

Minutes

**City of Alexandria, Virginia
WATERFRONT COMMISSION - REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, December 11, 2024**

Virtual

7:30 a.m.

Commission Members

Members present:

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
Eldon Boes, Representative, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission
Marcee Craighill, Representative, Alexandria Commission for the Arts
Stuart Fox, 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 Mouledoux, Representative, VisitAlexandria, Vice Chair
Lebaron Reid, Commissioner At-Large, Chair
David Robbins, Representative, Alexandria Marina Pleasure Boat Owners
Debra Roepka, 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, Citizen, Park Planning District II
Esther White, Alexandria Archaeological Commission

Members excused: Maureen Cooney, Representative, Historic Alexandria Foundation

Members unexcused: None

Vacancies: Representative, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce; Citizen, Park Planning District III

Attendees:

City Staff: Michael Durham (RPCA), Catherine Miliaras (P&Z); Rami Chehade, Interim Director (DPI), Matthew Landes (DPI); Dirk Geretz (P&Z)
City Advisors: Stephen Skipper (Skanska), Sara Supulveres (Carollo), Eduardo Spinetti (Skanska), Jason Marie (Carollo)
Public: Gina Baum, Christine Berstein, Sandra Schlachtmeyer, Jeff Lipsky, Denise Dunbar, Donald Griffen, Al Cox, Paul Beckmann, Kathleen Allegrone, Dana Robert Colarulli, Yvonne Callahan

The Waterfront Commission meeting was held virtually. A meeting recording is available by visiting [December 11, 2024 Meeting Recording](#).

These summary minutes will note the approximate time to view the discussion.

Summary Minutes

1. Lebaron Reid, Chair, call the meeting to order
2. Items for Action
 - a. October 2024 minutes were approved unanimously with noted amendments.
 - b. November 2024 minutes were approved unanimously with noted amendments.
 - c. Waterfront Plan Implementation – Pump House Alternatives Discussion
7 minutes into meeting

Commissioner Reid, Chair, opened the discussion with brief remarks acknowledging multiple presentations from the City providing information on the implementation of the Waterfront Small Area Plan specifically regarding the proposed locations of the pump station. The purpose of today's discussion is to provide a recommendation from the Waterfront Commission for the placement of the pump station.

Commissioner Vesilind asked if attendees were permitted to speak as two attendees prepared a presentation for the Commission. It was confirmed, at the discretion of the Chair, attendees may provide comment.

Following a discussion between Commissioners, it was decided Commission members would discuss the proposed locations of the pump station within Waterfront Park followed by attendee comments.

Commissioner Discussion Pump Station Locations: 13 minutes into meeting

Commissioner Abraham asked what type of feedback has been received from the Community.

City Staff Matt Landes, DPI:

Community feedback has been reasonably consistent with a preference for option 2 next to Prince street parallel to the long side of Old Dominion Boat Club (Note: option 2 refers to a location within Waterfront Park).

City Staff Landes noted the Park & Recreation Commission received an update and was near unanimous for option 2.

City Staff Landes provided community comments were received from the City Open House and a survey that followed. It was noted that 40 surveys were completed in addition to the comments received at the Open House and approximately 67% of the respondents preferred option 2.

Commissioner Abraham stated it was important for the Commission to be aware of public input.

Commissioner Fox provided a summary of the Park & Recreation Commission's (PRC) discussion. The PRC understands the importance of the project although there were concerns about the loss of green space and without sufficient budget to fully replace the bulkhead. The PRC generally supported option 2, although supported, with sufficient funding, the City consider purchasing 1 Prince Street for the placement of the pumphouse outside the park.

18 Minutes into meeting

Commissioner Robbins: If only option is to choose is from the two provided, option 2 is preferred. However, he does not believe building a pump house in the park itself is consistent with the goals and objectives of the waterfront plan. He supported the project, although placing the pump house in a park isn't in keeping with the overall goals that this commission is monitoring.

Commissioner Artemel: The Commission letter of recommendation or decision should make it really clear what the concerns are about having a pump house in the park, and that the Commission understands the constraints by the current budget. But perhaps we should be really asking city council for more money to ensure the project can be built as needed and expected by the community. The preferred option is the Strand Street placement because of concerns the Prince St. option would pose to the preservation of views to the water. Although, with design and placement modifications, the Prince St. placement may be acceptable.

Commission Reid asked for clarification from City Staff Landes on the amount of space the station would take from Waterfront Park.

City Staff Landes stated the current size of the pump station is 3,700 square feet. The previous version was 5,000 square feet. Including the underground portion of the station, the total impact at this stage of design is 4,100 square feet.

City Staff Jack Browand, Commission Staff Liaison, provided a brief clarification for new members of the Commission and attendees. City Council adopted a Waterfront Plan and subsequently adopted the Landscape and Flood mitigation plan often referred to as the Olin Plan. The Waterfront Plan provided high-level guidelines and recommendations, and the Olin Plan was the first step in the implementation. The Olin Plan provided two pump stations, one in Waterfront Park and a second in Thompsons Alley.

City Staff Landes further added that following the flood-mitigation construction, there will be an addition of one quarter acre of net green space along the waterfront even with the addition of the pump station in Waterfront Park.

26 minutes

Commissioner Vesilind supported Commissioner Fox and Robbin's comments. The issues are not addressed, and it feels as if this is a last-minute decision. There are other groups that need to be considered and the financial benefits to the City. The City would be better to do nothing than do it incorrectly. He supported the idea of the City purchasing the private building for the pump station location.

Commissioner Smith acknowledged the City work, hired world-renowned experts, have a recommendation and it's time to move forward and back the City's proposal.

Commissioner Roseman agreed with Smith's perspective. She recognizes that some would prefer to have the pump station at 1 Prince Street, if money were no object, but clearly money is an object here. The city is in a very challenging budget situation, and even if the City Council were to allocate additional funds to the waterfront flood-mitigation project, those funds would be better used to fix the bulkhead along the waterfront. Advocating for moving the pump station to 1 Prince would simply delay the inevitable.

Commissioner Roepke stated this has been fully vetted. The city staff did look at all of the different options, and they've been responsive to concerns, and everybody understands that this is going to take up some space. But I agree that city council is going to be in a challenging budget situation. adding costs is not going to be an option, and the other thing is, if we have extra money available, we really should be taking care of the seawall.

Commissioner Vesilind stated that an increase of \$5 to \$10 million isn't raising the cost that much and \$5 million is not going to help the seawall. Budgetary issues are not the concern with this project.

Commissioner Hall stated this has been a long-time project and is speaking on behalf of the business community, many of whom have weathered this nuisance flooding on a regular basis for over 30 years have been waiting patiently. It's very obvious we're not all going to agree on one solution. we've got to deal with this now. We can't keep putting it off. The city manager and the mayor have made it very clear there is no money to purchase and raze this building. We need to decide and move forward.

City staff Landes clarified that depending on which of the offsite alternatives with private property, acquisition, and demolition, that this would be tens of millions of dollars. It's not just the cost of purchasing and acquiring a building. It's the soft costs associated with that process and the acquisition, duration and impacts accordingly. Legal costs, etc., and then the cost of demolition and additional costs of a more challenging and risky construction process could add 30% to 40% of the project budget, not 5 or 10 million dollars.

Commissioner Boes is not convinced that if we put the pump station in the park it will be an eyesore. It may be accepted, and maybe even welcomed, as a valuable feature of the park over time. Considering the added costs and the added uncertainty of going to a different location, we should accept the city's recommendation and move forward with one of the sites in the park. I might have a slight preference for the one along Prince Street.

Commissioner Fox stated it's our responsibility as Commissioners is to make recommendations to council. It may not be what they want to hear. It may not be what the city wants us, but our job is to be stewards of the waterfront, and so it's our job to make recommendations that we think are the best. He asked to hear from Al Cox and Paul Beckman.

Commissioner Abraham requested clarification on the process. Is staff looking for a vote on a recommendation today? What group will be involved next and are there more studies?

44 minutes

City Staff Browand stated that similar to the discussion with the Park & Recreation Commission, based on the recommendations that are consistent with the Olin Plan, which of the two options presented are preferred by this Commission.

City Staff Landes stated Browand is accurate. The city has conducted its analysis and understands that we must move forward with a pump station within Waterfront Park, and that we're seeking the community's feedback through this body. And then, in terms of next steps, we were hoping to advance a single concept for a single pump station location for the city's development review process. That would involve submitting a site plan and special use permit which would go before planning commission, first assuming that it is accepted and recommended for approval. It would then go to council for their

vote for the special use portion, which would be the pump station use in in this particular zone of our zoning code.

Commission Vice Chair Mouledoux recommended the option along Prince Street, to maximize the improvement to park amenities that a pump station design would bring, and specifically the stage component. When Visit Alexandria produced the Portside Festival, and even before that, when the city produced the Memorial Day Jazz festival, the stage was positioned in Waterfront Park along the Prince Street side. This supports Commissioner Boes in keeping a view of the water during performances as well as the position of the sun, since the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, and not having the sun directly in the faces of either the performers or attendees. Also, given the potential for a greater portion of the 100 block of Strand street to be made into pedestrianized zone, it would be desirable to maintain the view out toward the water from the Strand. So, between these two options, 2 would be recommended.

Commissioner Roepke responded that it was reported that 67% from the survey earlier preferred the Prince Street option. How many people actually responded to the survey?

City Staff Landes stated 41 completed the survey.

Commissioner Macek stated it would be helpful to hear from members of the public who have to speak on this, but presumes that we'll circle back to further discussion by commissioners before we take an action on this. Once we've heard from the public.

Commissioner Reid stated once we have heard all commentary. The end will be the Commissioners.

Commissioner Vesilind asked if the questions posed by the public would be addressed.

City staff Browand stated if there is time, the questions will be addressed. Otherwise, answers will be published on the web.

Commissioner Reid, Chair stated over the last few weeks I've taken time to hear both sides of this question. Where should the pump station be located? The pump station is principally one of the things we should be concerned with is getting something done and getting something done correctly. Because of our tax base we have limited funds, so we have to work with what we have. City staff have been working on this for years. It's important to consider that when this was originally started there were going to be 2 pump houses, one in Waterfront Park. Now we're down to one. We were going to start with a 9,000 square foot footprint, and now we're down to 3,700 or so square foot footprint. A pump station on Prince Street and its impact on Waterfront Park is minimal, and an additional quarter acre will be added to the waterfront. If funding was unlimited, then yes, possibly we could pursue the other option. City staff Landes' presentations have addressed the questions by the citizenry, the city of Alexandria, as well as the Waterfront Commission. The Park & Recreation Commission had the point of view that if, all things being equal, if we have unlimited funding, then possibly we could pursue another option. But we don't, but we need something, and we need something done now. There's no need to wait.

53 minutes

Commissioner Reid, Chair at this time recognized Al Cox and Paul Beckman to provide a presentation.

Al Cox, public attendee

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission. My name is Al. Cox. I live at 311 North Alfred Street. I come here today with several concerns about the currently proposed flood mitigation plan. As the former historic preservation manager and city architect. For almost 30 years I was actively involved with Olin in the development of the waterfront master plan. What you see here today is not that plan. I want to be clear that my comments are not directed at Matt Landes, who I've worked with in the past and have respect as a landscape architect. Rather, I believe that the city has collective amnesia, and decisions are being made by Staff and the public officials who were not here to participate in that long and sometimes contentious master plan process which was ultimately very successful and produced a beautiful plan. Everyone agrees that nuisance flooding is an issue that disrupts businesses on King, Union and the Strand, as well as the public enjoyment of the waterfront parks, and that it requires some form or forms of mitigation. Everyone also knows that master plans must evolve when new information comes to light or budget priorities change. However, there is nothing in the present proposal that conforms to the plan that was approved in 2014. A pump station which sits in the park and blocks that vista defeats one of the primary organizational elements of that plan and seriously jeopardizes the success of those businesses. One of the fundamental features of the Olin plan is a cross axis at the foot of King Street, that presents a much larger, more open and welcoming park space and activities for the public when looking north and south on the Strand. What is being proposed here now is more than twice that size, and the multipurpose structure that was originally in the parking lot seems to have moved east into the park space You may be able to see a very small one-story building in the parking lot at the west end of Waterfront Park that was intended to serve as a combination trolley stop, pump station, outdoor movie screen, stage and public toilets. But I would also like to call to your attention some other features of the master plan that do not appear to be part of the present plan, which, if implemented as proposed, would preclude ever implementing the Olin plan which included an urban bulkhead promenade that ran straight along the entire waterfront from Robinson Landing to the city Marina, with enhanced paving, guardrails, benches, and lighting per an approved common elements.

Mr Cox proceeded to review other elements of the Olin plan available for review on the City website. The Olin plan anticipated elevating these parks to match the bulkhead height wherever possible, as they were going to be redeveloped anyway. Likewise, the streets in this zone will be excavated to replace the century old storm sewers. Take a step back and look at the goals and activities proposed in the approved Master Plan and ask whether what is now proposed is in conformance with the plan that has already cost the city thousands of hours of staff time millions of dollars in consultant fees and well over a hundred public meetings since 2010. A painted parking lot, with public art at the foot of King Street, with a riprap shoreline and a pump station in the middle of our only urban park is not world class. It's 3rd class.

Paul Beckmann, public attendee

This is Paul Beckman, longtime resident of Alexander, Virginia for the last 30 years at 214 East Mount Ida Avenue over in Delray. Mr. Beckman presented his conceptual design and thoughts on utilizing the 1 Prince Street private property for the placement of the pump station and thoughts on placement in Waterfront Park.

I've been working in this vicinity for the last, say 15 years, so I'm intimately familiar with almost every single one of the buildings all in and around Waterfront Park. The

presentation proceeded to show renderings of slight realignments of the pump station within Waterfront Park and how that would look through modeling. The exhibits showed the size and mass of the station and anticipated impact within the park.

Mr. Beckman provided conception designs of what a pump station may be if utilizing the 1 Prince Street private property and placement next to a civic building within Point Lumley Park.

The presentation is available on the [Waterfront Commission website](#) within the video posted.

1 hour & 10 minutes

Commissioner Reid, Chair asked for any comments from the public

Gina Baum, public attendee

A lot of talk about money. That is not your problem. As a Commissioner of the Waterfront Commission, it is your job to protect and preserve the waterfront. Let me just tell you, I personally was a part of the waterfront planning process. It was a long and grueling process. I spent 13 years as the chair of the Park and Rec. Commission. I spent a decade on this commission. The staff recommendation is not keeping with the waterfront plan in any way. I noticed you guys did not do any sort of evaluation of such. This is not keeping with the plan. It's not in keeping with the Olin plan. The reason I contend that we need a pump house of this size is because we are only elevating the area 3 feet, and we are creating a bathtub effect. For decades we've been told that the nuisance flooding wasn't addressed, because as soon as it comes in, it leaves now suddenly it needs to be addressed immediately. What about just pumping out with pump trucks the water that comes in as nuisance flooding. I oppose the staff alternative provided. Ms. Baum stated that the Commissioners are on the Commission to state the position of their stakeholders. There are a few members not representing the position of their stakeholders. Ms. Baum stated the options provided are not in keeping with the Olin plan in any way, shape or form, or the waterfront plan.

Yvonne Callahan, public attendee

I want to start off, if I may, and respectfully request of the chairman that Paul be permitted to complete his slide presentation. As to my other comments, as stated by city staff, the project is being funded through capital improvement funds. I would remind you that the entirety of the city, with the exception of this project, is being financed with the taxes, the utility fees. Let me not call it that, we pay through our water and sewer bills. We are paying money to River Renew and getting nothing back for this project.

The other thing I want to talk about briefly is you are being told that this has to proceed very, very quickly. What you are not being told is that this property, where the project is going to be, is being proposed requires an amended court order. There is a court order in place for the US. District Court for the District of Columbia, not even Alexandria, which sets a height limit of buildings on this property to 15 feet. The city will tell you that they are working with the National Park Service, that will take a long time. I would suggest to you that right now you're being asked to approve a property, a development that is not permitted under the current settlement agreement that the city entered into in the 1980s.

Commissioner Reid, Chair

Thank you, Miss Callahan, just with regard your request for Paul to proceed. Paul did

adequately present his alternative ideas. And his commentary was interrupted as it was waving into another area.

Jack, did you just want to quickly weigh in on what Yvonne said with regards to the Department of Justice.

City staff Browand deferred to City staff Landes to comment on discussions with the federal government.

City staff Landes respectfully disagreed with Mr. Callahan. The City has been very transparent about the deed restrictions and the height restrictions and that we have been coordinating with the National Park Service from the inception of the waterfront plan adoption in 2014 to date. The National Park Service is typically the lead agency.

1 hour & 20 minutes

Commissioner Reid, Chair asked if there were any further comments from the public and there were none.

City staff Browand reviewed the questions in the Q&A, and they were addressed within the staff and Commissioner discussions.

Commissioner Reid, Chair asked City staff if the Waterfront Commission identified a set of priorities.

City staff Browand stated that he was not aware of priorities adopted other than those within the Waterfront Plan.

City staff Browand and Landes proceeded to provide clarifications and discussed elements of the posted Waterfront Small Area Plan, Olin Plan and recommendations to date.

Commissioner Macek stated in hindsight that I'm not sure why this meeting was virtual, because this is a very difficult meeting to have virtually, and we should have all been in person for this, I think, as a commission, we should prioritize meeting in person and providing provisions for people to meet virtually if they can't participate. I appreciate the perspective that Al Cox provided. Regarding the considerations of the Olin plan. This project transformed at one point from the waterfront plan implementation process to more of a flood mitigation, and that has overtaken this, and I know that the city keeps saying flood mitigation was the city Council's top priority. But to what end? It wasn't just to mitigate flooding for the sake of mitigate flooding. It was to provide for parks and public spaces that would meet the performance standards of the waterfront plan. And if you look at the waterfront plan goal statements, there are 10 of them that are on pages 18 through 20 of the waterfront plans that talk about being authentic, connected, inclusive, dynamic with respect to the topic at hand. We have now backed into a very engineered solution for the waterfront flood mitigation. And you know we were going down a similar path with Windmill Hill Park at one point, and wound up, moving towards a very natural shoreline something very different that had a very different cost structure, and has been quite successful, and I don't think that that same treatment is appropriate here, but I think some of the same principles that led to the decision at Windmill Park could have been. With respect to the issue at hand, I think design option 2 is better because it orients the building better to the existing waterfront Park. My

complaint is that we're only seeing half a waterfront Park and we need to integrate the plan for the whole park and look at you know the north half of the park as well.

Commissioner Vesilind expressed his disappointment that we didn't hear from Paul Beckman. He has some very intriguing analysis, technically and architecturally, to explain why the 1 Prince Street project is financially feasible. As a commission we shouldn't be talking about money. That's unfortunate. I didn't ever think in that vein, because that I'm a businessman, and I want to understand the numbers. You know the reason why we started with this flood mitigation, in the 1st place, was to basically to understand how historic buildings in Old Town and increase green spaces. Mr. Vesilind continued to describe elements of the City options he disagreed.

Commissioner Robbins stated he didn't believe our commission itself should be constrained by what fits within that existing budget like it's our job to have vision of what makes sense for the waterfront area. The pump station proposed by staff is substantially bigger than what was envisioned within the approved small area master plan for the waterfront and sort of the scale of that building creates new problems.

1 hour & 39 minutes

Commissioner Reid, Chair suspended commentary because we have heard a lot of comments, and some of those comments have been the same. I believe a lot of people have had their voices heard, which I think is very important to this commentary. Okay, now, what I want to move towards is what I am going to propose for the Commission members to consider one location for the pump station.

From approximately 1 hour & 40 minutes to 1 hour & 51 minutes, City staff and the Commissioners clarified the proposed location, Public vs Private property, and the recommendations presented.

Commissioner Smith made a motion to support the option on Prince Street within Waterfront Park, giving the City the opportunity to adjust the location to improve park use.

Commissioner Roseman, after considerable discussion by the commission, seconded the motion to support Waterfront Park option 2 along Prince Street.

Vote to approve 12 Yes; 3 No; 1 Abstention
2 hours into the meeting

Commissioner Fox made a second motion that the Commission recommend to City Council they strongly examine the 1 Prince Street private property location to preserve green space, activation of Strand Street, and potential civic uses, archaeology, and a visitor center.

Commissioner Vesilind seconded the motion

Vote to approve 13 Yes; 2 No; 1 Abstention
2 hours 3 minutes into the meeting

The Commissioners continued to discuss the format of the letter.

Commissioner Fox made a motion authorizing the Chair and Vice Chair to complete a letter of recommendation including the two motions adopted, after sharing a draft of the letter with the Commission for its review and comments.

Commissioner Artemel seconded the motion

Motion passed unanimously

3. Items of Information: No Update

4. City Update

a. No update

b. No update

c. Catherine Miliaras provided the following:

i. Robinson terminal North will be going to public hearing in February. Staff working on the report and conditions.

ii. Vola's Dockside airstream renewal application submitted. Public Hearing in December.

iii. Murray Bonitt submitted a application for a taco restaurant with rooftop outdoor seating for up to 40 people at the Big Wheel Bikes location at the corner of Prince and Strand. This is an administrative SUP, and staff will be taking public comment through December 12 and will go to the BAR for review and approval of a certificate of appropriateness.

5. Commissioner Updates

a. Commissioner Macek informed the Commission that the February Planning Commission meeting was published online yesterday. The staff report won't be published until late January, but you are able to see what the applicant for Robinson Terminal North site submitted.

6. January items will be determined by the Chair and Vice Chair

Commissioner Reid, Chair made a motion to adjourn

Commissioner Webb Seconded

Motion passed unanimously

Meeting adjourned approximately 9:20 am