



City Hall
Alexandria, Virginia

Alexandria Waterfront Committee
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
1108 Jefferson Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314



May 31, 2011

The Honorable William D. Euille
Mayor of Alexandria
City Hall
301 King Street, Room 2300
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mayor Euille:

This letter summarizes the majority position of the Alexandria Waterfront Committee on the Waterfront Small Area Plan. **The Waterfront Committee supports the Plan with the qualifications outlined in this letter, which we believe Council should address to strengthen the Plan.**

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 Plan is necessary to guide future development and civic investments. We have long advocated for development 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 for the area to be competitive with neighboring waterfronts. A Waterfront Plan will assist in addressing these shortcomings.

Over the past two years, the Waterfront Committee, its members, other community groups, and the public at large have collaborated to create the Plan recently endorsed by the Planning Commission. Throughout the plan-making process, the Waterfront Committee offered critical feedback on multiple drafts of the Plan.

- In May 2009, the Waterfront Committee offered its [Waterfront Plan Principles](#), a 91-point summary of the elements we thought critical to include in any Waterfront Plan. Many elements of these principles were incorporated into the Waterfront Plan's goals and objectives.
- In February 2010, the Waterfront Committee, Department of Planning and Zoning, and Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Activities jointly sponsored Marina Night, an interactive community discussion on the City Marina and future maritime needs of the Waterfront. This event culminated in the Waterfront Committee's [Marina Vision Statement and Briefing Paper](#). This paper helped shape the

Plan's proposed marinas, which provide a waterside gateway to Alexandria that separates pleasure from commercial watercraft.

- In June 2010 the Committee provided Planning staff 10 pages of [comments](#) on the Concept Waterfront Plan. This letter carefully outlined our critique of the early draft relative our Committee's May 2009 Waterfront Plan Principles. These comments were addressed by staff as the Plan evolved over the next six months.
- In March 2011 we again offered [detailed feedback](#) when the draft Waterfront Small Area Plan was released, with particular concerns regarding implementation the Plan's parking strategy; the scale and tenor of redevelopment; the proposed Waterfront Park restaurant building; and the implementation timeframe for completion of the long-delayed Windmill Hill Park Plan. These recommendations were generally addressed by staff in advance of the May 3 Planning Commission meeting, although the Waterfront Committee has some lingering concerns, summarized at the end of this letter.
- In April 2011 [we wrote](#) the Planning Commission urging the proposed Fitzgerald Square to remain the Plan's vision for the foot of King Street. The Planning Commission responded by amending the Plan to state that Fitzgerald Square remains the proposed alternative for this location.

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 boutique 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, of benefit not only to the Waterfront, but also to the City in general.

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

The Waterfront Committee believes that there are several key issues for City Council to resolve prior to adopting the Plan and as it is implemented: retaining the original Fitzgerald Square concept; re-considering the proposed Waterfront extension and 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 major 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 Council 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 the summer of 2011 to see if it works.

Furthermore, we believe no existing public parking spaces should be removed without assurance of reasonable replacement spaces, and that a parking management plan 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 Council to add 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.

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We appreciate the opportunity to offer these comments on the Waterfront Small Area Plan. If you should have further questions regarding this matter, please contact me at 202-365-2927 (mobile) or natemacek@hotmail.com.

On behalf of the Alexandria Waterfront Committee and the broad Citywide constituencies that we represent, thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Nathan M. Macek, Chair
Alexandria Waterfront Committee

- CC: Alexandria City Council
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