

Minutes
City of Alexandria, Virginia
WATERFRONT COMMISSION - REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday, September 17, 2024
City Hall - Sister Cities Conference Room
301 King Street
7:30 a.m.

Commission Members

Members present at the meeting:

Jan Abraham, Citizen, East of Washington St. and South of King St.
Sarah Bagley, Member, Alexandria City Council
Eldon Boes, Representative, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission
Maureen Cooney, Representative, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Stuart Fox, Representative, Alexandria Park & Recreation Commission
Lawrence Gillespie, Citizen, East of Washington St. and north of King St. (remote)
Charlotte Hall, Representative, Old Town Business
Nathan Macek, Representative, Alexandria Planning Commission
Claire Mouldoux, Representative, Visit Alexandria, Vice Chair
Lebaron Reid, Commissioner At-Large and Commission Chair
David Robbins, Representative, Alexandria Marina Pleasure Boat Owners
Debra Roepka, Representative, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Louise Roseman, Citizen, Park Planning District I
Sydney Smith, Representative, Founders Park Community Association
William Vesilind, Representative, Old Town Civic Association
Patricia Webb, Citizen, Park Planning District II
Esther White, Representative, Alexandria Archaeological Commission

Members excused:

Agnes Artemel, Citizen, East of Washington St. and North of Pendleton St.
Marcee Craighill, Representative, Alexandria Commission for the Arts

Vacancies:

Representative, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Citizen, Park Planning District III

Staff: Jamie M. Bridgeman, Captain, APD; Jack Browand, Commission Staff Liaison & Deputy Director, RPCA; Catherine Miliaras, Principal Planner, P&Z; Michael Swidrak, Urban Planner III, P&Z.

Attendees: Kristina Hagman

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Chair Reid at 7:35 a.m.

2. **Items for Action:**

a. **Approval of Minutes**

The June 25, 2024, minutes were approved unanimously.

3. **Items for Information:**

a. **Robinson Terminal North Update**

Ken Wire, partner at Wire Gill LLP representing Rooney Properties provided an update on the Robinson Terminal North development plans. The development special use permits (DSUPs) are expected to be submitted to the City Council for approval at its December 2024 meeting.

Mr. Wire presented refined renderings. The plans now call for 73 residential units, with 38 in the west building and 35 in the east building. Three restaurants are planned: a coffee shop on the south end of the west building, a two-story restaurant on the north end of the west building, and an up-scale restaurant in the round portion of the east building facing the open space. The west building construction cannot occur below grade due to contamination on that site.

One of the challenges relates to the grade differences in the open space on the east side of the property; the design to accommodate these elevation changes needs to be ADA compliant.

The discussion that ensued touched the various development considerations, including the following issues:

Oronoco unit block. The Waterfront Plan calls for an end garden on the east half of the unit block of Oronoco St. That may be difficult given the infrastructure under the street. The design calls for two pads on each side of Oronoco for use by food trucks or other types of kiosks. The developer's improvement of this area, which is City property, is part of its contributions to the Waterfront Plan.

Frontage. The developer is responsible for the frontage adjacent to the construction. The plan incorporates the sidewalks, tree lawns, bicycle lanes, and driving lanes. The railroad tracks south of Pendleton that served the Robinson Terminal will be removed. In response to a question, City staff indicated that the City is aware that the railroad tracks crossing Pendleton pose danger to cyclists due to the angle of the tracks and will consider whether they should also be removed. There has been no decision to date on the extent to which N Union Street will need to be closed during construction.

Tree canopy requirements. The east building garage will not preclude meeting these requirements.

Flood mitigation. Whenever construction is planned in Alexandria on a flood plain, a flood mitigation study is required and there are also regulatory requirements. For this project, a wall can

be built as high or low as needed and it will not impact the flow of the Potomac River. The concern is flooding of the buildings and hydraulically this will not be a problem for this project.

Historic interpretation. There may be interpretive signage, the design of which has not yet to be decided. There may also be wayside panels incorporated into the railings and wooden paving design elements representing historic piers. Rooney Properties will be working with City staff to finalize these elements of the design.

Pier. The pier, which has wooden and concrete components, is structurally unsound. When the RiverRenew project demobilizes from this site, Rooney Properties will remove the entire top of the pier and the wooden pilings. The City will determine whether the concrete pilings should also be removed. Rooney Properties believes that responsibility for removal of portions of the pier is shared with the City; the results of the City's contamination testing will dictate the final decision on the disposition of the remaining portions of the pier.

Responsibility for Maintenance of Open Space. A member of the Commission stated that the developer should not turn responsibility for the maintenance of open space over to the City. Instead, the condominium should be responsible for the ongoing upkeep of the open space, which would be subject to a public easement. This is particularly important given City budget constraints. This approach is consistent with certain other waterfront communities, such as Harborside, which owns and is responsible for maintaining Shipyard Park. Another member indicated that the Parks & Recreation Commission has a strong preference for the developer to retain the title to the open space, subject to a public access easement, because it makes maintenance easier and efficient.

Restaurants. The determination of whether the restaurant owners will own the restaurant space or lease it will depend on the restaurant operator.

Public bathrooms. Plans include outside bathroom access that will be managed by restaurant staff.

Timing. The Board of Architectural Review has completed its review and has signed off on height, mass, scale and general architectural character of the buildings. A community meeting will be held on September 24, and has been communicated, and a further briefing of the Waterfront Commission may be scheduled to discuss the details of the DSUP conditions. City Council approval of this project is anticipated at its December meeting. There will be two DSUPs, and possibly a third for the open space. It will take approximately six to nine months to get through permitting issues. FEMA also needs to remap the site. Construction may start as early as mid-2025. Some of the pier work will need separate permitting. A member of the Commission asked about the feasibility of providing a continuous waterfront walk at an early stage of the site development. There has been no discussion with City staff on this matter.

Mr. Wire reiterated that this is one of the most important and challenging projects on the waterfront.

b. 2025 Site See Waterfront Art Installation

Diane Ruggiero presented the proposal of Nekisha Durrett, the selected artist for the 2025 Site See installation at Waterfront Park. Ms. Durrett has an art installation in Arlington known as Queen City and has completed many other projects within the region. For the Site See work, she researched the

relationship between Black Alexandrians and their relationship to the river. As part of this research, she met with Audrey Davis at the Black History Museum and John Chatman through his manumission tours to better understand the historical relationship.

During her research, Ms. Durrett learned about a sidewheel paddleboat that was docked in Alexandria that had become a party boat for Black Alexandrians. The boat “mysteriously” burned down. The other story she learned about was a female slave who had apparently drowned in the river and left along the shoreline or street until someone was sent to take care of her body. Ms. Durrett also found a historical painting of Abraham Lincoln inside the River Queen before it became a party boat for Black Alexandrians. During the time of segregation in Alexandria, Black Alexandrians had no access to the swimming pools, making it necessary for them to travel to the District of Columbia to access a pool. Two young boys drowned in the river because they didn’t want to travel to DC.

Ms. Durrett has created what she calls “Great Water” which references all these elements, i.e., Black history and the water, the River Queen side paddle boat, and sandbags, which are used along the river to protect things that are valued. During her research for the project, Ms. Durrett went to Monticello and there found some carvings created by the enslaved people and is hoping to bring some of these design elements into the sidewheel paddleboat. The artwork will be place on the asphalt area where the Site See installations are usually placed. The artwork is thirteen feet high and 24 feet wide. The design of the project will discourage climbing on the artwork.

The artist doing the Site See installation is also responsible for a mural on the asphalt area and Ms. Durrett is planning something colorful to contrast the majority black of the artwork. There’s also a requirement for a nighttime element; therefore, the artwork will have lights installed on the inside. There will be interpretive signage with a QR code to explain the historical significance of the artwork.

It is hoped that the project installation will be the first week of March 2025 and will be taken down before the holiday tree is installed, at which time the artwork becomes the property of the artist. The City is available to assist with other placement of the artwork if there is interest.

Funding for the annual Site See art installations will be suspended during the implementation of the waterfront flood mitigation program; this is currently the last scheduled project. A member of the Commission asked whether thought has been given to using an Alexandria artist for these projects. Ms. Ruggiero noted that the challenge is that Alexandria artists typically do not take on large scale projects such as this.

A member of the Commission expressed disappointment that the aspect of the Waterfront Plan that contemplated public art throughout all parks along the waterfront to further enhance the parks has not been pursued, except for the Site See program.

c. Overview of Waterfront Commission Functions

Chair Reid explained that the Waterfront Commission was previously known as the Waterfront Committee until a name change in May 1989. Its function is to advise City Council, the City Manager and appropriate City departments on matters pertaining to the use of the Alexandria waterfront by commercial and private vessels and implementation of the Waterfront Small Area

Plan. The work of the Commission is focused on the Alexandria waterfront and all things that can improve and maintain the waterfront.

4. **City Updates**

a. **Community Projects & Activities** – Jack Browand, Deputy Director, RPCA

The conversion from summer/fall into winter has begun in preparation for holiday activities. The City is looking into options for maintaining the grass panel at the end of King Street, which is often overly wet. In response to a question, Mr. Browand indicated that he did not have definitive information regarding the planned pump station.

b. **Private Development Updates** – Catherine Miliaras, Principal Planner, P&Z

As noted earlier, a community meeting is planned to discuss the Robinson Terminal North development plans; also, an update will be provided at an upcoming meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission. The City Council will be asked to approve the development special use permits at its December meeting. Therefore, any input by the Robinson Terminal North Subcommittee should be provided to City Council by mid-November.

There have been some complaints about the impact of the construction of the townhouses on S Union Street opposite the Hotel Indigo. A meeting was held with the developer to address those concerns and limit the impact on the public right of way. Updates are being provided to adjacent neighborhoods weekly. In response to a question, Ms. Miliaras explained that the City code allows for construction on Saturdays, but the hours are modified. Charlotte Hall, representing Old Town Business, requested a meeting with Ms. Miliaras regarding issues with this site specifically.

Ms. Hall noted, in response to a question, that The Coopers Mill, the reconstructed warehouse at 10 Duke Street, is planning a soft opening of its tavern and market on December 9.

c. **Public Safety** – Jamie M. Bridgeman, Captain, APD

Captain Bridgeman noted that the City Council is considering a pilot pedestrianization of the 200 block of King Street from November 22 to January 8. The additional police detail for the waterfront that is scheduled to end on October 1 will most likely be extended due to pilot extension of the pedestrianized portion of King Street.

Several cars were broken into in a parking garage and is being investigated. **Commission Reports / Subcommittee Reports / Announcements**

If anyone is interested in the Robinson Terminal North subcommittee, please send an email to the chairman.

The Environmental Policy Commission held its first fall meeting and noted that the City reported on its compliance with the Chesapeake Bay requirements and plans to meet the requirements by 2028.

Old Town Business held a successful sidewalk sale in August and the Old Town Cocktail Week will run from September 26 – October 6, and Oyster Week will run from October 12 – October 20, two Halloween events are planned on October 26, Cookie Crawl on November 23 & 24.

There is signage outside of City Hall with information showing that Today's Cargo has moved from

upper King Street to the 100 block of North Fairfax.

Due to fewer office tenants, more parking garages are now being used for employee and employer parking at a discounted rate.

It is being suggested that pedestrian lights be added at King and Lee Streets and King and Union Streets.

A reminder that Historic Alexandria will have another pop-up archaeology visit at the gallery at Robinson Landing on October 4. The exhibit will be up until the end of December.

5. **Proposed Discussion Topics / Items of Information – Future Meetings**

- a. Robinson Terminal North
- b. AlexRenew Open Space Presentation
- c. 200 Block of King Street Pedestrianization Pilot
- d. Homeless population on the Waterfront

6. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Waterfront Commission will be on October 15, 2024, at 7:30 a.m.

7. **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:25am.