

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Tuesday, March 26, 2012

Alexandria City Hall

Members:

Present: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Arthur Fox, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business and Professional Association
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen and Chair
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC)
Stephen Thayer, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.
Townsend A. (Van) Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association
Christa Watters, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.

Excused: Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat lease holder
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Peter Pennington, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council

City Staff: Jim Hixon, Dockmaster, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Sandra Marks, Division Chief, Transportation Planning, Department of Transportation and Engineering Services (T&ES)
Karl Moritz, Deputy Director, Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Carrie Sanders, Principal Transportation Planner, T&ES
Nancy Williams, Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests: John Gosling, Old Town Civic Association
Tony Kupersmith
David Olinger
Kathryn Papp
Joanne Platt

Welcome and Introductions

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

Discussion: Union Street Corridor Circulation Study Scoping Specifications

Macek introduced the discussion as a de facto Committee focus group to discuss the proposed scope of the Union Street Corridor Circulation Study, which would provide T&ES staff feedback regarding data requirements.

T&ES provided Committee members a summary of the study's proposed scope, the relevant Waterfront Small Area Plan (Waterfront Plan) recommendations, and the Waterfront Plan Work Group discussion recommending that a Union Street corridor study be conducted prior to approval of any new Waterfront development. The study will collect information for the area extending from the west side of Union Street to the Potomac River, between Pendleton Street and Jones Point Park.

Marks said that when Council approved the Waterfront Plan it required that a study collecting full baseline traffic data for Union Street be completed before any actions were taken to implement the Waterfront Plan. The Waterfront Plan also recommends that a transportation plan comprehensively addressing parking, motor coach, freight loading, and other impacts along the corridor be completed prior to any new development along the corridor being approved. Marks said this study's baseline data would be updated by studies associated with development proposals when the first Waterfront development proposal is received.

Marks asked members' advice on several issues. Had T&ES' draft study scope identified the correct issues for the study to address? What questions did members hope the study's data would answer? What are the peak periods for the different transit modes and does the draft study scope need to be adjusted to include these peak periods? Is there additional information that members consider important to have available when answering these questions?

Marks emphasized that a key question to address when deciding what information to collect is what questions the data should help answer.

Timing of Study

Marks said quick action approving the study's scope was needed because standard practices for traffic studies require data to be collected prior to the school year's finish in May. This way information covers an area's regular office, residential and visitor traffic.

Van Fleet disagreed with data only being collected during May and said summer months are a very heavy traffic period for Union Street. Hafer said the corridor's heavy tourist and business traffic warranted collecting data through the June-July period. Marks said some pneumatic traffic counts could be conducted in late June-July period to calibrate data collected in May.

Geographic Scope

Bernstein and Van Fleet said the study's geographic scope should be expanded. Van Fleet said data should be collected for the Washington Street to Union Street grid since traffic from this grid feeds into Union Street. Bernstein said traffic is routed into the Waterfront area via streets with different designations, some as "local" and others as "feeder" streets. She said the goal should be to provide residents better access to the Union Street area and this required studying the broader grid area as part of the Union Street corridor study. Marks said the geographic scope, confining it to Union Street, had been set. Moritz added that the data to be collected about the Union Street intersections

would also provide information about traffic patterns on streets feeding into Union Street.

Conflicts between Modes

Marks noted that the Waterfront Plan Work Group had highlighted the need to minimize conflicts between cars and bikes on Union Street and that some recommendations had been offered by the existing Old Town Area Parking Study but that this issue was beyond the scope of the Union Street corridor study.

Members said improved enforcement of traffic regulation is needed to mitigate conflicts between bikes and cars. There was agreement that although this question might be outside the Union Street study's scope, the Union and King Street intersection is a significant area needing further attention regarding congestion, intermodal conflicts and improved traffic regulation enforcement for all travel modes.

Mount Vernon Bicycle Trail signage

Marks said the National Park Service conducts an annual count of bike traffic on the Mount Vernon Trail by hand.

There was agreement that there should be better signage guiding through-traffic on the Mount Vernon Trail (the Trail) to routes other than Union Street. Watters suggested the 11-mile marker, just after the power plant, as an appropriate place to install signs guiding through-traffic traveling south and noted that some North Old Town Civic Association members worry that Trail traffic directed to Royal Street might create intermodal conflicts. Macek said Trail signage could be installed at Pendleton Street, near Oronoco Bay Park, to encourage bikers to take Fairfax Street rather than Union Street. Marks said the Union Street study would include community meetings during which these issues could be discussed. She said the Committee would be briefed on the study as it progresses and when it is finished.

Bicycle Parking

Marks noted that the Waterfront Plan Work Group had recommended increasing the number of stands for bike parking near and along the Waterfront.

Pedestrian traffic and safety

Bernstein said small measures could have a large impact on pedestrian safety and offered the example of the impact a pedestrian paddle sign at the Union and Princess Street intersection had had during the two years it had been up prior to disappearing. Bernstein said T&ES Director Rich Baier had told her the sign would be reinstalled when the weather improved. Marks agreed with the significant impact small measures could have and said she would remind Traffic Department staff to follow up on this.

Baum suggested that the potential impact of the Waterfront Plan's proposed Waterfront walkway should be considered for pedestrian traffic along Union Street and other areas.

Defining Peak Periods

Marks said T&ES is particularly concerned that the study collects data for multi-modal traffic patterns that cover the correct daily and weekly peak periods for each transit mode. Peak times for traffic related to retail, residential and business activities need to be confirmed.

Members disagreed with excluding collection of Saturday evening data from the scope since it is one of the Union Street corridor's busiest times. Marks accepted the Committee's recommendation.

The Committee discussed collecting the data over a 10-day Friday to Monday period, including two weekends.

Marks said two types of data are collected. Pneumatic tubes automatically collect the number of vehicles passing a point over the course of a week, and people record one weekday and one weekend day's observations of turning at selected intersections during peak hours. Moritz explained that the labor to record turning movements, including recording vehicle sub-categories, during a 3-hour peak period is a traffic study's most expensive element. In response to the Committee concern that the proportion of left turns, right turns and straight-thru traffic might vary from day to day, Moritz said the intent is to pick a representative day to collect data.

Papp said it would be important for the period and locations of data collection to be consistent with the Old Town Area Parking Study so that readers could integrate the results of the two studies if they wished to do so.

Loading/Deliveries/Drop-Off

There was agreement that the peak hours for loading and unloading are 6:00 to 9:00 a.m. Baum said the use of loading zones for King Street deliveries is generally good, but that Union Street has a double-parking problem related to deliveries. Members suggested vendors be surveyed to learn the hours for their deliveries and refuse collection and noted that refuse pickups appear to begin as early as 6:30 a.m. Members agreed that anecdotal information should not be relied upon. Bernstein suggested taking photographs as part of the data collection.

Bernstein said she hoped T&ES would review designations of local, arterial, and feeder streets to determine whether some street designations need to be changed and noted the importance of having clear category definitions available for developers' reference. Macek noted that Union Street is a "local" street but some other streets are "residential collectors". Marks said no street is considered arterial where it intersects Union Street as there are no arterials east of Washington Street.

Bernstein asked whether there are current regulations limiting bus and delivery truck volume on streets against which the data from the study can be compared. She emphasized the importance of identifying the current volume of commercial vehicles and whether existing regulations are being enforced. Marks agreed that regulations for loading on Union Street should be reviewed.

Macek said that although such information might not be a part of the Union Street study it would be appropriate to have before any special use permits are approved.

McCall said delivery trucks become backed up near Starbucks and Firehook on Union Street when commuters double park to pick up their coffee. Marks agreed it would be useful to review short-term parking issues that impact circulation.

Intersection Turning Movement Counts

Marks said the study would include data collection at intersections whose traffic patterns might warrant adding a traffic signal. Marks made clear that staff recognized that during public outreach on the Waterfront Plan there had not been support for additional traffic signals but that data would be collected to help evaluate current patterns.

The study proposed that data be collected for Union Street intersections at Pendleton, Cameron, King, Duke and Franklin.

McCall said Gibbon Street merits study. Macek said Franklin and Union Street traffic seemed greater than that at Union and Gibbon Streets. Thayer noted that traffic backs up when people turn onto Union Street from King Street. McCall said Mai Thai customers use this block for picking up take-out orders. There was agreement to collect data at Union and Gibbon Streets. Van Fleet suggested adding Prince Street to the list but the proposal lacked Committee support.

Unit Block of King Street

Marks said data would be collected to evaluate the potential impact on circulation and access of converting King Street's unit block to "predominantly pedestrian", noting access would need to be preserved for trash pickup, delivery access to businesses, and for the King Street Trolley turnaround site. Gosling said the issue of creating a pedestrian zone should be studied. Some Committee members suggested that closing the 100 block of King Street should also be considered. Van Fleet said that he supports closing King Street's 100 block and that this was supported by the members of the Old Town Civic Association.

There was agreement the study should address pedestrian facilities along Union Street and that data needs to be collected on pedestrian traffic on the unit block of King Street, even if the Union Street study were not the vehicle do this.

Platt noted that traffic backs up along Union Street while people wait to enter the parking lots while attendants collect payment upon entry.

Watters asked whether removing parking meters had resulted in fewer on-street parking spaces because people parked further apart. Marks said the data did not support this and that parking revenue has risen since meters had been removed.

Marks said the issues covered by this study would dovetail with the Old Town Area Parking Study.

Motor Coaches

Fox said it's important that data regarding the sites and times that motor coaches drop off and pick up passengers, and where they park and rest.

Announcements / Public Discussion

Macek announced that the finalized staff memo for reorganizing the Waterfront Committee and changing it to a Commission had been posted to Council's docket page. The City Manager's report on the proposal would be considered at Council's March 27 meeting. The first reading was set for April 10 and the second reading and public hearing was set for the April 17 Council meetings.

Macek announced the Committee's annual Waterfront Walk had been tentatively scheduled for Saturday, June 9.

Adjournment

Hafer moved and Manor seconded that the meeting be adjourned. Without objection the meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.