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January 9, 2009

Richard Baier  
Chair  
Alexandria Ad Hoc Motorcoach Task Force

Dear Mr. Baier,

I write as a delegated representative of the Tobacco Quay Homeowners Association and the Founders Park Community Association. I would also like to point out that my comments reflect the concerns for residents who live in public, elderly, low-income and special needs housing adjacent to the Tobacco Quay development.

First, I would like for it to be noted that Tobacco Quay HOA, which borders both Pendleton and North Fairfax Streets, was never included in an invitation to participate in the above committee. Nor as far as I can ascertain, were the residents of the public, elderly, low income and special needs housing that is concentrated in the Pendleton/North Fairfax area. This particular intersection is the most densely populated in the historic district, as well as the most heavily trafficked from early in the morning until late at night. It is crowded at any given time during waking hours – and long after many have gone to sleep -- by pedestrians; tourists to and from North Old Town hotels; bikers, hikers and pedestrians frequenting Oronoco Bay and Founders Parks and the Potomac Path and, last but not least, residents. These facts render the statements of your Draft Report dated December 22, 2008, pages 7 and 27 as incorrect in stating that “community input” was solicited for these proceedings.

Exclusive of the members of the FPCA (because they were invited to participate in the process and I hereby join their voices with those expressed to you today in memo from the Alexandria Old & Historic District Residents Group, I submit that the residents of Tobacco Quay and the other disadvantaged populations mentioned above who live adjacent to our development have been and will be *disproportionately* and *adversely affected – without benefit of representation* -- if the recommendations of the December 22 report are implemented. I expressed these specific health, welfare and safety concerns in the first Task Force meeting last summer during comment from the public. It was my understanding that these specific concerns would be incorporated into the mission statement of the Task Force and into subsequent moderated discussions. They appear not to have been.

The Washington Post reported on January 5 that the Washington Metropolitan Area expects to be “the nation’s most-visited destination by charter buses this year” driven by the affordability issues of would-be travelers. It is self-evident that implementation of

inadequate, unsafe and unfair bus management policies will, given the collision of these facts, lead to wreckage, injury, illness, property, damage and needless conflict in what would otherwise be a peaceful community of quietly cohabiting and mutually respectful business owners and residents – all of whom pay taxes to support government oversight.

Aside from the ethical, moral and legal issues of these first two points and the advancement of the third, there are practical ones that seem not, either, to have been considered. Specifically, steering tour bus traffic to Pendleton Street, either directly or indirectly yet deliberately, for the convenience and profit of drivers and owners will have dire consequences on our area, unless relevant impact statements disprove the intuitive. The voices that were not represented nor respected by the Task Force proceedings will tell you the following, and failure to attend to these issues now will, without a doubt, establish malicious intent at the worst and negligence at the least, should health, safety, welfare or property damage afflict the residents of the areas I represent if the City fails to protect same.

I offer the following facts as support:

1. Pendleton Street is per code, off limits to tour bus parking, yet it is deliberately not enforced. Neither the City nor the Police will erect signage indicating same, despite numerous promises to do so by Lt. Story and Lt. Bartlett over the past three years. Further, only when a resident is forced to call the police do they bother ask the buses to leave. I have written numerous memos, e-mails and letters to City Council about the dangers presented to residents resulting from these offenses, to no avail. *Not even after one driver threatened my life, and not even after I reported drivers turning off the lights in their buses and drinking while they waited to return their customers to their points of origin!* The obvious cliché, “*accident waiting to happen*” in this case imparts as much responsibility on local authorities as it does on drivers and owners.
2. Both drivers and police, routinely ignore the few “No Parking” signs that do exist, adjacent to Oronoco Bay Park. I have sent photos to the police – again, to absolutely no avail. To the contrary: I was reprimanded for taking a photo of school buses parked in front of “No Parking” signs. The insult to this injury arises from the pathetic example set by representatives of the school systems that teach students by their own behavior to ignore the laws of the places they visit. Yet that seems to have been condoned here in Old Town.
3. The North Union/ Pendleton Street area is so congested that it is a matter of time before someone is seriously injured or killed. I have witnessed frequent near misses with pedestrians, children, bikers and people in wheelchairs and walkers. Yet, again, there has been no consistent enforcement of current code or protection of citizen safety. When I expressed the inevitability of a serious injury or death during one of the Task Force meetings, one of the Council

members shrugged his shoulders and said, “Well, what can we do?” What can you do??? Prevent it by enforcing the law, maybe?

4. Increasing the size of the tour buses, allowing them to idle longer, allowing unlimited starts and stops in a heavily residential neighborhood, all in combination with the above points, are decisions that will hasten the inevitable.

Though I missed one meeting of the Task Force in November I was struck by the persistently adversarial tone allowed and even fostered by moderators, i.e., that residents who sought to protect the health, safety, welfare which is our right, and the property for which we pay taxes disproportionate to the rest of the city, are somehow anti-tourist. This is a false choice and it is disingenuous of Council to incorporate it into their thinking, their negotiations or their strategy. Old Town is unlike any other city in the nation, both in the priceless history that has been entrusted to us -- the preservation of which we have accepted at our own expense -- and in the economic, cultural and social interests that distinguish America throughout the world. All of us contribute to this national and local heritage. To unfairly and unnecessarily burden those who have not been given a voice for the benefit of a few is not worthy of our City, or a prudent expenditure of our tax dollars.

Respectfully yours,  
Andrea Stowers  
(for) Tobacco Quay Homeowners Association  
(for) Founders Park Community Association