

Summary Minutes

ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMISSION

Thursday, September 27, 2012

Alexandria City Hall, Room 2000

Members:

Present: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Morgan Delaney, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Stewart Dunn, Alexandria Planning Commission
Art Fox, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business and Professional Association
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen from west of Washington St. and Chair
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
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: Dennis Auld, Citizen, Park Planning District II
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat leaseholder
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Trey Hanbury, Citizen, Park Planning District I
Melinda (Mindy) Lyle, Citizen, Park Planning District III
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeological Commission
Patricia (Pat) Miller, Commission on the Arts
Peter Pennington, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council.

City Staff: Rich Baier, Director, Department of Transportation and Engineering Services (T&ES)
Tom Canfield, City Architect, Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Al Cox, Architect/Historic Preservation Manager, P&Z
Faye Dastgheib, Transportation Planning, T&ES
Faroll Hamer, Director, P&Z
James Hixon, Dockmaster, RPCA
Cheryl Lawrence, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs (RPCA)
Sandra Marks, Division Chief, Transportation Planning, T&ES
Iris Portny, Commission Recording Secretary, RPCA
Lt. Juan Torres, Alexandria Police Department
Nancy Williams, Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests: Tina Fink, Toole Design Group (TDG)
Mel Garbow, Harborside

Dan Goodman, TDG
Lauren Kaufmann, TDG
Jonathan Krall, Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
(BPAC)
Mike Young, 6 Prince Street

Welcome and Introductions

The Commission was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Macek announced that a quorum was present, and Commissioners, staff and guests introduced themselves. Macek said that public comment would be taken prior to the Commission's discussion of the Union Street Corridor recommendations.

Presentation of Union Street Corridor Study Recommendations and Waterfront Commission

Overview

Marks said the recommendations reflected feedback received on the August draft recommendations presented at the August 23, 2012 Waterfront Commission meeting, the September 19, 2012 public meeting and other stakeholder inputs. She said the next step would be to present the staff recommendations to the Planning Commission, Transportation Commission, and City Council.

Fink said the recommendations were of two types: short-term recommendations that could be implemented within six to 12 months, and long-term recommendations that would establish a vision for the Corridor. Marks said it was important to understand that although each of the short-term recommendations could be implemented within six to 12 months, all of the recommendations would not be able to be implemented together within six to 12 months.

Goodman reviewed highlights of the stakeholder feedback received: That pedestrian safety and comfort should be a Corridor priority, traffic enforcement needs to be improved, safety for all traffic modes needs to be improved, the concept of a shared street design was of great interest, the historic street features need to be preserved, improved traffic management at the King/Union Street intersection is needed, and stakeholder opinions varied about whether some modes of traffic, such as motor coaches and delivery vehicles should be restricted.

Goodman said the recommendations focused on the Corridor's high-traffic core area and reflected data analysis and stakeholder preferences tempered by staff's professional judgment about what would work best to meet the identified goals for the Corridor.

Preserving Union Street as a Multimodal Corridor

Goodman said staff was not recommending that any modes of traffic, such as delivery trucks or bicycles, be restricted because vehicles need to access the Corridor's parking garages, delivery vehicle access facilitates a vibrant Union Street business district, and Union Street needs to be preserved as an important link in the Mount Vernon Trail used by bicyclists. Goodman said the possibility had not been ruled out that parts of the

Corridor could be closed to some modes at certain times but the data analysis indicated space is available to accommodate delivery vehicles and parked cars, with the challenge being how to utilize existing space more efficiently and how to remove the delivery vehicles from the traffic flow using, for example, loading zones and relocating deliveries to alleys, where possible.

Bicycles

Goodman said the study's extensive data collected on bicycle traffic, including intercept interviews of bicyclists using the Corridor, had created a fuller understanding of the factors that influence how bicyclists use the Corridor. He said that because many bicyclists using the Corridor for exercise said they would be willing to use a route parallel to Union Street the question would be how to encourage those riders to use a parallel route. He said the recommendations propose improved traffic enforcement and calming measures but that, because of Union Street's importance to the Mount Vernon Trail, bicyclists should not be required to dismount.

Site-Specific Recommendations

Mount Vernon Trail (the Trail) Connection at Robinson Terminal North

Fink said this was the only site for which short-term, mid-term and long-term recommendations had been developed. She said that to improve pedestrian safety in the short-term, a recommendation proposed that the existing car lanes be narrowed to free up space along Union Street's eastern side for a pedestrian walking area. She said a mid-term improvement would create a sidewalk for this pedestrian walkway and after the sidewalk had been created the existing crosswalk could be removed. Fink said curbed islands could be used to formalize the left turn lane here.

Manor asked if the option of removing the railroad tracks had been considered to improve safety and Fink said it had not because the recommendations focused on actions that could be implemented over the short and mid-term.

Transition between Bicycle Lanes and Shared Lanes

Fink said the short-term recommendation to improve the Trail's transition onto Pendleton Street was to improve the signage for cyclists directing them to Pendleton Street and to provide visual cues for motorists that warn that bicyclists enter and exit from the Trail at this location.

King/Union Street

Fink said the recommendations build upon those of the Waterfront Small Area Plan's proposal that motor vehicle access be limited here and that a pedestrian hub be created for the unit block of King Street. Fink said a video behavioral analysis identified multimodal safety problems such as pedestrians crossing outside the crosswalks, vehicles encroaching on the crosswalks and bicycles not stopping at stop signs and several short-term recommendations were proposed to address these problems: (a) use a contrasting pavement texture for crosswalks at King/Union Street to make them wider and more prominent; (b) create a bicycle corral at King/Union Street, to use no more than two parking spaces and be tested as a pilot project, to encourage and cluster bicycle parking at King/Union Street; and (c) implement, four-way "no left turn"

restrictions at King/Union Street, also to be first tested as a pilot project. Fink said long-term recommendations being considered to improve safety included adding a raised intersection and curb extensions. She said the option of adding a traffic signal at Union/King Street was considered and rejected.

Pilot Projects: Part-Time Parking and Others

Goodman said a pilot was recommended to test the concept of creating part-time parking spaces that could be used to provide additional pedestrian space at peak pedestrian traffic times. He said examples of how this concept is used in other cities include using the extra space for outdoor tables. This pilot project would be in addition to those recommended by the Commission for a four-way “no left turn” restriction at King/Union Street and for a pedestrian-only space on the 100 block of King Street.

Windmill Hill Park

Fink said that because data indicates that vehicles travel at higher speeds along this part of the Corridor, a raised crosswalk with curb extension at the Mount Vernon Trail is being recommended to make bicycles, pedestrians and cars more visible to each other and to slow vehicular traffic at this location.

Traffic Management and Enforcement

Goodman said this recommendation reflected the Commission’s insistence that this be included among the measures to reduce intermodal conflicts.

Long-Term Improvements for the Corridor

Fink reviewed the four alternatives considered: no change; narrowing the street’s lanes, creating a shared street, and removing on-street parking and Goodman said staff’s recommended alternative was for a shared street as the preferred way to address the current problem that almost 75 percent of Corridor traffic is pedestrian but only 25 percent of the Corridor’s physical space is designed to accommodate pedestrian traffic. He said the shared street concept had also received significant stakeholder support. Goodman reviewed possible design details that could be used for a shared street but Baier said the design details were being showed only to illustrate the possibilities since the study’s recommendations focus on concept-level recommendations, not details. Goodman said an important issue to consider when developing a shared street’s design is how to design the roadway to encourage cars to slow down.

Delivery Vehicles and Curb Design

Goodman reviewed a variety of possible design options that exist to address traffic calming and right of way issues, including using contrasting surface materials to distinguish between, for example, the shared space for cars and bicycles and non-shared space for pedestrians. He said materials and curb placement could also be used to designate a pedestrian-only sidewalk space, including plastic bollards.

Next Steps

Marks said the next step would be for the City to select the preferred alternatives. Then work could proceed on those alternatives that required either additional design work and review and capital modifications For example, the shared street concept would be

passed along to be incorporated into flood mitigation design activities that had been included in the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

Public Comments

Krall said the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee supports the shared street concept as a way to improve bicyclists' safety along the Corridor. Also, he said that when choosing potential locations for a bicycle corral near the King/Union Street intersection it should recognized that bicyclists want to park in areas of significant pedestrian traffic to reduce the chance that a parked bike would be stolen. If a bicycle corral were too far from pedestrian traffic it would not be well used.

Garbow said actions should be taken to preserve on-street parking near Windmill Hill Park since its availability enhances the park's convenience to residents.

Commission Discussion

Corridor Concepts

Shared Street

Delaney said he supported shared streets as a concept that respects the street's historic proportions and relationships and said Union Street's appearance should not differ much from that of other streets in the Historic District. Bernstein said she supported a shared street concept that included effective ways to slow down cars. She said placing "pedestrian right-of-way" paddle signs near Founders Park had effectively slowed car speeds in the neighborhood.

Baum said she supported the shared street concept but design and surface material details, such as including granite curbs, would be important to success. Manor said a multimodal shared street would humanize the Corridor and asked if this could be implemented on the unit block of King Street. Fink said traffic could not be restricted on King Street because access to the parking garages could not be impeded. Barnekov said he was concerned about the safety implications if a shared street's design resembled a pedestrian plaza because pedestrians might be less likely to use crosswalks and less watchful for approaching vehicles and bicycles. He said a shared street might further confuse traffic at King/Union.

Fox and Thayer said they supported the shared street concept for cars and bicycles coupled with enforcement and a separate sidewalk provided for pedestrian use. Hafer said she supported the shared street concept with the understanding that it be designed in a way that would not exacerbate flooding problems. Marks it was because of the connection between street design and flooding that T&ES had combined planning for the Union Street Corridor with the ongoing flood mitigation study and engineering. She said design details would be presented to the Commission for its feedback as they are developed. Macek said the shared street concept would help implement flood mitigation and other elements of the Waterfront Plan.

Preserving Multimodal Access to Union Street

Manor said he supported adding restrictions on delivery hours. Van Fleet said the European practice of limiting delivery truck size and delivery hours in historic districts

should be followed. Dunn said delivery hours are already restricted by ordinance and incorporated into Special Use Permits. Van Fleet said recommendations need to be developed to restrict motor coaches in the Historic District.

Pilot Projects

Commissioners said they support testing proposed traffic changes as pilot projects before making any final decisions on them and that they wanted to be consulted on details of the pilot projects as they are developed. Macek said that without carefully designed pilot projects the actual impact of proposed traffic and parking changes could not be realistically predicted. He said the proposed pedestrian space along the 100 block of King Street was an example of a recommendation that requires a carefully detailed pilot project to learn if the change's impact would be as hoped.

Moving Tree Wells to Create a Wider Pedestrian Area

Watters, Dunn and Macek said an arborist should examine any trees identified for removal so that tree wells could be moved to the parking space area. Watters said that absent an arborist's approval, removing the trees would likely trigger opposition and concern. Macek said he accepted the need to relocate tree wells from their current sidewalk locations so that the concepts of the Corridor improvements could be implemented.

Flexible Parking

Macek said the idea of using parking spaces for flexible uses such as outdoor seating was potentially useful for areas in the core area. Manor asked for more information about how the concept might be implemented.

Fink said sample uses of flexible parking spaces include additional pedestrian space during peak traffic hours and for outdoor tables for shops with significant walk-in traffic such as Ben and Jerry's, Firehook and others. Marks said developing details of the concepts being recommended would be worked out at a later step in the process after concepts for the Corridor had been approved.

Additional General Comments on Concepts

Dunn said he liked the plan concepts, its focus on including both short-term and long-term options, and its preservation of the existing balance of historic streets.

Site-Specific Recommendations

Mount Vernon Trail Connection at Robinson Terminal North (RTN)

Bernstein asked how much of the space between the RTN building and the curb is owned by the City and how much by RTN and whether it would be possible to require RTN to have a bigger setback for a building when and if the site is redeveloped so that a sidewalk could be added along the east side of Union Street. Staff responded that the Western wall of the RTN building rests on the property line.

Watters said she supported the short-term interim recommendations for improving safety in this area since this is a dangerous area for both pedestrians and bicyclists, She said she had concerns about planning long-term measures before it is known how

soon RTN might redevelop the site because if RTN were to redevelop the site in the near-term permanent modifications that City had made to the street, such as paving changes, might need to be removed.

Transition between Bicycle Lanes and Shared Lanes

No comments offered during the discussion.

King/Union Street Pedestrianization

Bernstein said the recommendations with her support for pedestrianizing the area over the long-term and she supported the introducing shared streets beyond Union Street. Fox and Macek said they also supported pedestrianizing the unit block of King Street, and Macek would be consistent with the Waterfront Small Area Plan's goal of creating a pedestrian space at the foot of King Street. Delaney said he had concerns that creating a full-time pedestrian space might undercut the area's vitality and the idea exceeded what was needed for pedestrian safety concerns because pedestrian traffic peaks only at certain times of the day and week. He said Washington DC's pedestrian space at F St NW near the Portrait Gallery had eventually been removed and Charlottesville's pedestrian plaza was initially less successful than expected.

Bicycle Corral

There was general agreement that a bicycle corral would be more appropriate at Waterfront Park than near the Union/King Street intersection. Baum said a bicycle corral should not conflict with the Waterfront Plan's goal to create an unobstructed view shed of the river in this area. Hafer said a bicycle corral should not be located near the Marina to avoid encouraging bicycle riding in that area. Bernstein said more consideration should be given to how to balance residents', bicyclists' and pedestrian needs in the Historic District. Macek said the Waterfront Plan Work Group's goal was to use the unit block of King Street as a pedestrian plaza and having a bicycle corral (or any parking) there would impede that goal.

Four-way "no left turn" at King/Union Street

Macek, who had proposed the idea at the Commission's August meeting, reiterated his supported for the concept and the need to test it out as a pilot project to determine the impact of the traffic pattern change. Baum asked if a traffic enforcement officer would enforce the "no left turn" restriction at King/Union Street when it was implemented and Marks said that variable message signs and an orange flag are always posted to warn drivers when a traffic pattern change has been implemented. Van Fleet said that a 24/7 "no-left turn" restriction here would inconvenience residents. Delaney said he was concerned this might push Union Street traffic onto neighboring streets.

Windmill Hill Park

Thayer said this area must be designed to provide a safe walking area and slowing bicycles down was needed for that. He said a mechanism should be added to stop or slow bicycles leaving the tunnel as they approach Union Street. Dunn and Watters said a stop sign for bicycles should be placed at the Trail tunnel's opening onto Union Street. Van Fleet said a turnstile or gate would be needed to stop Mount Vernon Trail bicyclists

exiting the tunnel before they enter Union Street. Delaney said bicyclists rarely stop where the Trail crosses the George Washington Memorial Parkway even though a “bicyclists must dismount before crossing” sign is posted. Manor, Dunn and Van Fleet said rumble strips should be considered as a means to slow bicyclists’ leaving the Trail and entering Union Street. Marks said that because bicycles need to be able to access Union Street safely when they exit the tunnel, traffic calming is also needed to slow cars down. Barnekov said traffic calming measures should be added between Wolfe and Gibbon Streets. Fox said the speed limit for cars should be reduced here to perhaps 15 MPH. Fink said using physical design changes to encourage traffic calming would be needed in addition to a reduced speed limit.

Delaney said further analysis was needed about how to connect the two parks and asked if a different pavement surface could be used between the Union/Gibbon and Union/Wolfe intersections to convey a connectedness between the park areas. Baum said the Windmill Hill Park Master Plan had recommended this be done but there had been no funding for it. She said the Park and Recreation Commission said the design should be improved to marry the two park sites together, and to do so in a time frame shorter than the five to 10 years staff had suggested. Baum said the Corridor study’s design recommendations only addressed the goal of slowing down bicycle and car traffic. Van Fleet said he did not support traffic calming measures that would slow down Union Street traffic in this area because it would encourage traffic to use neighboring streets.

Commission Support for Aspects of Study’s Recommendations

Moved by Dunn, seconded by Manor, endorsing the following improvements to the Union Street corridor:

- The general concepts of the staff recommendations
- A shared street design concept for Union Street that can be tied to a shared street design for the 100 block of King Street, that includes well-marked crosswalks at the King/Union Street intersection, and whose details such as embedded curbs would be considered by a design team.
- Limiting delivery hours
- Enforcement of traffic regulations
- A bicycle corral located around the corner from the King/Union Street intersection, perhaps at Waterfront Park
- Windmill Hill Park’s proposed short-term improvements to crosswalks
- The need for further development of Windmill Hill Park long-term traffic control measures to slow bicyclists exiting the Mount Vernon Trail tunnel before they enter Union Street.
- Pilot projects being used to test the impact of proposed traffic management measures and for the details of those pilots to be carefully designed to ensure that realistic outcomes are produced by the pilots.
- The importance of Commission feedback being solicited on pilot project details as they are developed.
- The need to receive additional information about (a) how timing of redevelopment plans for Robinson Terminal North might affect installing an interim sidewalk on

the east side of North Union Street between Pendleton and Oronoco Streets and (b) whether any future development plans for the RTN site could be required to provide a sufficient setback from the street to enable permanent pedestrian and bicycle pathway safety improvements for the Mount Vernon Trail's connection to Union Street here.

Discussion of the Motion

Van Fleet said the study's recommendations should not be finalized until the outcomes of current court cases related to the Waterfront Small Area Plan are known so that the Corridor's future density could be predicted more accurately. Dunn said he did not think Waterfront Plan implementation should be deferred until all of the related court actions were settled. Marks said that Council had directed staff to conduct the current study to provide baseline information and planning before development occurs.

Baum and Manor said that as the Waterfront Plan is implemented the additional pedestrian areas planned for the Waterfront should help alleviate pedestrian congestion on Union Street. Macek said he did not see anything in the draft recommendations that would be inconsistent with future development, and that most of the improvements recommended by the Corridor study focused on the core area of Union Street, within one block of King Street, an area for which the Waterfront Plan had not proposed new development.

The Dunn/Manor motion was approved on a voice vote, with Van Fleet dissenting.

Macek asked staff to provide information about the feasibility of implementing a sidewalk along the eastern side of North Union Street next to the Robinson Terminal North site as a mid-term improvement.

Announcements and Public Discussion

There were no additional comments from the public.

Macek said the Commission's Marina Committee would meet on October 11, 2012 and that the Torpedo Factory Food Court would be among the issues to be discussed.

Macek announced the next meeting of the Waterfront Commission would be on October 16, 2012.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 PM.