

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting May 19, 2009

Members: Jay Atkinson
Christine Bernstein
Henry Brooks
Mel Fortney
Mike Geissinger
Doug Gosnell
Linda Hafer
Nathan Macek
Peter Pennington
Pete Peterson
Susan Pettey
John Renner

City Staff: Andrea Barlow, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Richard Baier, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Roger Blakeley, RPCA
Capt. Dianne Gittens, Police Department
Laura Seidler, RPCA

Guests: Susan Cohen
Frank Fannon, City Councilman-elect
Dene Garbow
Harry Harrington
Alan Harwood, EDAW
Sean McCabe, National Park Service
Kerry-Ann Powell
Andrea Swigart, EDAW
Van Van Fleet

Welcome and introductions

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of minutes from the April meeting

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

Update on Waterfront Planning

Harwood reviewed the two waterfront planning meetings held to date. He noted that a lot of the ideas presented came from large cities, but the waterfront areas within those cities that are of interest to Alexandria are in similar-scaled neighborhoods.

He said that there would be a boat tour on May 30 that would focus on Alexandria and its history, its previous waterfront plan, and its natural resources. The boat would travel from Jones Point Park to Daingerfield Island and would provide a different perspective of the waterfront.

He said on Saturday, June 27 there would be a two-part waterfront planning workshop. The morning session would include a report on findings and existing Waterfront conditions (including land use, zoning, and economic development) and outline opportunities available. The afternoon session would be to shape a collective vision for the waterfront. One of the highlights would be a large floorplan of the existing waterfront that would facilitate discussion. He said that participants would be broken into smaller discussion groups that would help to prioritize next steps for the waterfront.

Following the June workshop, there would be subsequent rounds of public review and comment and refinement of the plan, with public meetings roughly every other month.

Petty added that the Committee's annual Waterfront Walk would be expanded to support the waterfront planning effort.

Gosnell suggested that future waterfront boat tour announcements clarify that reservations were required.

Brooks asked for clarification on the process for development of the draft plan, asking who would ultimately make the decisions regarding what the plan would include. Harwood said that the plan would be to apply collective decision making throughout the process, with ultimate approval by the City Council. Brooks suggested receiving feedback from Council throughout the process.

Update on Waterfront Security

Blakeley said that there was a plan in place for improving security at the marina and circulated a memo to the Committee. RPCA would first approach Council regarding installation of cameras, followed by installation of temporary gates, with eventual installation of permanent gates. He announced that police patrols in the vicinity of the marina had been enhanced. In response to a question from Atkinson, Baier said that he would work to make sure that the procurement of the temporary gates advanced.

Gittens said that only one incident had been reported at the waterfront during the last month. Gosnell challenged whether there should be additional reports given one incident he had reported and another Atkinson had reported. Gittens said she would look into the issue.

Gosnell suggested that the memo regarding marina security be forwarded to slipholders. Seidler said that she would forward the memo to them.

Discussion of Remaining Draft Waterfront Principles

The Committee resumed its discussion of waterfront principles begun during the April meeting. Notes on each of the principles discussed during the meeting follow.

General Vision

1. *Encourage water-related development along sections of the Waterfront.**
[Request to clarify what “waterfront-related development” entails.]

Pennington stated that this principle was related to ensuring there was space along the waterfront for water-related activities. Pettey added that there were some activities more conducive to the waterfront than others and the preference would be for water-related activities.

The sense of the Committee was to include this statement as written.

2. *Waterfront should be open and accessible both to and from the river.*

The sense of the Committee was to include this statement as written.

Environmental Constraints/Impact

1. *To achieve the City’s goal of a citywide tree canopy of 40 percent, the planting of trees shall be encouraged along the Waterfront. Trees should not obscure sight lines to the river.*

Brooks stated that it would be difficult to enforce this. Pennington said the intent was to ensure that new trees would not obstruct views of the river from perpendicular streets. Fortney said that there weren’t many streets that pointed to the river that had not already had views obstructed by trees.

Bernstein said that this was a good addition. She said that trees were planned for Founders Park several years ago, but the plans were changed to smaller bush-like trees to avoid obscuring views of the water from the park and streets adjacent to the water.

Pennington noted that tree coverage had declined from 33% to 31% since had moved to the City.

Amended to read:

New plantings should be sympathetic to river vistas down streets.

Transportation

1. *Waterfront pathways shall be well-marked with well-lighted pathways and appropriate wayfinding and interpretive signage. [modification to approved principle]*

Pennington noted that light pollution was an issue. Fortney said that power would be required, which had a cost. Geissinger said that low-power solar lights could be installed. He said there was room for interpretation as to what appropriate lighting would be.

Atkinson suggested stating “appropriate lighting” instead of “well-lighted”

Amended to read:

Waterfront pathways shall be well-marked with appropriate lighting, wayfinding, and interpretive signage.

2. *Ensure that parking in the vicinity of the waterfront is adequate to serve existing businesses.*

The sense of the Committee was that this concept was captured in existing transportation principles, so the statement was deleted.

Parks & Open Space

1. *Parks are an essential element of the Waterfront and shall provide a mixture of active and passive uses. [Request discussion of what constitutes active & passive use.]*

Petty asked whether the City has a definition of active and passive recreation. A guest said it may be defined in the City’s recreation plan. No one present at the meeting had the definition of active and passive recreation.

Brooks said the statement was so general that it should be included. Bernstein said that there were already active and passive parks in the City, so it simply stated what already existed.

Subsequent to the meeting, Seidler circulated the following definitions of active- and passive-use areas applied the by the city, which was developed by the National Recreation and Park Association:

Passive-Use Area: An area primarily designed for picnicking, passive trail use such as hiking, sightseeing, and fishing and other non-organized recreation activities. This type of facility often emphasizes natural settings.

Active-Use Area: An area designed primarily for organized or non-organized active recreation of one or more age groups. This type of design may include as its primary feature playfields, playground apparatus, ball fields, tennis and/or basketball courts and skate parks to mention a few examples.

The sense of the Committee was to include the statement as written.

Marina

1. *Consideration should be given to a community boating program on the waterfront, where the public could take classes in sailing, boating, and water safety.*

Brooks said it was a great idea, but should be installed in a non-residential area. Fortney said the best location would be where the public schools have their boat house, but that's only for use by the schools. McCabe of the National Park Service said that launch facilities for low-scale boats such as kayaks and canoes were planned for Jones Point Park.

Petty said that as part of this discussion there was no need to determine where the facility should go.

Geissinger said that such a program was integral to the development of the marina. Brooks said that certain elements could be at different locations along the waterfront. Fortney said that Windmill Hill Park was an appropriate place for marine uses because it was secluded from tidal flows.

The sense of the Committee was to include the statement as written.

2. *All docks should be floating, with appropriate ladders and sufficient pilings (by number and size) to accommodate a variety of craft, be they pleasure or commercial.*

Gosnell said that the City's Marina was very accommodating to pedestrians since the docks were fixed. Water levels could vary by as much as three feet higher and ten feet lower than mean levels.

Fortney said that the floating docks could be considered only for new instead of existing facilities.

Pennington said that this principle was very prescriptive. Geissinger said that it was a design element and should not be included as a principle.

The sense of the Committee was to delete this statement.

Waterfront Attractions

1. *New waterfront venues may include attractions for children such as a playground, splash park, a place to touch the water, and/or interactive public art, where appropriate. [modification to approved principle]*

Brooks suggests limiting this statement to include attractions for children without any suggestions. Petty suggested calling it a splash fountain instead of a splash park, and adding that there should be a place to touch fresh water (to distinguish from the Potomac River).

Amended to read:

New waterfront venues may include attractions for children such as a playground, splash park fountain, a place to touch fresh water, and/or interactive public art, where appropriate.

Other Suggestions

Petersen suggested modifying the principle that read “*Development along the waterfront shall be respectful of Alexandria’s history.*” Instead, he suggested it read, “Development along the Waterfront shall be sensitive to and respectful of Alexandria’s unique and authentic historical legacy as a major American colonial port city.” Petersen said that his constituents thought that the statement as originally written needed additional emphasis.

The sense of the Committee was to include the statement as amended by Petersen.

It was suggested that the statement reading, “*Historical markers, guides, and other interpretive materials along the entire length of the Waterfront, should acknowledge the full spectrum of Alexandria’s history, not just the 17th and 18th Centuries,*” be edited to cut the phrase “not just the 17th and 18th Centuries.”

The sense of the Committee was to amend this principle as proposed.

Moved by Pennington, second by Hafer, to approve the Committee’s Waterfront Principals as amended during discussion. Motion carried on a voice vote.

Survey of Desirable Waterfront Features

Petty introduced a list of potential features for the Alexandria waterfront. She asked for Committee members’ feedback on whether these features are appropriate to include on the waterfront (without designating a specific place). She requested that members review the list for potential additions. She announced that she would circulate a revised list to committee members via email for their feedback.

There was some discussion of whether and how to prioritize suggestions, with the ultimate outcome that the selections should be prioritized using a scoring system of the Chair’s devise.

Plans for June Meeting

Petty noted that she had hoped to include a presentation from the Public Arts Committee on its planned waterfront art walk. She said there was no time during the May meeting, but said she would like to suggest a regular June meeting in addition to the Committee’s annual Waterfront Walk. The Committee agreed to both to a regular meeting on June 16 and the Waterfront Walk on June 24.

There was discussion of whether the proposed Waterfront Walk should be on a weekday morning or during the weekend or evening hours. Macek said that he favored a time for the Waterfront Walk other than 7:30 a.m. on a weekday morning. Ultimately, the Committee elected to hold the Waterfront Walk as scheduled at 7:30 a.m. on June 24.

Petty noted that the Waterfront Walk has a large focus on maintenance issues. She said that in support of the waterfront planning process, the walk would examine more than just maintenance, and provide as broad a picture as possible.

Gosnell said that the Committee's walk was to review the waterfront and re-certify the condition of the territory within the Committee's charge. He said both ends could be accomplished with the same event.

Blakeley said that past Waterfront Walks had led to the inclusion of several projects in the City's CIP, as well as helpful discussions of why certain features exist and how parks were maintained.

Fortney said that only three properties could be developed along the waterfront so there was no reason to discuss any more than that. Petty said that the waterfront planning process was broader in scope than just development of private property.

There was brief discussion of how to interpret the event for participants both for planning and waterfront Committee purposes. Hafer, Macek, and Peterson volunteered to assist Petty in organizing the Waterfront Walk.

Announcements

Hafer announced that the Ford Motor Company was doing a product launch at Art League's Duke Street facility that day.

A guest commented that while he supported the Alexandria Red Cross, the Committee had made the wrong decision at its April meeting to endorse plans to expand the Waterfront Festival to Founder's Park. He noted that the agreement with City Council was for Founder's Park to be a passive park, and City Council had said that the Jamestown commemorative events at the park several years ago would be the lone exception to this policy, but it has not been the case.

Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 9:17 a.m.