

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting September 15, 2009

Members: Engin Artemel
Jay Atkinson
Mel Fortney
Mike Geissinger
Doug Gosnell
Linda Hafer
Nathan Macek
Peter Pennington
Pete Peterson
Susan Pettey
John Renner
Robert Taylor

City Staff: Kathleen Beeton, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Roger Blakeley, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Lt. Len Fouch, Police Department
Jim Hixon, RPCA
Laura Seidler, RPCA
Jim Spengler, RPCA

Guests: Harry Harrington
David Olinger
Joanne Platt
Van Van Fleet

Welcome and Introductions

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the June meeting.

NOAA Presentation

Hixson said that the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) would like to install a historic marker and weather station on a buoy south of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. The buoy would commemorate the historic waterway and monitor tide, wind, temperature, and other data. Presentation postponed.

Waterfront Flooding Remediation

This presentation was postponed.

Update on Waterfront Planning

Beeton reported that since June P&Z had hosted several waterfront tours in Alexandria (by foot and by water) and a field trip to waterfront locations in New York City. The next community waterfront planning meeting would be September 29 at the Torpedo Factory. She said that the meeting would have very little staff discussion or presentations; the primary goal is to receive citizen feedback on the waterfront plan proposals that have been developed. She said that staff hoped to learn whether the plans were heading in the right direction. She said that further presentations would occur at a P&Z Commission work session scheduled for Oct. 6 at 6:30 p.m. and a City Council work session scheduled for Oct. 27 at 5:30 p.m. After September, the next community meeting would likely be in November.

In response to a question from Macek, Beeton said that P&Z would not have much in the way of materials for participants to review in advance of the September 29 workshop, but would have a long window to receive citizen comments on the proposed plans and would distribute the written plan well in advance of subsequent meetings.

Artemel asked whether it was appropriate to meet with Council and the P&Z Commission before everyone had a chance to respond to plan, but noted that the October meetings would be work sessions and the bodies would not be acting on the plans on these dates. Beeton said the goal was to keep the P&Z Commission and City Council apprised as the process goes along.

Artemel requested that P&Z staff present findings to the Waterfront Committee in October as well, and Beeton agreed.

Introduction of James Spengler

Petty introduced Spengler, the new director of RPCA. He said he was glad to be working in his hometown of Alexandria. He said it was a very different city than when he grew up here, and was stunning to see the positive developments here since then. He said he looked forward to working with the waterfront Committee and was happy to attend our meetings and assist as he could.

Update on Waterfront Security

Blakeley reported that video cameras had been installed at the marina and were being used to monitor the area. He said that cameras could be monitored in real-time. The video was being archived for a 30-day period and would then be erased unless police requested a video for law enforcement purposes. He said the cameras could be used as webcams but additional software would need to be purchased and the concept would need to be coordinated, approved and initiated by the City's Information Technology Department.

He said that marina staff members have tried to catch individuals trespassing on boats after hours by changing patrol routines, which had been somewhat successful deterring unwanted activities.

Regarding the marina gates, Blakeley reported that the City had received one bid to construct and install gates at each pier for \$107,000, which was being analyzed by the City procurement office. He said that the bid was higher than the \$100,000 originally budgeted by the City because it included features in addition to the base design, such as security equipment. He said he didn't believe that the City would accept this bid, in part because the contractor had expressed doubt about whether the system would work. Therefore, Blakeley said that Seidler would visit other marinas in the area to learn how they had gated their piers. RPCA would then determine whether any of the contractors who had installed facilities at other marinas were available under an existing City procurement contract. He noted, however, that revised design would again be subject to review by the City Board of Architectural Review.

Pennington asked whether pricing at the Alexandria marina was competitive. Seidler responded that RPCA monitored prices and amenities of other marinas. She said that the Alexandria marina was designed in 1980s when the average boat was smaller. She said that many modern boats require a wider beam berth than the Alexandria marina offers. She also noted that the marina has older electrical and water connections that could deter modern boaters. She said that RPCA did a fee study found that its fees were competitive with other area marinas. She noted that Alexandria didn't charge as much as National Harbor, but didn't offer the facilities of National Harbor, either.

Artemel stated that didn't have a boat but did spend a lot of time on the waterfront and noted that dockmaster Hixon was frequently present. Artemel thanked Hixon for providing information to visitors and providing a positive influence on the waterfront.

Fouch reported that over the last 60 days there had been three reported calls for assistance in the dock area. These included a disorderly call that resulted in an arrest, a trespassing charge, and a hazard call regarding lights out at marina. He said he had responded to the issue regarding the coding of marina's street address in City's emergency dispatch system. He said that foot patrols had been increased, and cameras would assist police as well. Gosnell noted that his boat alarm had sounded many fewer times in recent months.

Fouch reported that there were legal requirements that limited the ability of police to arrest trespassers. He said that Alexandria judges required police to have given notice before a trespassing charge could proceed. In effect, would-be trespassers must be verbally told to leave the premises before they can be arrested for trespassing. He said that if desired, a property owner could issue a

barment order that bans individuals from their property (such as a boat), after which subsequent acts could be immediately charged as trespassing.

Gosnell asked for clarification regarding whether trespassers were defined as persons on boats or the pier. Fouch says there was a point at which an infraction became more than trespassing. He said that if individuals were caught on a boat and the owner wished to press charges, there would be an investigation and the charge could be for more than trespassing, such as breaking and entering or burglary.

Seidler said there has been a recent issue with a boater who has been illegally docking at the Alexandria marina without paying. The boat had been tied to a gazebo at the end of a pier, which could have caused damage. She said that the Alexandria marina and other area marinas have had an ongoing problem with this particular boater illegally docking. She said that Alexandria would need to serve notice of barment before the boater could be charged with trespassing, given how trespassing charges are enforced by Alexandria courts. Gosnell noted that there could be alternatives under maritime law to enforce remedies against problem boaters. Pettey asked whether the issue would appropriate for a marina subcommittee to discuss. Blakeley said the City would be happy to review the issue with a subcommittee.

Artemel stated that there had recently been several break-ins in Old Town North and Rivergate. He said he had noticed a lot of bicycle policeman and patrol cars, and appreciated the effort. Fouch reported that over the last 65 days, there had been an increase in burglaries in Old Town. He said there had been 25 in residences and storage sheds, excluding commercial burglaries (such as one at the Chart House Restaurant which was observed by a deliveryman and resulted in an arrest). He said that residents were generally out of town and away from the residences that were broken into. He said that while gone, residents had not had mail or newspapers stopped. In some cases, burglars had left door hangers or phone books on doorsteps to monitor whether residents were home. He said that descriptions of offenders vary, and there had only been one direct observation of a break-in in progress. He said items stolen included small flat-screen TVs, jewelry, silverware, and other items easy to carry away. He suggested that residents remain aware of the people in their neighborhood and call the police if they suspected anything suspicious. Hixon added that he lives at the end of South St. Asaph Street and noted that cars there had been recently stolen. He suggested locking car doors and leaving valuables out of view.

In response to a question from Atkinson, Fouch clarified the police hierarchy in Sector 1. Fouch said that he reported to Capt. Tammy Hooper, who manages Sector 1. Fouch oversees the day shift and Lt. James Bartlett manages the evening shift.

Discussion of Summer Events

Waterfront Festival: Blakeley said that it had been rainy before and during the festival and took about 6 weeks for the grounds to recover. As a result, he said there were more costs involved in restoring the parks this year, but they were covered in full by the Alexandria Chapter of the American Red Cross.

New York City Waterfront Tour: Renner described the tour as an eye-opener. He said that the tour hosts emphasized how they had paid for Battery Park improvements, first by building commercial improvements, then by developing the adjacent parks. He noted that Alexandria already had parks in place and could build the commercial around them. He said that New York City had created a Business Improvement District to develop Bryant Park in the heart of Manhattan. They discussed how they had involved food vendors. He noted that the parks were very active with people. He said the waterfront walks had been built wide enough to accommodate fire trucks, which supported pedestrians and bicyclists alike.

Pennington reported that there was a lot of shade in New York parks through the use of double-rows of trees. He said Bryant Park had loose chairs instead of bolted benches, which facilitated social interaction. He noted that the parks also had activities for children.

Petty said that two of the three parks had funding through a private foundation or dedicated BID revenue. She said that there was a challenge associated with keeping up parklands, just as there was for maintaining marinas, and funding is key. She said that a lot of the features in the New York parks were reflected in the Committee's waterfront principles adopted earlier in 2009.

Hafer said that there were a lot of great ideas, but the challenge was how to provide funding. She noted that there was a large difference between the density of New York and Alexandria. She said that Alexandria needed to view the entire City as the "adjacent" authority to fund improvements to its waterfront, as the waterfront should be viewed as a citywide resource.

Establishment of Marina Operations and Planning Subcommittee

Petty described some of the potential responsibilities of a Marina Operations and Planning Subcommittee, including marina improvements, funding, operations, maintenance, security, and other issues. She said that she saw the Waterfront Committee as the natural City committee/commission for monitoring marina issues.

Hafer asked whether the Subcommittee would be comprised of Waterfront Committee members or other members of the public. Petty said it would be comprised of Committee members, but could involve the general public.

Gosnell asked whether the Marina Operations and Planning Subcommittee would supersede the marina enterprise subcommittee established last year. Pettey confirmed that it would.

Subcommittee volunteers included Atkinson, Geissinger, Gosnell, Hafer, Pennington, and Pettey. Pettey nominated Gosnell to serve as Subcommittee chair. The Subcommittee held its first meeting on Thursday, Sept. 17.

Announcements

None.

Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 8:38 a.m.