

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting October 21, 2008

Members: Engin Artemel
Henry Brooks
Mel Fortney
Michael Geissinger
Doug Gosnell
Nathan Macek
Peter Pennington
Pete Petersen
Susan Pettey
John J. Renner II

Guests: Christine Bernstein
Susie Cohen
Brian V. Buzzell
Linda Hafer
Harry Harrington
Joanne Platt
Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet
Van Van Fleet

City Staff: Kathleen Beeton, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Roger Blakeley, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Jim Hixon, RPCA
Laura Seidler, RPCA

Welcome and introductions

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of minutes from the September meeting

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the September meeting, with the correction that Macek was in attendance at the September meeting. The motion carried on a voice vote.

Introduction of the City Wayfinding Initiative

Macek reported that the City has a Wayfinding Initiative underway. The initiative will impact the waterfront as wayfinding signage to and along the waterfront will be updated. He urged the Waterfront Committee to continue to monitor this effort and seek to provide feedback to City staff and consultants as the concepts for waterfront signage become more concrete.

The program will develop a comprehensive citywide wayfinding signage system. The wayfinding system will project a consistent image for the entire city; reduce visual clutter; and promote walking, bicycling, and use of mass transit. A Wayfinding Stakeholder Advisory Group was established by the City Manager to provide input to the City and consultant team and to serve as a liaison to the community regarding the project as it develops. Macek reported the further details on the program are available at the City's Wayfinding Initiative website, <http://alexandriava.gov/planning/info/default.aspx?id=10720>.

Membership of the group is made up of representatives from business/civic groups and City commissions and boards, but the Waterfront Committee does not have membership on the stakeholder group.

Several members commented that signage should facilitate parking, with electronic information such as parking lot name, spaces available, and cost. Eventually such technology could extend to in-vehicle GPS systems. Pennington noted that this was consistent with the City's Environmental Action Plan.

Crenshaw Van Fleet, a member of the Wayfinding Stakeholder Advisory Group, commented that electronic signage will not initially be addressed by the wayfinding consultants, who are examining signage color and design first. Consideration of any electronic parking signage would be part of a subsequent study.

Discussion and approval of Annual Report to the City

The Committee received the Waterfront Committee FY08 Annual Report from City staff and commended staff on the quality of the document.

Two edits were suggested: Pennington suggested changing the goal to "Support a vibrant waterfront that capitalizes on Alexandria's maritime heritage, that serves the needs of residents and visitors" to add "that includes mixed-use retail and residential development." Macek suggested that the goal to "Understand City budget proposals related to the waterfront; and advocate for adequate resources to maintain and improve the waterfront and related parks" should also include the marina.

Moved by Pennington, second by Artemel, to approve the Waterfront Committee FY08 Annual Report with suggested amendments. Motion carried on a voice vote.

Update from RPCA on budget and other issues

Blakely reported that recent market conditions have impacted the City's finances. The City Manager has asked RPCA to cut \$1.6 million from its budget. He stated that this will result in a decline in services in the near-term.

Blakely provided an overview of the City’s capital budget planning process. In 2005, RPCA had an \$8 million capital budget. Subsequently the City moved to a tiered system in which capital priorities are ranked and prioritized in three funding tiers. Now RPCA has a capital budget of approximately \$2 million. Proposed funding by tier in FY10 and FY11 is as follows:

	FY10	FY11
Tier 1	\$1,215,001	\$658,409
Tier 2	\$607,500	\$329,204
Tier 3	\$607,500	\$329,204
TOTAL	\$2,430,001	\$1,316,817

Council may choose to fund all three tiers, or just the top two, or just Tier 1. A hearing on the proposed budget was scheduled for October 30, 2008.

This budget does not fund repairs to damaged marina seawalls, which has been proposed to the City Manager but is not presently programmed for funding until FY12 at the earliest. The seawalls require repair due to issues with erosion behind the seawall, holes, and damage from fire department equipment. Hixon noted that the damage is visible on the north side of the marina where the sidewalk is multilevel and seawall has fallen in. There will continue to be visible damage.

Windmill Hill Park improvements are excluded from the tiering process, and should be funded regardless of Council’s decisions regarding tiered funding priorities. Currently, the City is focused on improvements to the bulkhead in the park and is doing soil borings now and will continue planning for the project. Other large projects, including construction of a new Charles Houston Recreation Center and new police headquarters, are also excluded from the tiering process.

Gosnell asked why fields are included in the FY10 but not FY11 budget. Blakeley stated that \$937,125 is for synthetic fields, which have a lower life-cycle cost. Brooks stated that synthetic fields are a high-priority improvement for the Park and Recreation Commission.

Pennington asked Blakeley to describe the specific impact of the budget on the Waterfront. Blakeley responded that funding of \$40,451 in Tier 2 has been budgeted to support marina improvements, including repair of winter damage and the upgrade or replacement of signs and light fixtures. Re-surfacing of the Montgomery Park tennis courts, which are near the waterfront, are also Tier 2 and Tier 3 improvements.

Blakeley stated that he hopes that moving to more annual leaseholders at the marina results in less staff that will be required to manage transient slipholders. He noted that before such a move the City would need to ensure that sufficient

electrical connections for annual slipholders, as there have been complaints of not enough electric outlets for transient slipholders.

Bernstein asked how this budget compares to other City departments. Blakeley responded that there have been similar cuts across all City departments.

Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet asked if this budget is based on priorities of the City Council and RPCA commission, and whether they will be re-evaluating their priorities. Blakeley responded that Council has developed a five-year plan. The budget won't change for 2009 (the City's current fiscal year); 2010 and 2011 are now being considered. Council can revisit its priorities, but the budgets generally carryout the priorities specified in previous planning processes.

Buzzell commented that capital improvements at Harborside and the Old Dominion Boat Club are funded by landowners. He noted that the City's marina is a revenue generator and asked why the marina isn't funding its own capital improvements, when fees can be raised for pleasure craft and commercial slipholders. Blakeley responded that the marina had not previously operated like a business, but has become more like a business. With fuel prices high and a slow economy, RPCA has sought to lease more slips annually. More revenue could be collected in rent than in day use fees. The marina could apply a model in the future which revenue from rent fully covers the boat slip operation costs and there is no subsidy by the City.

Blakeley noted that RPCA has cataloged all of the City's fields and playgrounds in operation today (43). These data have been posted on the City's website. \$4.2 million is required to improve existing playgrounds, and \$32.0 million for fields.

Blakeley recommended that Committee members examine the proposed improvements to playgrounds and fields near the waterfront. He asked that the Committee support what it can at the October 30 budget meeting. Pettey asked whether Blakeley would recommend that the Waterfront Committee support all three tiers of capital improvements. Blakeley said yes, and said that he is trying to share with the Committee what has been proposed so that the Committee is informed.

Artemel recommended that the chair urge Council to support investments in waterfront parks. Renner stated that the Committee should also talk about establishing an enterprise fund to make the marina self-sufficient. He noted that the marina needs to be attractive for visitors. Seidel stated that the costs to be funded by an enterprise fund would need to be defined—would graffiti, for example, be covered by the marina's enterprise fund or the City's general fund?

Moved by Artemel, second by Geissinger, to work with RPCA to develop a position to be presented to Council at upcoming meetings in support of

funding for capital improvements to waterfront parks and other waterfront-related projects. The motion carried on a voice vote.

Discussion of *U.S. v Bryant re Old Dominion Boat Club*

The Committee discussed the recent U.S. District Court ruling on this case regarding title to parcels owned by the Old Dominion Boat Club. The case was based on riparian law, and the court ruled in favor of the boat club on 4 of 5 points.

Gosnell noted that it was interesting that the judge ruled for summary judgment after so many years. In response to a question, Harrington clarified that the club's north parcel is north of King Street and includes the wharves; the south parcel includes the club's parking lot and portions of the Strand.

Discussion of Committee role supporting the Waterfront Planning Process

Beeton reported that P&Z has asked Kramer and Associates to begin interviewing waterfront stakeholders to gather background information before the planning process begins in January. Waterfront Committee members will be contacted by Kramer. Pettey noted that she would be meeting with Kramer the following Thursday morning.

Beeton stated that the City's request for proposals (RFP) from waterfront planning consultants has closed, and the City is now reviewing proposals. No advisory group has been formed to date, and P&Z welcomed the Committee's input.

Artemel stated that the waterfront planning RFP mentions two groups, a stakeholder group and an advisory panel, to support the planning process. He noted that the membership that would comprise those panels would be selected from the same constituencies already represented on the Waterfront Committee. He asked if two new panels were being established to guide this effort, and whether the Waterfront Committee should be the panel. He asked Committee members what role they wanted the Committee to play.

Beeton stated that the City hasn't yet formed any groups. She said the idea is to have an inclusive process in which people have an opportunity to participate.

Geissinger asked why the City needed two more panels, and asked who was driving decision to make two more panels. Beeton responded that decision would be made by P&Z in consultation with the City Manager and City Council.

Geissinger recommended that the Waterfront Committee talk directly to the City Council and City Manager and advise them not to establish new committees for this purpose.

Artemel stated that he was not criticizing staff, but urged the Committee to consider the role that it wants to play. He said that the Committee needs to let the City Manager and Council know that it is ready to do this. Brooks stated that it may require more time than the Committee is used to. He stated that the Committee would need to provide increased responsibility if awarded increased authority. Geissinger stated that the Committee should take a stand on this issue.

Gosnell stated that the Waterfront Committee could either stand as a Committee of the whole to support the waterfront planning process, or seek to place its members on the City's waterfront planning committee. The planning effort may require more than members can take on as a volunteer, once-a-month group. Renner stated that members without the time shouldn't be on the Committee. He added that the Waterfront Committee should serve as the waterfront planning committee because its members have already been appointed by City Council to address these issues.

Pennington said that the Committee should not underestimate the challenge that can be met by volunteer committees, and cited his experience on the City's Environmental Policy Commission as an example.

In response to a Committee question, Beeton stated that P&Z, RPCA, and Transportation and Environmental Services (TES) staff would work in collaboration with other committees to staff the waterfront planning process.

Renner asked why staff couldn't bring those agencies together to agree that the Waterfront Committee should support this planning effort, and asked that the Waterfront Committee not be discarded.

Blakeley stated that the Waterfront Committee's first goal, adopted earlier in the meeting, was to support the City waterfront planning process.

Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet urged caution in talking to Kramer and Associates. She also stated that the Waterfront Committee will have to stand up to the City to play a role in the waterfront planning process.

Artemel stated that the Committee needed to decide whether to play a lead role, or to discuss the issue further at a future meeting.

Gosnell stated that the Waterfront Committee reported to the City Council and Mayor, and should send its chair along with two or three other members to make the Committee's case front and center to the City Manager, Mayor, Council, and others. He noted it may require further meetings in the future, and urged the Committee to make a display of support.

Bernstein stated that the Committee needed to make its case in a positive way. She suggested asking City officials the existing organization *shouldn't* be used, and why new committees should be formed.

Moved by Pennington, second by Renner, to write a letter urging coordination between City departments in support of the Waterfront Committee's lead role supporting the waterfront planning process, and to meet with City Council members and the Mayor.

Gosnell stated that now was the time to advocate for this position, that the case must be made over the next few weeks. There was some discussion over whether to talk to the P&Z Director first before approaching the City Manager, but the Committee agreed that it reported to the Mayor and City Council and should take its concerns directly to Council.

Beeton stated that she would have a conversation with the P&Z Director about the Committee's concerns.

The motion carried on a voice vote.

There was consensus that three to five Committee members should meet with City officials.

Announcements

Artemel announced that Alexandrians Delivering Smart Growth Around Metro Stations (ADAM) will have a fall tour meeting on November 8 to demonstrate how residents and visitors alike can access the waterfront without using cars.

Buzzell noted that Harborside residents are concerned with how much trash has floated in along the river but has not been cleaned up. Blakely responded that the City picks up trash along the waterfront every month or two, but does not pickup trash from the water as it is not within the City's jurisdiction.

Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 9:22 a.m.