

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 22, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER *J*

SUBJECT: RECEIPT OF REPORT ON THE PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM FOR FY2007

ISSUE: Updating the Council on the historic preservation program for FY 2007.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive this staff report.

BACKGROUND: The last time the Department of Planning and Zoning (P&Z) briefed the Council on the City's historic preservation program was in December 2005. Much has happened since then to focus the City and its citizens on the critical importance of historic preservation. On April 22, 2006, the Council approved the expansion of the Old and Historic Alexandria District to include properties along the southern side of King Street in the 1500 and 1600 blocks. On April 26, 2006, the City Council and historic preservation groups sponsored an address by Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., of Charleston, South Carolina, as part of an Historic Preservation Forum. On April 24, 2006, City Council committed \$100,000 in additional funds in FY 2007 to P&Z for historic preservation purposes.

DISCUSSION: The purpose of this report is to outline for the Council, P&Z's current historic preservation program. The program consists of the following elements:

- Expansion of the historic districts
- 100-Year Old Building documentation
- Historic Preservation Summit workshops
- Parker Gray National Register Survey and Nomination
- Community Outreach
- Infill and zoning regulations

Expansion of the Historic Districts

The Council approved the expansion of the Old and Historic Alexandria District in April 2006 to include the 1500 and 1600 blocks of the south side of the upper part of King Street, adding ten buildings to the district.

The next phase of this work is analyze the area along Cameron Street between North Patrick and Harvard Street for inclusion in one of the historic districts. There are approximately 125 structures that need to be assessed and documented, considerably more than the 10 buildings documented in the upper King Street area. An analysis was done of this area along Cameron Street between the existing Old and Historic District and the Parker Gray district about 10 years ago and the documentation is currently being updated.

P&Z is hiring an historic preservation expert to work on this phase. This phase will take about 8 months to complete. An important part of the task on upper King Street was working with the property owners and answering any questions they had. In the Cameron Street area, the consultant will face the challenge of working with many more property owners. A series of meetings in the community will be held with extensive outreach to educate and inform property owners so they can make clear decisions about whether they want to be included in the historic district.

Historic Structures Outside the Historic District Boundaries

Some 32 buildings that are located outside the two historic districts are on the 100-Year-Old-Building list. These buildings are protected from demolition and exterior changes to the same extent as all buildings within the historic districts. However, the department has preliminarily identified another 77 buildings that potentially qualify for the 100-Year-Old-Building list. Richard Bierce, a noted area architect and architectural historian, is engaged in documenting the age of the buildings and determining whether they meet the criteria for being added to the list.

Once the buildings have been documented and judged to meet the criteria for adding to the 100-Year-Old Building list, a consultant will meet with the property owners to explain what it means to be added to the list and to answer any questions they may have. This will allow the property owners to make a clear decision about their property being protected by being on the 100-Year-Old-Building list. Technical work will be completed by early fall, with extensive outreach to follow with presentation to Council in the Spring.

A second step to be undertaken later in this fiscal year is to expand the area of analysis to include additional buildings not yet identified as 100 years old, and those that are approaching that age. The focus of this effort will be to provide an early warning system to the City of those properties that embody architectural features significant to the dynamic evolution of the city's streetscape.

Historic Preservation Summit Workshops

P&Z has been chairing meetings with a Historic Preservation Summit planning group for about six months. The group was responsible for assisting the Council in sponsoring the meeting featuring an address by Mayor Riley in April and is planning a series of workshops for the Fall 2006.

The planning group consists of representatives from those in the community who are committed to historic preservation and the education and outreach efforts that will ensure a continuing vibrant community. They include the Historic Alexandria Foundation, Historic Alexandria

Resources Commission, Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission, the Boards of Architectural Review, Alexandria Archaeological Commission, Black History Museum, Old Town Civic Association, Office of Historic Alexandria, and the Department of Planning and Zoning.

The planned workshops in the Fall of this year seek to continue the successes of historic preservation in the City and recognize the challenges of historic preservation in the 21st Century. Workshop issues that are being considered by the planning group include:

- Perspective on what has been accomplished in the City during the past 60 years, what remains outstanding, what are current and future threats to historic preservation, and what are ideas for the future. Include a comparison of Alexandria to other areas and ideas about things that work elsewhere that could be used here.
- Educational session on the purpose and process of listing properties on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. Discussion about updating the national and state listings for the Old and Historic area and whether or not the Parker Gray area should be added to the national and state listings.
- For those historic structures that are outside the locally regulated historic districts, the City lists buildings on the 100-Year Old Building List if they meet certain criteria. Should there be changes to the zoning ordinance to protect buildings outside the two locally regulated historic districts if they are only 50 years old?
- Compatibility of design for new construction and additions in an historic setting. Should there be design guidelines or should we prepare a “pattern book” for Alexandria neighborhoods that illustrates good design and techniques for renovating and building Alexandria houses?
- Focus historic preservation issues on the whole City and discuss why preservation is important to us all.
- Which 20th Century buildings are worth preserving and why? Is it the age of the building, the architectural merit, the neighborhood setting and context, the history, or the social/cultural context that make a structure significant?

P&Z is planning to hire a conference planner to assist with the logistical work necessary to put on a major set of workshops in the fall. Volunteers from the planning group are going to help identify speakers/panelists for the various topics and P&Z staff can assist with the preparation of issue papers.

Parker Gray National Register Survey and Nomination

Work is underway to list the Parker Gray area on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Department's historic preservation work program. A separate Council memorandum discusses this element of the program in detail.

Community Outreach

A continuing challenge is to educate the community and, in particular, new and established property owners within the historic districts regarding the responsibilities of being located within an historic district.

To that end, the first issue of a periodic historic preservation newsletter highlighting emerging current preservation issues will be distributed within the next month. The newsletter will supplement the current extensive outreach program that includes:

- Annual letters to historic district property owners;
- Notice in tax assessment mailings;
- Postcards mailed to all new property owners;
- Historic district brochure that was sent this past year with annual letter; and
- Expanded website with guidelines, applications, etc.

Infill and Analysis of Zoning Regulations

The Council approved interim infill regulations on June 17, 2006 and is scheduled to consider an emergency ordinance on June 27 to implement interim regulations. P&Z is working on analysis of long term infill solutions.

Current allowable FAR provisions may allow additional density in the historic district that is not consistent with the context of the district, while at the same time they may act as a strong impetus for redevelopment that results in demolition of buildings that are key to the historic district context. Staff is analyzing this as part of the infill studies and identifying areas where this is an issue.

Conclusion

The City's historic preservation program is moving forward with several significant initiatives with the support of the Council and the City's historic preservation groups. The successful expansion of the historic district on Upper King Street provides a tested model for analyzing contributing properties along Cameron/North Patrick and Harvard Streets, and for assessing additions to the 100 Year Old Building List. The enthusiastic reception of the April Historic Preservation Forum has encouraged the preservation summit planning group to structure broad ranging workshops for the Fall.

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