilitate communications, between the two groups and that a Planning Commission member's liaison role would parallel that played by the Council member who sits on the current Committee.

Bernstein asked why planners would sit on an implementation commission. Moritz said Planning Commission members currently sit on the Transportation Commission and other Small Area implementation groups and that part of the Waterfront Commission's function would be to bring together the major Waterfront stakeholders involved in implementing the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

Moritz added that having a Planning Commission representative on the Waterfront Commission would enhance the group's understanding of issues that traditionally arise when small area plans are implemented. It would also give the Planning Commission a fuller understanding of the Waterfront Commission's perspective during the Planning Commission's considerations of Waterfront Small Area Plan implementation actions. Macek strongly agreed with having a Planning Commission member on the Waterfront Commission when implementation issues are discussed. Macek also made the case that adding these additional members to the Commission would assist the Chair in actions he takes to implement the Committee's recommendations.

Moved by Van Fleet, seconded by Bernstein, that the Committee object to the recommendation to include a Planning Commission member as a full-time voting member on the Waterfront Committee/Commission.

The motion passed on a vote of 8 ayes, and 2 nays, with Macek and Manor voting nay.

Moved by Van Fleet, seconded by Bernstein, that the Committee object to adding a Traffic and Parking Board member to the Waterfront Committee. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Discussion: Windmill Hill Park Bulkhead Improvement Project

Baker reviewed recent City Manager memos to Council dated March 5, 2012 and March 19, 2012 that reviewed the project's status, available and proposed Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funds, the concept plan as approved by Council in April 2003, and staff recommendations for project elements on which work could begin in the near future using available funds.

Baker said there has been no funding for bulkhead design and engineering work and T&ES has proposed such funding be included in the FY2016-17 CIP budget. T&ES plans to work with the community and the Park and Recreation Commission in coming months to identify Windmill Hill Park improvement projects that can be implemented now. T&ES recommendations include projects such as shoreline elements, interpretative signage, crosswalks, dog park improvements, a kayak launch, and other elements.

Baker said \$1.3 million in prior-year CIP funds are available for Windmill Hill projects, with \$750,000 of that earmarked for flood mitigation and other Waterfront Small Area Plan implementation actions. Although the City had expected funding from the Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) for some elements of the project, Baker said the Corps has now advised the City those funds will not be available.

In response to a question, Browand explained that staff had received a March 9, 2012 safety report that flagged safety risks related to the bulkhead's instability and recommended that public access to the bulkhead be blocked now. T&ES then drafted the follow-up March 19, 2012 memo to Council outlining interim safety-related actions recommended in the March 9, 2012 safety report.

Baker said T&ES is considering installing protective fencing at the bulkhead to bar access. Questions were raised by the Committee regarding whether installing an unattractive cyclone fence would be the best use of available funds.

Smedberg questioned why additional work would be needed to develop design options for the bulkhead since decisions were made in 2003. Baker said staff intends to keep the agreed-upon design but to examine whether less expensive ways for constructing the bulkhead may now be available.

Macek noted that the Committee in recent years has been a clear and persistent advocate for the City spending funds now on Windmill Hill Park improvements and asked what steps staff and Council are planning to take now regarding the repairs. Baker said staff will develop a proposal for how to spend the available funds.

Discussion: Union Street Corridor Circulation Study Scoping Specifications

Marks reported that T&ES had drafted an RFP for a Union Street Corridor traffic study to follow up on Council's request for a study collecting full baseline traffic data before any actions were taken to implement the Waterfront Small Area Plan. Marks had provided the Committee a list of draft questions identifying data for the study to collect and invited Committee members to review the questions and suggest any additional useful information that T&ES had not yet included.

Marks said T&ES had planned to finalize the study scope by the end of that week so that traffic data could be collected in May before school lets out. She noted that May is a high visitor time, especially for Union Street. Van Fleet and Hall said their comments were too numerous to fit the meeting's remaining time.

Kupersmith said he appreciated the Waterfront Committee's having the opportunity to review the planned study since the scope of the Waterfront Small Area Plan's first traffic study had been criticized by many. He offered to provide examples of information appropriate for inclusion.

Van Fleet and Fox said that because the Committee had only received the scope guidelines the previous Friday, the Committee should establish a subcommittee to review the guidelines in detail to provide advice.

There was a Committee consensus that was too little time available for a subcommittee to review the scope specs and make a recommendation to the full Committee.

Van Fleet moved and Fox seconded that a special meeting of the full Committee be scheduled to discuss the proposed scope of the Union Street traffic study.

The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

The Committee's special meeting was scheduled for Monday, March 26, 2012 at 4:00 p.m. Members deferred most discussion to the March 26 meeting, but Members and guests raised several questions for staff to consider in advance of the March 26 meeting. It was recommended that data be collected on bicycle traffic volume and conduct, including numbers of bicycles that run stop signs and/or ignore other traffic

regulations. In response to Kupersmith's question about what is meant by "industry-based methodology", Marks said staff would provide a more detailed version of the specifications for comment. Marks explained that the study's signal warrant analysis references an analysis of whether traffic data for an intersection might warrant installing a traffic signal and "intermodal conflicts" refers to conflicts between different transportation modes.

Van Fleet, Bernstein and Gosnell suggested the study's geographic scope be expanded beyond Union Street since the traffic on the entire grid, especially on Franklin and Gibbon, influences Union Street traffic patterns. They suggested integrating data for the grid from Washington Street down to Union Street.

Marks clarified that the study's geographic scope - from the western end of Union Street to the river - had been set. Suggestions sought by staff regarding the study scope relate to types of data that the study should collect within the specified area.

In response to a question, Marks confirmed that the 100 and 200 blocks of The Strand were included within the Union Street study's scope.

Announcements / Public Discussion

Macek announced that the next regular Committee meeting would be April 17, 2012.

Macek announced that the Waterfront Committee's annual Waterfront Walk would be held on Saturday, June 9, 2012 at 10:00 a.m. beginning at the Windmill Hill Park bulkhead.

Macek announced that Jones Point Park's opening ceremony would likely be either June 23 or 30, 2012. Browand said the project's construction contract calls for work to be completed by June 25, 2012.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned without objection at 9:30 a.m.