

## Summary Minutes

### Alexandria Waterfront Committee Special Meeting Tuesday, November 29, 2011

#### Alexandria City Hall

**Members:**

Present: Engin Artemel, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.  
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission  
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association  
Arthur 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 and Chair  
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)  
Peter Pennington, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)  
Stephen Thayer, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.  
Van Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association

Excused: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation,  
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat lease holder  
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council

Vacancy: Alexandria Archaeological Commission

**City Staff:** Bruce Johnson, Acting City Manager  
Richard Baier, Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental  
Services (T&ES)  
James Banks, City Attorney  
Lt. Mark Bergin, Police Department  
Jack Browand, Acting Deputy Director, Parks Operations, Department of  
Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)  
Faye Dastgheib, Parking Planner, T&ES  
Faroll Hamer, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning (P&Z)  
Jim Hixon, Dockmaster, RPCA  
Lance Mallamo, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria  
Sandra Marks, Chief of Planning, T&ES  
Karl Moritz, Deputy Director, P&Z  
James Spengler, Director, RPCA  
Nancy Williams, Principal Planner, P&Z

**Guests:** Liza Baldwin  
Benno Brenninkmeyer, Harborside  
Brian Buzzell  
Geoff Caldwell, Citizens for an Alternative Alexandria Waterfront Plan  
(CAAAP)

Katy Cannady, CAAWP  
Susan Cohen, Public Art Committee  
Linda Couture  
Deena de Montigny, OTCA, CAAWP  
Mary Ehlers, CAAWP, business owner  
Mary Frances Jetton  
Al Kalavaitis  
Tony Kupersmith, CAAWP  
Harry Harrington, Old Dominion Boat Club  
Poul Hertel  
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeology Commission  
Andrew Macdonald, CAAWP  
Kathryn Papp  
Joanne Platt  
Carl Smith, CAAWP  
Andrea Stowers  
Hugh Van Horn, CAAWP  
Sue Van Horn  
Boyd Walker, CAAWP  
Margaret Wood

### **Welcome and Introductions**

The Committee was called to order at 4:30 pm. and members introduced themselves. Macek explained that the Committee had scheduled this special meeting as a follow-up to discussions begun at its November 15 meeting when Citizens for an Alternative Alexandria Waterfront Plan (CAAWP) had presented an overview of its report. Additionally, the Acting City Manager would provide the Committee an overview of the City staff's analysis of the CAAWP report, information that had not been available for the Committee's November 15 meeting.

### **City Staff Evaluation of the Waterfront Small Area Plan and Citizens for an Alternative Alexandria Waterfront Plan Report**

Acting City Manager Bruce Johnson reviewed highlights of the staff analysis of the CAAWP report's recommendations from the standpoint of whether they would be financially feasible and legally defensible and to what extent the CAAWP recommendations would manage changes coming to the City. Based on these criteria, it was staff's judgment that the CAAWP recommendations did not offer a viable alternative to the City's Waterfront Plan.

Johnson focused on CAAWP's alternative proposals for redevelopment of three properties, the Robinson Terminal North (RTN) and Robinson Terminal South (RTS) sites and the Cummings-Turner block. CAAWP has proposed the City acquire some or all of these sites for public realm uses. Johnson said that neither the City's capital budget nor its operating budget could accommodate expenditures to buy the properties. The cost to acquire these properties at assessed values and create passive parks on

them is about \$100 million. Additionally, Council has advised City staff to expect limited revenue for the next several years.

Johnson said the City's museum staff had reviewed the premises underlying CAAWP's attendance and revenue estimates for a proposed fee-for-admission maritime museum and considered them to be overly optimistic. For example, CAAWP has projected an annual maritime museum attendance of 500,000, but Mallamo's office considers 50,000 visitors more realistic when compared to comparable museums across the country. Johnson said the City currently needs to subsidize each of its existing seven museums and attendance at the largest one is 40,000 annually.

Johnson said it is unrealistic to expect that the City acquire the Washington Post Company-owned Robinson Terminal Warehouse Corporation (RTWC) properties at less than assessed value or to offer the owner development rights at another location. The City further assumes that RTWC would want to develop its sites, at a minimum, at levels permitted by current zoning, and the possibility remains that RTWC might reinstate its lawsuit against the City that argues that the higher density of the 1983 Settlement Agreement applies to RTN and RTS. Any proposal to downzone the RTN and RTS sites would not, Johnson said, be legally defensible.

Johnson said City staff stands by its premise that revenue generated by Waterfront hotels should be considered as a possible funding source to cover costs of the City's planned flood mitigation actions.

### **Discussion: Waterfront Small Area Plan and Citizens for an Alternative Alexandria Waterfront Plan (CAAWP)**

#### ***Down-zoning***

Van Fleet disputed Johnson's characterization of the CAAWP report as recommending down-zoning, saying that CAAWP instead proposes preserving the current zoning for the three properties. Banks said that the CAAWP language calls for measures to be taken that would prevent the current owners from developing their property to the levels permitted by current zoning and that, regardless of the language used to describe the action, it is down-zoning.

#### ***Public-Private Partnerships***

Bernstein asked Johnson what efforts the City had made to engage private sector partners in funding the City's historic waterfront. She said that public-private partnerships had helped fund redevelopment and historic renovations such as Pittsburgh's riverfront, the Mount Vernon mansion, and Ford's Theater.

Johnson said that a public private partnership would still require financial support from the City, and that funding for virtually all the city waterfront revitalizations that CAAWP had reviewed had also included grant sources unlikely to be available in the current economic climate. Hamer said this type of detail was more an implementation issue than a planning one. Mallamo said the City always looks for private sector support for its

seven museums, but has yet to find a major local benefactor interested in playing a role such as that of the Heinz family in Pittsburgh.

***The three development sites – Potential costs of City acquisition and related zoning***

In response to a question from Manor, Baum said that when the Brandts had recently bought the Cummings-Turner property, one of the Waterfront Plan's three sites identified for redevelopment, the property had been sold at twice its assessed value. It had been assessed at \$2.5 million and sold for \$5 million.

In response to a Pennington question about which potential uses for the Robinson Terminal North (RTN) site would require a W-1 zoning change, Hamer said a zoning change would not be needed for a park at RTN, and would probably not be needed for a water-related museum at RTN. Hamer said that although the proposed W-1 zoning change permitting hotels would apply to all undeveloped W-1 sites in W-1, RTN, RTS, and the Cummings-Turner block are the only three undeveloped W-1 sites.

***Flood Mitigation Costs***

Pennington asked whether the cost for implementing the flood mitigation plan should be included as a Waterfront Plan cost since flood mitigation planning predates the Waterfront Plan. The Waterfront Committee had, Pennington noted, persistently urged the City in recent years to address flood mitigation. Johnson said that the flood mitigation plan had been conducted on a separate but parallel track from the Waterfront Plan but that are related in that they both affect the waterfront's future. Johnson said the City flood mitigation estimate is \$6 million and rejected CAAWP's flood mitigation estimate of \$3 million. Ely, a member of the Waterfront Plan Work Group (WPWG), noted that during WPWG meetings he had raised questions about the feasibility of some elements of flood mitigation plan such as elevating some street levels.

***Attendance and revenue estimates for a maritime museum***

Pennington asked how CAAWP had developed its estimate for 500,000 annual visitors for a maritime museum. Macdonald called the CAAWP attendance estimate "preliminary" and said that CAAWP volunteers had used as a baseline reference the Torpedo Factory Art Center's 400,000 annual attendance since the Torpedo Factory is a cultural waterfront institution located in the neighborhood proposed for the maritime museum. CAAWP also assumes that more of visitors to the City would take advantage of new amenities such as a maritime museum. Macdonald also said that, although the report did not include the idea, adding a municipal Waterfront parking garage could provide additional revenue.

Macdonald described the CAAWP report as a "first cut" less focused on developing precise estimates for either revenue projections or land acquisition costs than on conveying CAAWP's message that its members felt that a number of factors affecting waterfront planning had been inadequately considered by the City plan.

Pennington said he did not think the Torpedo Factory's 400,000 annual attendance figure could be used to extrapolate potential maritime museum attendance because, for

example, Torpedo Factory admission is free and the proposed maritime museum would charge admission. Pennington offered as more appropriate references annual attendance figures for several museums: London's popular Churchill War Museum, in the heart of London's tourist area, attracts 327,000 annually, and a similar maritime museum in Wilmington, Delaware had struggled for three years before achieving an annual attendance of 50,000.

Pennington further noted the substantial ongoing costs of fundraising. For example, he said, an English national maritime museum currently spends \$800,000 to raise \$2.5 million annually. Macdonald said questions about the realism of their initial attendance estimates for a museum are misdirected because the CAAWP report does not regard a museum as the only revenue-generator in its proposed waterfront alternative. Macdonald said that, for example, Project for Public Spaces data indicates that parks generate significant revenue for their community in a variety of ways.

### ***Questions about rhetorical excesses***

Pennington said he was deeply troubled by rhetorical exaggeration in parts of the CAAWP report and offered as an example its statement that the City plan proposes hotels "all along the waterfront", an inaccurate statement since the Plan proposes hotels at only three sites. He questioned whether development of three currently under-developed sites was likely to "clog" the Waterfront.

Macdonald said several principles underlie the CAAWP report: (1) that preserving "slivers of waterfront" for the public is not enough; (2) that expanding current public spaces and the role of Waterfront historic interpretation would add real value to the City over the long term, and (3) that the adverse impacts of the City's Plan would outweigh all of the Plan's positive impacts.

In response to Walker's statement that ACVA had opposed CAAWP's proposal for a maritime museum, Manor said that ACVA maintains its position that museums continue to be a desirable asset to attract visitors to the City, and that the City Manager's November 18 report had accurately stated ACVA's position. Walker accepted Manor's correction.

Cannady said that neighbors worry about the Waterfront becoming "clogged" by development at RTN and RTS because the old warehouses currently on RTN and RTS generate little traffic, but they would be replaced by development that generates substantial traffic. She also said that the proposed floor area ratio (FAR) increase for the Cummings-Turner site, from FAR 2 to FAR 3, would additionally contribute to the risk of "clogging".

### ***West's Point***

In response to a question from Van Fleet about whether the Old and Historic District could be modified to include West's Point, Hamer said the question is not whether it is possible to add West's Point within the Historic District but rather whether it is appropriate to do so. For a site to be included in the Old Historic District it needs to have 'historic integrity', but the current West's Point (e.g., Robinson Terminal North) is

not where the original West's Point was. Almost 80 percent of the current West's Point land is on fill land added well into the City's history. Moreover, the current West's Point has a 20th century warehouse; and the neighborhood surrounding West's Point has modern, not historic, buildings.

***The extent to which 1981 waterfront planning strategies could be used today***

Artemel, the City's Planning and Zoning Director at the time the City's 1982 Waterfront Plan was adopted, said the City's Draft Plan was generally consistent with the 1982 plan. He encouraged people to consider ways in which elements of the CAAWP report's proposals might be incorporated into the City's Plan. He said that he supported having a waterfront maritime museum and observed that hotels and conference centers are natural complements to museums.

Artemel also said the City had been able to use means not now possible to produce actions related to implementing the 1982 Waterfront Plan. For example, the City offered Texaco a land swap that let Texaco donate its waterfront land to the United Way and the City and, as a result, made Oronoco Bay Park possible and this would be difficult to repeat for the Robinson Terminal sites. RTWC is not able to make a donation and there is insufficient land available in the Eisenhower Corridor for a land exchange. Artemel also reviewed some of the agreements that the City had reached with developers in the 1980s on public amenities: Canal Center had provided an amphitheater, lock, and a maritime museum (since closed) and Rivergate had donated waterfront open space.

***The possibilities for compromise***

Artemel said it is important to recognize that the City has to make compromises but as long as the City and developers share an objective, whether it be with RTWC or other developers, the City could ask them to incorporate concepts into their development projects. Artemel supported creating a City foundation as part of a public-private partnership and encouraged Macdonald and CAAWP supporters to work to develop some compromise ideas that might be appropriate for incorporation into the City plan.

Macdonald said he agreed with the need for compromise but was unsure at this point about a process that might produce that compromise. Pennington said a first step would be to identify the fears provoked by various aspects of the proposals and develop ways to address them.

Pennington said, for example, that a successful and financially sustainable museum, such as that proposed by CAAWP, would be broadly supported, but those concerned about the museum's feasibility fear that with the City already subsidizing seven museums, the proposed maritime museum would become a drain on City finances.

Pennington said another fear is that the Robinson Terminal Warehouse Corp. (RTWC) would, under existing development rights, create a bland, boring development on the Robinson Terminal sites. Supporters of the City Plan see having an approved Waterfront Plan that includes design guidelines, open space and other public amenities as a way to avoid this risk.

Pennington said that even though the Plan's proposal for creating several activity anchors along the Waterfront reflects ideas from the public that were presented at the outset of the Waterfront planning process, this proposal now triggers fears about additional neighborhood traffic and parking pressures that might "clog" the Waterfront area. These parking and traffic fears are exacerbated by the fact that City plans for measures to mitigate these impacts have been neither tested nor proven effective.

Pennington said the fear that a protracted waterfront plan discussion would lead to "planning blight", and lose the City's opportunity to influence waterfront development's design was real, and that equally important is the need to recognize that tourism is an important revenue source for Alexandria.

Macdonald said he thought planners had failed to define a vision for the Waterfront and that has undermined the ability to identify problems needing to be addressed before that vision could become a reality. Pennington said that when CAAWP has used pictures of a Founders Park office block proposed in the 1970s to suggest why CAAWP opposes the City's current Waterfront Plan, it has created unnecessary fears about the plan and undermined the chances for bringing people together to discuss possible compromises.

#### ***City sewage treatment system's ability to support Plan's proposed development***

Pennington said he had been dismayed by a CAAWP member's "scare tactic" warning at the Waterfront Plan Work Group's community meeting that the proposed waterfront development would overload the City's sewage treatment system. Moritz said the three development sites are served by the Potomac Interceptor which, currently operating at 10 percent capacity, has the capacity to process all the sewage that could be generated by development on these sites.

#### ***Hotel size***

Baum asked if the City thought RTWC would be likely to agree to the City's plan for converting the now-private RTN pier to public open space if the City did not increase the density at RTN. Moritz said he considered that unlikely.

#### ***How the 120-150 room size for hotels was developed***

Thayer asked if the City could negotiate with developers for hotels having fewer than 120 to 150 rooms. Hamer said hotel operators had said that 120 to 150 rooms is needed for a hotel's financial viability and that Morrison House, a smaller hotel, is only financially viable because a single company operates both Morrison House and the two adjacent Old Town hotels.

#### ***The foot of King Street***

In response to a Pennington question about CAAWP's vision for the foot of King Street, Macdonald said that CAAWP supports increasing public space and has suggested that the City work cooperatively with ODBC to increase public access along The Strand. CAAWP has not taken a position about public space at the bottom of King Street.

Hamer clarified, in response to Walker's misperception that Fitzgerald Square had been taken "off the table" during staff discussions with the Waterfront Plan Work Group, that

the Square's development has been deferred pending a negotiated agreement with Old Dominion Boat Club. Fitzgerald Square remains in the Waterfront Plan.

### ***CAAWP's evolving response to the City's evaluation of the CAAWP Report***

Artemel offered the Marine Corps Museum, for which his company had done a feasibility study, as an example of how museums and hotels complement each other and of the size of a museum that draws almost as many annual visitors as the 500,000 CAAWP had projected a Waterfront maritime museum could attract. He said the Marine Corps museum draws 489,000 visitors annually, has a 40,000 square foot exhibit area, and a total building area of about 100,000 square feet. The museum's parking lot would, he said, be completely inappropriate for Old Town; and would probably cover most of the entire RTN site. The Marine Corps Museum's site area is 400 acres, and they are now planning to add a hotel and a conference center.

In response to a Manor question about how CAAWP proposes that parking and traffic generated by a new waterfront museum should be addressed, Macdonald said there are a number of parking-related issues that need to be further addressed. He cited the impact of eliminating the Chadwick's parking lot as another such one. Kupersmith said that if the museum were at RTWC North, it would be in a different traffic center than lower King Street and the City could consider this as part of a reconsideration of how traffic is routed in north Old Town.

Kupersmith said that CAAWP has, in response to the City's analysis of its report, begun to develop additional options and he agreed that traffic and parking needs to be addressed as an integral component of adding a museum and/or park land. Kupersmith said that the museum could perhaps be deferred 10 years or until after the City has implemented a parking and traffic plan that has resolved current problems.

Macdonald said that CAAWP, in response to the City's financial analysis of the CAAWP report's proposals, has also begun to consider possible revisions to enhance its recommendations' financial feasibility.

Artemel said that hotels, museums and open space complement each other. For example, hotels and museums might be able to share parking because hotels generally need evening parking and museums need daytime parking. He said it could be possible "to have our cake and eat it too", to have a mix of open space, hotels, and museums and encouraged people to sit down with each other and determine what might be realistic rather than scaring each other.

### ***The City as a unique regional and national historic destination***

McCall, a member of the Alexandria Archaeology Commission and its subcommittee that wrote the History Plan, said the History Plan's vision is to enhance the City as a unique regional and national destination and that he was concerned that people might lose sight of the fact that the City will have few such opportunities to develop such an integrated vision.

McCall encouraged people not to focus only on what may be financially viable with a four to five year timeframe. McCall said that Krupicka, at the Council meeting before the Waterfront Plan Work Group had been authorized, had said additional financing opportunities for the Waterfront Plan need to be identified and McCall regretted that this had not yet been done. For example, in response to a Pennington comment that it would be expensive for the City to commission art, McCall said there are unique potential revenue streams for supporting public art.

***Traffic and parking (continued)***

Walker suggested creating a motor coach drop-off near the end of Pendleton Street, supported a municipal parking garage, supported creating a pedestrian zone at the foot of King Street and said he continues to fear the impact of having three development sites within a three block area.

Artemel said traffic and parking must be addressed now and a Union Street traffic study be completed. He disagreed with the staff premise that having parking available within five to six blocks of a visitor's destination is close enough and suggested building a municipal parking lot to insure adequate accessible waterfront parking, noting that a parking garage could be designed to appear as a historic building.

Van Fleet said a traffic management plan for the entire grid needs to be completed before approving the Plan, that congestion from tour bus parking and delivery vehicles on Union Street needs to be addressed, and that adding waterfront hotels would exacerbate existing problems. Artemel said that the Waterfront Committee has persistently advocated for parking and traffic plans to be implemented and tested.

Bernstein said she disagreed with the Waterfront Plan's premise that it be self-funded.

***The impact of delaying a Plan's approval***

Pennington asked Macdonald how CAAWP thought the City should respond if RTWC were to decide to develop the RTN site in 2012. Macdonald said CAAWP supports development under the lower 1992 density and transfer of the land to the City, either by City purchase or other means, so that the land could be used for public realm purposes.

Macdonald said CAAWP would like the Waterfront planning process slowed down to offer time to develop some compromises. Artemel said that, in all fairness, staff had already modified some aspects to the Plan in response to inputs, and that planning should be recognized as a process where certain details are worked out during a plan's implementation phase. Artemel said he had already seen the Plan evolve as part of the Waterfront Plan Work Group process in ways that included some Plan objectives being modified and implementation details being clarified, but he still thought that additional compromises would likely need to be made.

Pennington asked staff and CAAWP to comment on the possibility that if RTWC were to develop the Robinson Terminal sites without having Waterfront Plan's design guidelines in place, the end result would likely be boring, bland residential development. Hamer agreed and said the Plan offered the City several advantages in return for offering

modest increases in additional density: (a) developer contributions to amenities, including funding for the art and history plan and for open space, (b) additional hotel and restaurant design guidelines included in the Plan, and (c) providing developers clear information about what the City expects from a development's design.

De Montigny, an architect, said that although the goal of the City's zoning ordinance is "to preserve and protect the neighborhoods", she thought the City's focus had been on using zoning primarily to increase City revenues. She said she fears what hotels permitted under a 162% increase over existing density would look like on the Cummings-Turner block. Hamer said the Plan offered a modest increase in square footage, and noted that approximately 100,000 of the Plan's 161,000 proposed square foot increase is under dispute with the RTN and RTS. Absent a Waterfront Plan, if RTWC were to take the City to court and win the right to the density provided by the 1983 Settlement Agreement, Hamer said RTWC could end up with the additional 100,000 square feet - but without needing to make any additional contributions to public Waterfront amenities. Hamer said the increased density's impact would be relatively small since it would be spread out over three sites.

Macdonald said he considered the amenities proposed by the Plan in return for increased density to reflect a concept that is fundamentally flawed.

Ely said he agreed with Artemel's statement encouraging efforts to develop a consensus about the Plan, but that he thought such a consensus was not close, and that he thought City officials had created a "false sense of urgency" to approve the Plan.

### **Public Discussion**

Hertel followed up on several issues raised during the discussion: Even though the City had, in 1974, proposed tearing down the Torpedo Factory to replace it with a parking lot to support Bicentennial activities, today City data indicates the Torpedo Factory generates \$20 million annually. The City, for fairness reasons, has always used a historic district rather than designating historic buildings. CAAWP supports the 1992 zoning code's goal of having a residential W-1 district. Hertel said he considered the Waterfront Plan's most important negative impact to be its flexible development options for the RTWC sites, not its increased density for the three development sites. He considered by-right development unlikely due to financial feasibility concerns. He said he expected technical issues to delay GenOn site development for the near future.

Papp said she supported Artemel's encouragement for creating a dialogue designed to develop possible compromises and recommended that the City hire a nationally known mediator practiced in developing consensus to lead such an effort. In response to Bernstein's interest in identifying possibilities for public-private partnership, she noted that during two days of research using The Foundation Center's databases she had discovered a large number donors living just within the 22314 zip code.

In response to Papp's suggestion, Bernstein said she agreed that an effort should be made to reach out to City residents of means to support a public-private partnership for

the Waterfront, and did not think it the City should leave it only to residents to engage private donors as potential participants in a public/private partnership.

Walker said he had met with the director of The Project for Public Spaces in New York and had informally received a proposal that for less than \$10,000, the Project could run a one-day consensus-building symposium for Alexandria focusing on the waterfront. Walker said that if the City were interested in such a consensus-building activity, CAAWP members would be willing to help raise funds to cover part of the cost of such a meeting.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned without objection at 6:30 p.m.