

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Work Session March 3, 2011

City Hall – Sister Cities Room

Members

Present: Engin Artemel, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.
William Cromley, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business Association
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen and Chair
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association
Peter Pennington, Environmental Policy Commission
Van Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association

Excused: Jay Atkinson, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Mel Fortney, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat lease holder
Pete Peterson, Archaeological Commission
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council
Robert Taylor, Alexandria Seaport Foundation

City Staff Jim Hixon, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Guests: Katy Carmody, Rosemont Citizens Association
Matthew Harwood, Alexandria Commission for the Arts Public Art
Committee
Khiber S. Masterson, Jr.
Sally Masterson
Sarita Schotta, Waterfront Alliance
Julie Van Fleet, Waterfront Alliance

Welcome and Introductions

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

Meeting called to order at 4:10 p.m. The group met as a committee of the whole; no formal actions were taken at the work session. Meeting purpose was to discuss the draft Waterfront Small Area Plan.

Draft Waterfront Small Area Plan Discussion

Plan-related issues were broken into (a) overarching issues, and (b) site issues within the five geographic zones identified by the draft Report. Members anticipated that some

of the issues highlighted by the Committee might be resolved by submitting questions to City planners while others issues raised might need to be addressed by revisions to the Plan.

Questions considered

- 1) What do Committee Members like in the City's draft Waterfront Small Area Plan?
- 2) Which Plan aspects would Committee Members like changed? How, including specific constructive suggestions, should those aspects be changed?
- 3) Are there plan elements about which Committee members have questions and would like more detailed information?

Report Outreach Process

- 1) Committee frustration that the detailed WF Plan was only now being shown to Committee members – offering a late first opportunity for Committee feedback on specific plan elements since the Plan is expected to be presented to the Planning Commission in April for action.
- 2) Draft doesn't reflect inputs from P&Z community meetings, e.g., Rivergate Civic Association told planners they oppose boat-launching facility – but it stays in the draft.
- 3) Committee members are interested in helping City planners reach out to community and develop ways to adapt Plan to reflect community concerns about it certain aspects of it.

General comments – Overarching issues

- 1) Today's Waterfront fails to live up to its potential either for residents or as a contributor to the City's economic vitality; existing infrastructure is aging and needs to be revitalized for the area to be competitive with neighboring waterfronts – but concerns regarding the Plan's practicality exist.
- 2) The need for prompt City approval of the Plan - If the City does not approve a comprehensive development plan soon, private developers can move ahead piecemeal on individual commercial projects with no Master Plan to guide City considerations.
- 3) Actions are needed to preserve the Waterfront's attractiveness for visitors over the next 20-30 years, and also to keep it competitive with nearby waterfront areas.
- 4) The Plan should recognize the Waterfront's historic commercial role in the City – and should retain that commercial role as a component rather than overemphasizing, for example, parks space.
- 5) Balancing residential, commercial and visitor-oriented Waterfront development, especially civic and cultural activities attractive to both visitors and residents, is a challenge. Too much residential development creates the feel of a Waterfront being a private area primarily for residents. Too much commercial development leaves an area empty at night

Outstanding issues to be addressed

P&Z should not defer further work on planning issues such as parking, and how to implement phasing of Plan's elements, while working on the following issues:

- 1) **Plan implementation costs** - closer examination needed.
- 2) **Phasing in Plan elements carefully** - needs to be examined and detailed.
- 3) **Flood mitigation** - Planners need to integrate into the Plan.
- 4) **Hotels** – Needs details and analysis – Will National Park Service approve it? Can City support three? (See discussion below.)
- 5) **New marina in southern Plan area** - More details needed, including design, maintenance costs, and how its construction can be phased in to minimize impact on existing entities. (See discussion below.)
- 6) **Land use availability** - More information needed regarding whether owners of private property (e.g. boat club parking lot) will make that land available for purposes envisioned by planners.
- 7) **Hotels and piers – proposal needs more detailed examination.**

Concerns regarding the Plan

- 1) **Question about the practicality of some Plan details.**
- 2) **Community support crucial** – Without community support, the plan is unlikely to be approved by City Council soon. The Plan as drafted does not seem to reflect ongoing inputs from residents and organizations that have been briefed on it thus far.
- 3) **Parking** - Parking details are not thought through; e.g., parking around boat club and health club is already crowded. How would a hotel impact that problem? How might the possibility of returning under-bridge parking at Woodrow Wilson Bridge affect the Plan?
- 4) **Parking plan – implement it now on a trial basis.** Since an effective parking plan is key to the Plan's public acceptability and the success of its implementation, members felt Plan-related parking changes should be implemented now – as early as spring//summer 2011. Will drivers accept proposed changes, e.g., will park-and-ride lots be utilized? Is valet parking needed?
- 5) **Phasing in Plan elements:** Without careful phasing in of Waterfront Plan elements existing Waterfront elements and businesses will be damaged.
- 6) **Hotels proposal** – Members reactions ranged from opposition to any new Waterfront hotels (preferring instead perhaps San Francisco-type waterfront development with perhaps an Art League, Archaeology Museum, or Seaport Foundation) to an interest in considering what types of hotels might best respond to residents' needs and City economics. Will National Park Service approve 3 waterfront hotels?
- 7) **Hotel proposal follow-up needed** - Encourage City to study Plan's hotel proposal and implications more thoroughly, with attention to striking a proper balance between residential, commercial and visitor-oriented development, recognizing the difficulty of identifying a funding source for alternative uses such as museums
- 8) **Pleasure Craft Marina-** New marina is proposed at Robinson Terminal South – but without details of the new marina and how elements would be phased in.

Docks and piers need more careful analysis. Concerns were raised regarding annual maintenance costs of the pier as designed. The current pier design might require \$2-3 million annually for dredging.

- 9) **Wayfinding** – What is the implementation schedule?
- 10) **Windmill Hill Park needs to be added to the Plan.** It should be in the Plan's central region. Plan only includes Jones Point to Daingerfield.
- 11) **City Council consideration of the Plan and related revenue actions.** Should Council consider the Plan together with proposed taxes for implementing it (as proposed)?
- 12) **Food Pavilion** – Could this location be used more effectively in the context of an overall Waterfront development plan? There is widespread community dissatisfaction with the Food Court, especially the space's poor utilization, and wonder why City officials have not pressured the master leaseholder to recruit more business to the facility.
- 13) **Detail more family-friendly and child-oriented activities** – Plan gives insufficient attention. Should Plan's Oronoco Park discussion address this in some detail?
- 14) **City's history aspects might be a bit more detailed** – Feelings were mixed whether the Plan needs more details regarding how aspects of Alexandria history will be preserved and represented,
- 15) **Environmental concerns not discussed in much detail** - Some streets are allowed to drain oil straight into the river. Combined sewers - storm water and sewage go together and, when backed up, overflow into the river, a potential long-term problem for City. EPA has recently advised larger cities like NYC, Philadelphia and DC they need to correct – at great expense - this design flaw in their own systems. Some remediation will likely be needed for Oronoco Bay Park.

Plan Aspects Supported by Members:

- 1) **Continuous public access to the Waterfront is well addressed.**
- 2) **Recognition of area's economic importance** - Support for Plan's overall concept of waterfront as a vital part of the city's economics its awareness that its manmade elements are beginning to show their age and need renewal, and its recognizing the potential damage from a City failure to renew the Waterfront elements in a timely fashion.
- 3) **Balancing quiet areas and vibrancy** - Plan provides a good balance of economic vitality with quiet places

Hotels: Discussed Plan's idea for three new Waterfront hotels at length – opinions varied.

- 1) Strong opposition to the Plan generally and to its proposed new hotels – seeing no benefit to residents, noting City's current hotels operate at only 70 percent capacity. New hotels shouldn't be added until existing hotels are 100 per cent utilized. Plan's envisioned hotels would increase overall density with no benefit to waterfront residents, especially with trucks needing to service these hotels 24/7.

Old Town Civic Association told planners they opposed the draft plan – but Plan does not reflect their inputs.

- 2) Support in principle for the hotel idea – if not the number. Could be boutique ones, as (i) attractive to visitors, (ii) generating WF activity; (iii) providing an economic engine for the Waterfront area, (iv) a source of additional meeting areas for the local community, and (v) an important potential source of revenue that might be used to finance Waterfront renewal projects.
- 3) Surprised Robinson Terminal South is proposed for hotel – plus planned Robinson North hotel.
- 4) Would a Robinson Terminal South hotel be consistent with Settlement Agreement regarding Robinson Terminal's use?
- 5) Recognition that hotels would offset some of the residential property tax burden.
- 6) Dining - Support for proposed Waterfront hotels adding more area restaurants;
- 7) Dining - Opposition to Plan's proposed 14 new restaurants as too much.

Proposed new marina at southern end: Discussion

Piers would be developed privately in conjunction with a hotel that might be developed there – envisioned as an eventual replacement for the City's current marina.

- 1) **A fully staffed marina needed** - which current marina is not. Concept well intended, but City must ensure that south end's marina area is correctly developed and staffed.
- 2) **Details** - Marina proposal lacks details.
- 3) **Practicality** - Proposal's practicality questioned (e.g., is the Boat Club likely to give up its parking lot so it can be developed for other uses?)
- 4) **Jurisdictional problems and navigational** - Piers as designed extend into DC waters.
- 5) **Phasing in details lacking**- inadequate attention to the needs of existing businesses – For example, Chadwick's needs parking to replace its current parking slated for elimination.
- 6) **Parking** – No adequate detailed parking plan to accommodate the southern end marina's development (e.g., Dandy currently has inadequate parking for its weekend clients. Chadwick's, Dandy, and Water Taxi staff need parking also.) Union Street traffic already overcrowded, including motor coaches.
- 7) **Drop-off area needed** for marina users.
- 8) **Storage needed** - For both commercial and private boat operators) Robinson Terminal storage is currently used by commercial operators.
- 9) **Seaport Foundation** - Plan is vague regarding where Foundation programs would be relocated
- 10) **Dock/pier relationship** - develop both dock and pier in a way that supports each other.
- 11) **Proposed marina design**
 - Marina would need at least 250-260 slips to generate revenue to cover the costs (vs. the 110 proposed)
 - Another part as currently designed would likely to catch logs.
 - A design extending into DC waters will require NPS approval and may require act of Congress to implement.

- A new channel would be needed to provide water access to DC (Army Corps participation.)
- Annual maintenance dredging for current concrete pier design likely to be \$2-3 million/year.

Hotels: Discussion - Are there viable alternative uses of these sites?

- 1) Planners need to study further hotel types envisioned and their potential positive and negative impacts.
- 2) Some interest in why, NPS approved a mixed-use plan for Robinson Terminal in 1982 that opposed hotels in the mix, wondering whether concerns from back then might have any relevance today.
- 3) An interest in possible alternative uses for the hotel sites - Art League activities, an archeology and/or Seaport Foundation museum were suggested – while recognizing that revenue sources to pay for them have not been identified. Waterfront development models of Charleston, San Francisco, and Key West waterfronts, and Chicago lakefront areas were offered as attractive alternative concepts
- 4) A desire to avoid the Georgetown waterfront concept.
- 5) Awareness of potential city revenue benefits of Waterfront hotels - estimated at \$1 million per hotel.
- 6) Should there be a special Waterfront tax district? Is a BID likely?

Waterfront Committee Meeting Time

Several members raised and supported the idea of changing the Committee's monthly meeting time from 7:30 a.m. to late afternoon, perhaps 4 p.m.

Meeting ended 6:15 pm