

Summary Minutes

ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMISSION

Thursday, August 23, 2012

Alexandria City Hall, Room 2000

Members:

Present: Dennis Auld, Citizen, Park Planning District II
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Morgan Delaney, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Art Fox, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business and Professional Association
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen from west of Washington St. and Chair
Townsend A. (Van) Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association

Excused: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Stewart Dunn, Alexandria Planning Commission
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat leaseholder
Trey Hanbury, Citizen, Park Planning District I
Melinda (Mindy) Lyle, Citizen, Park Planning District III
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeological Commission
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.
Christa Watters, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.

City Staff: Rich Baier, Director, Department of Transportation and Engineering Services (T&ES)
Officer Michael Booth, Alexandria Police Department (APD)
Tom Canfield, City Architect, Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Faye Dastgheib, Transportation Planning, T&ES
Officer Edmund Dougherty, APD
Faroll Hamer, Director, P&Z
Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager
Cheryl Lawrence, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs (RPCA)
Sandra Marks, Division Chief, Transportation Planning, T&ES
Jeremy McPike, Director, Department of General Services (GS)
Catherine Miliaras, P&Z/Board of Architectural Review
Karl Moritz, Deputy Director, P&Z
Iris Portny, Recording Secretary, RPCA
Officer Patrick Taylor, APD

Nancy Williams, Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests: Engin Artemel
Brian Buzzell
Tina Fink, Toole Design Group (TDG)
Dan Goodman, TDG
Judy Guse-Noritake, Chair, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Michael Hobbs
Lauren Kaufmann, TDG
Kate McMahon
Caleb Norville
David Olinger
Kathryn Papp
Joanne Platt
Joanna Schwevens, TDG
Mike Young

Welcome and Introductions

Macek called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM and Commissioners, staff and guests introduced themselves. Macek said the meeting would proceed in the absence of the quorum for the purpose of receiving the day's briefing.

Update on Waterfront Plan Implementation Activities

The Beachcombers Restaurant Site (0 Prince Street)

McPike summarized and requested comments on a Request for Proposals (RFP) that General Services (GS) planned to issue for a land lease to operate a restaurant as an ancillary use to open space on this City-owned property. McPike said a detailed history of the property, developed by Alexandria Archaeology, is on the City website and the now-vacant Beachcombers building was designated historically significant in April 2012 by the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) for its cultural significance. The Beachcombers restaurant originally on the site was one of the first non-industrial uses of the City's Waterfront. He said the historic structure of the balconies has been documented and the City is updating a structural review of the building completed prior to the 2011 earthquake. McPike said having a restaurant on the site would be an "active reuse" that complements the City's Waterfront Small Area Plan (Waterfront Plan) and the new park planned for the Waterfront east of The Strand. The City's goal is to find a business likely to be successful that complements the setting. McPike said proposals would be evaluated on factors that include price and a potential lessee's intended treatment and operation of the building.

McPike said lease terms have been designed to ensure the City could reacquire the lease if the leaseholder's business were terminated and the property left vacant for an extended period of time. McPike said the City wanted a leaseholder to have a long enough lease to recoup its initial investment in the property and operate a profitable business. The City has estimated building upgrades valued at slightly under a million dollars would be needed prior to a restaurant's opening. A 10-year lease is expected with two five-year renewal options and an option for the City to buy out the lease if the

property becomes vacant for 18 months or other lease terms are defaulted upon. McPike said he expected the RFP to be ready for release by late October and the City to review proposals over the fall 2012/winter 2013. He said GS would arrange a property inspection for potential applicants after the RFP's issuance. The City plans to publicize the RFP widely.

There was widespread concern among Commissioners that the lease terms should protect the City from repeating its experience with the long-vacant Torpedo Factory Food Pavilion. Van Fleet, Hall and Bernstein said the RFP should not be restricted to proposals for a restaurant on the site. McPike said a restaurant was the preferred use because it would be likely to attract people to the Waterfront, unlike an office building. Van Fleet and Bernstein said a restaurant would worsen Old Town's traffic congestion. McPike said a suitable application would include a plan addressing the restaurant's parking needs.

Bernstein and Van Fleet asked why the property was being leased and not sold. McPike said leasing would let the City preserve its role in deciding how the property would be developed and also receive commercial tax revenues generated by the restaurant's business. Noritake said she opposed selling the property since, over the long run, the City would have preserved its ownership of scarce Waterfront property whose use might change over time if the building were to become unusable. Noritake said the City should direct funds from the land-lease to the Open Space Fund since the City, originally planning to tear down the Beachcombers building, had bought the property with Open Space funds but the property was not being used as open space..

Noritake asked how far the land-lease would extend from the building's footprint and how the area would interface with the new Waterfront park planned for the area. McPike said the lease would not include the main public walkway providing public access to the Waterfront and the Dandy.

Landscape Architectural Design Services

Williams reported that the RFP for Waterfront Landscape Architectural Design Services. was issued August 14, 2012, and that a pre-bidders conference, held August 23, 2012, had attracted representatives from about 15 firms interested in submitting proposals. Proposals are due to the City's Procurement Office by September 18, 2012.

Presentation and Discussion: Union Street Corridor Study

Options and Concepts: Overview

Marks said the Toole Design Group (TDG) briefing would present the initial concepts of alternatives being developed to improve multi-modal traffic and parking usage along the Union Street Corridor (the Corridor) and reflected summer 2012 data and stakeholder inputs on Corridor issues related to safety and comfort of vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians who use the street for residential, business, and recreational purposes. She said police and other City staff were also interviewed regarding practical constraints, environmental resources, engineering challenges, historic preservation, and other issues bearing on the alternatives being developed. Marks said stakeholders contacted for the study included residents, the Chamber of Commerce, businesses on or serving

the Corridor, the Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, civic associations such as the Old Town Civic Association, the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, and other organizations.

Goodman said stakeholder inputs were gathered via surveys, intercepts of bicyclists using the Corridor, and meetings with stakeholder groups. A public meeting to discuss the alternatives was planned for September 19 at City Hall. The data collected covered cars, pedestrians, bicyclists, motor coaches, delivery trucks, and parking. Bicyclists using the Mount Vernon Trail had been asked, among other questions, why they take particular routes through the City and what actions might encourage them to use different routes.

The meeting was the second of three Commission meetings scheduled to review the study as it progressed: the first, June 21, to discuss data being collected, the second to discuss alternatives developed in response to the data collected, and the third, scheduled for September 27, to review revisions to the alternatives made in response to additional stakeholder inputs, including those at a public meeting planned for September 19.

Coordination with other Waterfront planning

Marks said the Union Street Corridor Study recommendations would be coordinated with staff working on the City's Flood Mitigation Engineering Study and the Waterfront landscape architecture plan to be developed.

Overview

Goodman said many issues about which data had been collected were proposed by Commissioners at their June 19 meeting, including Commissioners' direction that in-person traffic management options be included and that recommendations first be implemented on a pilot project basis before final decisions are made. Goodman said a problem such as bicycles not stopping at stop signs, raised previously by Commissioners, would require choices about in-person traffic management as well infrastructure modifications. He said user needs varying by location, day and by time-of-day were reflected by the recommendations.

Site-specific Improvements: Presentation and Discussion

Fink reviewed the issues, background and recommendations for five Corridor alternatives and four site-specific locations developed to address Union Street's multi-modal traffic problems. The four sites addressed were the (1) Mount Vernon Trail Connection at Pendleton Street, (2) unit block of King Street, (3) King/Union Street intersection, and (4) Windmill Hill Park between Wolfe and Gibbon Streets.

Location 1: Mount Vernon Trail Connection

Fink reviewed potential interim and long-term improvements for the Mount Vernon Trail (the Trail) connection that transitions the route from the Trail to its continuation along City streets. Fink said long-term improvements could be incorporated as Robinson Terminal North (RTN) is developed. Issues included: (1) improving turning ease for Trail bicyclists onto and from Pendleton Street (2) the pedestrian crossing at

Union/Pendleton Streets, and (3) the lack of a connecting sidewalk on the eastern side of Union Street to connect Oronoco Park and Founders Park.

Proposed Interim improvements included (1) striping a crossing on the roadway; and (2) narrowing vehicular travel lanes to free up space for a striped pedestrian walkway along Union Street's eastern side. **Proposed long-term improvements** included (1) moving curbs closer to the road's center to let sidewalks be widened on either side of the street; and (2) constructing medians to formalize interim improvements for enhancing bicyclists' left turn access to/from the Trail.

Locations 2 and 3: Unit Block of King Street and King/ Union Street Intersection

Fink reviewed alternatives designed to implement the Waterfront Plan's vision of creating a pedestrian hub in the unit block of King Street that limited motorized access to emergency vehicles, motor coaches, delivery vehicles and the King Street Trolley (the Trolley). Design actions proposed included creating a plaza-like environment at the foot of King Street, widening crosswalks, adding curb extensions at King/Union Streets, and an enhanced Trolley stop. Marks said infrastructure changes to implement the concept of a pedestrian policy would be coordinated with T&ES engineers working on flood mitigation planning to ensure their viability.

King/Union Street Intersection

Fink said the analysis focused on ideas to improve pedestrian safety related to crowding at crosswalks and intersections. Fink said options include widening the crosswalk, adding curb extensions, and adding a traffic signal. She said a traffic signal had the advantage of defining pedestrian-vehicular right-of-way but also had the potential disadvantages of increased pedestrian wait-times to cross the street (up to 40 seconds) and the risk that pedestrian-vehicular accidents might increase if drivers with a green light proceeded into the intersection without checking for pedestrians walking against the light. At their June 19 meeting Commissioners had asked that the options of adding curb extensions ("Beatly bulb-outs") and/or a traffic signal be considered.

Location 4: Windmill Hill Park at Wolfe Street and Gibbon Street

Fink reviewed several options to address issues related to cars traveling faster along this part of the Corridor and of pedestrians and bicyclists entering Union Street from the Wilkes Street Tunnel. She said the alternatives built upon concepts from the Waterfront Plan and the Windmill Park Concept Plan and included options such as (1) adding a raised crossing and curb extensions to slow cars and increase pedestrian and bicyclist visibility, (2) adding a center median, and/or (3) adding a chicane (a traffic calming feature that lets only one vehicle pass at a time on a 2-way street, thus slowing the traffic.) Fink said all of the alternatives would add parking on the east side of Union Street between Gibbon Street and Wolfe Street. Macek asked that any local examples of chicanes be provided to the Commission. Goodman said any of the proposed site-specific improvements could be implemented as modules regardless of choices made for the full Corridor.

Discussion: Site Specific Improvements

Location 1: Mount Vernon Trail Connection

Macek, Noritake and other Commissioners recommended adding, as an interim improvement, a sidewalk or asphalt paved area for pedestrians to replace the current muddy strip along the east side of Union Street, next to the Robinson Terminal North building (RTN). Noritake said she favored using a street design with cars and tree wells sharing the parking lane rather keeping tree wells within the sidewalk area. She said a design offering two parking spaces, then a tree well in the parking lane could be considered and she shared a photograph of similar street layouts in Bonn, Germany. Macek said he supported this concept.

Buzzell asked if ways were considered to improve the safety problem when bicyclists leaving the Trail cross the uneven surface created by the railroad tracks after leaving the Trail. Fink said no measures were proposed but the issue could be reviewed further.

Motor Coach Relocation

Bernstein said more emphasis on pedestrian safety near Robinson Terminal North (RTN) was needed and the long unattractive rows of parked and idling motor coaches near RTN should be relocated since they create a pedestrian safety hazard. Van Fleet said motor coaches should be moved outside the Old and Historic District and their passengers shuttled in. Hall said parking and idling motor coaches should be relocated from Union Street and said the City should investigate whether motor coaches could park under the Woodrow Wilson Bridge again.

Locations 2 and 3: King/Union Streets Intersection and Unit Block of King Street Creating a pedestrian plaza on the Unit Block of King Street.

Delaney, Hafer, Macek, Noritake, Hall and others said they supported the concept. Noritake said a roadway design should omit curbs and gutters as a way to create a public realm area for non-vehicular traffic that would provide the flexibility to open up and close off the block to vehicles depending upon events and circumstances and do so in a way that would be fully accessible under the Americans for Disability Act (ADA accessible).

Macek supported the concept and said the idea of creating a pedestrian plaza at this location was discussed in the Waterfront Plan Work Group's report as a way to provide a public space at the foot of King Street earlier than the Waterfront Plan's proposed public square might be able to be implemented. Hall said she supported eliminating parking on the unit block of King Street. Fox said he supported creating a pedestrian plaza area here, but doing so should not create access problems for the Old Dominion Boat Club.

Adding a traffic light at the Union/King Street intersection

Macek said the issue at King/Union is not volume but how to move traffic to reduce congestion. Macek and Van Fleet opposed adding a traffic signal here and said in-person traffic direction should be added instead. Delaney and Auld said they supported adding a traffic signal. Delaney said the intersection was dangerous for both pedestrians and motorists. Delaney and Noritake said a signal should include an all-pedestrian crossing light. Auld said the options presented did not adequately address vehicular traffic at King/Union especially for eastbound cars on King Street that turn

right onto Union Street. He said removing parking in this area would facilitate turns and installing a signal here should not be avoided because pedestrians might ignore it.

Bernstein asked if moving the King Street Trolley stop at Union/King to Market Square had been considered. Marks said relocating Trolley stops was not within the study's parameters but the question could be considered. Hafer said she liked the idea of moving the Trolley waiting area from King Street's unit block but not the Trolley stop.

Curb Extensions' Potential Impact on Vehicular Turns

Delaney said he opposed adding extensions because they might impede emergency vehicles' access. Marks said the curb extension concept would be modified to accommodate actual usage at the site and flood mitigation planning. She said T&ES is also considering how to coordinate these concepts in a way that would create a pedestrian plaza. Macek said he supported adding curb extensions as a way to increase pedestrian safety and said barring left turns at the Union/King Streets intersection should be considered. Bernstein said she supported the no-left turn idea. Fox and Hall said parking should be eliminated on Union Street within a half-block or one block either way from the King/Union intersection.

Buzzell asked if Robinson Terminal had an agreement that specified that certain delivery vehicle access routes to their site be available. Staff said they would investigate the question.

Location 4: Windmill Hill Park (at Wolfe Street and Gibbon Street)

Potential impact of Union Street traffic calming measures on neighboring streets

Van Fleet, Noritake, Auld and other Commissioners said they were concerned that adding chicanes or other traffic calming measures might improve Union Street traffic but push through-traffic to Lee Street. Van Fleet said traffic volume and congestion, not speed, is the problem here. Goodman said the data collected for the study showed that cars travel at higher speeds along this part of the Corridor than in the core, but speeds are still relatively low. Noritake said the priority should be on improving pedestrian safety in this park area heavily frequented by children during peak traffic hours.

Bernstein asked if chicanes might hinder emergency vehicle access. Goodman said that the chicanes were designed to ensure that specific vehicle types can navigate through a chicane area.

Noritake said consideration should be given to how the two park areas might be knit together visually and functionally to create a combined park area, and to how to make this area more pedestrian-friendly. Hafer said she supported Noritake's idea that two chicanes, not one, be added on Union Street at each side of the park. Macek said the roadway design should present the street as being within Windmill Hill Park rather than running past it. Noritake said adding parking on the east side of the Union Street would separate the parks from each other. Instead she said ways should be considered to open up the view from the top down in this area traditionally used as a site for viewing boats traveling the river. She said the view area could be preserved by framing it by chicanes, trees and/or cars that leave the center area of the block open. She said the

view of the roadway from Windmill Hill Park should be factored into planning for this area.

Long-term adaptability of options proposed.

Macek said the options presented could be adapted over time as the Waterfront evolves. Van Fleet said he thought many of the proposed options addressed current conditions but not the changes likely as the Waterfront Plan is implemented over the next 20 years.

Corridor Alternatives: Presentation and Discussion

Overview of the Corridor's multimodal challenges.

Goodman reviewed general issues affecting traffic planning along the Corridor as a whole. The Corridor is a priority pedestrian and bicycle corridor with vehicular-pedestrian-bicycle traffic congestion problems that cannot be addressed by widening the roadway because it is a historic street. Central core conditions differ from those at the Corridor's periphery.

He said pedestrian traffic dominates Union Street in the core area, especially on Saturdays. 55 percent of Corridor users are pedestrian, but only 25 percent of Corridor space is allocated to pedestrians. 75 percent of Corridor space is allocated to cars and bicycles that constitute only 45 percent of Corridor users. Goodman said the idea of closing the Corridor's core area to vehicular traffic had been considered and rejected since it would change the street's historic mix of traffic supporting business, residential and visitor activities.

The roadway currently has eight feet of effective sidewalks on each side, seven feet for parking, 26 feet shared by cars and bikes, and effectively four feet for pedestrians. Goodman said five alternative concepts were developed to address this problem, including Alternative 1 as a "No Change" option. "Effective sidewalk width" refers to space available without stoops, tree wells and other pedestrian obstructions.

Fink summarized key concepts of the five alternatives developed to address pedestrian clogging along the Corridor.

Fink said Alternative 1 preserves the Corridor as is.

Commissioners' comments: Van Fleet said he supported this option. He said he opposed any changes that would lessen the street width available for vehicles and opposed removing any on-street parking because it might impact local businesses. He said he favored removing trees from the west side of the street on certain blocks to improve pedestrian access on the sidewalks.

Fink said Alternative 2 increases sidewalk space by moving tree wells from sidewalks into the parking lane, and narrows car and bicycle travel space from 26 feet to 22 feet. A proposed design for the parking lane would alternate parking spaces with tree wells.

Commissioners' comments: Macek, Noritake, Hafer, Bernstein, Fox and Delaney said they supported this option for the Corridor. Delaney said he supported widening sidewalks but opposed curb extensions for their potential impact on emergency vehicle access. Delaney, Macek and Bernstein said trees should be kept along both sides of the street as an historic character-defining feature. Hafer said space needs to be increased for pedestrians, as long as the loading area in front of the Torpedo Factory is preserved.

Delaney and Fox said tree wells should be moved as trees die. Bernstein said the Founders Park Community Association had been told by the City tree wells could only be moved as trees died. Noritake said a desire to preserve trees in less-than-ideal current locations where their trunks and roots create obstacles for pedestrians and wheelchairs should not prevent the City from implementing the best plan for the Corridor's future. Van Fleet said trees should be removed from Union Street's west side in the area of the Public House since trees and roots make sidewalk access difficult.

Fink said Alternative 3, a shared street, has a flush, curb-less surface used by all modes of traffic. Fink said the advantage is that cars travel at slower speeds, all users need to negotiate right-of-way, and user safety is improved. She said this design would reflect the way multi-mode traffic currently uses Union Street and showed examples of similar designs used in Cambridge, MA, Silver Spring, MD, and Denmark.

Commissioners' comments: Macek, Hafer and Noritake supported the concept. Macek said a shared street would be appropriate within the core area between Prince and Cameron Streets but not for the full Corridor. Noritake said eliminating curbs and gutters would be especially useful for the Corridor's core area since it would create a more flexible street surface that could be made available to different modes of traffic depending on time of day, time of week and season. Hafer said she supported any measure that increased pedestrian space as long as the loading area in front of the Torpedo Factory is preserved.

Fink said Alternative 4 would remove on-street parking from the Corridor to free up seven additional feet for sidewalk use.

Marks said the option of pedestrians and bicycles sharing the additional space could be considered, but not a separate bicycle facility because a bicycle facility would encourage higher bicycle speeds.

Commissioners' comments: Fox, Bernstein, Hall, Macek, Noritake, Delaney. Hafer and Delaney said they support removing some or all on-street parking as long as the Torpedo Factory's loading zone is preserved. Macek said parking might be removed at the Cameron/Union and Duke/Union Street intersections and the space used as loading zones during certain times of day. Noritake said on-street parking should be barred during peak hours. Bernstein said the proposal needed to be coordinated with the Old Town Area Parking Study and improved signage would be needed to direct drivers to available parking. Hall said the concept should first be tested as a one-month pilot program.

Fink said Alternative 5 would convert Union Street to one-way at selected points.

Fink said this would reduce inter-modal conflicts and expand sidewalk width by 9-13 feet. Marks said there were several options for managing this such as creating a one-way north or south section only between Duke and Cameron Streets. Marks said the one-way option would be refined to reflect the Commission's feedback

Commissioners' Comments Bernstein and Hafer supported a one-way street if both Lee and Union Streets were converted to one-way streets in opposing directions. Macek and Fox opposed the idea. Macek said it would confuse drivers and Fox said traffic might be pushed onto King Street. Macek, Hall and others supported barring left turns at King/Union as an alternative to relieve congestion. Noritake said it made more sense to remove parking spaces along a couple blocks in the core area to reduce congestion rather than convert parts of Union Street to one-way.

Additional concepts discussed

Define the City's pedestrian/vehicular priorities for the Corridor.

Bernstein said the City needs to decide if the Corridor should be primarily pedestrian or should create a balance between pedestrians and cars. She said further actions to improve pedestrian safety are needed.

Test actions as limited pilot projects before deciding whether to implement them.

Hall and others said proposals such as eliminating parking along some or all sections of the Corridor should be tested to observe their impact.

Flexible parking

Fink (TDG) said using flexible parking could enable alternate active uses of parking space areas, for example on-street dining. She said Mountain View, CA uses parking and walking surfaces with similar elevations and also bans parking during peak pedestrian traffic hours. Fink suggested this would be suitable as a pilot project.

Commissioners' comments: Delaney said the advantages of concepts should be weighed against the possibility they might undercut the historic character-defining features of City streets.

More options are needed to address vehicular needs

Auld said the alternatives address pedestrian needs well but not those of vehicles, especially those turning from King Street onto Union Street and proposed eliminating parking at the King/Union corners. Goodman said the needs of cars had been considered. For example, the option of eliminating cars in the Corridor's core area had been considered and rejected to preserve Union Street's historic commercial nature and accommodate multi-modal traffic.

Remove trees from the west side of the Corridor.

Van Fleet proposed this for a one or two block area, for example in front of the Public House, as a way to increase pedestrian's sidewalk walking area without narrowing the street.

Commissioners' comments: Delaney said historic character-defining sidewalk features need to be recognized when considering options such as moving tree wells, removing trees from one side of the street, or widening sidewalks. Macek and Bernstein agreed and said Alternative 2's proposal to move tree wells from sidewalks to the parking lane should be used instead.

Bar left turns at King/Union Streets intersection to lessen congestion.

Macek proposed 'no left turn' here instead of converting parts of Union Street to one-way. Hall supported the idea and said it should be tested as a pilot project first.

Limit truck deliveries along the Corridor to early morning hours

Macek, Bernstein, Van Fleet, Noritake, Fox and Delaney supported this. Delaney said loading zones should be kept for the Torpedo Factory and other local businesses.

Commissioners thanked the briefers for providing detailed materials in advance of the meeting.

Announcements and Public Discussion

Hobbs asked if a version of the presentation would be made available to the public. Macek noted that the draft version had been posted to the Commission's website and offered to forward a link to Hobbs.

Marks announced that the Corridor study's public meeting was scheduled for September 19, 2012 at 5:30 PM.

Macek announced the Commission's next meeting would be Tuesday, September 18, 2012.

Macek announced the Commission would hold a special meeting on September 27, 2012 to discuss the Union Street Corridor recommendations and public inputs received at the September 19 meeting.

Goodman announced that briefings on the Corridor study's recommendations were planned during the fall for the Planning Commission, Transportation Commission and Council.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 PM.