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**Waterfront Committee Position Statement on  
Waterfront Small Area Plan**  
July 19, 2011

This statement summarizes the position of the Alexandria Waterfront Committee on the Planning Commission-endorsed Waterfront Small Area Plan and alternatives proposed to-date. The Waterfront Committee supports the proposed Plan, but also believes there are several key issues to be resolved prior to plan adoption. We are eager to continue discussions on the Plan in hopes of reaching broad compromise that will enable our City's Waterfront to move forward.

**Background**

The Alexandria Waterfront Committee is a unique City-wide assembly of Waterfront stakeholders established by City Council in 1989 to study and advise the City on Waterfront issues. We represent a wide cross-section of the community and have the best interests of the Waterfront at heart. Members include City residents, businesspersons, and members of selected business associations, non-profit organizations, and City commissions.

We believe a new Waterfront Plan is necessary to guide future development and civic investments. We have long advocated for creation and enactment of a new plan, and believe it is essential to establish guidelines for future development before any specific projects are proposed. Today's Waterfront does not meet its full potential to serve residents or improve the City's economy. Existing infrastructure is aging and needs to be revitalized. A Waterfront Plan will assist in addressing these shortcomings.

**Key Achievements of Draft Plan**

The proposed Waterfront Small Area Plan will renew the Alexandria Waterfront. It accomplishes several key objectives urged by stakeholders:

- **The Plan balances new areas of economic vitality with quiet places for contemplating the water.** The Plan respects existing neighborhoods, many of which are the product of past Waterfront planning efforts. It proposes re-development only in those locations with existing commercial and industrial uses.
- **The Plan provides new open space and enhances existing parks.** A vast portion of the Plan's acreage includes renewed open space. Long-stalled plans for Windmill Hill Park would be realized, as well as improvements to Oronoco Bay Park. Founders Park would remain passive open space.
- **The Plan provides an anchor in Fitzgerald Square**, which would serve as a central hub tying together disparate pieces of existing Waterfront amenities with Old Town's commercial artery. The square would provide a celebratory sense of arrival on Alexandria's Waterfront both from the landside and the waterside. Without the central anchor that Fitzgerald Square provides, other worthwhile public improvements contemplated by the Plan will not have the meaningful focal point that is required to link them together.

- **The Plan provides enhanced connectivity and preserves and enhances Waterfront vistas.** Redevelopment of the existing Robinson Terminal sites and City-owned parcels along The Strand would provide the much sought-after continuous pedestrian access along the Waterfront, enabling riverfront walks from Jones Point Park north to Marina Towers and beyond. This element of the Plan would make productive use of little-used existing public parks at street ends, and provide the public sweeping views of the Potomac.
- **The Plan interprets the history of Alexandria, and provides a stunning vision for incorporating the arts.** The community can be proudest of two resident-led efforts the Plan incorporates: the Waterfront Public Art Proposal and the Waterfront History Plan. The Public Art Proposal, if realized, would make Alexandria's Waterfront a showplace for the arts, including public, fine, and performing arts, most notably by developing an art walk parallel to the river. The History Plan envisions a Waterfront that recognizes the significance of Alexandria's place in American history, incorporating historic preservation and interpretive measures along the Waterfront to preserve existing architectural treasures and re-tell the fascinating history of Alexandria to future generations.
- **The Plan maintains Alexandria's working Waterfront, with expanded facilities for commercial boat services and a relocated pleasure boat marina.** Proposed piers, even if within the existing pier line that delineates the present boundaries between Virginia and the District of Columbia, would provide space for existing excursion services to expand, as well as for new operators to enter the Alexandria market. The Plan relocates the water taxi dock to facilitate access to King Street, and provides a prominent docking location for tall ships and other historic vessels. The Plan separates pleasure boats from the commercial marina, mitigating the conflicting maneuvers present at the current marina. It proposes to enlarge the City Marina to an economically-viable size, which could wean the Marina from City subsidies and provide a more secure location for private vessels.
- **The Plan sensitively integrates nuisance flood mitigation measures.** As April showers once again demonstrated, the Alexandria Waterfront is susceptible to nuisance flooding on a regular basis. The City's recent flood mitigation study outlined a cost-beneficial approach to mitigating nuisance flooding of up to 6.0 feet, such as the April 16, 2011 storm that resulted in flood levels of 4.77 feet. But while original engineering designs featured stark flood walls that would separate Alexandrians from the river, the Waterfront Plan takes a subtle approach, integrating barriers into proposed infrastructure and landscape improvements. This combination of form and function allows flood mitigation to enhance rather than impede public access to the Waterfront.
- **The Plan provides a framework to fund improvements without increasing taxes or establishing a business improvement district.** The Implementation chapter of the Plan demonstrates a method of covering the cost of public improvements to the Waterfront with revenues generated from redevelopment of existing industrial and underutilized commercial parcels. The hotels proposed for these locations that would be enabled by the Waterfront Plan's zoning ordinance text amendment are among the Alexandria's most productive revenue-generating land uses.

Without a comprehensive plan for the Waterfront area, these improvements could not be accomplished in a strategic, harmonious way.

### **Key Issues to be Resolved**

The Waterfront Committee believes that there are several key issues to be resolved prior to adopting the Plan and as it is implemented: retaining the original Fitzgerald Square concept; re-considering the proposed Marina design; activating the Parking Implementation Plan; dedicating new revenues generated from Waterfront

redevelopment to the maintenance and improvement of Waterfront amenities; mitigating the impacts of proposed Waterfront hotels on residential neighborhoods; retaining the Waterfront's existing cultural institutions; and incorporating Alexandria's history. These points are summarized below.

- **Fitzgerald Square Concept:** The Waterfront Committee strongly disagrees with proposals to relocate the proposed Fitzgerald Square from the foot of King Street to Prince Street or elsewhere along the Waterfront. We agree with the Planning Commission that the original proposal for Fitzgerald Square is the preferred, optimal design, and believe that it has the potential to be not only the centerpiece of the Waterfront, but also one of the City's crown jewels. Realizing this vision, however, will require leadership by City Council. We encourage the City to continue negotiations with the Old Dominion Boat Club, especially when reasonable alternatives exist. However, in no instance should the King Street right-of-way be blocked by a relocated parking area.
- **Waterfront Extension and Marina Design:** The Draft Waterfront Plan proposes two extensions into the Potomac River, including piers at the foot of King and Cameron streets and a pleasure craft marina off the current Robinson Terminal South location. The financial ramifications—including construction costs and ongoing maintenance expenses such as for dredging—of the proposed marina designs are not clear.

The Plan envisions a new marina area off the current Robinson Terminal South. The Waterfront Committee has two concerns regarding this structure. The first concern is about the technical feasibility of such a structure in a river that can surge from meteorological events and can carry large tree trunks and, at times, ice floes. The second concern is about the economic feasibility of the structure. Whereas the management details are for future discussion, the Waterfront Committee's own research suggested a minimum size of 150 berths before a marina can become viable. The same research also showed that a marina of such a size would require storage areas and proper transfer points for families to load and transition from land vehicles to watercraft.

Similarly, increased commercial traffic will require storage facilities for boat operators.

Given the impact on other elements of the Plan, this issue should be considered prior to adoption.

- **Parking Implementation Plan:** The Draft Waterfront Plan cites the Old Town Area Parking Study, which found that "issues with Old Town parking relate to proximity, rate, and availability and not to overall capacity." The study—and the Draft Waterfront Plan—recommends better management of the existing supply to serve present and future demand for parking in Old Town. If this indeed the case, we urge the immediate implementation of the recommendations of this chapter, including wayfinding, limited valet parking, and shuttle services aimed at maximizing existing parking capacity, coupled with enhanced enforcement of existing parking policies in adjacent residential areas. Such a pilot program will mitigate existing parking issues, and provide a model as implementation of the full Waterfront Plan unfolds. There is no reason to wait for further development of the Waterfront to address the parking issues that presently exist. Let us test this concept during Fiscal Year 2012 to see if it works.

Furthermore, we believe no existing public parking spaces should be removed without assurance of reasonable replacement spaces.

In addition, a transportation management plan that comprehensively addresses parking, motor coach, freight loading, and other impacts should be completed prior to approval of any new development.

- **Dedication of Waterfront Revenues:** We believe that net additional City revenues generated by redevelopment on the Waterfront should be solely applied to Waterfront-area amenities, including parks, programming, and other public uses. We encourage the addition of language to the Plan dedicating new Waterfront revenues as such.
- **Waterfront Hotels:** The Plan will support commercial land uses, including hotels, which enliven the Waterfront and help to pay for the Plan. A key consideration, however, is what types of commercial uses are appropriate. We support the Plan's call for re-zoning three locations to permit hotels with no more than 150 rooms each, and meeting space for no more than 50 persons, especially relative to the by-right development currently permitted on these sites. Residential, commercial, and visitor-oriented Waterfront development must be carefully balanced, including civic and cultural attractions for both visitors and residents. Too much residential development may give the Waterfront the feel of being a private area primarily for residents, while too much commercial development may leave the area vacant at night. However, any development must mitigate the traffic, parking, trash, and noise impacts on adjacent neighborhoods.
- **Existing Cultural institutions:** We echo the Plan's support of maintaining existing cultural institutions on the Waterfront, including the Seaport Foundation, The Art League, the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, the Torpedo Factory Art Center, and others. We encourage the City to take proactive measures to retain these organizations on the Waterfront as the Plan is implemented.
- **Incorporation of History:** The Plan should be unique to Alexandria. Its design concepts should be compatible with the historic tenor of Old Town and the City's long heritage of maritime and commercial Waterfront activity. It must have the "look and feel" of the best of what's already here, and continue to differentiate Alexandria's Waterfront and the Old Town business district from others in the region. We encourage excellence in design as the Plan is implemented.

### Plan Alternatives

In addition to consideration of the draft Waterfront Small Area Plan, the Waterfront Committee has evaluated the three alternatives that were presented to City Council at its June 11, 2011 workshop. These include Alternative 1 – Parks and Museums; Alternative 2 – Current Zoning, no Special Use Permit (SUP); and Alternative 3 – Current Zoning with SUP. Each of these alternatives is assessed below.

#### Alternative 1 – Parks and Museums

This alternative proposes significant expansion of parks and cultural space at the three major Waterfront parcels poised for redevelopment—Robinson Terminal North, Robinson Terminal South, and Cummings/Turner block. Alexandria's brand is historic authenticity, and this alternative provides a broad canvas for expression of that theme.

This alternative, as proposed, has projected costs of \$220 million and projected tax revenues of \$164,000 annually. Refinement of both estimates and the elements comprising them is warranted, and must include the significant cost of programming these facilities. In addition, there may be opportunities for funding from state and federal government sources as well as private non-private organizations, which could help to defray the cost of this (or another) Waterfront Plan alternative.

We note that there is a fundamental policy question to be answered whether proposed civic improvements to the Waterfront are to be funded through net tax proceeds from new development in Waterfront areas, or whether additional General Fund revenues generated Citywide should be invested. The availability of public money to support an alternative such as this opens the door to a different type Waterfront redevelopment than a

scenario which must be self-financed through partnerships between the City and private developers. The City already incurs significant annual expense to fund eight existing museums, the City Marina, the Torpedo Factory Art Center, and the many parks lining the Waterfront. How much additional City tax funds are available to support the capital and ongoing operating cost of proposed Waterfront improvements?

An important subsidiary question is where the first dollar of public investment should be made. This proposal contemplates acquisition of many parcels, including the parking lot at the foot of King Street and Waterfront parcels along The Strand in addition to the Robinson Terminal and Cummings/Turner blocks. With scarce resources, the Plan must prioritize which land is to be acquired first, and which would remain privately held.

We are concerned that this alternative may not activate the Waterfront enough, as it presents few opportunities for Waterfront dining and commercial activities, which many participants in the Waterfront Small Area Plan-making process have requested. Similarly, any new public spaces must be carefully designed and need to provide a reason for people to use them lest they become deserted like existing assets such as Waterfront Park and the Torpedo Factory Food Pavilion. The City's past experience with a failed maritime museum in North Old Town's TransPotomac Canal Center is also instructive.

This alternative provides fodder for a possible compromise plan, which intersperses elements of this alternative into the Planning Commission-endorsed plan. For example, there are significant opportunities for mixed-use commercial, recreational, and cultural uses, such as a museum housing a restaurant, a commercial building with ground-floor retail, or a hotel housing an art center. These are amongst the many options for the working group to explore.

#### **Alternative 2 – Current Zoning, no Special Use Permit**

We are very concerned about the potential for this alternative to materialize through lack of Waterfront-area planning action by the City.

This alternative offers only limited protection of community interests. There would be few civic improvements benefiting the public. A Waterfront pathway *would* be one such improvement when development occurs where Department of Interior settlement agreements are in place, but would provide the absolute minimum amount of open space of the various plan alternatives. This scenario would generate limited revenue to fund the proposed Waterfront art walk, historical interpretation, or flood mitigation measures, key features of the Planning Commission-endorsed Plan.

The City's ability to specify terms to developers would be severely limited under this alternative. The Board of Architectural Review for the Old and Historic Alexandria District does not have jurisdiction along the Waterfront north of Oronoco Street so there would be limited opportunity to influence the design of the Robinson Terminal North parcels. (To address this, the City may wish to consider extending the Historic District north of Oronoco Street as part of any Waterfront Plan scenario, an action for which there is past precedent.) Under current policies, Alexandria's Waterfront could wind up with uninspired development that has very little bearing to its riverside proximity.

On the other hand, opting for this alternative would enable the City to end what has become an acrimonious planning process. But Alexandria would likely suffer completely unacceptable development inconsistent with its aspiration for a World-class Waterfront.

**Alternative 3 – Current Zoning with Special Use Permit**

This alternative is slightly less problematic than Alternative 2. While the City would have more control through the SUP approvals process, it would still be responding to developer’s proposals rather than setting forth expectations for developers’ to fulfill.

Notably, it is not the City’s but the *developers’* choice whether to proceed with Alternative 2 versus Alternative 3 based on the tenor of the development proposed. The odds are that any developer would likely opt for an SUP for the Robison Terminal and Cummings/Turner blocks given the significant flexibility and profit potential for development with an SUP compared to the by-right development contemplated by Alternative 2. This provides greater potential revenue to support major aims of the Waterfront Plan such as the art and history initiatives and the flood mitigation measures.

Still, even with an SUP, we are concerned that the City’s reactionary position would significantly limit the Waterfront’s potential. Better to be proactive by approving a visionary plan that the community supports.

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The Waterfront Committee stated in its Waterfront Plan Principles—adopted in 2009, prior to commencement of the Waterfront Plan-making process—that Alexandria is embarking on a once-in-a-generation planning effort for its Waterfront. We stated at the time, and still believe, that it is crucial that the Plan balance the residential, commercial, and tourist interests as it seeks to enhance the enjoyment of the Waterfront by City residents, workers, and visitors alike. We note that compromise and discussion will be required to achieve a Waterfront Plan that will be enthusiastically supported by all Waterfront Stakeholders, and remain optimistic that we will find common ground.

The Waterfront Committee looks forward to working with our fellow citizens and stakeholders to address these points, and to future enhancements that will create a Waterfront that all Alexandrians can be proud of.