Alexandria Waterfront Commission
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
1108 Jefferson Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

ATTACHMENT 2: WATERFRONT COMMISSION LETTER

October 15, 2012

Mr. Rashad M. Young
City Manager
City of Alexandria
301 King Street, Room 3500
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Young:

RE: Union Street Corridor Study Recommendations

At a special meeting on September 27, 2012, the Alexandria Waterfront Commission **endorsed** a series of preferred alternatives resulting from the Union Street Corridor Study. This letter summarizes the Commission's recommended improvements to Union Street.

Background
In January 2012, the Waterfront Committee supported a recommendation of the Waterfront Plan Work Group favoring several early implementation activities upon adoption of the Waterfront Small Area Plan. This included completion of a Union Street corridor transportation study prior to approval of any new Waterfront development to mitigate and manage traffic along the Waterfront. On March 26, 2012, the Waterfront Committee provided comment on proposed scoping specifications for the Union Street Corridor Study. The study soon commenced following the City's selection of consultant Toole Design Group.

On June 21, 2012, the Waterfront Commission held an interactive work session with the consultant, discussing key issues such as motor coaches and delivery trucks, enforcement, maintaining pedestrian friendliness, managing bicycle traffic, and implementing and testing options early. The consultant also summarized traffic counts and other data collected for this study.

On August 23, 2012, the consultants presented several site-specific improvements and corridor alternatives for consideration by the Commission. Based on the Commission's feedback, these concepts were refined and presented to the public at a meeting held September 19, 2012. Following this meeting, the consultants presented recommended site-specific and corridor improvements for consideration by the Waterfront Commission on September 27, 2012, when the recommendations relayed in this letter were endorsed.

Throughout the process, there were numerous opportunities for public comment, including the September 19 public meeting and public discussion periods during each Waterfront Commission meeting, as well as meetings of the Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and the Old Town Civic Association.

Findings
In general, the Waterfront Commission finds that current conditions on Union Street can be improved and that changes are needed. The street should continue to serve all users, including pedestrians, motor vehicles, motor coaches, the King Street Trolley, delivery trucks, and bicycles. Given usage patterns, pedestrians are and should continue to be the priority at the intersection of King and Union streets; therefore, providing flexible space to serve the high volume of pedestrians at this location is a critical and necessary outcome of this project. Other modifications are warranted where Union Street connects to the Mount Vernon Trail and at Windmill Hill Park. In

addition, a combination of engineering, education, and enforcement is necessary to facilitate and mitigate the impacts of delivery trucks and bicyclists on Union Street. Along the entire corridor, improvements should be high-quality and consistent with the historic character of Union Street.

Recommendations
The Waterfront Commission endorses the following site-specific and corridor-long improvements:

- **Delivery Vehicles:** The Commission supports the creation of targeted delivery loading zones, which would minimize existing blockages due to double-parking along Union Street. Loading should be permitted only during designated time periods, which should be strictly enforced. Delivery activities should be relocated, when possible, off of Union Street and onto adjacent alleyways.

- **Bicycles:** The Commission supports maintaining Mount Vernon Trail connections to Union Street. We remain concerned, however, with the violation of stop signs and speeding laws by bicyclists along Union Street. We support additional traffic calming measures along the Union Street corridor, and urge increased enforcement by the Police Department. We also support development of a "bicycle boulevard" along Royal Street to provide an enhanced route for through bicyclists away from the Waterfront. The Commission supports additional bicycle parking in the Waterfront area—including installation of a bike corral—but recommends that it be located away from the unit block of King Street.

- **Mt. Vernon Trail Connection:** The Commission reviewed several potential improvements near the intersection of Pendleton Street and North Union Street, where the Mount Vernon Trail transitions from a dedicated bike trail to Union Street:

    - We support installation of a dedicated left-turn lane for bicyclists from eastbound Pendleton Street onto the northbound Mount Vernon Trail at Oronoco Bay Park. This facilitates bike traffic that chooses to use Royal Street as an alternative to Union Street. This may be accomplished in the near-term with pavement striping and temporary bollards, and in the medium-term with raised medians and other durable improvements to the intersection.

    - We support realignment of the bike lane across the railroad tracks at the corner of Pendleton Street and North Union Street to provide a safer geometric configuration for bicyclists.

    - We support the addition of a pedestrian walkway on the east side of North Union Street near Robinson Terminal North, where presently none exists. Pavement striping and plastic bollards may provide a temporary solution, but we encourage the installation of a sidewalk here in the medium term. We understand that the City's right-of-way here extends to the face of the existing Robinson Terminal North warehouse building, so a sidewalk could potentially be installed here with minimal encroachment on the existing parking lanes and roadway. With the addition of a sidewalk here, the irregular diagonal crosswalk at the intersection of Pendleton Street and North Union Street could be eliminated.

    - We support the installation of sharrows and other pavement markings as appropriate near the intersection of Queen Street and North Union Street to indicate the transition to shared lanes.

- **Intersection of King and Union Street:** The Commission understands that this is an extraordinary intersection, with pedestrian volumes during particular times of the week that dwarf automobile and bicycle traffic. This is understandable as King Street pedestrians cross Union Street here to reach the Torpedo Factory Art Center, the City Marina, and other Waterfront attractions. Conversely, visitors disembarking

from the Water Taxi or the King Street Trolley cross the other direction to reach King Street's shops and restaurants. Such an unusual traffic pattern calls for unique design solutions in this area.

- In the short-term, we support improved crosswalks at this intersection, utilizing site-appropriate materials to clearly distinguish this intersection as a pedestrian zone.

- We support piloting a dedicated pedestrian space in the unit block of King Street, which would maintain one-way, westbound access for motor vehicles and the Trolley yet provide more seating and gathering space on the south side of the unit block of King Street.

- We support the institution of left-turn restrictions at the intersection of King Street and Union Street. This would eliminate the conflicting movements for automobiles that cause the greatest motorist delay at this intersection. In addition, it would improve pedestrian safety by requiring traffic to turn right or move straight through the intersection, maneuvers which are much simpler to execute than left turns. The Commission does not support the installation of a traffic signal at this intersection.

- We support permanently eliminating some on-street parking spaces at the immediate intersection of King and Union Street, which currently waste space that could be better used to provide more elbow room for pedestrians. The Commission supports a pilot program to test part-time removal of on-street parking at select locations to provide expanded tree boxes, additional pedestrian space, or space for outdoor dining.

- In the long-term, the Waterfront Commission endorses construction of a shared street, which would raise the road to be flush with the sidewalk, where pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles share a common street space, along Union Street between Cameron Street and Prince Street, and in the unit and 100 blocks of King Street. Implementation of this concept will require further design, which should consider such factors as the optimal allocation of space between users, delivery vehicle access, curb design and transition, traffic calming and right-of-way, materials and curb placement, drainage, and accommodation of special events.

- **Windmill Hill Park Improvements:** We support improvements to slow traffic and promote a cohesive Windmill Hill Park along South Union Street. The Commission supports installation of raised crosswalks at the intersection of Gibbon Street and South Union Street. We also support installation of raised crosswalks where the bike path from the Wilkes Street Tunnel intersects South Union Street, but believe a stop sign, rumble markings, or other controls for bicyclists should be installed where the trail meets Union Street. In the long-term, however, we believe further improvements will be required to make the area less like two parks divided by a roadway and more like a unified park with a parkway through the middle.

- **Increase Traffic Enforcement:** The Commission strongly endorses additional police enforcement of traffic regulations in the corridor, including parking, loading, and stop sign compliance by motorists, delivery trucks, and bicyclists. Our efforts to create a more livable public space will not succeed without cooperation by the police to ensure order in this area.

- **Ensure Quality of Proposed Improvements:** The Commission urges the City to ensure that improvements to the Union Street corridor are high-quality and consistent with the historic character of Union Street. This extends to suggested pilot programs, where a haphazard interim approach could sabotage support for long-term improvements. Many of the suggested improvements will require further design and engineering; the Waterfront Commission would like to continue to provide feedback on proposed concepts as they evolve.

Next Steps
In our Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) recommendations, the Waterfront Commission endorsed funding for implementation of recommendations of the Union Street Corridor Study. The Commission has also endorsed FY14 CIP funding for final design and construction services of flood mitigation improvements, including modifications to the unit block of King Street, The Strand, and North and South Union Street. These activities should be linked, as both affect street surfaces along these blocks. The Commission reiterates its funding request for these expenditures.

In addition, the Waterfront Commission has endorsed completion of a Lower King Street Pedestrian Traffic Study in its FY 2014 CIP recommendations. This project would study alternate traffic patterns and capital improvements along the Unit and 100 blocks of King Street to maximize pedestrian accessibility, and is an important follow-on to the Union Street Corridor Study. The Commission is particularly interested in construction of a shared street in the 100 block of King Street, in addition to the unit block of King and Union Street between Prince and Cameron. This study would inform how best to utilize a shared street in this area. The Commission understands that funding may be identified to complete this study yet in FY13, but if not, this should be a high priority follow-on to the Union Street Corridor Study in FY14.

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We appreciate the opportunity to provide this feedback on the Union Street Corridor Study, and look forward to providing continuing feedback as the recommendations of this study are implemented by the City. On behalf of the Alexandria Waterfront Commission and the broad Citywide constituencies that we represent, thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Nathan M. Macek, Chair
Alexandria Waterfront Commission

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