



City Hall  
Alexandria, Virginia

*Alexandria Waterfront Committee*  
*Department of Recreations, Parks and Cultural Activities*  
*1108 Jefferson Street*  
*Alexandria Virginia 22314*



June 23, 2010

Ms. Faroll Hamer, Director  
Department of Planning and Zoning  
City of Alexandria  
City Hall  
301 King Street, Room 2100  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Ms. Hamer:

This letter summarizes the position of the Alexandria Waterfront Committee on the Concept Waterfront Plan recently circulated for public review and comment.

The purpose of the Alexandria Waterfront Committee is to study and deal with issues relating to private and commercial uses of the waterfront. The Committee is a City Council-appointed body that represents a broad cross section of Waterfront stakeholders including City residents, businesspersons, and members of selected business associations, non-profit organizations, and City commissions.

Waterfront Committee members have been active participants throughout the Waterfront Plan-making process, including the unveiling of the Concept Waterfront Plan on May 3, 2010. The Committee received a presentation on the Concept Waterfront Plan from Mr. Karl Moritz and Ms. Nancy Williams of the Department of Planning and Zoning at its May 18, 2010 meeting and featured the Concept Waterfront Plan during its annual Waterfront Walk on June 8, 2010. At the Waterfront Committee's June 15, 2010 meeting, members discussed the Concept Waterfront Plan and by unanimous voice vote adopted the response documented in this letter.

The Alexandria Waterfront Committee's Waterfront Plan Principles, adopted in May 2009, outlined over 90 principles for consideration by residents, City staff, businesspersons, the general public, and other stakeholders in developing the Waterfront Plan. It included the following topic areas:

- General Vision
- Uses/Zoning
- Commerce
- Environmental Constraints/Impacts
- Parks and Open Space
- Historic Preservation
- Transportation

- Arts
- Safety and Security
- Marina
- Waterfront Attractions

In addition to these principles, the Waterfront Committee adopted a [Marina Vision Statement](#) in March 2010 that outlines additional principles for enhancement of the City Marina. The principles expressed in these documents were overwhelmingly supported by the membership of the Waterfront Committee.

The Concept Waterfront Plan publicly proposed by City staff is comprised of a two-page Goals and Objectives statement dated May 3, 2010; and the City's Concept Waterfront Plan presentation given at the Lyceum on May 3 and at subsequent City meetings. To date, no further written details of the Concept Plan have been provided. Notably, no written report summarizing the Concept Waterfront Plan presentation has been released. The lack of detail hampers review of the Concept Plan, as its underlying details and policies are unknown.

This letter summarizes the Committee's comments on the Concept Waterfront Plan. It incorporates a comparison of the City's Concept Plan materials released to date to the Committee's Waterfront Plan Principles and Marina Vision Statement. It is organized by the topic areas outlined in the Waterfront Plan Principles.

### ***General Vision***

The Committee stated in its Waterfront Plan Principles that Alexandria is embarking on a once-in-a-generation planning effort for its Waterfront, stating that it is crucial that the Plan balance the residential, commercial, and tourist interests as it seeks to enhance the enjoyment of the Waterfront by City residents, workers, and visitors alike. We note that compromise and discussion will be required to achieve a Waterfront Plan that will be enthusiastically supported by all Waterfront Stakeholders, and are optimistic that we will find common ground.

The Committee recommended that the Plan encompass programs and activities in addition to land uses and capital improvements. The Concept Plan contains no vision for programs and activities, which must be addressed in subsequent drafts.

The Committee recommended that that the Plan envision Waterfront investments by the public and private sectors alike. The Concept Plan does not address budgetary requirements or investment by either sector, a crucial element for implementation of the eventual plan, which must be addressed in subsequent drafts.

The Committee recommended that the Waterfront be a destination for people of all ages and physical abilities. The proposed Goals and Objectives include an objective to "Provide a variety of activities for people of all ages and cultures," but do not make specific mention of accessibility by the physically disabled. While such accommodations are required by federal law, Alexandria's plan should be proactive in ensuring accessibility.

The Committee recommended that the Waterfront ambience emphasize Alexandria's history, maritime heritage, marine uses, recreation, and the arts. The Concept Plan addresses these to varying degrees. While the proposed Goals and Objectives start by stating that the Waterfront has a unique identity that is grounded in the City's history, there is limited evidence of this objective in the Concept Plan materials. Similarly, there is limited mention of the City's marine heritage. Marine uses, recreation, and the arts are addressed to a more significant

degree, but as described in the sections that follow, additional details are required to adequately cover each of these areas.

The Committee recommended that development must preserve the historic scale and atmosphere of the current Waterfront area. The Concept Waterfront Plan concentrates development in areas most appropriate for development—the existing Robinson Terminal sites and the vicinity of The Strand. The Concept Plan does not propose new uses for thriving, existing neighborhoods.

The Committee recommended that open panoramic views be protected; visual awareness of the Waterfront should be improved and preserved; the Waterfront should be attractive both to and from the river; and the Waterfront should be open and accessible both to and from the river. The Concept Plan has a stated goal of enhancing permeability by enhancing vistas of the water from surrounding areas, and of the Waterfront from the river. Open vistas are depicted in artist's renderings of the Concept Plan. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that any monuments proposed for street ends or other locations along the Waterfront not obstruct water views.

The Committee recommended continuous public access along the Waterfront. This is accomplished in the Concept Plan, which envisions new opportunities for public access along portions of the Waterfront currently inaccessible to the public.

The Committee recommended encouraging water-related development along sections of the Waterfront. This is a feature of the Concept Plan, which includes an enlarged Marina; opportunities for non-motorized water recreation in Rivergate and Jones Point Parks; and utilization of existing large docks as part of any redevelopment of the Robinson Terminal sites.

### *Uses/Zoning*

Major recommendations of the Committee included encouraging a mix of new development compatible with the scale and tenor of existing development; close review of the design of proposed Waterfront buildings; and establishing maximum height limits and minimum setbacks. In addition, the Committee recommended maintaining existing residential areas; converting industrial sites to new uses; encouraging water-related activities and organizations in and near the water; and promoting day and evening activities. The degree to which many of these recommendations will be incorporated into the Waterfront Plan is difficult to assess at this time, as presentation materials released to date provide insufficient details on these points.

The Committee recommended that development be compatible with the historic character of the Waterfront. The Concept Plan's architectural concepts for sites appropriate for re-development—including both Robinson Terminal locations and The Strand—do not appear consistent with the historic scale and character of Old Town, resembling an update of the large-scale, "phony colony"-style of architecture of the 1960s urban renewal projects along King Street.

The Committee recommended several possible uses appropriate for Waterfront areas, including park uses that incorporate both active and passive recreation, a maritime museum, restaurants with outdoor/river views, boutique retail shops, an expanded Marina with dock suitable for visiting tall ships, boutique hotel, amphitheater, and office/residential components. Of these, the plan appears to address all but a maritime museum (or other type of museum facility), and it is unclear from the existing Concept Plan what provisions are being made for

cultural institutions such as the arts, public affairs, and historical organizations currently sited along the Waterfront. It is crucial that subsequent drafts of the Waterfront Plan make clear provisions for these key Waterfront stakeholders.

### ***Commerce***

The Committee noted the historical importance of commerce to the Alexandria Waterfront and encouraged that it continue to promote trade and maintain a vibrant Old Town business district. In addition, the Committee encouraged investigation of opportunities to incorporate retail and other appropriate commercial uses in the redevelopment of Waterfront industrial sites. In this regard, the Concept Plan succeeds in anchoring the King Street retail corridor and promoting new retail opportunities at existing industrial sites. Caution must be taken, however, to ensure that retail is balanced across the business district and that additional Waterfront retail is not detrimental to other parts of Old Town, such as King Street west of Washington Street.

The degree to which the Concept Plan encourages more neighborhood-serving retail uses—another of the Committee’s recommendations—is unclear. Enhancing the commercial attractiveness of the business district to Alexandria residents is an important component of balancing residential interests. The plan should strive to balance the market tendency for restaurants to dominate retail spaces where Lower King Street meets the Waterfront.

The Committee recommended encouraging the tourist potential of the historic and architectural aspects of Old Town, as well as the arts and cultural aspects. The Concept Plan succeeds in adopting the vision of the Alexandria Commission of the Arts, but does not provide sufficient detail on promoting the historic and architectural aspects of the Waterfront.

### ***Environmental Constraints/Impact***

The Committee recommended consideration of flood mitigation techniques based not only on historic flood events but also projected future sea level rise. The Concept Plan incorporates the Potomac Waterfront Flood Mitigation Study, but this only mitigates nuisance flooding. The Concept Plan does not address how existing historic buildings near the river may be made flood resistant as part of any historic preservation and redevelopment project. The Concept Plan does not address the subject of sea level rise and its impact on the Alexandria Waterfront, which could result in development upon lands that could be in jeopardy. Resolution of flooding issues must take priority over implementation of other major improvements recommended by the plan.

The Committee recommended passive land uses in flood prone areas, the preservation of existing wetlands, and preservation of existing shorelines. The Concept Plan is supportive of these recommendations, and goes further by proposing new wetlands in Oronoco Bay Park and the adoption of natural shorelines in several Waterfront locations.

The Committee recommended the upgrade of City sewers to eliminate combined sewer overflow and prevent sewer backups, and the use of environmentally sustainable construction and renovation approaches in accordance with the City’s Environmental Action Plan. The Concept Plan does not address these recommendations, although it does react to existing combined sewer outfall locations by avoiding water activities in these areas (such as the corner of Oronoco and North Union streets.)

The Committee recommended that the Waterfront be kept clean and free of manmade and natural debris, and that Waterfront features be engineered to limit the accumulation of debris. It is not clear to what extent this advice has been incorporated into the Concept Plan, specifically with regard to the proposed expansion of the City Marina and the development of a protective jetty. The likely environmental consequences of proposed changes to the City Marina must be understood and incorporated into subsequent drafts of the Waterfront Plan.

The Committee recommended planting trees along the Waterfront, but that new plantings should be sympathetic to river vistas from City streets. The planting of additional shade trees at Founders Park has been mentioned, but the Concept Plan does not include a comprehensive vision for additional shade along the Waterfront.

### ***Parks and Open Space***

The Committee recommended that the City maintain and improve existing parks, preserve existing and acquire new open space, and provide ample open space. The Concept Plan provides a vision for expansion of Waterfront parkland, but notably sacrifices a portion of Waterfront Park in exchange for property currently owned by the Old Dominion Boat Club. Ideally, the City could identify an alternate location for Boat Club parking that does not sacrifice parkland. One potential option is to maintain parking on a portion of the existing lot in the 200 block of The Strand, a site that may prove challenging to develop into parkland given past industrial uses.

The Concept Plan incorporates previously-adopted redevelopment plans for Jones Point Park and Windmill Hill Park. Jones Point Park redevelopment will proceed as the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project winds down, with the Virginia Department of Transportation slated to receive contractor's bids for redevelopment later this year. Plans for improvement of Windmill Hill Park, however, have slipped year after year as the City has struggled to identify capital improvement funds for the project. It is vital that the longstanding Windmill Hill Park plan, including bulkhead repairs, be completed. The experience with Windmill Hill Park underscores the importance of including a comprehensive funding plan in the Waterfront Plan that is ultimately adopted.

The Committee recommended that parks provide a mixture of active and passive uses, and include features such as fountains, art, and gathering spaces such as a performance amphitheater, picnic pavilion, or porch-style swings where appropriate. The Concept Plan succeeds in proposing fountains, art, and performance spaces, but must provide a more complete vision for incorporating passive park features such as swings and picnic pavilions. The Concept Plan's proposed pier (or alternately, an appropriate riverfront promenade) should consider including amenities that make it a welcoming place to view the river by residents and visitors not using the pier to access boat services, e.g., porch swings, a pavilion or gazebo, and café-style tables and chairs.

The Committee recommended providing a continuous pedestrian pathway and bikeway along the entire Waterfront. The Concept Plan succeeds in developing a Waterfront pathway from north to south along the River. However, the Concept Plan does not address signage or designation of preferred bikeways through Old Town, currently the weakest link in the Mount Vernon Trail system of bicycle paths.

The Committee recommended that fishing be permitted in designated locations. The Concept Plan does not address this recommendation.

### ***Historic Preservation***

The Committee recommended that Waterfront development be sensitive to and respectful of Alexandria's unique and authentic historical legacy as a major American colonial port city, protect buildings and areas of historic and

architectural value, and require adaptive reuse of historic or architecturally interesting old structures. In addition, the Committee recommended that streetscapes (parks, public walkways, and other Waterfront areas, as well as building materials, lighting, signage, landscaping, etc.) meet standards and be consistent with the City's historic context. The Concept Plan incorporates existing historic structures into the plan, but does not outline viable options to preserve existing historic buildings such as the former Beachcombers Restaurant at 0 Prince Street, or the vacant warehouses on South Union Street. Furthermore, the Concept Plan does not provide details of design standards for new development that would ensure compatibility with the existing historic fabric of Old Town. Architectural renderings included in the Concept Plan depict faux-historic buildings that are not compatible with the Committee's recommendations. Subsequent drafts of the Waterfront Plan must acknowledge that prime locations for Waterfront redevelopment are located in the Old and Historic District, and provide additional details on the incorporation of historic preservation into any redevelopment.

The Committee recommended that the plan maintain historic east-west vistas, corridors, and arteries such as alleys, former railways, and the shoreline of the historic Alexandria Waterfront, and that interpretive materials along the entire length of the Waterfront acknowledge the full spectrum of Alexandria's history, including the City's commercial, maritime, military, cultural, and social history. The Concept Plan preserves these corridors, but provides limited details on interpretive approaches for them.

The Waterfront Committee acknowledges the City's recent action to permit a restaurant to lease a portion of Wales Alley for an outdoor dining deck in exchange for improvements to the alleyway. On this point, our Committee is divided: A majority supported this action, but a minority of the Committee opposed encroachment into the alleyway, and notes that future such actions are contrary to preserving historic alleyways and could impinge on waterfront views.

### ***Transportation***

The Committee encouraged access to Alexandria's Waterfront by a variety of transportation modes, including transit, bicycle, boat, and foot, via options that distinguish Alexandria, such as the water taxi, trolley, and horse-drawn carriages. This included encouraging access via existing transit services, including the King Street Trolley. The Concept Plan succeeds in encouraging alternative transport options and promotes the King Street Trolley. The Concept Plan must carefully consider, however, how pedestrian traffic from commercial boats and water taxis interchanges with other public spaces. For example, the Concept Plan proposes to place the Water Taxi and commercial vessels along the proposed King Street pier. This contrasts sharply with the Charleston, S.C. Waterfront Park pier, which includes passive amenities and does not serve as a boat terminal.

The Committee noted that transportation and parking are required to promote commerce and access recreation, but should not impinge on the Waterfront experience, which requires a comprehensive parking plan. In addition, the Committee recommended that open field parking be eliminated and replaced by unobtrusive parking in structures that are compatible with the Waterfront area. The Concept Plan does not address parking in the vicinity of the Waterfront, a significant omission that must be addressed in subsequent drafts. Notably, the Concept Plan appears to *decrease* available parking in the vicinity of the Waterfront, while new development along the Strand will likely require additional parking to facilitate additional visitors. A proposed, the Concept Plan would place an additional burden on residential parking areas. A comprehensive parking plan and transportation management plan must be completed before embarking on this plan. These plans should consider the impacts of automobiles, tour buses, transit buses, bicycles and motorcycles.

The Committee recommended consideration of traffic-free areas. The only areas proposed to become traffic free are King Street east of the The Strand and The Strand between King Street and Wales Alley. Opportunities may exist to close additional streets to through traffic on a permanent or part-time basis.

### ***Arts***

The Committee recommended that Alexandria's Waterfront be a showplace for the arts, including public, fine, and performing arts, and include such features as sculpture and an outdoor performing arts venue. The Concept Plan succeeds in adopting the vision of the Alexandria Commission of the Arts, which include these elements.

The Committee recommended including a cultural facility that would be an educational resource for the community as well as visitors, including visual arts, literary arts, music, drama, and dance. In the event that Waterfront redevelopment projects displace existing arts organizations located along the Waterfront, the Committee recommended that the City work with the organization to identify and secure new locations in the same vicinity. While the Concept Plan maps potential locations for such new or relocated facilities, the viability of the City's support for such institutions is unclear. This will need to be detailed in subsequent drafts of the Waterfront Plan.

### ***Safety and Security***

The Committee offered several recommendations regarding Waterfront safety and security, including adequate policing, capital investments, public activity and visibility, and security infrastructure such as call boxes. The Concept Plan does not directly address these recommendations, though it does envision development at the Robinson Terminal sites and along The Strand that would enliven these areas and potentially deter crime. Subsequent drafts of the Waterfront Plan must detail options for ensuring a safe and secure environment, as well as estimated costs for securing new public facilities proposed for the Waterfront area.

### ***Marina***

The Committee envisioned an Alexandria City Marina that facilitates the recreational, commercial, historical, transportation, public service, and public safety objectives of the City's residents, businesses, visitors, non-profit organizations, and government. The Marina should facilitate activities that promote and preserve Alexandria's maritime heritage through such enhancements as:

- A central gathering place that preserves open vistas of the Potomac River and attracts residents and visitors alike
- A modern, well-maintained facility for docking boats that meets the technical specifications and market demands of recreational boaters
- Sufficient dock space and other facilities required to support commercial vessels, including tour boats
- An inviting permanent portal to the City for visitors arriving via ferry services such as the water taxi
- Continued space for river-oriented public service organizations such as the Alexandria Seaport Foundation
- Landside and dock facilities required to meet the needs of the Alexandria Fire and Police Departments
- A dock suitable for the permanent or temporary mooring of historic watercraft such as tall ships
- A berth adequate for visiting large ships such as cruise ships and warships

These features appear to have been adopted in the City's Concept Plan, which envisions sweeping changes to the City Marina that separate commercial and pleasure boat traffic; provide a dedicated berth for water taxis; construct additional pleasure boat slips; and improve and replace a significant portion of the existing Marina

infrastructure. However, the Concept Plan does not describe how elements of these objectives could be phased in advance of—or in lieu of—any large-scale Marina redevelopment. For example, existing Marina infrastructure—including dockmaster facilities and electrical supply—are in need of immediate attention, and should be addressed now irrespective of the timetable for future Marina redevelopment.

The Committee recommended that the City develop a strategic plan for the Marina that establishes a clear mission, vision, and goals, and then formulate a financial plan for the Marina that meets the objectives of the strategic plan and considers the needs of existing commercial and pleasure boat owners, residents, and tourists. The Committee suggested that the Marina become a self-sufficient enterprise, with user fees covering the cost of operations, maintenance, and capital improvements that primarily benefit boaters. The Concept Plan includes a dramatic expansion of the City Marina, but it is not clear whether the proposed expansion is guided by the economic drivers recommended by the Waterfront Committee.

Furthermore, the Concept Plan proposes expansion into Potomac waters controlled by the District of Columbia. The degree to which the District will be amenable to encroachment by Alexandria is not clear. Presentations on the Concept Plan by City staff have assumed away the difficulty with which the necessary permissions are likely to be achieved. The Waterfront Plan must acknowledge the sovereign boundaries of the City of Alexandria and the Commonwealth of Virginia and include a plan for Marina expansion that fits entirely within the City's jurisdiction, with expansion into the District as a *secondary* option *if* permission is granted.

The plan must also acknowledge other approvals required to develop the Marina as envisioned, including federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Department of the Interior, in addition to relevant state agencies. This is supported by a phased approach, with incremental improvements as conditions permit.

The Committee recommended that the City ensure that Potomac River waterways remain accessible to watercraft eligible to use the Marina and other docking facilities. The proposed jetty or breakwater alongside the Marina appears to be one attempt at maintaining river access by limiting the need to dredge the City Marina. However, the proposed jetty must be evaluated from a hydrological engineering standpoint to ensure it will achieve its desired purpose. Beyond the proposed jetty, river access is not addressed in the Concept Plan.

The Concept Plan calls for development of a boat launch at the foot of Prince Street to exclusively serve the Old Dominion Boat Club. The launch would replace the Club's existing boat ramp at its parking lot at the foot of King Street. This location is slated to become one of the most active stretches of the Waterfront and is an inappropriate location for a boat launch. Furthermore, instead of developing what would effectively be a private boat launch, the City should seek opportunities to locate a public boat launch accessible to all at a more appropriate location elsewhere along the Waterfront. Jones Point Park may be the most appropriate location for such a facility, but if such facilities cannot be accommodated there, other locations should be identified.

### ***Waterfront Attractions***

The Committee recommended that the Waterfront have a sense of place that is unique to Alexandria. The Concept Plan does not make a compelling case for proposed improvements within the context of Alexandria's uniqueness. Subsequent drafts of the plan must justify the improvements contemplated and relate them to the City's Waterfront history. Further, the plan must incorporate architectural design guidelines grounded in

Alexandria's architectural history. Architectural renderings associated with the Concept Plan convey a sense of historical no-place and not Old Town Alexandria.

The Committee recommended that the foot of King Street be a focal point for the Waterfront and provide an open view of the water to attract people. The Concept Plan proposes a large plaza for the foot of King Street, as well as a pier extending into the Potomac River. Enhancements to the foot of King Street are welcome, but should not sacrifice existing public park space in Waterfront Park as the proposed swap for Old Dominion Boat Club parking would do. The pier, while an intriguing concept, may be problematic to deliver as proposed given the jurisdictional issues involved with extension into the District of Columbia. It is also likely to be costly and must be considered in terms of City resources available to fund Waterfront investments. As noted earlier, the environmental impacts of proposed waterfront features must be fully understood, and features must be appropriately engineered to limit the accumulation of debris.

The Committee recommended that new Waterfront venues may include attractions for children such as a playground, splash fountain, a place to touch fresh water, and/or interactive public art. The Concept Plan proposes only one designated children's area along the Waterfront, in Oronoco Bay Park. Opportunities should be identified for multiple spaces and activities for children along the entire extent of the Waterfront. With careful design, art installations and interpretive signage may engage children (as well as adults) without being overtly aimed at children. Ideally, Alexandria's Waterfront will be viewed as "fun" place that children want to return to with their parents again and again.

The Committee recommended that Waterfront walkways capitalize on Alexandria's views of the Potomac, the U.S. Capitol, and other landmarks. The Concept Plan succeeds in this regard, but must ensure that this remains the case in any Marina development scenario that does not encroach into the District of Columbia.

The Committee noted that special events such as festivals and tall ships are an integral part of Alexandria's Waterfront experience and recommended that such events continue to be promoted, and that the Waterfront include vital public gathering places for large and small groups. The Concept Plan succeeds in designating space in Oronoco Bay Park and elsewhere along the Waterfront for large gatherings, and provides space for Tall Ships in a revamped City Marina. On the other hand, provisions for small groups are scarce. Accommodations should be arranged for small groups, picnickers, and wedding ceremonies.

The Committee recommended that the City promote opportunities for small-scale recreational watercraft (non-motorized) such as canoes, kayaks, row boats and/or un-powered sail boats. The Concept Plan recommends space for these activities in Rivergate Park, and supporting facilities are also proposed for Jones Point Park.

The Committee recommended that entertainers and historic interpreters be encouraged in public gathering places such as the Marina boardwalk; the Waterfront incorporate an outdoor covered pavilion to serve as a gathering place; the City consider obtaining a tall ship for permanent display to serve as a tourist attraction that interprets maritime heritage; and the City consider locating a maritime, archeology, or Alexandria history museum at the Waterfront. The Concept Plan does not address these recommendations.

***Other Points***

Much of the focus of the Concept Plan is on a small segment of the Waterfront, from Oronoco Bay Park south to Robinson Terminal South. Subsequent drafts must more fully address the entire Waterfront, from Four Mile Run and Daingerfield Island south to Jones Point Park.

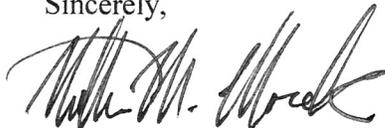
The only phasing contemplated in the Concept Plan is a graphic summary of how improvements to the City Marina may be phased in over time. In reality, there is much low-hanging fruit that may be (and in some cases, must be) accomplished quickly, and other concepts that will require years to implement. Subsequent drafts of the Waterfront Plan must address the likely timing of improvements, distinguishing near-term from long-term objectives.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Alexandria's Concept Waterfront Plan. We look forward to working with your department as the Waterfront Plan is further refined over the next few months.

If you should have further questions regarding this matter, please contact me at 202/365-2927 (mobile) or [natemacek@hotmail.com](mailto:natemacek@hotmail.com). On behalf of the Alexandria Waterfront Committee, thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Nathan M. Macek, Chair  
Alexandria Waterfront Committee

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