

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

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2-28-01

DATE: FEBRUARY 23, 2001
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*
SUBJECT: PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK FOR THE PLANNED STUDY OF A POSSIBLE CITY VISITORS CENTER

ISSUE: Proposed scope of work for the study of a possible City visitors center.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive this report, and docket it for public hearing on Saturday, March 17, and for consideration on Tuesday, March 27.

BACKGROUND: Over the last five years, the City has discussed providing a new, larger and more convenient visitors center, in addition to the small Ramsey House Visitors Center located at 221 King Street. Currently, about 120,000 (about 330 per day) of the some 1.5 million annual visitors to Alexandria visit Ramsey House. At its November 28, 2000, legislative meeting, City Council requested that staff draft a scope of work (Attachment 1) for a consultant study to address the need and potential locations for a new visitors center, so that the scope could be reviewed by Council and set for public hearing to obtain citizen input.

DISCUSSION: At its January 26, 1999, legislative meeting Council received a report from the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA) about the establishment of an additional visitors center. The ACVA report stated that Ramsey House alone was not adequate to meet the needs of visitors to the City due to its limited size, its historic status and its configuration, which limits the amount and types of information that can be provided to, and displayed for, tourists. At that time, Council discussed the feasibility of locating a new larger visitors center in the area near Union Station, as discussed below.

The physical limitations of the Ramsey House Visitors Center most likely do result in visitors receiving an incomplete view of all the City has to offer. As a result, ACVA believes that we lose opportunities for visitors to enhance or extend their planned visits, which results in lost opportunities for local museums, restaurants and retail establishments. Consequently, the City's economy and related tax revenues may not receive its full tourism potential. The large number of tourists and convention attendees who visit the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area raises the probability (particularly with the planned new Convention Center in the District of Columbia) that we may not be maximizing the full potential of the area's visitor market.

In addition to the location and the size of the Ramsey House Visitors Center, parking, of course, is difficult in Old Town. Frequently the Market Square parking garage is at capacity and cannot meet visitor parking needs, and visitors have to search for available parking in the immediate area. Surveys of tourists visiting the Ramsey House in the spring and summer of 1997 confirmed that parking, as well as finding the Center, were problematic, as was the lack of a handicapped accessible entryway to the main floor of the Center.

States, cities and historic areas have learned that the key to the success of visitors centers, orientation centers, or welcome centers are their being accessible to major highways and other forms of public transportation, and their being easily located by visitors. Examples of this include the roadside welcome centers on interstate highways operated by the Commonwealth of Virginia and other states, the City of Charleston, South Carolina, Visitors Center that is located in Charleston at the edge of its historic area, and the town of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia where the National Park Service operates a visitors center with parking outside of the town and shuttles visitors to and from the town on buses. Charlottesville, Virginia, and Lexington, Kentucky, are other examples of cities that have established visitors centers that are accessible from major roads.

In addition to easy transportation access, the availability and convenience of parking is key to a visitors center's success in attracting tourists and extending their visit. If parking is easy to find and utilize, more visitors are likely to be attracted to a visitors center, and therefore to the City.

In January 1999, when Council received the ACVA report on the need for a new visitors center, the discussion focused on locating a new center at Alexandria Union Station (which at that point was being discussed for possible donation to the City). At that time, staff were directed to study the possibility of placing a visitors center, along with office space for ACVA and Virginia Railway Express (VRE), at Union Station, and to report back to Council.

At a June 22, 1999, Council work session, staff presented drawings and a plan to expand Union Station to accommodate a visitors center and office space for VRE and ACVA. Council expressed its concern about the size of the facility and asked staff to come back with a scaled back version of the proposed center. There was also community discussion of the plan, in an effort to seek input on the proposed location near Union Station. Since then, ACVA office needs have been satisfied with the lease of office space at 421 King Street, and VRE has determined that its future space needs were greater than could likely be provided at the Union Station site. As a result, the office space components of the original visitors center proposal are no longer applicable to the determination of the location or size of a visitors center structure.

At its November 28, 2000, legislative meeting, when Council accepted the donation of Union Station to the City by Commonwealth Atlantic Properties, and received the concerns of a number of citizens about the Union Station location for a visitors center, Council requested that the consideration of a new visitors center (and the related consultant study) not just focus on Union Station, but on other locations in the City as well. Council also requested that a proposed scope of work for the visitors center consultant study be the subject of a public hearing in order to obtain citizen input.

Proposed Scope of Work. In order to obtain an objective and independent study on the need and potential feasible locations for a new visitors center in the City, I recommend that a consulting firm (or a team of firms collaborating together) with the necessary professional expertise be hired. This would entail the City's Purchasing Office issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to a large number of firms that may wish to undertake the study, and then selecting the most advantageous offer (defined in this type of procurement as the best combination of experience, proposal and price) using the City's established competitive negotiation selection process.

The visitors center RFP will need to include a scope of the work that identifies the issues which the City wishes to have addressed by the consultant and generally the overall work that the selected consultant will be expected to undertake. Attached (Attachment 1) is the draft scope of work for the visitors center RFP. The draft covers the tasks to be performed including the proposed study methodology, as well as the desired deliverables.

Under the draft scope of work, the consultant would focus on the group tour and the individual leisure and business travel markets, which are important segments of the City's overall visitor market. The consultant would (a) collect and analyze data on these two visitor market segments, (b) analyze whether (and to what extent) a new visitors center would enable the City to attract a larger share of these market segments, (c) define what that center would have to provide in order to achieve this attraction of more visitors (in terms, for example, of space, parking, shuttle bus or similar service, location and general functions), and (d) propose a plan or alternative plans for a visitors center that would achieve this increased attraction of visitors.

In determining the benefits associated with a new visitors center and whether a new center is something that the City should pursue, and also in proposing a plan (or alternative plans) for a new center, the consultant would be directed to consider at least three visitors center options:

- a. A visitors center that would serve the group and individual leisure and business travel markets, would provide long-term day parking for both motor coaches and individual visitor vehicles, and would provide a shuttle service to transport these "group" and "individual" visitors between the center and the lower King Street area in Old Town.
- b. A visitors center that would not serve the group travel market but would focus on the individual leisure and business market visitor, would provide long-term day parking for individual visitors' vehicles only, and would provide a shuttle service to transport these individual visitors between the center and the lower King Street area.
- c. A visitors center that would not serve the group travel market but would focus on the individual leisure market visitor, would not provide any long-term day parking for individual visitors' and business vehicles, and would not provide a shuttle service to transport these individual visitors between the center and the lower King Street area. This option could focus, therefore, on a larger, more accessible

visitors center in the lower King Street area (through, for example, the leasing of retail space for a visitors center).

In addition to these three options, the consultant would be free to consider and propose other visitors center models or configurations.

The consultant will also be required to project the capital and operating costs of the plan (or alternative plans) recommended, as well as suggest possible locations for the recommended center. Union Station would be one of many locations that the consultant would be able to consider.

The proposed scope of work includes having the consultant obtain input on the topic of a visitors center from interested business, civic and neighborhood representatives.

The attached scope of work provides more details on the contemplated study methodology.

FISCAL IMPACT: Estimating the cost of a complex study such as this is difficult, as this proposed study will require knowledge and application of a number of professional disciplines. Also, the degree that ACVA and City staff can provide the selected consultant with data and assistance will impact the cost of the study. At this point, we estimate that the cost of this study would be in the \$150,000 to \$250,000 range. In negotiations with the selected consultant, staff will of course seek to obtain the most cost effective contract. Funding for this study is available in a prior FY 2000 appropriation in the City's Capital Improvement Program of \$374,000 earmarked for visitors center development.

ATTACHMENT:

Request for Proposals, City of Alexandria, Virginia Visitors Center, Draft Scope of Work

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA
VISITORS CENTER**

DRAFT - SCOPE OF WORK

OBJECTIVE: Evaluate and report on the needs, economic impact and potential locations of a new visitor center in relation to various tourism market segments in the City of Alexandria

SCOPE OF WORK

I. TASKS TO BE PERFORMED

A. The Group Tour Market

1. Analyze the market for group tours and tour operators in the City of Alexandria, including developing a group tourist profile with demographic and geographic information and spending patterns. Group tourism defined for the purposes of this study includes tour operators and group leaders, as well as those who charter buses for schools, senior citizens, or non-profit organizations.
2. Interview and survey tour operators and group leaders to determine:
 - a) why they come to Alexandria
 - b) how they found out about Alexandria attractions
 - c) their itineraries
 - d) Alexandria's importance to the overall itinerary
 - e) number of days of complete tour
 - f) length of time spent in Alexandria

The information gathered shall include transportation elements such as a description of vehicle and routes into and out of the City.

The staff of the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association will assist the consultant in identifying tour operators to interview and survey.

3. Determine the length of time that the typical group stays in Alexandria and visitor spending patterns on retail goods and restaurants.
4. Estimate the volume of group business deriving from the tour bus market as well as its direct economic impact on the City.
5. Determine through interviews and/or by survey: (a) how group tour operators utilize visitors centers, and (b) what services would encourage their return.
6. Determine through interview and/or survey if tour operators would utilize a visitors center either primarily as an information and orientation location only (and would proceed to Old Town via the charter bus), or would utilize a visitors center if charter bus parking was available and bus patrons could take a shuttle to the lower King Street area of Old Town.

Information gathered in addressing these issues would include, but not be limited to:

1. Why tour operators or group leaders would use, or not use, a visitors center.
2. The types of information or services that tour bus operators would like to see at a visitors center.
3. If the availability of a visitors center would cause tour operators or group leaders to increase the number of tours to Alexandria, or the length of time a tour stays in Alexandria.
4. The features or functions that should be included in a visitors center.
5. Other information or issues pertinent to usage of a visitors center.

B. The Leisure or Business Traveler

1. Analyze leisure and business markets (defined as persons, business travelers, or groups of persons such as families, who visit Alexandria via automobile or mass transit), develop a visitor profile, and determine when those visitors come to the City of Alexandria, including lengths of stay and times of the year, by segments of the visitor market that the individual leisure or business traveler (often day visitors) represents. The Alexandria

Convention and Visitors Association will provide the consultant with available information about the leisure and business travel market in Alexandria, as well as copies of prior studies.

2. Determine where leisure and business travelers originate, and what their destination is after visiting the City, including the routes taken in and out of the City.
3. Determine the length of time that leisure and business travelers typically stay in Alexandria, attractions they visit and their spending patterns on retail goods and restaurants.
4. Estimate leisure and business traveler volume by day and overnight visitor and the direct economic impact on the City.
5. Determine problems or issues relating to the current Ramsay House visitors center (amount of Alexandria information, disability access, parking, etc.) where the existing center may be falling short of visitor needs and expectations, as well as suggestions for improving service.
6. Determine if (and to what degree) the individual day visitor would utilize a new visitors center, the type of programs, facilities or information that a new center should provide the individual day visitor, as well as if a new visitors center would increase (and to what degree) tourism in the City.
7. Determine if (and to what degree) additional visitors center services would increase the number of day and overnight visitors to the City.
8. In order to assist the consultant, the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association will survey visitors to its existing visitors center (Ramsay House) in the spring and early summer of 2001 to obtain some of the information needed for the analysis described in B.1-3 and B.5 above.

C. The Visitors Center

1. Review and include in the final report information about the types, sizes and functions of visitors centers for at least five comparable cities/areas in the United States. City staff, the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, and the consultant will jointly select visitors centers to be studied.
2. Interview and/or survey local representatives of the tourism and travel industry to gain an understanding of the needs of Alexandria visitors to

determine if those needs are being met. The Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association and City staff will assist the consultant in the identification of tourism and travel industry representatives in Alexandria.

3. From interviews, surveys, and other information gathered about the various segments of the visitor population (in tasks A and B above) who visit the City of Alexandria (from the various visitor population segments who arrive by automobile, transit, tour or charter bus), provide an analysis of this information.
4. Summarize the findings in A and B above and provide the consultant's best professional judgment on (a) to what degree a new visitors center (in addition to the current Ramsay House location in Old Town) would be utilized, and (b) by which segments of the visitor population (and in what estimated volume) would it be utilized, as well as what the estimated economic impact of any additional visitor utilization would be.
5. In determining plans and alternative scenarios for a visitors center, consider at least three program plans and scenarios as described below in a, b and c, and, as to any center plan and scenario determined to be feasible, estimate the amount of land needed and the ranges of cost for the capital investment in and operation of the center and shuttle (in options a and b below).

Potential Program Plans

- a. A visitors center that would serve the group and individual leisure and business travel markets, would provide long-term day parking for both motor coaches and individual visitors' vehicles, and would provide a shuttle service to transport these "group" and "individual" visitors between the center and the lower King Street area in Old Town.
- b. A visitors center that would not serve the group travel market but would focus on the individual leisure and business market visitor, would provide long-term day parking for individual visitors' vehicles only, and would provide a shuttle service to transport these individual visitors between the center and the lower King Street area.
- c. A visitors center that would not serve the group travel market but would focus on the individual leisure and business market visitor, would not provide any long-term day parking for individual

visitors' vehicles, and would not provide a shuttle service to transport these individual visitors between the center and the lower King Street area. This option could, therefore, focus on a larger, more accessible visitors center in the lower King Street area (through, for example, the leasing of retail space for a visitors center).

- d. The consultant may recommend other visitor center models or configurations.
6. In any proposed visitor center plan that includes shuttle service to the lower King Street area, the consultant shall project the capital and operating costs of providing a shuttle based on recommended shuttle vehicle design, seating capacity, shuttle headways, and frequency of service (both in peak and non-peak tourism seasons).
 7. In projecting shuttle costs, the consultant shall assume that the type of vehicle used in the shuttle is a rubber tire multi-passenger vehicle of some recommended type (alternative fuel vehicles can be considered) and is not a fixed guideway or fixed rail type of shuttle system.
 8. In addition, the consultant should review and make recommendations on the feasibility of establishing a shuttle and recommend the fare for the shuttle.
- D. Location Options for a visitors center
1. Based on the information gathered on visitor travel routes and patterns, and likely utilization of a visitors center, and the land needed for a visitors center, the consultant shall recommend one or more specific or general locations for a visitors center in the City. City staff will assist the consultant in providing land information and land cost estimates.
 2. The consultant shall interview at least 20 key business, civic and neighborhood leaders as to their thoughts, ideas and concerns about the location of a visitors center. City and Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association staff will assist the consultant in identifying the persons to be interviewed.
 3. In considering location options, the consultant shall review and take into consideration traffic counts, traffic projections, as well as planned transportation improvements. The City's Department of Transportation & Environmental Services will provide the consultant with information on

planned traffic and transportation improvements and shall be consulted regarding location options, as well as in analysis of the traffic impact of any proposed location.

4. In considering location options, the consultant shall consider proximity to, and value contributed by, other transportation systems (interstate highways, inter-city highways and parkways, Metrorail, Metrobus, DASH (Alexandria Transit Company), AMTRAK and Virginia Railway Express).
5. In considering location options, the consultant shall consider ease of pedestrian access to and from potential visitors center sites.

II. DELIVERABLES

- A. In responding to this Request for Proposal, the offeror shall provide the City with a suggested time line for the proposed tasks as well as for completing the study.
- B. The offeror shall provide the City with a report of preliminary draft findings (see III. A below), as well as a final report. The final report shall be in an easy to understand format, including a combination of text, tables, and graphs as appropriate. The final report shall include all items listed in the scope of work. The raw data used in the study shall be organized and submitted to the City as part of this study.
- C. During the course of the study the offeror will present its preliminary research findings to the Board of Governors of the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, the City Manager, as well as present those preliminary findings in one City-sponsored public input setting where business and residential community feedback on the preliminary findings will be sought. The offeror should budget for three meetings.
- D. The final report will be presented at one or more meetings (including a potential work session) to City Council. The offeror is required to be present at these meetings. The offeror should budget for two meetings
- E. The offeror will provide 100 final copies of the study to the City by the completion date.
- F. During the period of this study, the consultant will be required to meet frequently with City and Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association staff to plan the details of the study, to work out issues as they arise, and to review the progress and outcomes of the study as they emerge.

III. PROPOSED STUDY METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

- A. This written scope of work outlines the City's best judgment on the areas and issues that it believes need studying, as well as outlines some of the proposed methods of undertaking that study. However, the City remains open to other opinions and professional judgments from offerors of the best methodology of undertaking this study. As a result, in written responses to this Request for Proposal, offerors may propose alternative study methodologies, additional areas of study, fewer areas of study, a different framework developing recommendations, or revisions in the proposed desired deliverables or study process.