

**Minutes**

**City of Alexandria, Virginia**

**WATERFRONT COMMISSION - REGULAR MEETING**

**Tuesday, October 15, 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.  
Sarah Bagley, Member, Alexandria City Council (Remote)  
Marcee Craighill, Representative, Alexandria Commission for the Arts  
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, (remote)  
Claire Mouldoux, Representative, VisitAlexandria, Vice Chair  
Lebaron Reid, Commissioner At-Large and Commission, Chair  
David Robbins, Representative, Alexandria Marina Pleasure Boat Owners (Remote)  
Debra Roepka, Alexandria Seaport Foundation  
Louise Roseman, Citizen, Park Planning District I  
Sydney Smith, Representative, Founders Park Community Association  
Patricia Webb, Citizen, Citizen, Park Planning District II  
Esther White, Alexandria Archaeological Commission (Remote)

***Members excused:***

Eldon Boes, Representative, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission  
Maureen Cooney, Representative, Historic Alexandria Foundation  
William Vesilind, Representative, Old Town Civic Association

***Members unexcused:***

***Vacancies:***

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

**Staff:** Jack Browand, Commission Staff Liaison & Deputy Director, RPCA; Catherine Miliaras, Principal Planner, P&Z; Mathew Landes, Portfolio Manager, DPI; Michael Swidrak, Urban Planner III, P&Z.

**Attendees:** Chris Carrigan; Rich Hopf; Christine Berstein; Paul Beckman; Al Cox; Ken Wire; Murray Bonnett; William Schyler; Sandy Schechtmyer; Gina Baum; Joby Manor

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 of past sessions**

September 19, 2024, minutes were approved unanimously.

3. **Items for Information:**

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

The subcommittee has met and has planned a second meeting. It is using the Waterfront Small Area Plan's six development goals and 14 development guidelines as the roadmap to analyze whether the proposals for Robinson Terminal North adheres to the guidelines and goals associated with the project. The subcommittee has completed a review of all the goals and half of the guidelines and will present its findings at the November Waterfront Commission meeting.

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

Matt referenced previous letters asking the City to consider alternative locations for the pumphouse. He spoke about the consideration of alternative sites to build a singular pump station, noting that two primary locations, one at Waterfront Park and the other further to the north around Thompson's Alley, have been evaluated. He also noted that due to cost constraints and other considerations, the City chose to go with a single pump station at Waterfront Park. Concerns have been raised about the location at Waterfront Park. Four sites were considered, a building at 110 S Union, a site at 1 Prince Street, Big Wheel Bikes/Misha's and Point Lumley Park.

Question: For the Prince Street location was the pump station to replace the building?

Answer: All options using buildings on Prince St. would involve complete demolishment and reconstruction. The buildings cannot be preserved.

Question: Is the timeline the same for all alternatives?

Answer: No, privately held sites would result in significant delays from current schedule.

Questions; How much of a delay?

Answer: The delay would potentially be from one to two and a half years dependent upon evaluation, negotiating terms with private owners, acquisition, and demolition.

Question: What are the incremental costs?

Answer: Each site has a different tax value and a different assessed value, which is not necessarily a reflection of market value. Essentially one would have to add the market value and development cost.

Question: Are the incremental costs small?

Answer: No – development next to an existing foundation or with extreme constraints will increase construction costs.

Comments: For the City Council to make an informed decision, it would be prudent to see the pros and cons of each site.

One of the prevailing considerations in the previously mentioned memo is that the City has flagged the need to replace significant portions of the bulkhead. The project was estimated to cost approximately \$300M to \$350M and the current budget is not funded for these replacement costs.

Comment/Question: So \$150M to \$250M dollars coming from CIP funds, the AlexRenew project was funded with utility fees. Is there an alternate funding mechanism?

Question: Do you have a sense of what the incremental funding request to replace the bulkhead is?

Answer: The estimated range of additional costs is between \$25M to \$100M depending on which segments we aim to prioritize. It was recommended that we prioritize as much as the CIP can absorb.

Answer: The office of management and budget has looked at different funding sources including bonding, CIP and the storm water utility being in consideration. However, the flood action Alexandria program is also highly constrained and can only do top tier projects.

Question: Are you aware of any other jurisdictions in the area that have proposed adding flood mitigation or adding a pump station of this size and scope to their park space?

Answer: Fairfax County built a very similar stormwater pump station just a few years ago in Huntington on the shoreline. It is much less prominent in terms of land use. These facilities are located around the area, above and below ground but often in less prominent locations. A sewer lift station was recently built in Potomac Yard completely integrated into a prominent park.

Question: Could you give us a sense of the scale of the building, i.e., two story, three story?

Answer: As a single station in its current configuration, it is roughly 36 feet in one dimension, about 100 feet in another dimension and about two stories tall.

Question: Will noise study also be conducted because the pumps will not only be running during a flood event?

Answer: The pumps will only operate during a rain event or when there is a major topping event of the river when crested over top of our bulkhead elevation. They will not be running during normal conditions.

Question: Regarding overhead transformers. Is everything going underground?

Answer: The project team has been working with Dominion Power since bringing the design builder on board evaluating cost, infrastructure, etc. Dominion has requested and recommended that the existing transformers on both Prince and Strand Street should stay above grade. The type of transformers that would be required to go underground have a 2-to-2.5-year lead time which is much longer than our current projected schedule. Even if they were ordered now, which the project team is not prepared to do until additional design is completed, this would be an unacceptably significant delay. There is a proposal to put the overhead transformers going north on the Strand underground and moving south on the Strand the transformers would remain overhead; however, this is still under evaluation from a cost and utility constraint perspective.

Question: Will this pump station help with the current nuisance flooding?

Answer: Yes. The pump station and the outfall structure at the end of the river will act similarly to backflow preventers so that water and debris will not be able to flow back into the streets. The only time the streets will be wet is when it's raining or if the river does overtop the bulkhead.

Question: When are you expecting to have a revised site plan rendering and what is the current anticipated timeframe for development, special use permit or site plan approval by the Planning Commission and the City Council?

Answer: The current schedule shows 30% level design is anticipated by late December or early January. In terms of the overall DSUP, the 30% technical exhibit will be build on the concept submission and start the preliminary plan process which typically takes about one year.

Clarification: The process will probably not be completed until the early to mid of 2026. The project team is working on early site plan release so that some of the construction may start mid to late 2025.

Question: Is there a possibility of taking down the old food court near Blackwall Hitch and using that space for the pump station?

Answer: Based on where large buildings are and where infrastructure is it would not be cost effective to build a pump station at that location. The northern pump station in 2015 shown around Thompsons Alley or north of that on the corner of where the E/F pier would be, there is a small city-owned parcel that was looked at but was deemed infeasible to site constraints and land and ownership restrictions.

Further staff comment:

Comment 1: There is a concern in the community about the continued viability, accessibility and business attachability of the waterfront. Essentially, for every day the businesses and parks on the waterfront are not accessible it changes the perception of the waterfront as a vital location for the community.

Comment 2: There is an urgent need to address this concern and to some degree the more time/money spent on the process the less there is to be spent on delivery and the process has been delayed to some degree and the process of improvement will continue but we are anxious to start the actual buildout and minimize negative community impact as the project continues. The Commission will continue to be updated on schedule shifts.

Comment 3: There are still opportunities to incorporate the programmatic elements of the pump station. The need for office space has decreased and there is the potential for mixed-use space that could offset the economic impacts and preservation of an asset that many in the community want to see retained. Perhaps there should be some reconsideration and integration of thinking to come up with something that is more layered.

Comment 4: The project team is not able to work within the confines of the building on Prince Street due to the size of the wet well and excavation that would need to occur, i.e., the building would have to be torn down and rebuilt but would cause instability to adjacent foundations and there are inherent risks in doing so.

Question: Are other ways that could be cost effective in alleviating this issue mentioned in comment 4.

Answer: While there are other ways that could be cost effective, there are other considerations, i.e., the timeline, acquisition and other due diligence issues that would push the project out for another 2 to 2.5 years.

Comment: This project is anticipated to have a lifespan of between 50-75 years and the City needs to balance about making cost effective decisions, time efficient decisions, for this period of time. The City and continue to evaluate climate change

Question: Has the pump station has gone from 30-60 feet to 48 x 90.

Answer: Yes, and the project team is working on concepts to make it smaller.

Question: The inlet across from Windmill Hill Park was designed so that it could safely flood. Should consideration be given to something that would take water into the inlet, i.e., the docks and bulkheads were removed, and the area was designed so it could flood and be resilient. Has consideration been given to moving water in that direction?

Answer: There are two types of water being dealt with, i.e., rainwater and river water. Some hybrid options were developed for the rainwater, and we could put that water underground and store it and we could build a smaller pump station and pump it out over time. This solution was deemed to be more expensive than the funding we have. Additionally, there was community opposition to the underground storage solution and some risks involved and in terms of the rainwater storage needed it would require such a large underground facility.

Question: Has the City approached the Department of Justice concerning the settlement that was entered into by the court and the District of Columbia in 1983 providing for resolution of the properties that limit buildings on this site to 15 feet with public access only? Have you gotten permission from the DOJ to do any of this?

Answer: The project team has been working with the National Park Service who is the primary point of contact for all lands that were settled by that agreement. The National Park Service and the DOJ were the settlement bodies, but the National Park Service Division of Lands and Planning is the administrative and operating entity with jurisdiction over the land on behalf of the United States government.

Question: Do you realize that you still have to get the agreement of the court, and it has to be printed in the Federal Register, and you need a period of public comment ,which is a process that could take a year or more?

Answer: The process has been unfolding for a long time regarding that parcel and the National Park Service is working with the DOJ to ensure compliance with all processes.

Question: If the pump station stays in Waterfront Park and construction starts in mid-to-late 2025 when would it be completed? When is the pump station operating how loud is it in terms of the noise near Waterfront Park?

Answer: The pumps are underground and when running they will be surrounded by water, concrete and earth so much of the noise and vibration would be intenerated within the ground itself. The component that would most likely have any audible sound to it would be the HVAC equipment that controls the electrical rooms to ensure they don't overheat or the generator that would probably be operated once or twice monthly from a testing standpoint to ensure that it is operational and running efficiently and would only run for any significant duration if the power grid was down and there was an event where the pumps needed to run. Therefore, in terms of duration, there would be a very infrequent need to have the generator running, and the testing of the generator can be controlled.

A detailed construction schedule is not yet available, but one to 1.5 years is a reasonable estimate to complete the entire project, but there are other factors that could impact that timeframe.

Question: If additional funding were available would the project remain as presented?

Answer: It's difficult to say what additional funding could achieve or what could be accomplished.

Commission Comments:

Commission Comment: The first element of the plan should be started and if additional funding becomes available make the other suggested improvements. It was suggested that the public and private property owners would be more willing to collaborate with the design team if they did not work in isolation regarding the project.

Question: What could be done to visually minimize the impact of the project on the community?

Answer: The scale and mass is the starting point and if the project team is able to split it up to orient the building in such a way that the scale and mass can have minimal impact on the community but also serve as the backdrop to the park where the architecture can frame the public space and use. Whether that is with a shade structure between two small facilities or the creation of a plaza or a stage like experience, there are many ways that the project can be modified from one single box into something that is much more integrated into the public space element. Certainly, the architectural expression itself, i.e., the materials, the style and language and how it relates to our history are things that can be done in addition to breaking down the scale and mass. The starting point will be the orientation, whether it's broken or not, and where it's placed in the park and then follow with greater details.

Question: Is any analysis of the options or alternatives that have already been decided or will the alternatives be further discussed or is the position being taken that the City is saying there are no alternatives?

Answer: Currently, the design team is going forward with the station on City-owned land.

Question: If an alternative were available that would cost more but was not at so high a level of funding needed would the project team consider that alternative?

Answer: The design team has been given a budget and is making recommendations within the available funding. If additional funding was made available, and direction received to consider other alternatives, the project team could respond accordingly. While there are technically feasible alternatives that would work, the project team is ready to proceed with the budget constraints currently in place. A plan was adopted in 2024, and a design-builder has been procured who is ready to start the project and who scoped to specifically stay with the current budget.

Commission Comments: Of the three alternatives presented is the Commission ready to make a recommendation. It was suggested that no decision be made until the full board was present and obtain input from constituents. It was also suggested that a vote be taken during the November meeting as to which alternative should be chosen. It was mentioned that during the current meeting it was discovered that there are some minor details that need to be clarified and warranted more discussion.

**c. FY 2026 Budget Priorities**  
**Lebaron Reid, Chair**

The letter sent to the City Council last fall referencing the Commission stance on priorities can be

largely used with the addition of a request on funding for RTN. The financial constraints should be considered inclusive of CIP. The City Manager has requested recommendations from the commission by November 1. It was suggested that the recommendations could be discussed during the current meeting or grant the chair and vice chair the authority to draft a letter based on the previous year's priorities. A motion was made that the chair and vice chair draft a letter and circulate to the Commission for comment so that it could be provided to the City Manager prior to the November 1 deadline. The motion carried.

4. **City Updates**

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

The contractor is replacing lights along King Street in preparation for the holiday. The current Site and See art installation will be taken down early November in preparation for holiday events and holiday trees that will be placed at Market Square and at the foot of King Street.

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

They are continuing to work with the developers with the intent of mitigating the construction impact for Robinson Terminal North. There was a question regarding when the project would be completed. The commission was informed that the utilities should be completed within a couple weeks.

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

No report

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

The RTN Subcommittee will meet on October 16.

Jack Browand reported that Iris Portney passed away in early June.

Invitations were provided to the commissioners for an event on November 14 regarding the new Seaport building.

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

It was suggested that the commission take a look at the north waterfront in terms of the nuisance flooding and try to find a viable solution for dealing with the problem.

7. **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:15 a.m.