

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting November 18, 2008

Members: Engin Artemel
Jay Atkinson
Christine Bernstein
Henry Brooks
Mel Fortney
Doug Gosnell
Linda Hafer
Nathan Macek
Peter Pennington
Pete Petersen
Susan Pettey
John J. Renner II

City Staff: Kathleen Beeton, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Roger Blakeley, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Jim Hixon, RPCA
David Huchler, Police Department
Paul Lombardi, RPCA
John North, Fire Department
Laura Seidler, RPCA

Guests: Susan Cohen
Dene Garbow
Harry Harrington
Joanne Platt
Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet
Van Van Fleet

Welcome and introductions

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of minutes from the October meeting

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

Discussion of meetings with Mayor and City Council members

Pettey reported that Committee members had met with Mayor Euille and Council members Krupicka, Smedberg, and Lovain regarding the Committee's involvement in the waterfront planning process. She stated that Councilman Krupicka suggested that the Waterfront Committee provide letters of support for its position from its constituent organizations.

Bernstein noted that Planning and Zoning Department Director Faroll Hamer said during the Committee's meeting with the Mayor that there may have been a misunderstanding regarding the number of groups that would assist the process and the intended role of the Waterfront Committee. Pettey said that there is a desire to include more diversity in the waterfront planning committee, to ensure that views are represented from citywide, and that there is racial diversity on the planning committee.

Artemel said that he thought that the meetings were productive, and was glad that Hamer participated in the meeting with the Mayor. He said it was clear to him that a decision regarding this issue would be made at the Council rather than the staff level. He said he was glad that the Committee initiated this effort, because members showed their willingness as a volunteer group to assist.

Bernstein reported that Hamer said she wants to arrive at the most productive, least contentious decision, and wants to include the Waterfront Committee in some capacity. Ultimately the decision will be up to Council, according to the Mayor. She said that the Mayor said he appreciated our bringing this to his attention, added that she thought that the Committee couldn't have possibly come away with anything more from the meeting.

Pennington reiterated that the Mayor said the membership needed to be citywide, and that he raised the issue of involving people of color in the process. Macek noted that there is interest in representing the interests of City taxpayers residing west of Quaker Lane and even Van Dorn Street, who may have different priorities than residents of Old Town or other sectors of the City's east side.

A guest commented that the Mayor was trying to have it both ways, noting that in the case of Potomac Yard, involvement by the Old Town and Del Ray Civic Associations was excluded. Artemel said he believed there was subjectivity in the decision of who was involved in Landmark and Potomac Yard planning processes, with appointments based on convenience or politics. He noted that the Waterfront Committee is composed of volunteers, and the question is who is interested in serving and who is not.

Pettey said that requests for meetings with the three remaining Council members—Gaines, Pepper, and Wilson—remain outstanding and she would keep Committee members posted on any scheduled meetings. She added that Committee members had been meeting with the City's contractor, Kramer & Associates, regarding the waterfront and waterfront planning process.

Macek said that the Committee should write a letter to Council reiterating its position, restating what had been learned from talking with Council, and offering a compromise, if necessary. Artemel disagreed, stating that if the Committee is going to play a key role, it should maintain its position. He suggested waiting and talking to the remainder of Council before developing a final position.

Bernstein said she did not want to diminish any ground the Committee had gained, and reiterated the Mayor and Hamer stated during their meeting with the Committee that they wanted the Committee's involvement and a less contentious process. Artemel said that the extent to which contention is removed from the process creates problems. To the extent that process is more inclusive, it may become more contentious. Bernstein stated that Hamer had said during the meeting with the Mayor that she desired a process in which people may disagree with the outcome, but don't disagree with the process.

Atkinson said that if the Mayor doesn't think the Committee is inclusive enough for the waterfront planning process, he probably doesn't think the Committee is inclusive enough, period, and he may not pay much attention to it. Bernstein countered that the Mayor and other Council members have each been impressed with the list of stakeholders that are already represented on the Committee. Gosnell said that Committee members have pointed out to Council that its membership has a diverse array of outside professional experience. He said that none of the Council members the Committee spoke with had formed their own opinion on this issue, and the Committee needed to focus their field of view by getting their attention on this issue early. He stated that the Committee was volunteer group, and had not been a controversial group, but would be squeaky wheel on this issue.

Artemel said that Council is going to make a decision, and that the Committee should develop some thoughts on how that should happen. He said it doesn't have to be in the form of a letter or large group meeting, but could be a small group meeting again with the Mayor. Hafer said she likes the idea of a letter, she noted that it could be drafted and re-edited following meetings with Council members. Artemel asked whether the letter should wait until the meetings with Council have concluded.

Pennington said that P&Z had stated that they would like to get the process moving by the December Council meeting. She said a letter is a good idea, that it's harder to ignore a letter, but it shouldn't be too controversial.

Moved by Macek, second by Artemel, to continue meeting with the remainder of Council members, and to draft a follow-up letter to Council for review at the December Waterfront Committee meeting.

Beeton noted that P&Z aims to present its strategy to Council by mid-December. Pettey offered that she could send a thank-you letter to Council members as a follow-up to the meetings, which would reiterate the Committee's position. Renner agreed that given Council's timing, the Committee could not wait to draft the letter.

Macek accepted a friendly amendment for follow-up thank-you letters to be drafted by the Chair, to be sent at once to Council members with whom the Committee has already met, and immediately following upcoming meetings with additional Council members.

Under the revised motion, the Committee would not wait until the December meeting to draft, review, and deliver letters to Council members.

Motion carried on a voice vote.

Discussion of Department of General Services proposal to reduce security at marina

Blakeley reported that the City's Department of General Services had called for the elimination of night security patrols at the marina. Gosnell said the consensus of boat owners is that with the proposed gates in place at the end of boat piers, boat owners would be very supportive of the proposal. But the gates are not yet in place, and there is a continual problem with the public boarding boats. He noted that the gates would stop people from accessing private boats, but not the Potomac Riverboat Company. With the gates, there could be a cost savings achieved by eliminating night patrol during the summer months as well. Blakeley said that RPCA has tried to pull together enough money to implement the gates. The cost of security is \$70,000 to \$110,000 per year, while the gates are budgeted to cost \$100,000.

Blakeley said that gates would help with security, but there are issues that need to be addressed by security patrols. Atkinson said that he has a boat at the marina and lives across Founders Park. He noted that the area is a magnet for miscreants, and said there would be problems as soon as people realized there is no security patrol in place.

Lombardi provided an update on the progress towards installation of the proposed gates. He said that since approval by the Board of Architectural Review on June 18, there were Code Enforcement and Fire Department egress issues that were resolved. Meanwhile RPCA has awarded a Multiple Awards Selection (MAS) contract, which allows the department to award construction contracts on a task-order basis to a pre-selected pool of qualified contractors. The gates project will be one of the first task orders under the contract. RPCA is using this project to develop a template for future projects under the contract. RPCA expects to meet with contractors, do field visit to the site, and conduct a selection process based on each contractor's ability and proposed price. From a constructability point of view, it will be each proposing contractor's responsibility to find a qualified fabricator and to develop shop drawings, as well as work in the card-swipe security control system. RPCA is hoping to make an award within two months. The department has budgeted \$100,000 for all three gates, a price that does not include the security system. The project is presently funded.

Hafer said she is concerned about having security eliminated. In response to a question from Pennington, Officer Huchler said that the Police Department provides service at the waterfront regardless of whether additional security patrols are in place, and routinely patrols the area. Gosnell stated that RPCA could ask the Police to make a visual inspection once an hour or so. Huchler said that whether security is there or not, the Police Department would patrol the area. Gosnell said that presence is the deterrent. He noted that private boats on the marina's isolated north piers invite the possibility of additional issues, noting the presence of security cameras on sections of the marina. Seidler said that security cameras at the marina are trained on Potomac Riverboat Company boats and are not actively monitored; they serve as a deterrent and for after-the-fact monitoring.

Petty thanked RPCA for bringing the issue to the Committee's attention. Blakeley said that RPCA would keep moving forward with the gates project.

Seidler said that RPCA has sent out an email to all marina slip holders recommending that they move their boats to the A-B pier for the winter. She said that the gates are not going to be installed before funding for security patrols ends, so the hope is to move the boats together so that slip holders can police the piers themselves. Gosnell asked whether the City had the ability to keep the security patrols in place until the gates are installed. Blakeley stated that RPCA doesn't control General Services, but that RPCA could ask to wait until later in the year to reduce night patrols.

Moved by Gosnell, second by Atkinson, to write letter to Council and the Department of General Services urging security patrols to be maintained until the gates are installed on the marina's south pier.

The motion carried on voice vote, with Artemel abstaining.

Discussion of City proposed Phase I Environmental Action Plan

Pennington reported that the previous evening was the first public presentation of the draft Phase I Environmental Action Plan, with surprising attendance by over 60 members of the public. He noted that there were many comments that the Environmental Policy Commission would be working to absorb. Comments may be sent electronically via the Commission's Eco-City Alexandria web site, <http://alexandriava.gov/tes/eco-city/default.aspx>.

He said asterisks included in the draft plan represent initiatives already underway by the City. In some cases, draft policies emphasize existing initiatives; in others, it points the City in a new direction. For the moment, the Commission is concentrating on near-term policies; the Phase II plan will focus on FY11 onward.

Petty said that several items in the plan were within the purview of the Waterfront Committee, including accession of additional open space, and encouragement of stream clean-up.

Macek noted some differences between priorities raised by the Committee during its December 2007 meeting compared the draft action plan now being considered. For example, he said that the draft plan could do more to address regional watershed protection, improving Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay water quality, improving wildlife habitats, and addressing litter control over land and water. He noted that the Commission may plan to more fully address some of these issues in the Phase II action plan. He did not recommend formal action by the Waterfront Committee, but said he would be submitting his own comments on an individual basis. Petty encouraged other Committee members to do so as well.

Discussion of improving marina's fiscal sustainability

Seidler stated that the Committee had raised the issue of establishing an enterprise fund for the marina. She said that RPCA would leave it to the Committee to develop a plan for implementing an enterprise fund. She noted that several issues must be considered, such as whether capital investments are included, and if so, to what extent. She also said that operation costs must also be considered, such as whether the fund would cover upkeep of any facilities adjacent to the marina. She noted that the issues could tie up the full Committee and suggested establishing a subcommittee. She also noted that RPCA is not the only City department or organization that incurs costs at the marina, noting that the Department of General Services, the Fire Department, and Transportation and Environmental Services as well as the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA) and the Seaport Foundation also incur costs. She stated that establishing an enterprise fund is a large task to undertake, but the City is not opposed to this model.

In response to a question from Macek, Seidler said that the City does not presently have any enterprise funds for recreation, but the Chinguapin Park Recreation Center must cover a small percentage of its expenses. What an enterprise fund must recover depends on how the fund is structured.

Fortney asked where funds presently generated by the marina go. Blakeley said the funds go back into the City's general fund. The money is not earmarked to go back into the marina. Fortney said that the Committee's point is that funds should go back into the marina.

Gosnell said that Committee needed to decide what kind of enterprise model the marina should have. He noted that most marinas have activities besides slip rental, such as selling fuel or parts and offering dry-docking or maintenance services, which the City's marina does not offer.

Blakeley reiterated that there are other agencies besides RPCA that incur marina expenses. He said if an enterprise concept is adopted, he's not sure it should be all-inclusive, noting that there is 30-year-old infrastructure, including seawalls that have erosion, electrical supply issues, fixed docks that do not float, and a water system that is turned off because it is not winterized to provide year-round supply. In addition, dredging occurs every 5 to 10 years. There needs to be a definition of what infrastructure investment can be funded by the enterprise fund and the share for which the City would be responsible. He said that a lot of time could be spent on this issue, and suggested the Committee form a subcommittee to define what an enterprise fund is and how it should be structured in this case.

Gosnell asked for a report on the sources of uses of funds for the marina, to see the extent of annual ongoing expenses and capital improvement projects. Blakely suggested reviewing the marina's cost center book on the City's website. He noted that another book would be produced this year. Seidler noted that the report includes RPCA expenses, but excludes other cost centers with expenses at the marina. The cost center book is posted online at <http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/MarinaCostBook.pdf>.

Seidler said that RPCA has conducted market studies that compare the City's marina costs to peer marinas. The City has reached the point where the cost of its marina is competitive with its peers given its amenities, including fixed piers, limitations to electrical service, absence of fuel or maintenance service, and open public access to the piers during the day.

Artemel recommended that the Committee act on RPCA's recommendation to form a subcommittee to examine this issue in further detail.

By action of the Chair, Pettey formed a subcommittee to study this issue. Volunteers comprising the subcommittee include Artemel, Atkinson, and Gosnell.

Update on City budget/CIP status

Blakeley reported that the City started work resurfacing the Montgomery Park tennis courts a year early. He noted that since the weather has dropped below 30 degrees, staff will stripe the asphalt as-is, and will return in warmer weather to color the courts. Artemel expressed his appreciation on behalf of the park's neighbors.

Blakeley reported that the City's budget outlook had worsened since the Committee's last meeting. He said that the RPCA budget would be \$3.2 million lower next fiscal year, a drop of 20 percent. He said the City Manager will be applying tiered cuts to department budgets. If the third tier is applied, the department will be cutting staff. The department has been asked to maintain as much service as possible, so seasonal workers, overtime, and travel and training budgets have been cut. He said that RPCA's goal is to provide the best service possible to the community given the budget situation.

On behalf of the Committee, Pettey expressed thanks to the staff. She said that the budget situation makes working conditions more challenging and the Committee is grateful for the work they do.

Announcements

The AVCA will host the annual Festival of Lights boat parade on waterfront on Saturday, December 6 just before dusk. Atkinson noted that the event would be different this year, starting and ending in Alexandria instead of ending in Washington, with the awards ceremony in Old Town. Blakeley said that the City expected to attract between 5,000 and 6,000 people for the event.

Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 8:57 a.m.