

Minutes

City of Alexandria, Virginia

WATERFRONT COMMISSION - REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

City Hall - Sister Cities Conference Room

301 King Street

7:30 a.m.

Commission Members

Members present at the meeting were:

Jan Abraham, Citizen, East of Washington St. and South of King St.
Agnes Artemel, Citizen, East of Washington St. and North of Pendleton St.
Eldon Boes, Representative, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission
Marcee Craighill, Representative, Alexandria Commission for the Arts
Stuart Fox, Alexandria Park & Recreation Commission (Remote)
Lawrence Gillespie, Citizen, East of Washington St. and north of King St. - remote
Nathan Macek, Representative, Alexandria Planning Commission
Claire Mouledoux, Representative, VisitAlexandria, Vice Chair
David Robbins, Representative, Alexandria Marina Pleasure Boat Owners
Debra Roepka, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Louise Roseman, Citizen, Park Planning District I
William Vesilind, Representative, Old Town Civic Association
Esther White, Alexandria Archaeological Commission

Members excused:

Sarah Bagley, Member, Alexandria City Council
Maureen Cooney, Representative, Historic Alexandria Foundation
Sydney Smith, Representative, Founders Park Community Association

Members unexcused:

Charlotte Hall, Representative, Old Town Business
Lebaron Reid, Commissioner At-Large, Commission Chair
Patricia Webb, Citizen, Citizen, Park Planning District II

Vacancies:

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

Staff: Jaime Bridgeman, Captain, APD; Jack Browand, Commission Staff Liaison & Deputy Director, RPCA; Mathew Landes, Portfolio Manager, DPI; Michael Swidrak, Urban Planner III, P&Z.

Attendees: Dan Straub; Gail Rothrock; Gina Baum

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Claire Mouledoux, at 7:30 a.m.

2. **Items for Action:**

a. **Approval of minutes of past sessions**

a. Approval of the October 15, 2024, minutes was deferred to December.

b. **Subcommittee Report - Robinson Terminal North Development Project
Jan Abraham, Waterfront Commission**

The group met twice in open meetings and staff were present at both meetings. Proposals and recommendations were developed, which were forwarded to the commission.

Three specific issues were highlighted: (1) the importance of the location was emphasized as there are very few areas for development along the waterfront and this and the power station are the last remaining areas. The subcommittee felt it was important to capitalize on the unique natural and historic value as well as the development of a place where the public would be able to congregate and for the developer to have a profitable business when developing recommendations. The subcommittee focused on ensuring that the land be maintained at its highest and best use and recommended that the condominium association retain ownership and responsibility to maintain the open space for public use, including recreation and events. This is a unique property because of the federal, state, city and community private use elements. The subcommittee was focused on making sure it is maintained in its highest possible condition.

There was significant discussion about the environmental impact, navigational issues, and aesthetics associated with the pier. The subcommittee suggested that the City consider using a reconstructed pier as an access point for those wishing to use the river for water sports as has been done at Robinson Landing.

The subcommittee also felt it was important that public access along the waterfront be maintained as feasible throughout construction.

Question: During the discussion regarding the pier was there any discussion of cost?

Answer: No; however, there are safety concerns with leaving the pier as is given its lack of structural integrity..

Comment: It has been estimated that it would cost approximately \$1.2 million to take the pier down. There has been discussion of whether removing the pier would cause contamination of the water. There is a current agreement with the City that the surface of the pier and any pilings that can be removed without causing contamination would be taken out; the remaining pilings would be left in place, which would allow the City to focus on environmental remediation. The current plan is to remove the pier by March as it is a safety hazard.

Comment: There is a concern about cutting the pier down and local boaters are aware of safety issues. Final permits have not yet been issued to start the necessary work.

Question: Regarding the subcommittee report, will there be feedback from the developer side, or the city side? It would be helpful to receive active feedback.

Answer: The report will be discussed in the staff report that goes to the City Council and the Planning Commission.

Comment: It was reiterated that the community would like access to the waterfront during construction. Has this been given consideration?

Comment: The developer hopes to complete the plan submission by next week. The developer hopes that by February the plans can be submitted to the Planning Commission and the City Council for a vote and in the interim, they will be working on conditions for approval of the open space with the intent to agree on a budget and determine how to execute the plan.

Comment: The report that was adopted today and moved forward by the Commission in terms of a recommendation will be a part of the staff report that goes to the Planning Commission and the City Council. This committee will have the opportunity to send a representative to speak at the public hearings, which will be with the Planning Commission and City Council. Therefore, there is an opportunity for this Commission to be heard on the recommendations they feel are important to any final decision.

Question: Are the seawall and the pier City-owned properties?

Answer: Ownership is still under discussion.

Comment: The recommendation made by this Commission is that if the areas are privately owned but publicly accessible then the shoreline could be privately owned and made available to the public via the conditions, or it could be conveyed to the City.

Comment: The pier itself would probably not be owned by the condominium association.

Comment: That is to be determined. Currently the recommendation could be that the City reserves the right to build something in the future and they would own it, or it would be cooperative with the owner at the time, but all of this is still under discussion and the recommendation that comes from this meeting will be a part of those final conditions.

Comment: There was an earlier concern about whether the association or private entity could have responsibility for the sea wall which would be a subprocess enforced by the city.

Comment: There is a working model of how this has been successful in the past, but this is a massive responsibility for the incoming owners and homeowners' association, but the developer is willing to assist with how this was structured at Harborside. There is an ongoing concern for homeowners. The developers will come to the next meeting with the conditions so that all will be informed because this is a very complicated process. The Commission can revise its correspondence in January based on additional information presented by the developer. The following meeting dates were confirmed: Waterfront Commission, January 21, Planning Commission docket will be published on January 24 and Planning Commission meeting will be held on February 4.

Question: Are there any particular concerns with the report as presented by the subcommittee?

Answer: The maintenance pendulum which homeowners will share in the cost. If the cost is excessive for the 73 homeowners, the developer will not do the project.

Question: Will the developer be able to maintain the continuous walkway during construction?

Answer: Because of equipment needs during the initial stage of construction, the walkway will not be maintained.

Question: Will Union Street remain open?

Answer: During the raising of Union Street by two feet, it will be closed.

Question: When not actively performing construction activities, will Union Street remain open for pedestrians and vehicles?

Answer: Yes.

Clarification: The commission and committees will table this issue until January and will make a final recommendation and finalize the submission to the staff report.

Question: Will the subcommittee letter to the Planning Commission need to be complete by January 24 so it's ready for the docket or does it need to be complete before the Planning Commission meeting?

Answer: It should be ready by January 23 so that it can be included in the packet so it can be part of the submission. Although, letters may be sent to the Planning Commission at any time in advance of the meeting

3. **Items for Information:**

a. **Waterfront Plan Implementation – Pump House Alternative Analysis**
Matthew Landes, Portfolio Manager

An update was provided to the Commission on two proposed locations of the pump house in Waterfront Park. The locations, each of similar sizes, were identified as parallel to either Strand Street or Prince Street. The two new proposals have been reduced in size and may include four family style restrooms. Additional information on the location of the pump house may be found in the presentation posted on the Commission website.

Question: What happens to the parking on Strand Street?

Answer: It would be eliminated and much of Strand Street would be pedestrianized.

Clarification: Two things that have been consistent throughout this process have been is this building size the minimum footprint to satisfy the utility of it or as a high priority for this Commission, does the addition of restrooms increase the size of the building.

Formerly there was a larger restroom facility. While trying to minimize the footprint, the electrical room, and the infrastructure for Dominion's equipment, etc., was downsized and the number of restrooms was reduced.

Question: Why do the park concepts only show the southern half of the park because we know that the northern half of the park is also subject to being completed? We need to consider the entire park with respect to what the site plan would look like.

Answer: Given the cost-based budget that we have, the assumption is that we must stay within the improvements we have already made to Waterfront Park. As we consider the pump station and the concepts we can deliver, until we find additional funding we must assume that we will either restore in kind what's there or make very minor changes to that area. Until we know what the next budget cycle will include, it's largely going to be focused on shoreline improvements but that may mandate some impacts on northern Waterfront Park that may require some improvements.

Question: From a budgetary standpoint is this now focused not just on the pump station but also on the southern part of the park?

Answer: It is anticipated that there will be some fairly large impact in this area during construction, but they are working to minimize impact on trees, etc.

Comments: Since there is no material advantage technically having the pump station along the Strand or Prince Street, having it along the Strand would be better because it would be blocking a parking garage, which isn't as aesthetically pleasing as the boat club across Prince Street.

Comment: An important consideration is what the Strand itself is. If the Strand is to be waterfront dining with adjoining restaurants some consideration should be given to what the views are versus the street being open to vehicular traffic, or the street closed, or kiosks put on it. What happens to the Strand is an important consideration to whether you want the Strand itself blocked by a building or do you want the view to be open. As redevelopment or change of ownership occurs that drives different businesses and uses what are the constraints at the various locations?

Comment: The reconstruction of the 100 block of King Street with new lighting and patios and level changes, includes that corner of the Strand.

Comment: As the station location is being decided and park options and get feedback on them, King Street, both the 100 and unit block and the reverse "L" along the Strand will have some improvements made to them. More feedback will be sought from those affected by the construction.

Question: Is it known how the footprint of the waterfront parks is changing when considering that elements are been added and removed?

Answer: There is about an acre of green space being added to the parks, given the incorporation of the current City parking lot directly south of the boat club into Pt. Lumley Park. More detailed information will be provided at the open house.

Question: Could you provide some general feedback on the cost to maintain the hardscape versus a lawn or plant area?

Answer: That information will be obtained and shared but generally the landscape is more expensive.

Comments: Advantages of having the pump station on Prince Street: the ability to see the entire park; if pedestrianized the view from Strand Street would remain open to the river; the commercial property opens opportunities for waterfront dining and further development.

Comments: This scenario above was a hallmark of the Olin Plan where the corners of the park were supposed to have clear views of the park.

Point Lumley: The cost-based option did not include the bulkhead, but a budget request is being discussed with the City Manager. Currently a boardwalk is being explored keeping and the cove intact; shade tree requirements are being met as required by the City.

Question: Are bikes and scooters allowed on the waterfront promenades?

Answer: They are not currently allowed, and the goal is to continue precluding them. The formal trail is Union Street and there continue to be problems along the waterfront with the signs being ignored. There was a plan to have geofencing to stop scooters from weaving in and out of park areas. Discussions are on-going as to how the regulation can be enforced.

Specific questions can be emailed to Matthew Landes, Portfolio Manager.

Question: This is a suboptimal plan, i.e., placing a building in a park. If the building is on placed Prince Street, will Prince Street be pedestrianized?

Answer: The current plan is to maintain parking and maintain it as an emergency access on Prince St.. The street and gardens that were a part of the Olin Plan were not in the cost-based budget.

Public Comment: A signed waterfront settlement agreement between the City and the Department of Justice (DOJ) in 1981, not with the National Park Service.. In 1981 the City agreed that all structures along the waterfront would be open to the public and only 15 feet tall. Every concept presented is not in accordance with the agreement between the DOJ and a District of Columbia circuit court judge. Therefore, is the City willing to spend \$110 million ignoring the court order and have the DOJ order that it be torn down because it is in violation of a court order and forbidden by the deeds when this property was conveyed? This is the reason why there is pressure to have the pump station built to the west of the Strand.

The City has been transparent regarding the deed restriction and has been working with the National Park Service who is manager of all lands in the agreement and is coordinating.

Public Comment: The developer should not be having this discussion with the National Park Service but with the DC circuit court to have the order changed.

The City is working collaboratively with all parties and the alternative analysis has been completed. The City will continue working with the National Park Service as a deed modification is currently in process with the DOJ and will hold public open houses and notifications as needed. At the time of the settlement agreement, none of the flood mitigation was conceived or necessary.

Public Question: Will elevations of the proposed pump house be presented?

Answer: Yes, they will be presented at the open house.

Public Question: Where will those who visit Old Town park, considering the parking spaces that will be eliminated during construction?

Developer Answer: A mitigation plan will be developed to minimize the impact during construction.

Staff informed the Commission of the open house to be held on November 25 to solicit information from the community and the commission so they can provide feedback.

4. **City Updates**

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

The City is installing synthetic turf at the foot of King Street and replacing the existing synthetic panel. A reminder that the phase 1 pilot of the 200-block closing will start this weekend through January 6 and will resume in March and run through September. The City Council will decide whether to make the pedestrianization of this block permanent in the fall of 2025. **Private Development Updates** – Michael Swidrak, Urban Planner III, P&Z

No specific updates.

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

The Scottish Christmas Walk and the boat parade are scheduled for December 7. A resident and business impact notice will be forwarded to Commission members to share with constituents.

No changes in crime statistics.

5. **Commission Reports / Subcommittee Reports / Announcements**

Visit Alexandria Holiday activities: Tree lighting (11/22), plaid Friday (Thanksgiving weekend), small business Saturday, artist Sunday at Torpedo Factory, parade day and Scottish Walk (12/7), Boat Parade of Lights (12/7) Water Skiing Santa (12/24); First Night Alexandria 30th anniversary (12/31) – all event dates and times can be found on the [Visit Alexandria](#) website.

Seaport received its permit from the Army Corps of Engineers for the Seaport Center II, which will be directly north of the current Seaport Center.

Commission members discussed the Chair's survey from the spring asking for input for how the waterfront could be improved – this information was to be used to shape future Commission agendas and determine what recommendations should be made to City Council or to a particular City department. A high-level overview of the survey was provided in May, but the compilation of all the suggestions were never shared with the commission. This information is needed so the Commission can determine which of the suggestions should be pursued.

A walk on the north end of Old Town was suggested rather than the traditional walk from Windmill Hill Park to Founders Park.

More information is needed regarding the revitalization of the Torpedo Factory and the power plant developers.

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

- a. Seaport Foundation Second Facility
- b. Waterfront Flood Mitigation Update
- c. Revisiting Survey of Topics for Discussion
- d. Torpedo Factory Update

7. **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:15 a.m.