

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 15, 2020

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: HILLARY ORR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM #4 – KING STREET PLACE

ISSUE: Provide an update on King Street Place – a Pedestrian Pilot Program on the 100 Block of King Street.

RECOMMENDATION: The Transportation Commission hold a public hearing and endorse the pilot project and recommend approval by the City Council.

BACKGROUND: Staff is proposing a pilot program to convert the 100 block of King Street (between Lee Street & Union Street) into a temporary pedestrian-only space during the weekends from April – October 2020. The groundwork for the pedestrian improvements started as part of the Union Street Corridor Study in 2012. The circulation for a pedestrian only space was evaluated as part of the 2015 Lower King Street Multimodal Feasibility Study. This study involved extensive community outreach and identified key values for the community. Around the same time, a temporary Old Town Area Parking Study (OTAPS) work group was formed to make recommendations on parking management in the Old Town area. Findings from the 2015 Lower King Street Multimodal Feasibility Study were put on hold until the OTAPS study was completed and provided further recommendations.

In the summer of 2019, Council requested that this project be added to the FY 2020 Interdepartmental Long-Range Work Plan and that staff return with a project plan.

In October 2019, staff presented a timeline and process for implementing a pilot project lasting from April through October 2020 and received more direction from Council. This is a joint project between Planning and Zoning (P&Z), Transportation and Environmental Services (TES), Department of Project Implementation (DPI), Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RCPA), and Visit Alexandria. Staff provided an update to the Transportation Commission on this project in December.

Staff is providing an update to Council in January and is seeking approval of the pilot in February. At the end of the pilot, a report will be provided to City Council with recommendations for a path forward.

DISCUSSION: Staff is recommending a pilot project to allow for pedestrian improvements to the 100 block of King Street and that vehicle traffic be restricted on weekends from April through October 2020. Staff has developed a draft design for the block based on input from the business community, safety restrictions, past feasibility studies, and comments from Council and the Waterfront Commission. The proposed design would allow for additional outdoor dining, public space, and a larger pedestrian space where vehicles normally travel. The pilot would remove parking at all times, allowing the outdoor dining and public spaces to remain and allow two-way vehicular traffic during the week, with safety barriers between the outdoor dining, public space and vehicles. The recommendation to remove parking at all times is based on business feedback, as well as cost savings benefits associated with avoiding additional storage and maintenance that would be necessary to modify the street design between weekdays and weekends. Additionally, in response to requests for more public seating, staff is proposing replace the two unrestricted parking spaces on the unit block of King Street with more options for public seating.

Trolley

In order to accommodate the closing of the 100 block of King Street, the lower King trolley route will be adjusted. This adjusted route will require the removal of some parking spaces necessary for turning movements. The eastbound route would turn north on Lee Street, East on Cameron Street, and South on Union Street to maintain access to the waterfront for those with mobility difficulties.

Design

Design options for the 100 block are currently ongoing. The space will provide additional public seating, expanded opportunities for outdoor dining, some programming for activities, greater pedestrian accommodations off the crowded sidewalks, and street paint and lighting elements. There will be barriers for safety which include removal bollards for emergency access, as well as planter and other heavy materials that double as design elements and protection. The roadway design leaves 20' for emergency vehicle access.

Opportunities

The King Street Place pilot also provides an opportunity to test out new innovative ideas – as a type of “pilots within a pilot.” One such idea is the incorporation of a Pick-Up, Drop-Off (PUDO) zone for valet, loading, TNCs, and third-party food deliveries. Another “pilot within a pilot” option is to incorporate the use of public spaces such as parklets or lounge areas. Parklets convert 1-2 parking spaces into public amenities such as on-street seating, landscaping, games, and art. During the pilot, staff will also monitor traffic, deliveries and loading to determine if more or less spaces are needed to accommodate businesses. Finally, a flexibly structured pilot would allow the City to test temporary full-street closures during weekdays in addition to the weekend pedestrianization. These ideas could be tested, evaluated, and adjusted throughout the pilot according to their success and the feedback from the community and surrounding businesses.

Engagement

The City, in partnership with Visit Alexandria, has proactively engaged stakeholder groups to gather input on the proposed pilot. Staff has met with and received feedback from:

- Businesses on and around the 100 Block
- Waterfront Commission
- Transportation Commission
- Old Town Civic Association

The majority of businesses on the 100 block are supportive of the pilot and staff is continually working with the businesses to hear their feedback and address concerns.

Timeline

Staff will provide updates to the Traffic and Parking Board and Council in January and receive feedback on the current proposals. Council will be asked to approve the pilot in February. If approved, staff will provide updates to the Special Events Committee and Traffic and Parking Board in March before implementation in April.