



## ALEXANDRIA OLD & HISTORIC DISTRICT RESIDENTS GROUP

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### Comments regarding the first draft of the Ad Hoc Motorcoach Task Force Recommendations

Date: 9 January 2009

To: Rich Baier, Chair, Alexandria Ad Hoc Motorcoach Task Force

Rich,

I did not realize until I got into this how much commentary was going to be required. Nor did I expect the content to be this rough. To do all of this over Christmas has been a bit much to ask of us and getting people to read the whole thing has been tough. Some that have read it have complained that they can't understand it. I too have had trouble.

That being said, I have done my best to comment where I could. I have read through this a number of times myself and I find cannot assent to most of it. The others that have read it agree with me. You will, however, find us in full agreement regarding a rigorous enforcement of existing law.

We find that there is also quite a bit of pertinent information that is not included that should be. I find it amazing that we can all meet for a period of eight months and have this paper demonstrate so little understanding of what the issues are for those of us who live here.

#### **What is the problem?**

The problem is poorly stated. Are there too many buses or too few? Are they too big or does size matter at all? Do they bring any negatives at all? If we cannot clearly state what the issue is and where we intend to go, we cannot construct a cogent document.

It is important to include an analysis of the existing motorcoach traffic in the Washington DC area. Alexandria is in a tight spot with regards to the tourist machinery of the District. Depending upon who you talk to, Washington can receive between 1000 and 1200 tour buses per day during the high season. The American Bus Association stated to this Task Force that the number is 1000 per day, the same number that was supplied to the Washington DC Tour Bus Initiative five years ago. Others think that it is higher.

Whatever number you use (it doesn't make much difference) and with some counting, it possible to begin to estimate the number of buses that come to the streets of Old Town. With these numbers, the physical constraints that the OTCA has so perceptively described become very real. Why are these numbers and constraints not included in the report? I am attaching a letter that I sent to Yon on October 26, 2008 that provides some insight on where these numbers are headed.

## **Lack of Residential Issues & Concerns**

The absence of residential opinion in this draft has not been for the residents' lack of trying, nor has it been for any reticence to speak up on the matter. Residents spoke out strongly at the last task force (the ACVA one) and in this one too. The OTCA put forward its own position in October. Our own group expended a five year effort researching this issue, publishing a paper and taking a position. We devoted an entire chapter of 27 pages to the deleterious effects that heavy motorcoach traffic brings to our neighborhoods. Numerous residents have written the city and the newspapers to complain about this traffic. The task force draft acknowledges none of this. Because of the lack of residential perspective in this document, there is very little to like in it. This document is very misleading in its present form.

Upon reflection, it should not be surprising that the residents' concerns are not showing up in this document. The results of the issues matrix (page 27) have buried our interests under those of the ACVA. The composition of this task force—1/3 commercial, 1/3 city, and 1/3 residential—made it possible for any two voting blocks to move this task force in a direction of their choosing. The residents, being in the minority, could not press the issues that were important to them. That needs to be noted in this report. **Designated routes, parking and loading are NOT the concerns of residents, they are the concerns of the motorcoach industry and the ACVA.** Rather it is the size, weight, numbers, noise, safety, inability to navigate, and time of operation of these huge vehicles that are our worries. Where in this draft is there any discussion of that?

## **Enforcement**

Of all the priorities of the task force, enforcement is something that we can all get behind. I note that the Title 9 sections are mentioned but there is no mention of Title 10, particularly §10-6-3. I recently received an email about this and I vaguely remember it being discussed at an early meeting. I do not remember what you said about it and I have no hand-outs and nothing in my notes. I think that it would be proper to include a review of the sections concerning vehicle width, height, length, and weight in the report along with the others.

## **Other Comments**

I am going to start the rest of my comments by addressing each item of the Motorcoach Task Force Recommendations on pages 7 and 8. We can only offer wholehearted support of item 8.

## **General Motorcoach Management Recommendations**

### **1. Appoint an advisory committee to oversee the future management of motorcoach operations within the City.**

Any advisory committee must not be structured like this task force. City employees should have no vote. Insofar as motorcoach operations will encroach, residents must have a controlling say in this committee. Residents on this committee must have an undivided and declared interest AS RESIDENTS. For example, a business

owner that is a resident should not be able to serve because of the conflict. My fear that too much pressure can be brought by special interests to bend the City government to their purposes. We are already seeing this. The Charleston Tourist Board might provide a good model to follow.

**2. Institute a voluntary, on-line motorcoach registration system by March 2010 to include fees and daily limitations on certain types of motorcoach trips. In the interim, conduct counts of motorcoach traffic in Alexandria.**

I fail to see how a voluntary system will work. I cannot see companies always opting to pay for something that they are not obligated to. I also do not see how the city is going to count motorcoaches that do not register. There is no registration now and an accounting of those buses has been deemed too difficult. How will this system be easier?

Also, everyone in this task force should be able to understand the philosophical differences between registration and permitting. This is important. If any motorcoaches are to be allowed east of Washington Street a permitting system, well rooted in law, is the only acceptable way.

**Designated Routes**

**3. Designate the unit block of King Street one-way westbound permanently to allow for safer traffic flow and provide better motorcoach management.**

We have never liked the idea of 45 foot motorcoaches in this area and it continues to bother us. This area is characterized by dense pedestrian use, narrow streets, tight corners, and sensitive structures. As an expedient measure, we have suggested that the buses be allowed down in this area only for the purpose of boat tours. But we have noted that the boat tour companies have been reluctant to provide detailed information regarding the number of motorcoaches and patrons using these facilities. This makes planning difficult and it should be recognized that these motorcoach-to-boat operations cannot be substantially scaled at this location. In the interest of developing this attraction further, could some or all of the motorcoach-to-boat operations be moved to National Harbor? Is that a proper question to ask? The boats are an ideal way to bring more people to town. Can that be improved upon?

**4. By March 2010, establish designated routes for four primary trip types: (1) Motorcoaches bound for hotels, (2) Motorcoaches bound for loading/unloading/short-term parking east of Washington Street, (3) Sightseeing buses with step-on guides and (4)**

**Pass-through motorcoaches. Routes will be vetted and approved through the proposed advisory committee.**

(1) Motorcoaches with luggage bound for hotels is something that we said that we would support in our paper. These tend to be very high value visits with low frequency. However, we note that others are opposed to this.

(2) In our paper, we have stated that we are against motorcoaches stopping east of Washington Street except for certain “core” purposes, I think we defined a core purpose as something of high cultural value. What we had in mind for the cultural value of Old Town was its history and period architecture—in short, its heritage. Our thinking was that the museums and historic houses (which are essentially empty most of the time) could benefit from motorcoach visitation. These patrons are the elusive heritage tourists, one of the higher value tourist categories that there are. As an adjunct to these museum visits, hotels, restaurants and stores would also benefit.

However, if we cannot agree on what a *core purpose* is in Old Town, then this cannot work. We do not consider restaurants and stores to be of high cultural value in and of themselves. These things can be found in just about any environment, including suburban malls. Motorcoach visitation to Old Town restaurants are going to involve after-dark travel and a transit through residential areas. Restaurants in Old Town are considered special uses requiring special-use-permits (SUPs) to operate. These SUPs have been instituted to maintain the quality of life for residents and to control the disturbances that can be created by the restaurant. There are too many restaurants in Old Town to allow motorcoaches to travel through residential areas to access these places with a four-trip bounce (arrival, to parking, from parking, departure). This cannot be allowed if residential areas are involved.

(3) These buses must be reduced in size. Exceptions should not be made for some tour operators while barring others. This must be fairly considered. Washington DC is teeming with professional tour guides. If you allow touring for one group, how do you not allow it for everyone? The law must be fair for everyone and favor no one.

(4) Pass-through motorcoaches shall be confined to Washington Street and Route 1.

## **Unloading/Loading and Short-Term Parking**

### **5. Designate the south side of Jamieson Avenue between Holland Lane and South West Street as short-term motorcoach parking with limited hours and seasonality.**

If this location is to be primarily used as a holding location for motorcoaches shuttling people in and out of Old Town, it should not be allowed. We do not like the idea that the motorcoach should be used as a shuttle vehicle into and out of the sensitive areas of the city. Smaller vehicles need to be used for this activity.

We believe that it has been a mistake to develop Market Square as a motorcoach depot. This has set too many of these heavy vehicles on residential streets. In 2002, when a proposal was put forward to develop a tourist center at Market Square, it was resoundingly opposed by the citizens. An unacceptable increase in motorcoach traffic was an aspect of that. Despite these warnings the city has gone ahead with this plan anyway—only without the buildings. They have tried to institute remote parking with the result of doubling the traffic. Market Square cannot continue to be used in this way. These spaces should be reserved for the use of smaller shuttle vehicles.

### **6. Improve signage at existing designated loading/unloading and parking areas.**

I don't know what this means. There are also locations and purposes that we do not approve of. I need more information to comment.

### **7. Designate new 15-minute loading/unloading spaces in the 100 blocks of North and South Washington Street from March through June to accommodate seasonal increases in motorcoach traffic.**

We have gone on record as saying that we like this idea in concept. However, we note that others disapprove. We would like to hear more details as to how this would work and what the objections are. What are the particulars?

## **Enforcement**

### **8. Instruct the Alexandria Police Department to more aggressively enforce existing city ordinances with respect to motorcoach traffic and collect/report data related to motorcoach violations.**

We couldn't agree more.

### **9. Within 3 years, include in the City's legislative package a joint City-industry proposal to amend the Code of Virginia to acquire regulatory authority to restrict operation of non-scheduled buses to specific streets and/or issue permits.**

This must be done right and well-rooted in the first principles of what constitutes a residential zone and historic district. This must not be arbitrary in conception or in development. If not done properly, we see dangers. We do not like the idea that we need the permission of the motorcoach industry to do this. That such an industry can reach into the political chambers of this city and project their influence is troubling. That our city employees would entertain this notion is even more troubling.

**10. Continue funding the Alexandria Police Department in its motorcoach management efforts in the Unit Block of King Street.**

How much does this cost again? That number should be included in the report. That number should be compared with the city benefits (read “taxes”) that are received. If the city is not receiving sufficient benefit for this, why are we funding it? As a general principle, if extra police are needed, those that directly benefit should pay.

**Education**

**11. Use a combination of electronic, print, and broadcast tools to improve communications efforts related to motorcoach traffic.**

Once a solution is found, this can be done. We are a long way from that.

**12. Publish a new brochure and motorcoach map in 2009.**

If a motorcoach map into Old Town is published on the basis of this report, then that will be the ultimate slap in the face. A resident should have no faith in the present government of this city.

**Motorcoach Route Summary p. 31, 32.**

I note that Lee Street, Pitt Street, and St. Asaph Streets are omitted. Why is this? I was under the impression that all streets would be studied. I will state outright that I find this list of streets difficult to assess as one street looks very much like another. There are small differences to be sure, but I think that most will agree that they are essentially the same. I do not see how someone could use the criteria provided to establish a motorcoach route that would run through a district that is supposed to be residential. The logic must be explained to me. If anything, this all looks quite illegal. Furthermore, I would like to see how many intersections in this grid of streets can easily accommodate a motorcoach turn without the coach occupying both lanes. I would like to see those intersections listed.

**Motorcoach Industry Comments, p. 24, 25, 26**

The motorcoach industry’s opinions, complete with logos, are certainly well represented in this draft. It is always interesting to hear the industry provide statistics on their industry. I am happy

to hear that the motorcoach industry carries many people and feeds and lodges them. I wish them all the success in the world. However, what is at issue here is the residential and historic areas east of Washington Street. This is not a large area out of all the areas that they cover. Can we have some reliable data on our corner of the world for a change? Why will no one say what they do here?

**Weight & Size.** One must keep in mind that a motorcoach is designed right at the legal limit for the federal highway system. It is a stretch of the imagination to suggest that such vehicles be allowed unfettered access to sensitive residential areas with narrow streets. It makes no sense. I find it extraordinarily frustrating that our own city government does not recognize this.

I object to the industry statement regarding the weight of their buses. Our paper has a substantial write-up on this very subject, which the city has not chosen to include in this draft.

The industry states that their buses, at 25 tons, are 60% lighter than a fully loaded tractor trailer. True. But it is not gross vehicle weight that is the important factor here. As any highway engineer will tell you, it is axle weight and wheel load. You can drive a house down the street as long as it is supported with enough wheels and axles.

A tractor-trailer has 18 wheels and 5 axles while a motorcoach has only 8 wheels (less than half that of the tractor-trailer) and 3 axles. This is a HUGE difference that continuously places motorcoaches right at or just over the legal limit for axle load depending on their configuration. As a result, the motorcoach industry has lobbied congress to increase the allowed axle load from 20,000 pounds to 24,000 pounds in 2009. This law is now in temporary effect and will probably be made permanent by the end of the year.

**Idling.** Another issue is idling and the 2008 change in the Virginia Code that now allows motorcoach idling up to 15 minutes in Virginia cities. This is an OUTRAGE! This was the only thing that the residents could get out of the ACVA task force. I think I know what happened but I will say nothing more until I know for sure.

**Green Motorcoaches.** I wanted to ask what all of this green stuff is doing in this report. Why is this applicable? This looks to me to be an industry propaganda dump. If you are serious, then you must take a closer look at what is really happening. How many people who come to Alexandria by motorcoach would really be driving instead? How full are the buses? How long do they idle? How much fuel is used running empty to and from parking? If you cannot answer that question, then this material should not be included. It is irrelevant. You can re-read our paper for a discussion of the issues.

**Demographics.** Quoting from page 26, “The ABA reported that the motorcoach industry continues to see growth beyond students and seniors with a noticeable uptick in high-end baby-boomer customers.” That is not what we are seeing from the industry here in Old Town. I am sure that they happen but I cannot remember the last time that I saw a senior tour or a “high-end baby-boomer” tour. During this past year, the vast, vast majority were grade-school tours. These groups are very budget conscious.

**Alexandria Touring Companies, p. 25.**

I do have a few additional comments and a few questions regarding these tours. I wrote a three page letter to you in early December regarding the touring situation here now which I am attaching to this document for your reference. Some of that information should have been included in the draft.

Rich, you must provide some analysis if you are going to include information that “the company reported a figure of \$2,000 to \$3,000 in benefits to the City due to each sightseeing coach.” Is this tax revenue or a \$3,000 restaurant tab? This applies to each bus?

Let us call this touring business what it is... a BUSINESS. While I have no interest in seeing the taxes that these folks pay on their entire income, I do have an interest to see how much commerce is being conducted on my residential street. The taxes that I pay on my house are public knowledge, why not a business being operated on the public way within a few feet of it?

A worker cannot put a ladder on the sidewalk of this city without a permit but it is OK for 50 people to congregate several times a night for ghost stories? A taxicab must leap over all kinds of regulatory hurdles to do business here while a slowly moving 27-ton 45-foot interstate motor-coach need do absolutely nothing to carry people around for money—and in an area where there is not supposed to be commerce?

The time has come for this to be controlled. These streets belong to everyone, not just the tour companies. This goes for the tours that occur on wheels and on foot.

**Task Force Field Trip p. 30**

The September 22nd motorcoach field trip did identify other issues of concern, yet you do not list them. They should be. I have attached the feedback letter that I sent to Yon last October for your review and inclusion.

**Closing Remarks.**

I have to say that we are disappointed in both the tone and the content of this draft. We have done what we can to comment on it but it appears to us that this task force is going the way of the the last one. We had held out much hope for this process but I now worry that the city will not fairly address this issue. July 28th was the turning point for me when our residential concerns were not included as task force priorities. As a consequence, our trust in this process has been substantially diminished.

I fear that we are very far away from being able to agree on many of these items. We can discuss this as a group on Monday and if you wish more information from me before that, I am available.

Rob Aronson



## ALEXANDRIA OLD & HISTORIC DISTRICT RESIDENTS GROUP

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26 October 2008

Yon,

I owe you feedback on the issue of motorcoach routes in Old Town and some commentary on the Motorcoach tour of September 22nd.

### **Washington Street Loading & Unloading**

We liked Paul's idea of using Washington Street as a loading and unloading area. It confines the buses to an arterial street as other cities have done. Washington Street near King, Prince, and Cameron Streets is within walking distance of almost all Old Town attractions, and for visitors who choose not to walk the King Street Trolley is nearby.

There would be a few issues to work out with regards to Washington Street rush-hour parking restrictions, safety, and remote parking (buses should not be allowed to park there for more than the time to load or unload). However, those do not seem to be insurmountable.

### **September 22nd Bus Trip Observations**

Even though the traffic on that Monday night was light, it was evident that the coach still had some difficulty navigating the streets in Old Town. Off-tracking continues to be a serious issue with these vehicles. Most intersections in Old Town are such that a motorcoach must use both lanes of the street during a turn. If the other lane is occupied by a car, the bus driver must wait until the other lane is clear or risk getting stuck in the turn. We have all seen this.

During our bus trip, the driver was observed rushing a turn while sounding the horn to claim the oncoming traffic lane before a car could block it. This is an all too common occurrence on many corners. I have seen and heard this a number of times where I live and elsewhere.

In two cases, our motorcoach had to back up—once to complete a turn and once while parking. It should be noted that these motorcoaches are not usually equipped with an audible back up signals. Viewed primarily as over-the-road-buses (OTRBs) by the federal government, federal law does not require them. However, in high-density pedestrian areas, it is a crucial safety device. Even garbage trucks have them.

Our bus trip was at night. Nighttime motorcoach travel in residential areas is also something that we remain vehemently against. There should be no heavy traffic of any kind on residential streets after dark. This trip did not put my mind at ease with regards to motorcoaches in residential areas, it only reminded me of the negative impacts.

## **Motorcoach Routes in Old Town**

As to motorcoach routes, we have decided to oppose any effort to establish dedicated motorcoach routes in the confines of Old Town east of Washington Street. We view these efforts as both improper and impractical. We realize that the ACVA wants this and that the City is trying to accommodate them. However, we note that there is no model to follow this action. Of all the cities that we have examined, none have chosen to do dedicated routing through residential areas. We do not see why anyone should see this as a proper thing to do.

Since July 27th, when the task force voted to prioritize route-finding as an objective, we have tried to keep an open mind. However, we now see that there is nothing new in these proposals. These proposals had been discussed at length before in the management committee of the old ACVA motorcoach task force, and to no agreement.

One resident likened the concept of a motorcoach route to the establishment a motorcoach “rail-road” in Old Town—with this frequent heavy coach traffic being concentrated only on certain streets. The concentrating of motorcoaches only concentrates the nuisances and dangers.

It sounds malicious to me to argue that these routes can be located where there are fewer residences, wider residential streets, or where there is already an established public bus route. This amounts to an intention to harm some while not harming others, essentially selling one street out for another. ALL residents should be treated the same. The protections that are supposed to exist for residential areas should be respected.

It needs to be understood that the establishment of motorcoach routes in Old Town would involve an EXTREME intensification in the use of some streets. Washington DC can receive between 1,000 and 1,200 motorcoaches per day during the spring busy season. We calculate that residential Alexandria is currently experiencing about 5% of that number, amounting to between 50 and 60 motorcoaches per day (perhaps a few more).

It should be clear to anyone that the natural year-over-year growth of motorcoach traffic in the District is going to increase these numbers further. This, combined with aggressive marketing by the ACVA, could easily double the number of motorcoaches in Old Town over the next few years. Beyond that, it is not inconceivable that that number could double yet again.

It doesn't take much to see that the motorcoach problem facing Alexandria is one of current and future numbers. However, this task force is apparently choosing to ignore this. Rather, routes and parking (systems that facilitate more and more motorcoaches coming to Old Town) have been voted as priorities. Residents, even though they are the majority in Old Town, are quick to point out that they did not get to vote on these points. Routes and parking are NOT their priorities. And as to enforcement? We need a task force to enforce existing law?

There is growing concern that the City is not going to address this issue either carefully or fairly. I am beginning to share that view.

R. Aronson



## ALEXANDRIA OLD & HISTORIC DISTRICT RESIDENTS GROUP

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3 December 2008

Rich Baier  
Chair, Alexandria Motorcoach Task Force

Rich,

Some commentary at the last Motorcoach Task Force meeting on 27 October made me think that our point is not being made clear. There seemed to be an underlying notion by some in attendance at that meeting that residents were somehow against tourism. From our point-of-view, nothing could be further from the truth.

All of us have a great regard for history. Some of us even have historical family roots here (my own go back to the time of the Civil War, others to before the Revolution). Indeed, we wish that a respect for the history of this town was an even greater priority with our City government and with those representing what Alexandria was all about.

Our desire is to make this better for everyone, including the touring companies. Properly managed, there is room for even more tourism. That being said, it must be recognized that there are limits as to how this touring activity should be conducted.

From some of the comments at the last meeting, I noted that there also seems to be a belief amongst those in the touring business that they may exploit the public spaces in whatever way they see fit; that they even have a *by-right* claim to operate there. In a world without zoning, this is certainly true. However, Old Town does have zoning and, on top of that, layers of permitting for special uses. Supposedly, these rules afford the community some measure of protection. But if the City chooses to ignore or misinterpret the letter or the intent of these laws, what protections are there? As one of our neighbors who sells real estate put it, "How much are residents supposed to endure for living here?"

It is clear that these touring businesses operate within residential areas for their own profit, apparently in contravention to the rules that are supposed to control commerce there. For years, this was not a concern due to the relatively low numbers of tours involved and nobody thought much about it. However, the motorcoach invasion of Old Town has completely changed this dynamic. There are simply too many of these vehicles carrying too many people for things to continue as they are.

Here is a case in point: During the last meeting, it was mentioned that the walking tours are expecting that customers can arrive on up to fourteen motorcoaches per day. Let us be clear as to what this means. Each motorcoach operating as a shuttle to Market Square requires four move-

ments in the city: (1) the arrival of passengers, (2) the removal to parking, (3) the return from parking, (4) and the departure of passengers. This would amount to FIFTY-SIX motorcoach movements to and from Market Square for this one category alone! This is also a prime example of the non-sustainability of a motorcoach “route.” The traffic is just becoming too heavy.

Keep in mind that this *fifty-six* number is merely the current number and does not take into any account future growth. Remember that Old Town is currently seeing only a very tiny fraction (about 5%) of the motorcoaches that arrive in the Washington DC. More will be coming as the touring business expands. Certainly more tourists are desirable but with these increases must also come tourist management. Rules and restrictions are necessary. This applies to all tours, not just those coming on the coach but also on those tours that are conducted on foot.

### **Walking Tours.**

Motorcoaches are having a direct impact on the tours by becoming feeders to most of the walking tours. They are also changing the very nature of them. Most of the walking tours that arrive on motorcoaches have greatly enlarged the group sizes, have increased the frequency of the tours, and have even moved the subject matter away from Alexandria’s core history.

#### **Group Sizes - from small to large.**

The ghost tours of the past were mostly assembled from King Street pedestrian traffic and were relatively benign in their impacts. Not many years ago, fifteen or twenty people were the maximum number on a tour and these numbers were strictly controlled by the tour operator. No longer. The motorcoach trade has changed this by depositing over fifty people into these groups at a time. Sometimes these are split into smaller groups, many times they are not. Fourteen motorcoaches can bring over seven-hundred people for these tours. On some evenings, one can count almost two hundred people standing on the four corners of an intersection. When groups grow to these sizes, the sidewalks become impassible and the noise levels grow.

#### **Tour Frequency - from a few to many.**

Any residence on one of these walking routes is treated to the same ghost story night after night after night, often within feet of a front door or window. One of my neighbors resided at the “short jack” location and his office was only a few feet from where the crowd gathered near his window several times each night. The repetitive narration of this story caused him no end of annoyance but, not wanting to complain, he never said anything. Most of us are like that. We don’t want to cause trouble. My neighbor has since moved but, upon leaving, confided that he would not miss the tour company hauntings at all. Anyone arguing that this is a benign activity should have to suffer through this folderol at their own house for five or six times each night for three-solid-months. This is how a fun form of street theatre can be turned into a neighborhood nuisance.

## **Subject Matter - from historic city to ghost city.**

We should also be clear as to what most of these tours have come to be about. History is no longer the primary thrust of most of these guided visits to the neighborhoods off of King Street. One of these Old Town touring companies does not even offer a scheduled history tour—only ghost tours.

**It is lamentable that despite Alexandria's significant history, 99% of those taking a guided walking tour in the City now take a "ghost" tour.** These tours find great appeal with the grade school students, which are one of the primary demographics of the motorcoach trade in this area. These tours are described as a "fun" diversion from the normal sight-seeing activity in the Washington area.

Certainly there is a place for this sort of thing but many are beginning to wonder if mixing made-up ghost stories with the important history of the town on a large scale is a proper thing to do. In this aspect of touring, history is being placed in the background in order to sell a manufactured *haunted* Alexandria. It is true that a short one or two minute dose of history is given before each much more lengthy ghost narration. But is the mixing of real history (true tales) with fantasy (tall tales which are essentially recent fabrications) doing justice to the important things that happened here? To hear what many people are taking away from these tours, there is little question that the tall tales are diminishing the true ones.

As to the tour guides themselves, there seems to be an unfortunate trend away from historical knowledge. A number of us have overheard some historical references being uttered by tour guides that were blatantly untrue. It should go without saying that anyone giving a tour should be explicitly fluent in the historical facts of the City. An ability to tell-stories and spin yarns is a valuable asset in any tour guide, but a command of the real and important history of this City is vital. This is how the City represents itself to the world.

Certainly walking tours should be encouraged. They are the ideal way to see Old Town instead of from an unwieldy motorcoach. But the presence of both the tour bus and the walking tour is an intensification in the use of areas that, through law, are supposed to have protections.

Touring should be regulated, not only because this activity exploits areas that are supposed to remain non-commercial, but also because it is an important activity. The history of Alexandria is a valuable resource and not just in terms of the money that can be shaken from tourists. It is of great cultural importance with a heritage that should be respected. Sharing this heritage with others should be done carefully. This care should apply all guided tours..

Rob Aronson