

The Alexandria Waterfront Committee's Waterfront Principles Statement to City Waterfront Planning Meeting of April 23, 2009

The Alexandria Waterfront Committee is appointed by City Council to advise the City on issues related to the waterfront. Its 15 Committee members are key waterfront stakeholders who represent citizens, business, marina and waterfront users, as well as City Commissions on Environmental Policy, Archaeology, and Parks and Recreation. We meet monthly to assist the City with oversight of the waterfront area and provide advice on waterfront policy issues.

We are excited that Alexandria is finally embarking on a once-in-a-generation planning effort for its Waterfront, and we look forward to active participation in this effort.

The Waterfront Committee envisions a vibrant waterfront with a sense of place that is unique to Alexandria. It should be a destination that attracts people of all ages, residents and visitors alike. Our Waterfront is and always has been a special mix of residential and commercial areas. We believe that the new Waterfront Plan must balance residential, commercial and tourist interests as it seeks to enhance the enjoyment of all.

Highlights of our vision for the Waterfront include the following:

- There must be continuous public access, and a continuous pedestrian pathway and bikeway along the entire Waterfront. City waterfront plans have called for this since 1981. The Waterfront Plan must include a strategy for achieving that critical objective.
- The Waterfront ambience must emphasize Alexandria's history, maritime heritage and marine uses, recreation and the arts. Our rich history, historic architecture, and river location are key elements that distinguish Alexandria from other tourist destinations and draws visitors from around the world. The City should encourage the tourist potential of the historic and architectural aspects of the Waterfront and Old Town, as well as its arts and cultural aspects.
- While seeking to capitalize on our historic environment, we must also preserve it. Development must be respectful of Alexandria history, and must preserve the historic scale and atmosphere of the current Waterfront area. Historic and architecturally significant buildings must be protected, and the City should require adaptive reuse of such buildings.
- Alexandria's Waterfront has been a place of commerce since the City's founding in 1749, and shall continue to promote trade. The Committee views the Waterfront as a vital conduit to maintaining a vibrant Old Town business district. We recognize that the commerce that we now enjoy and want to encourage must be supported by adequate transportation and parking.
- To reach the Waterfront, we need to support a variety of types of transportation, including transit, bicycle, boat and foot. Alexandria should encourage transportation options that distinguish the City, such as the water taxi, trolley and horse-drawn carriages.
- To be appreciated, the Waterfront must be seen. Visual awareness of the Waterfront should be improved and preserved. Open panoramic views should be protected. The Waterfront should be attractive both to and from the river.
- City parks provide a key aspect of access to the Potomac River and the Committee emphasizes the importance of maintaining and improving existing

parks along the Waterfront. We single this out for note here because of our concern regarding the adverse impact of current budget reductions on park maintenance. We also believe that is important for the City to continue to acquire land as designated in its Open Space Plan to support recreational and/or environmental objectives.

- Waterfronts, especially those in urban areas, are ecologically fragile, and particular concern should be paid to the ecology of the Waterfront, with plans to deal with wetlands, flooding, and river quality, all under the terms of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. We want to emphasize that a critical preliminary step in Waterfront planning must be an assessment of the projected sea level rise on water levels in the Potomac River and the impact on the Alexandria waterfront. We cannot base our Plan only on the Waterfront that we can see today, but must plan for the shoreline we are likely to have 20 to 50 years from now, based on best available projections. The City must determine a strategy for coping with sea-level rise and increased storm surge. Decisions will need to be made regarding which lands are to be conceded to rising waters and which will be defended.
- Alexandria has become known for its thriving waterfront arts activities, and those activities should be encouraged. The Committee envisions the Waterfront as a showplace for the arts, including public, fine, and performing arts.
- New mixed-use development should be encouraged in appropriate areas, and water-related activities and organizations should be encouraged along the waterfront.

Possible Waterfront uses/features that our Committee has identified are parks incorporating active and passive recreation and attractions for children, a maritime museum, restaurants with outdoor/river views, boutique retail shops, an expanded marina with docks suitable for visiting tall ships, public gathering spaces such as performance amphitheater and/or picnic pavilion, and office/residential components.

Unlike most plans developed by the City, we believe that the Waterfront Plan must encompass programs and activities in addition to land uses and capital improvements. Period and other entertainers and historic interpreters should be encouraged in public gathering places such as the marina boardwalk. Tall ships can also be used to draw people to the waterfront, as well as for historic interpretation. Special programs to educate and entertain can also enliven the Waterfront. The Waterfront should not be merely a sterile collection of historic or historically sympathetic buildings and lovely parks, but must be alive with people as well.

We look forward to working with the City to preserve the best aspects of the Waterfront that we cherish, and to make appropriate improvements that will distinguish Alexandria and enhance the Waterfront for generations to come.