



Alexandria Waterfront Commission

Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

1108 Jefferson Street

Alexandria, Virginia 22314

November 19, 2024

Attached is the Waterfront Commission's review and recommendations for the Waterfront Small Area Plan Development Goals and Guidelines for Robinson Terminal North.

The Commission recognizes the importance of Robinson Terminal North (RTN) as one of the last remaining waterfront development sites in Alexandria. The process to bring the development to this point has taken many years and considerable planning and the Commission commends the progress made. The current plan deviates from the original concept that included a hotel and museum, replacing it with a residential complex with three restaurants. The Commission recognizes the scarce resource of waterfront property and strongly encourages the City to work with the developer to maximize the public amenity space on the site and to pay homage to the historic nature of the site.

The site is contiguous to a large, dilapidated and complex pier. While a replacement pier is not included in the current development plan, the Commission strongly encourages the City to plan to address this structure in a manner that will improve the environmental condition, not impede navigational safety and significantly improve the aesthetics of this important historic and natural shoreline. The City should work towards replacing the pier in the future with either another fixed pier for use by pedestrians and boats or a floating kayak/dinghy/paddleboard/dock. This enhancement would help accomplish the long-term vision of the Waterfront Plan with multiple water access points to Alexandria.

The Commission strongly recommends that the RTN condominium association retain ownership of and maintenance/upkeep responsibilities for the public space (excluding the Alex Renew portion of the site), subject to a public easement. The Commission believes this approach will provide the highest level of maintenance of this important public area and will enable the City to deploy its scarce park resources elsewhere. This model has been successfully adopted elsewhere along the waterfront.

The Commission also recommends that a public walking path be established along with water and be maintained and open throughout construction to allow public use for the duration of construction as well as when the construction is completed.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plans, the Commission requests updates on the development plans as they are finalized.

Sincerely,

Jan Abraham, Chair, RTN Subcommittee

11-19-24

Report of Waterfront Commission Subcommittee on Robinson Terminal North Development

The Subcommittee, which was chaired by Jan Abraham and included Sydney Smith, David Robbins, Louise Roseman, and William Vesilind, met on October 8 and 16, 2024, to review the proposed Robinson Terminal North Development. The discussion focused on adherence to Waterfront Small Area Plan Development Goals and Development Guidelines for the RTN site. The meetings were announced and open to the public. Representative City staff attended the meetings.

Development Goals

1. **Employ a land use mix and design which invites the public and encourages activity within the proposed development in the adjacent public spaces.**

The proposed development plan achieves land use mix.

2. **Provide extensive public amenities and free access to and along the water's edge.**

Free access to and along the water's edge is achieved. It is unclear at this point what public amenities are included in the public space. The Commission strongly encourages extensive interactive amenities (e.g., game tables, places for music concerts, exercise classes, and other public events). Bryant Park in New York City can be a model of a public space with high interactive amenities and engagement by the public. Chicago, Ill. has also invested heavily in enhancing and supporting the waterfront as a community asset, notably with The Wild Mile which is an example of a public private partnership which enhances urban living.

The Commission recommends, as a condition of DSUP, that a pedestrian path be developed and maintained along the water's edge **throughout construction** so that the space created by AlexRenew and the water's edge is enjoyed by the community throughout the construction phase

To support public activation of the site the Commission encourages utilities and other supporting infrastructure, including water fountains, electricity, and generator support, be installed as part of the initial development.

Public restrooms are planned for the West building. We believe these restrooms are an important element of the planned development and should be a condition of the DSUP. The on-site restrooms should be publicly available 7 days a week, 365 days per year, from 7am - 10pm.

3. Improve access by extending Pendleton Street as a pedestrian connection to an improved public pier.

Pedestrian connection to the waterfront via Pendleton Street is achieved. No public pier is included in the proposed development due to lack of structural integrity of the existing pier and current financial constraints. The Commission needs clarity on how the current and future state of the pier will be addressed by the development and into the future. The criteria for addressing the pier should include 1) improve environmental condition, 2) address navigational safety and 3) treat the historic and natural waterfront in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The current state of the pier is entrapping huge pieces of debris and should not be allowed to remain in its current state.

The Commission encourages the City to retain the flexibility to build a public pier at Robinson Terminal North in the future to provide water access to the site for kayakers, paddle boarders, and boats. We believe amenities, such as a floating dock, should exist to encourage public access via the river.

The Waterfront Commission believes the park should be accessible to visitors who arrive from the river in various modalities. Robinson Terminal North is a historical deep-water port and a key connection between Alexandria and the river. Access from/to the river is also a key component of the Waterfront Plan. The current Robinson Terminal North development plan provides no access for visiting kayakers, paddle boarders or boaters. Access to Robinson Landing by boat, kayak and paddleboard has proven to be a huge success that both provides revenue to the City through docking fees, as well as public "parking" to access retail, restaurants, and adjacent parks.

4. Pay homage to historic West's Point through public space design and interpretive features.

The Commission has not yet seen the public space design and interpretive features paying homage to West's Point. The Commission requests an update on the plans before they go to the City for approval.

5. Maintain a building scale compatible with existing fabric to the south and west

The proposed development is compatible in scale.

6. Maximize water views from buildings, streets and rooftop open spaces

Many portions of the development have water views, which are primarily accessible to residents, such as from many of the condominium units and from the East building rooftop. Public spaces with water views include the two-story north-facing restaurant in the West building and the restaurant in the East building.

Development Guidelines

- 1. Active uses should be part of any development and should constitute the predominant ground floor uses.**

Two ground-floor restaurants are included in the West building and one ground-floor restaurant is included in the East building. Most of the ground floor space in the East building is devoted to residential units.

- 2. Preferred use on the site is mixed use, emphasizing arts, history and culture (including a museum) and including vibrant commercial uses (such as hotel).**

The proposed use of the site does not emphasize arts, history, and culture. Three restaurants on site support vibrant commercial use. The Waterfront Commission has been an advocate for a high level of activation for portions of the waterfront and encourages the plans to include appropriate infrastructure (electricity, plumbing etc.) to allow for active use of the public space, including the adjacent AlexRenew site and the football-shaped site on the southeast portion of the public space. The Commission requests updates on the plans as they are further developed.

- 3. Residential use and design should be compatible with a high level of public activity and located away from the water.**

The design currently has residential units in the East building on the ground floor and in close proximity to the area of public activity. There should be a requirement that the residential units have robust soundproofing to minimize noise complaints.

- 4. Residential use should not be the primary use of the site. The location, design and specific type of residential use proposed must coexist well with the other planned uses on the site and planned public activity in the public spaces adjacent to the residential development. Ground floor residential units are not permitted.**

This guideline is not met. While the development plan includes three restaurants, residential use is the primary use of the site. The East building has ground floor residential units.

- 5. The streetscape and pedestrian experience along North Union Street should be enhanced; in addition to undergrounding utilities, providing street trees and appropriate light fixtures.**

This guideline appears to be met.

- 6. Historic interpretation, consistent with the recommendations of the History Plan, should inform every aspect of the redevelopment and adjacent public spaces, with particular attention given to the West's Point site which is the area which extends from the water west up Oronoco Street to Union Street and represents the origins of Alexandria.**

We encourage implementation of this guideline but have not seen the developer's plans in this regard. The Commission requests updates on the plans as they are developed.

- 7. Encourage modern design inspired by historic precedent while maintaining compatibility with the nearby residential neighborhoods and ensuring compliance with the Potomac River Vicinity Height District regulations.**

This guideline appears to be met.

- 8. Redevelopment proposals shall require review on an advisory basis by the Old and Historic District Board Architectural Review prior to being considered by the Planning Commission and City Council prior to approval.**

This guideline has been met.

- 9. Parking for new buildings should be accommodated on site and below grade. Although the Plan anticipates low parking ratios, the applied ratio must be consistent with industry norms for similar hotels.**

Parking for East building is below grade, but building constraints require parking for the West building to be at grade. The current plan does not include a hotel. The Commission questions whether 16 public parking spaces are adequate for the three restaurants and guests of residents in the condominium units.

- 10. The bulk and scale of the buildings should be stepped down from Union Street toward the water.**

This guideline appears to be met; the East building is a smaller bulk and scale than the West building.

- 11. Curb cuts should not be located on any building and/or block frontages facing the water or North Union Street, and should be minimized if facing open space along Oronoco Street.**

There are two curb cuts for the development, one facing Pendleton Street for deliveries, trash collection and parking for the West building and one facing North Union Street for the underground parking garage in the East building.

The Commission suggests that trash removal and deliveries, particularly supporting the East building 35 condominium units and a full-service restaurant, be further studied as the amount of activity for deliveries and trash will be considerable and the practicality of moving trash and deliveries across Union Street is questioned.

12. Shoreline treatment at Robinson Terminal North should include native plantings and naturalization where possible.

The Commission does not have information regarding the landscape design and requests further updates as the plans are developed. The Commission supports ensuring that nothing is done during or after development that will hinder stabilization of the shore line.

13. Redevelopment should be compatible with any biosparging technology, or other bioremediation being employed by the City in treatment of the Oronoco Outfall-Alexandria Town Gas site located at the eastern end of Oronoco Street.

City staff confirmed these requirements have been met.

14. As part of the redevelopment, on and off-site public amenities shall be provided by the developer of the site. The specific amenities to be provided will be determined during the development review process. Desirable public amenities include:

- **Public art**
- **Open spaces with public access easements**
- **Retention of the Robinson Terminal pier**
- **Environmental amenities above and beyond minimum required**

Public art. The Commission is very supportive of public art on this site but has not yet seen the proposed art piece(s). We request that the Commission be updated as the plans are developed.

Open spaces with public access easements. The Commission strongly recommends that the RTN condominium association retain ownership of and maintenance/upkeep responsibilities for the public space (excluding the AlexRenew portion of the site), subject to a public access easement. The Commission believes this model of ownership will provide the highest level of maintenance and upkeep to this important public area and has been successfully adopted elsewhere along the waterfront, such as Harborside's ownership of and responsibility to maintain Shipyard Park.

The open space development plans should be coordinated with the contiguous AlexRenew space which while under separate ownership will flow naturally from the visitors' perspective.

Retention of the Robinson Terminal pier. The Commission recognizes the financial challenges of rebuilding the pier/dock at this time but strongly encourages the City to work towards replacing the pier in the near future with either another fixed pier for use by pedestrians and boats or a floating kayak/dinghy/paddleboard/dock. This enhancement would help accomplish the long-term vision of the Waterfront Plan with multiple water access points to Alexandria.

The Commission encourages the complete removal of the existing pier, including the pilings, and that it be done in an environmentally sensitive way. The Commission is opposed to leaving the pilings in a way that traps debris, otherwise degrades the view, or creates a hazard to kayakers, paddle boarders, rowers and other boaters. The current photo below illustrated the scale and complexity of the dock with the numerous pilings supporting the pier. The Commission strongly recommends that nothing be done in the development of the RTN that would preclude long term development of the waterfront for a future dock/pier which accommodates the evolving needs and preferences of future residents. To reiterate, the Commission needs clarity on the future plans for the pier/dock.



Environmental amenities. The Commission encourages the inclusion of one or more water fountains in the public space. Also, the Commission supports the removal of the railroad tracks on the street to support safer bike traffic.

15. The maximum FAR and floor area allowed is included on the chart.

City staff confirm this condition has been met.