

Summary Minutes

ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMISSION

Thursday, June 21, 2012

Alexandria City Hall, Room 2000

Members:

Present: Dennis Auld, Citizen, Park Planning District II
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Morgan Delaney, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Stewart Dunn, 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
Patricia (Pat) Miller, Commission on the Arts
Peter Pennington, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council
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: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat leaseholder
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Trey Hanbury, Citizen, Park Planning District I
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeological Commission
Melinda (Mindy) Lyle, Citizen, Park Planning District III
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)

City Staff: Jack Browand, Acting Deputy Director, Parks Operations, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Faye Dastgheib, Transportation Planning, Department of Transportation and Engineering Services (T&ES)
Sandra Marks, Division Chief, Transportation Planning, T&ES
Nancy Williams, Department of Planning and Zoning (P&Z)

Guests: Engin Artemel
Brian Buzzell
Tina Fink, Toole Design Group
Dan Goodman, Toole Design Group
Lauren Kaufmann, Toole Design Group
Stephanie Landrum, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership
Christina Mindrup, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership
Maria Ross, Dandy Dinner Cruises

Welcome and Introductions.

The meeting was called to order at 4 PM and Commissioners, staff and guests introduced themselves.

Overview of the Union Street Corridor Circulation Study

Marks introduced the Toole Design Group consulting team working on the study and explained that the Union Street Corridor study had been initiated to implement the Waterfront Small Area Plan's direction that a baseline traffic and circulation study along the Union Street Corridor be completed prior to the City's approving Waterfront redevelopment plans. The goal of the briefing was to facilitate early Commission inputs as data is collected, organized and evaluated. Marks said additional Commission briefings were planned.

Goodman and Kaufmann said the study would provide data and options affecting a variety of multi-modal traffic and parking issues along the Union Street area from north of Pendleton Street to Jefferson Street and would consider traffic information for Union Street and streets feeding into Union Street. Data being collected would cover existing traffic conditions, variances by time of day and day of the week, and capture a variety of stakeholder perspectives on current issues. Options would then be developed for improving the safety and comfort of vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians using the Union Street corridor. Goodman said the data-driven study was currently at a "collect and assess" stage and a challenge would be to develop options that address the sometimes-competing needs of businesses, residents and visitors. Public outreach would be a key element of the study and information would be captured through meetings with a variety of stakeholders, intercept surveys with people on Union Street, meetings with the Waterfront Commission, and a public meeting. The consultants said they planned to present alternatives and recommendations at their August Commission briefing.

The consultants would be reviewing information from a variety of sources, including data related to the current Old Town Area Parking Study (OTAPS) and implementation of the Wayfinding Plan and Bikeshare program. Consultants had already reviewed recommendations and data from previous City studies: the 2011 Waterfront Small Area Plan, the March 2008 Comprehensive Master Transportation Plan (multi-modal emphasis), the June 2008 Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Plan, the February 2010 Old Town Area Parking Study and Implementation Plan, the May 2010 Alexandria Waterfront Traffic Impact Study, the 2010 Wayfinding Study Design Guidelines, the 2008-2010 Motor Coach Task Force and the January 2002 Windmill Hill Park Consensus Plan, and five-year crash data. Fink said 5-year crash data through April 2012 had shown four crashes at the King/Union Street intersection and 15 crashes along the Union Street corridor but noted that crash data did not capture either user comfort or near-misses.

Fink provided an overview of traffic data collected during May and June, including peak hour turning counts at intersections, 12-hour daytime counts, week-long traffic counts with car volume and speed, bicycle volume, delivery truck loading and unloading along the unit block of King Street, motor coach loading and unloading on the unit block of King Street and the Strand, parking data on overnight parking and 7 AM to 7 PM parking analyses, and general observations of pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular traffic. It was explained that “peak hour” refers to the highest two-hour time period within a two- to four-hour time morning or afternoon commute period and can vary with the intersection. For example, on Friday peak time is 6-8 PM, but is 4-6 PM Mondays through Thursdays. Fink said the highest hourly pedestrian traffic on Union Street was recorded on Saturdays at mid-day.

Pennington asked if data had captured so-called “predator traffic”, vehicles that cruise a neighborhood looking for parking spots. The consultants said it did not. Marks said inter-modal conflicts and pedestrian congestion pose more of a challenge for Union Street than does the corridor’s ability to handle its traffic volume. . She said detailed information about daily and hourly volumes would be included in the study’s technical memo to be provided for the Commission’s August briefing.

The consultants said daily traffic counts were highest on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Peak hour turning movement counts, including breakouts by mode, had been conducted for three intersections on a Thursday evening, Union/King Streets, Fairfax/King Streets, and Washington/King Streets. The study collected Thursday evening data for Union/King because, even though visitor traffic was higher on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, Thursday was the only evening for which comparable reference data was available for the other two intersections. Of the three, traffic was heaviest at the Union/King Street intersection. The consultants said a peak Saturday total traffic volume at King/Union Street was recorded at 4,500 between 6 and 8 PM, including 3,800 pedestrians.

For future briefings, Commissioners asked that printouts of data be provided. Staff said a technical memo presenting the data would be provided for the Commission’s August meeting.

Discussion of Key Issues for the Study ***Motor Coaches and Delivery Trucks***

Commissioners asked for the study to break out data on motor coaches and delivery trucks instead of combining it into a single “heavy vehicle” category as the data summary had done. Van Fleet asked that exact data on time and volume of motor coach and delivery trucks be included and said there is little supervision or ticketing of tour buses or delivery vehicles. Commissioners said that although responsible businesses advise their visitors of City policies designating locations for motor coaches to pick up and deliver passengers improved enforcement is needed. Van Fleet said the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA) should develop a system to regulate tour buses visiting Old Town and that effective ticketing of motor coaches and delivery trucks is needed to provide data about actual violations. Pennington said the

British practice of imposing weight limits for vehicles using older streets should be considered.

Goodman asked Commissioners to consider what works well on Union Street and which aspects of traffic need particular attention.

The King/Union Street intersection, the area's activity hub, was of particular concern. Some Commissioners, such as Dunn and Watters, said the congestion created by mixed modes on Union Street, especially during weekends and evenings, added to the area's vitality, that the slower traffic helped reduce intermodal conflicts, but safe passage through the King/Union intersection needs to be better managed.

Commissioners said excessive bicycle speed along the corridor is a problem and Bernstein asked that the study consider how and whether having a bikeshare docking station east of Fairfax Street might add to current conflicts between vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.

Improved Enforcement

Commissioners said stricter enforcement of traffic regulations is needed for all modes to help move traffic safely through this intersection, especially during peak hours. The failure of cars, bicycles and pedestrians to respect right-of-way regulations was identified as a major contributor to traffic tie-ups and Commissioners urged that an APD or Traffic Enforcement officer be stationed at the King/Union intersection during peak hours to manage traffic. The consultants said APD had been among the Union Street stakeholders already interviewed for the study.

Preserving a Pedestrian-Friendly Area

Commissioners said keeping the area pedestrian-friendly should be a top priority and noted a recent discussion on WAMU's Kojo Nnamdi show had commended the City for preserving its historic character and its pedestrian-friendly nature. Commissioners said the City should publicize its pedestrian-friendly aspects. Staff said any expansion of the Union Street corridor's pedestrian walk areas would require areas used by vehicles to be reduced.

Commissioners discussed options for pedestrianizing the King/Union Street area, including closing the unit block and 100 blocks of King Street to all or most vehicles during the summer months and/or at other peak times. Van Fleet, who had been president of the Old Town Civic Association (OTCA) in 2006, said 75 percent of OTCA members who lived in the area had supported the weekend pedestrianization, but that businesses had opposed the idea because it conflicted with their deliveries and pickups. Pennington said that in European cities' pedestrian areas most deliveries are conducted in early morning, but for deliveries throughout the day the delivery vehicles move through the pedestrian area at pedestrian speeds. Hafer said the numbers of pedestrians who had taken advantage of the pedestrian area had probably been fewer than expected because the trial had not been well publicized and the temperatures had been in the high 90s at the time. Bernstein said residents should be included in the planning process early and the current Union Street study should be more broadly

publicized. Artemel said that improvement was unlikely without better traffic management. He suggested trying a pedestrian-only zone first for Fridays through Sundays, then perhaps expanding it throughout the week during summer. He said that merchants might be willing to contribute to the costs of increased enforcement since it would improve access to their businesses.

Macek said the study should include the option of eliminating parking near the King/Union intersection so that crosswalks could be widened into “Beatley bulb-outs,” similar to those in front of the Monaco Hotel in the 400 block of King Street. Bernstein said if Waterfront visitors had to use a bikeshare docking station at Market Square rather than one near Union Street, as planned, it would encourage people to walk rather than bike down to the Waterfront. Baum asked whether the continuous Waterfront pedestrian walkway proposed by the Waterfront Small Area Plan might mitigate pedestrian volume along Union Street. The consultants said options would be considered for providing local alternative routes for pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Delaney, who lives on lower King Street, said pedestrian congestion on King Street can at times make it difficult for cars to cross King Street. Fox said that because the non-stop flow of pedestrian traffic at King and Lee Streets creates a major challenge for motorists the option of adding a traffic light there should be considered. Commissioners said that if traffic conflicts near King/Union Street were to be significantly mitigated Waterfront activities would eventually need to be dispersed beyond the current King/Union Street hub. Bernstein, Delaney and Watters said proposals that would move some traffic away from the King/Union Street hub and into neighboring areas would need to integrate public inputs effectively so that a stakeholder consensus could be developed.

Bicycles

Macek said that, with the exception of King/Union Streets, the Union Street corridor works relatively well for pedestrians, cars and bicycles but the problem of cyclists creating traffic hazards because they do not follow traffic laws has been raised at every Waterfront Commission meeting. Commissioners asked the study to consider ideas for ways that using one-way street designations for Fairfax Street and Lee Street, as well as the unit block of King Street, might help mitigate congestion in the area. Hafer asked if having these as one-way streets might let a bike lane be added to them.

Commissioners said the challenge created by having traffic from three bicycle paths enter Union Street north of Pendleton Street needs to be considered, even though this is outside the Union Street area included in the study, and that enforcement was needed to encourage cyclists to stop or slow at intersections and to reduce their overall speed. The consultants said ideas were being considered for how to mitigate this problem, including designating separate local and thru-traffic bicycle routes, and invited suggestions for how physical or operational changes might encourage cyclists to follow traffic laws. Commissioners said they would like to consider suggestions from subject matter experts on this and other problem areas.

Implementing and Testing Options Early

Miller, Van Fleet, Bernstein and other Commissioners said it was important to identify and try out a variety of options to mitigate Union Street traffic problems now so that the most effective measures could be identified and implemented before traffic changes related to Waterfront redevelopment could become evident.

Watters said the corridor's problems included thru-traffic that tends to speed, evening traffic that can be difficult for pedestrians to maneuver through, and morning peak hours when delivery trucks clog the area and parking is difficult. Pennington and other Commissioners said options to reduce Union Street traffic speed were particularly important in the Windmill Hill Park area since currently cars tend to accelerate in this area heavily used by children and families visiting the park. Staff said options for lowering the speed on Union Street near Windmill Hill Park are being considered.

The consultants invited Commissioners to suggest outcomes that would indicate that traffic and circulation problems along the Union Street Corridor had been successfully mitigated. Ideas included reducing overall traffic numbers, improving traffic management at the King/Union intersection, stricter enforcement of traffic regulation for all modes, especially motor coaches and bicycles, eliminating motor coaches on Union Street, implementing measures that address the grid feeding into Union Street, improved signage, and a City effort to publicize the City as a walking community.

Macek said that, with the exception of the King/Union intersection, Union Street works relatively well for motorists and pedestrians, but bicycle speed and failure to respect traffic regulations are a continuing problem and that to address the King/Union Streets congestion options should be considered to disperse activities and pedestrianize the area. He said actions were needed to improve enforcement of current motor coach regulations, and to reduce speeds in the area near Windmill Hill Park.

Pennington said either the study or ACVA should survey visitors and tourists about their perspectives on safety and comfort to provide baseline information against which feedback could be measured after changes are implemented. Bernstein said broader and more visible outreach to residents publicizing the current process is needed so that proposals can be developed that reflect a stakeholder consensus. Macek encouraged Commissioners to publicize the ongoing study to their constituents as part of this process.

Bikeshare Docking Station

Marks reported that a location recommended by the Commission, on Prince Street at Union Street, the intersection's northeast corner, had been chosen from among the 10 that the Committee had considered and staff analyzed. She said the pilot program would be reviewed by Council annually and no decision would be made about the program's future in the city until at least its third year of its operation so that sufficient data would be available on the program's performance.

Windmill Hill Park Bulkhead Safety Fence

Browand reported that the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) had, at its meeting the previous evening, unanimously voted to defer installation of the City's proposed safety fence around the bulkhead and asked that a modified design be presented to the BAR at its July 25, 2012 meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM