

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 7, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF THE SUMMER TRIAL PROGRAM FOR THE WEEKEND PEDESTRIAN PLAZA IN THE 100 BLOCK OF KING STREET, AND CONSIDERATION OF A PROPOSAL TO CONTINUE THE TRIAL PROGRAM THROUGH THE WEEKEND OF NOVEMBER 3, 2006

ISSUE: Evaluation of the trial summer program for the weekend pedestrian plaza in the 100 block of King Street, and consideration of a proposal to continue the trial program through the weekend of November 3, 2006.

RECOMMENDATIONS: That City Council:

- (1) Receive the staff evaluation of the results of the trial program for a weekend pedestrian plaza on the 100 block of King Street (Attachment 1);
- (2) Approve a proposal to continue a second phase and longer trial pilot period for the weekend pedestrian plaza in the 100 block of King Street for 8 weekends during the fall/winter of 2006, beginning the weekend of September 15 and continuing through the weekend of November 3, 2006.
- (3) Allocate \$21,000 from Council's Contingent Reserve to support the continuation of this program; and
- (4) Request that staff bring forward before the end of the First Quarter of calendar 2007 an evaluation of the extended pilot program and a recommendation in regard to whether or not it should be continued starting in the spring of 2007.

BACKGROUND: On June 13, 2006, City Council approved a trial program restricting the 100 block of King Street to pedestrians for four weekends in June and July of 2006 (Attachment 2). City staff, local businesses and community groups worked collaboratively to determine the scope of the initial trial program and to implement it.

The objective of the pedestrian plaza concept was to provide a unique space in Old Town for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors, and to enhance the business climate for local merchants. By creating a special environment that captures the essence of both historic and modern day Alexandria, the plaza's objective was to provide a relaxing and vibrant expanded place for people to stroll, shop or dine, potentially drawing in new and returning customers for local businesses.

DISCUSSION: At its meeting on June 13, 2006, City Council approved a trial program for a weekend pedestrian plaza in the 100 block of King Street. The trial program, which was held on June 23-25, June 30-July 2, July 7-9 and July 14-16, included low-key entertainment, outdoor dining, and a festive atmosphere of flowering plants, benches and flags. On each Friday, the 100 block was closed to vehicular traffic at 3:00 p.m. and was reopened Monday morning at 6:00 a.m. City staff monitored activities on each weekend. City Council stated last June that the measure of success for the pedestrian plaza would be if the program was judged beneficial to residents, businesses and users. City staff surveyed each of these constituencies during the pedestrian plaza weekends. The results in total, provided in Attachment 1, were for the most part, but not universally, positive. However, while pedestrian users of the plaza (83%) supported it, the view from merchants was mixed. In particular, some of the merchants in the 200 block of King Street reported a drop in sales, and no merchant in either the 100 block or the 200 block reported a significant increase in retail sales. However, the four summer pilot weekends were not a representative sample, so testing the pilot closing of the 100 block of King Street through the first weekend of November 2006 is recommended to get more data and feedback, as well as a longer evaluation period. This is also a time when weather is better than in July.

Staff recommends that City Council approve the continuation of the pedestrian plaza trial program in the 100 block of King Street for weekends starting the weekend of September 15, and continuing through the weekend of November 3, 2006. This second phase of the trial program will allow the City staff, merchants, residents and users to experience and monitor the benefits and impacts of the plaza concept over an extended period, during different times of the year. This will provide a better measure of the positive and negative effects of the closing of the 100 block of King Street on weekends.

KSMET supports the continuation of the trial program (Attachment 3). With regard to the Old Town Civic Association, it is conducting a survey among its membership, and the results of the survey regarding the trial program were not available at the time of this report.

FISCAL IMPACT: Total costs for the four weekend initial trial program were \$14,300, as detailed in Attachment 1. The cost to operate the plaza over the 8 forthcoming weekends is estimated at \$21,000, based on the following:

	<u>Cost</u>
Transportation & Environmental Services.....	\$ 8,000
(Staff costs related to sign posting and traffic barrier placement)	
Police.....	\$ 5,000
(Staff costs related to officers monitoring traffic and safety)	
Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities.....	\$ 8,000
(Staff costs related to flag plants, greenery in the fall and winter)	
TOTAL	\$21,000 ¹

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Evaluation of the Results of the Initial Trial Program for a Weekend Pedestrian Plaza in the 100 Block of King Street

Attachment 2: Memorandum dated June 8 regarding Trial Pedestrian Plaza

Attachment 3: Letter from KSMET

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

Eileen Fogarty, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning

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Janet Barnett, Deputy Director, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Kathleen Beeton, Division Chief, Department of Planning and Zoning

Tom Fairchild, Business Facilitator, City Manager’s Office

Members, Special Events Committee

¹No formal entertainment will be scheduled, and it is expected that the merchants will continue to assist with the opening of the plaza and with the watering of plants, saving staff time.

EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE INITIAL TRIAL PROGRAM FOR A WEEKEND PEDESTRIAN PLAZA IN THE 100 BLOCK OF KING STREET

The following text summarizes the actions taken to implement and the feedback received on the trial program as approved by Council on June 13.

OUTREACH PRIOR TO THE PROGRAM

Prior to the commencement of the trial program, staff conducted extensive community outreach. Meetings were conducted with merchants along King Street as well as with the Old Town Civic Association. In addition, staff designated a City contact person for both merchants and residents, and provided cell phone numbers for any questions that arose over the course of the weekends. The City Business Facilitator visited all merchants on the 100 and 200 block of King Street to provide them with information describing the program and answer any questions or concerns. Staff also distributed flyers to all residences within 15 blocks around the 100 block of King Street. KSMET, ACVA, restaurant owners and retailers in the area were also consulted and involved in planning for the program.

OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS

Following is a summary of operational logistics during the four designated weekends:

DATES

The trial program was held on the following four consecutive weekends:

- Friday, June 23 through Sunday, June 25
- Friday, June 30 through Sunday, July 2
- Friday, July 7 through Sunday, July 9
- Friday, July 14 through Sunday, July 16

Although there was a contingency plan in place for inclement weather, 'rain date' weekends were not needed.

TIMES

The start and end times for the pedestrian plaza were as follows:

- Start:** Friday afternoon, 3:00 p.m. (no parking signs posted beginning Friday morning with notification that cars must be moved by 3:00 p.m.)
- End:** Monday morning, 6:00 a.m. (street reopened to vehicular traffic)

PARKING

Signage: T&ES placed traffic control signage along with the barriers at the intersections with Union Street and Lee Street. To mitigate potential traffic and parking impacts, the City also placed directional signage at the intersection of King and Lee Streets directing drivers to nearby off-street parking.

Valet

Parking: Prior to commencement of the trial program, one restaurant on King Street (100 King) held a permit to offer valet parking services. However, just as the program was beginning, 100 King suspended its valet service because of operational problems. The restaurant may apply for a new permit in the future, but did not offer valet parking during the trial program.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING IMPACTS

The Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) conducted traffic counts prior to and during the trial program in order to determine the volume of traffic displaced by the closing of the 100 block of King Street. Police officers were stationed at the intersections of King and Union Streets and King and Lee Streets to assist with the flow of vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic and to assist in the event of any type of emergency. T&ES conducted traffic counts on blocks in the vicinity of the 100 block of King by placing vehicle tube counters in the streets before, during, and after pedestrian plaza weekends. The results of T&ES Traffic counts are not entirely conclusive as several of the counters malfunctioned as the result of cars parking on the counters, thus precluding totally valid figures, a common problem when gathering data using tube traffic counters.

The details of the count are provided below:

1. 200 King Street realized a 52.8% reduction in traffic during the test weekend (one) of the closure.
2. 100 Cameron Street realized a 60.5% increase in traffic during the test weekend (one) of the closure.
3. 100 South Union Street realized an 18.1% reduction in traffic during the test weekend (one) weekend of the closure.
4. 100 North Union Street realized a 4.8% increase in traffic during the test weekend (one) during the weekend of the closure.
5. Those blocks without valid data are the Unit block of Prince Street, 100 Prince Street, 100 North Lee Street., and 100 South Lee Street.

While traffic does not appear to be an issue, staff recommends that T&ES perform traffic counts on a predetermined basis before and during the proposed extension of the trial program, in order to get more conclusive results. It should be noted, however, that complaints about traffic rerouting were minimal and less than anticipated.

EMERGENCY ACCESS AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Staff focused a great deal of time and attention on emergency access and general safety. Code Enforcement provided detailed guidance on the appropriate location for the barriers, crosswalks, and the need to maintain emergency access through the plaza.

The block was closed with movable street barriers, supplemented with signs and small flashing lights for better visibility both day and night. The barrier at the west end of the pedestrian plaza was supplemented with a directional parking sign directing motorists to off-street parking at nearby garages. The Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RP&CA) positioned planters in front of the barriers to provide an attractive gateway entrance to the plaza.

In the event of an emergency, the barriers would simply be picked up and moved to the side by police stationed at each entrance to the pedestrian plaza. Police officers were stationed at the intersections of King and Union Streets and King and Lee Streets to assist in the event of any type of emergency. Over the four weekends, no emergencies occurred.

TRASH REMOVAL

T&ES provided trash pick-up from the public cans on the 100 block of King Street twice a day during the program.

ENTERTAINMENT

The pedestrian plaza featured a variety of low-key activities, organized by the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities and KSMET. In addition, street musicians were invited to perform. The vision for entertainment in the plaza was non-amplified musical and/or theatric accompaniment. Entertainment was family appropriate and in keeping with Old Town's character, and was chosen to complement, not to detract from existing retail businesses and restaurants. The impact of non-amplified music was that it was difficult to hear the entertainment from anywhere but adjacent to the musicians, and the musicians drew small audiences.

As a result of the experience, staff believed that formal City-paid entertainment does not need to be scheduled, and that entrepreneurial street musicians (nonamplified) should be encouraged to perform in the closed off area of King Street.

OUTDOOR DINING

The six restaurants in the 100 block of King Street that currently offer outdoor dining continued to do so during pedestrian plaza weekends. The restaurants were afforded flexibility in determining where they would like to place their existing number of approved outdoor dining seats. Seating could be placed either in the roadway, where cars would normally park, within eight feet of the curb, or on the sidewalk. Staff informed restaurant owners about the need to comply with ABC regulations, and facilitated communication between ABC and restaurant owners.

STREETSCAPE

In preparation for the pedestrian plaza weekends, RP&CA placed decorative planters at the two plaza gateways and throughout the plaza, pruned and mulched trees. T&ES also hung large new American flags from all the light poles, power washed the street and sidewalks, and cleaned out the trashcans. Merchants donated a number of benches and plants that were placed throughout the plaza to provide resting spots and visual interest. These benches and planters have remained in place although the initial pilot closing project was completed.

OUTCOME MEASURES

Prior to the commencement of the program, staff explored how “success” of the pedestrian plaza would be measured. Ultimately, the conclusion was that the plaza should provide benefits to all stakeholders -- residents, visitors, and business owners, and that the benefits must far outweigh the negative impacts felt by any of those groups. Staff developed two surveys to measure the groups’ perceived benefits and negative impacts. The first was a “user” survey. The user survey was targeted at anyone (from local residents to tourists) who came to the plaza and used it in some way - to shop, stroll, dine, or just explore this new concept (Attachment 1). The second was a business owner survey for merchants (Attachment 2). The qualitative information gleaned from the surveys was compiled to record the reactions to the plaza concept and guide staff in providing a recommendation for the future course of the pedestrian plaza (Attachment 3).

Staff distributed user surveys at the Information Tent on the first weekend of the trial program. During the following three weekends, staff provided user surveys to all shops, restaurants and the Visitor Center for distribution to customers from each of those locations. Staff collected the surveys at the end of each weekend for compilation and analysis. Staff also distributed business owner surveys to merchants on both the 100 and 200 blocks of King Street.

In addition, the City received numerous emails from individuals wishing to comment on the trial program, and these were collected and summarized. Reaction to the Summer 2006 pedestrian plaza trial program was quite positive, with 83% of plaza users responding that they liked the plaza and would like “to see it happen again next year.” In retrospect, a more probing question (such as make the weekend pedestrian plaza permanent) may have elicited a less positive response.

RESULTS OF THE USER'S SURVEY

Users (anyone who came to the plaza and filled out a survey - whether residents or visitors) were almost exclusively positive about their experiences, with 83% saying they liked the pedestrian plaza and would like to see it continued. Many respondents who wrote in additional comments described the Plaza as vital, vibrant, relaxing, peaceful, family-friendly, safer-feeling, and providing a nice ambiance, a great sense of community, and a refuge. More than 35 surveys commented on the welcome quiet resulting from the lack of motorcycles. Many others were grateful for the reduced pedestrian congestion and many noted that the benefits of a pedestrian environment far outweighed the loss of 20 parking spaces. Several felt that the plaza would help Old Town compete with other commercial areas, especially new developments such as the revitalized Clarendon in Arlington. One respondent noted that keeping Union and Lee Streets open to cross-traffic was a key element to keeping traffic problems to a minimum.

On the first weekend, there were over 100 separate write-in comments recommending that the plaza become a permanent fixture, either 365 days or at least every weekend year round. Several suggestions were offered as to how to make this happen, such as removing the curbs and asphalt, making it one large, at grade, permanent pedestrian area paved in brick, with a fountain as the centerpiece and lined with trees and permanent benches and light fixtures. On subsequent weekends more than 35 users expressed similar sentiments suggesting that the plaza be made permanent in some fashion - either year round or on weekends.

Another frequent suggestion over the course of the four weekends was to extend the Plaza to the 200 block of King Street. Over 75 people recommended an extension to Fairfax Street, some suggesting a tie-in to Market Square and the Farmers' Market, and some suggesting an extension all the way to Washington and even to the King Street Metro Station. Another common suggestion was related to outdoor seating, asking that additional seating be permitted.

Only 17% of survey respondents said that they did not like the plaza concept and would not like to see it continued, in any form. Negative comments or complaints from these users regarding the plaza varied. One suggested that plaza visitors not be allowed to park on the streets. Several suggested better signage to direct vehicles to garages. One resident was displeased with the added traffic on Lee Street, and added traffic on the 100 block (cobblestone) of Prince Street. Some complained that the sidewalks on the 100 block of King were too cluttered with tables and benches.

RESULTS OF THE MERCHANTS SURVEY

Staff received 15 surveys from the merchants, with responses reflecting a 60% approval rating. Of those in favor of continuing the program, many expressed the hope that it would be expanded to include the 200 block and/or become a permanent program. Opinions diverged on what “permanent” might mean, varying from weekends only to 365 days a year to only certain seasons to busier months, like September or October. Particular comments noted that the Plaza “created an energy that was missing in Old Town,” and that it added “an element of uniqueness, charm and fun to the Old Town experience.”

Most of the merchants who oppose the continuation of the 100 block closure program were adamant in their opinion. Those merchants explained that the closure had adversely affected their business over the course of the weekends; some saying it was their worst summer business on record. Two suggested that the plaza concept should be redirected to Market Square. Most complained that lack of parking drove regular customers away, including senior citizens, handicapped, and parents with strollers, and that the plaza attracted tourists or visitors who did not come with the purpose of shopping. Again, there was a wide divergence in terms of merchants’ opinion on the plaza’s impact on business as some merchants said it was very beneficial financially and others said there was no change either way.

Because the trial program was conducted during late June/early July, often a slower season for merchants, it is possible that the changes in business revenues reported on the surveys may not be the direct or sole result of the pedestrian plaza. An extension of the trial program into the fall would provide for a more complete test of the merchants’ experience.

The City’s Business Facilitator surveyed businesses in the 100 and 200 blocks of King Street to understand the impacts of the trial program on their business. He advises that of the 15 business owners he spoke with in the 200 block, six business owners stated that they were opposed to the trial program and cited the loss of sales; eight business owners supported the program; and one business owner indicated that they were uncertain about it. The loss of business revenue in the 200 block of King Street also came simultaneous to a noticeable drop in vehicle traffic. In the 100 block, the City’s Business Facilitator reports that restaurant operators favored the program, as did two retail business owners. Three other retailers in the 100 block were uncertain about the program.

The most adamant negative feedback was in the 200 block of King Street, where a majority of merchants cited a large sales decrease. However, since it was viewed that the plaza drew patrons the 100 block, most of the businesses in the 200 block wanted the plaza extended to include the 200 block. Merchants that favored the plaza mostly cited the look and feel of the project. Although several did say their foot traffic increased, no merchant in the 100 block mentioned a significant increase in sales during the four weekend pilot period.

Included below are direct quotes from the survey in answer to the question: How did the pedestrian plaza program affect your business?

- (A) It was very beneficial to my business financially. Generated lots of interest among our local clientele and visiting patrons.
- (B) Business remained same as this time last year; customers seemed happy with plaza
- (C) It didn't affect much; same business as usual.
- (D) July is usually slow for us, so it was hard to determine if the plaza had any effect.
- (E) It was too short-lived to determine if it will affect business, but people sure seemed happy.
- (F) I am in favor of doing anything that can be beneficial for business, but I was unhappy with the lower pedestrian traffic counts that this brought into the store than in past years.
- (G) It did not increase my business. Musicians in front of store window distracted customers from coming in to shop.
- (H) As a restaurant in the 200 block, we did not do very well. Made the 200 block like a ghost town.
- (I) Being located in the 200 block, we experienced a 50% drop in business for the past three weekends.
- (J) My business was down when compared to the four corresponding weekends in 2005, ranging from 9-21% across the weeks.
- (K) Business was down 35-50% from the same weekends last year. A disaster.
- (L) Business was down when compared to the same days in 2005 - less traffic and very few local customers.
- (M) Tremendously decreased our business - obvious loss in sales volume.
- (N) Business revenues completely flat for 3 weekends, down for one!

Merchants provided many recommendations for ways that the plaza could be improved, the most common of which were increasing outdoor restaurant seating off the sidewalks and more entertainment. Others included better advertising and promotion, replacement of the asphalt street with brick or cobblestones, and not placing garbage cans in front of shops. There were numerous suggestions for streetscape improvements, including more planters and flowers, benches, public art, better design for the jersey wall barriers, and more frequent street cleaning.

Other comments ran the gamut from suggesting that benches and planters line all of King Street from the Metro to the river to the comment that "No improvements can make this a good thing." One merchant stated: "we would like to have an opportunity to voice our opinions before launching another project like this."

Staff recommends that if Council approves the extension of the pilot program into the fall that additional interviews with business owners on both blocks be conducted to get a more thorough sense of the potential positive or negative impacts.

FISCAL IMPACT: Costs borne by the City were higher than the original \$10,000 cost estimate as detailed below:

1.	RPCA Entertainment.....	\$ 3,400
2.	Public Safety.....	\$ 5,000
3.	T&ES.....	\$ 4,000
4.	RPCA Streetscaping.....	\$ 4,900
	Total Costs	\$17,300

ATTACHMENTS:

- (A) Alexandria Pedestrian Plaza Survey
- (B) Alexandria Pedestrian Plaza Business Survey
- (C) King Street Pedestrian Plaza Trial Program Survey Result Totals
- (D) Compilation of Written Comments



ALEXANDRIA PEDESTRIAN PLAZA SURVEY

The City of Alexandria is experimenting with occasionally making the 100 block of King Street a pedestrian-only street – this is one of the first weekends when this pilot program is taking place. We would like to know what you think about the program, and what suggestions you have for the future.

1. What brings you to King Street today (*circle one or more*)

Work *Shopping* *Dining* *Live Nearby* *Sightseeing*

2. How many times per month do you shop or dine on King Street? (*circle one*)

_____ *times/month* *Less than once per month* *This is my first time here*

3. Do you like having the 100 block as a pedestrian-only street?

Yes *No* *No Opinion*

4. What are the best attributes of having the 100 block as a pedestrian-only street? (*circle one or more*)

Ambiance *Outdoor Dining* *Relaxing Atmosphere* *Entertainment*
Family Attractions *Pedestrian Safety* *Other:* _____

5. What are the drawbacks of having the 100 block as a pedestrian-only street? (*circle one or more*)

Limited Access *Limited Parking* *Noise* *Other:* _____

6. Would you like to see this block used as a pedestrian-only street occasionally next year as well?

Yes *No* *No Opinion*

7. Do you have any suggestions for changes to a pedestrian plaza along King Street? If so, please suggest specific amenities you would like to see:

Benches/Tables *Planters/Flowers* *Retail/Food Vendors* *More Entertainment*
Less Restaurant Seating *More Restaurant Seating* *Public Art* *Other:* _____

Thanks for taking the time to fill out our survey!

If you have any questions regarding the survey or the Pedestrian Plaza, please contact Kathleen Beeton in the Alexandria Planning & Zoning Department at (703) 838-4666 or by e-mail at kathleen.beeton@alexandriava.gov

ALEXANDRIA PEDESTRIAN PLAZA BUSINESS SURVEY
July 2006

The City of Alexandria has completed a pilot program for the 100 block of King Street which allowed it to become a pedestrian plaza for some weekends during the summer.

1. As a business owner, how did the pedestrian plaza pilot program affect your business?

2. Would you like to see the pedestrian plaza pilot program continue? If yes, why? If no, why?

3. What did you like about the pedestrian plaza program? _____

4. What would you like to see changed?

5. Please give ideas you would like to see concerning improving streetscape.

Benches/tables _____ Planters/flowers _____ Public Art _____

More Entertainment _____ Other: _____

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Kathleen Beeton in the Alexandria Planning & Zoning Department at 703.838.4666 or Kathleen.beeton@alexandriava.gov.

King Street Pedestrian Plaza Trial Program Survey Result Totals

Below are the combined results of all user surveys taken during the four weekends in Summer 2006 of the trial program. Each result is ranked by percentage of the total. Additional write-in comments by visitors are listed on the subsequent pages.

Survey #1 (Out of 546 surveys)

What brought people down to King St.

45%	247	Live Nearby
	246	Dining
	109	Work
	63	Shopping
	63	Sightseeing

Monthly frequency with which visitors said they shop or dine on King Street

50%	275	5> times a month
	87	3-4
	60	1-2
	86	<1
	31	First Time

The best attributes of having the 100 block as a pedestrian-only street

66%	359	Relaxing Atmosphere
	303	Ambiance
	287	Outdoor Dining
	258	Pedestrian Safety
	184	Entertainment
	89	Family Attractions
	x	Other: (see attached page)

The drawbacks of having the 100 block as a pedestrian-only street

45%	249	None
	169	Limited Parking
	96	Limited Access
	28	Noise
	x	Other: (see attached page)

Liked pedestrian plaza and would like to see it happen again next year

83%	453	Yes
	55	No
	35	No Opinion

Suggestions (Specific Amenities)

47%	255	More Restaurant Seating
	244	More Planters/Flowers
	233	More Benches/Tables
	194	Public Art
	161	More Entertainment
	83	Retail/Food Vendors
	8	Less Restaurant Seating
	x	Other: (see attached page)

COMPILATION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS

USER SURVEY

BEST ATTRIBUTES

Family friendly, parents not fretting about kids running into traffic
Vital and vibrant
Very relaxing
Very peaceful
Nice ambiance
Feels safer
Sense of community, refuge
Will help Old Town compete with other commercial areas better than Clarendon
Cleaner air
Yea for no noisy motorcycles
Good for both residents and tourists alike
Nice free-moving environment
Less pedestrian congestion
Benefits all businesses on block
While some may complain about the parking lost, the benefits far outweigh this cost.
Keeping Union and Lee Streets open was a key element to keeping traffic problems to a minimum -- a big element of the program's success

DRAWBACKS

Traffic
Added traffic on Lee Street, and historic cobblestone on Prince Street
Traffic nightmare
Traffic confusion
Sidewalk clutter
Sidewalks were cluttered with tables and benches, forcing even those who didn't want to walk in the street to have to walk in the street
Outdoor seating makes it too narrow to pass in some places
Parking was too hard to find
City should direct tourists to municipal lots to give the residents a break
Please only do this on special occasions
Increased police and traffic enforcers would be a better way to calm traffic and make it more pedestrian friendly
Closing the street may hurt the business community
Will come back once your experiment has failed
Inaccessible
I hate it
Hurts cab drivers business due to limited access
Don't tacky up the block
Traffic is in my neighborhood
Poor access to eats
Do away with this idea
Interrupts bicyclists
Truly disheartened by the fact that the motorcyclists can't come down here anymore because these guys are really nice.

Was pedestrian safety ever a problem before
You tell me what the benefits are because I sure don't see any
Prohibited friendly motorcyclists from enjoying the 100 block
All my motorcycle friends are gone
The entire waterfront is for pedestrians, why do we need this
Get better restaurants down at the waterfront and more people will visit. That's what
needs to happen
This is a commercial district – losing traffic invites loitering
This is a bad idea that will not invigorate the area
These things usually end up badly, providing a forum for people to loiter, not shop or eat.
This is not conducive to the vibrant feeling of an urban street scene.
Old town has plenty of driving and parking challenges as it is
Putting benches in the street for people to sit on is so lame it hardly bears comment.
Re-paving the area and putting in fountains would be a waste of resources.
Old Town was starting to look up... don't blow it
Draws more attention to vacant shops on Union Street
Interferes with one's ability to enjoy 100 block of King St by automobile
Don't do it anymore!

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

There were over 100 separate write-ins to have the plaza as a permanent fixture; either
365 days a year, or at least every weekend year round.
Good, make it year round, but limit it to the weekends only, not 365 days a year
Make it permanent
Have it every weekend
Only do it during the summer
Only do it on special occasions
Summer time was too hot
Bring this back in the fall instead
Liked it, but please only make it occasionally if you do continue it
Do it one weekend a month only
Extend to Washington Street
Extend to Metro Station
Should include cross streets as part of plaza too, such as Lee and Union
Close King Street all the way to the Metro and operate a tram instead
Extend up to Fairfax Street
Extend it to include the 200 block

STREETSCAPING

Improve access for elderly and handicapped
Jersey wall barriers are an eyesore; make them more attractive
Get trees and a fountain to really make it a destination place
Get more benches
Overhead string lights draped across roadway to create a welcoming nighttime canopy
Roadway barricades unsightly, planters were nice, but didn't hide barricades well
enough.
More benches, but not any more outdoor dining tables
Put gazebos in the middle once this thing becomes permanent to take up the empty space.
More shade
Replace asphalt with more attractive pavers (brick, stone, etc.)

Provide more shade
Place fountains in the plaza

ENTERTAINMENT

Need more entertainment
Performers and entertainers remain down on Union Street and at the waterfront
Live DJ on Friday or Saturday night.
Lift ban on amplifiers with the idea that amplified music will draw more people from blocks further down who might not otherwise hear it over the traffic or travel to the 100 block of King
More music diversity
Jazz bands
Acoustic music only, no amplification
More children's entertainment on Saturday and Sunday
Provide free food
Operate a free petting zoo on the 100 block (for the kids)
Forget about family attractions! Keep the rest
More late night activities – Old Town needs more of nightlife to draw younger crowds
More entertainment
Organize the entertainment better so that they are not competing with one another
Would like to see more dancing groups because it draws a huge crowd.
No more mimes or clowns
Small concerts down at the end of the unit block to draw people out
Have artists out and do face painting for the children
Provide sidewalk chalk for people to draw on the street

OUTDOOR DINING

Expand outdoor dining; not enough tables- change the ordinances that prevent this, please
Allow drinking on the streets (margarita machines)

SAFETY

More police presence/enforcement

STREET VENDORS

One resident wants to ensure that the plaza not become overcrowded with street vendors.
Upscale street vendors
Would like to see more retail vendors, but definitely no food vendors
Would be nice to see different street vendors that don't directly compete with current businesses, for example: caramelized apples, pretzel, funnel cakes, flowers, etc.

PARKING/TRAFFIC

Build a new municipal parking lot and offer free shuttle service to and from the pedestrian plaza
Provide additional parking at a reduced rate
Provide free public parking
Route more traffic to other streets
Figure out a parking alternative
Allow motorcycles
Allow biking in the pedestrian plaza or install more secure bike parking

MERCHANT SURVEY RESULTS

1. As a business owner, how did the pedestrian plaza program affect your business?

- Business same or better than normal
- Too short-lived to determine
- Business worse than normal
- Musicians in front of store window distracted customers from coming in to shop.

2. Would you like to see the pedestrian plaza pilot program continue or not and why?

In favor of CONTINUING the program:

- However, I want to see the plaza expanded to include 200 block.
- We believe the results were so overwhelmingly positive that there is no more need of a pilot program; make it permanent.
- The plaza created an energy that was missing in Old Town. I think it was beneficial for everyone
- However, I want to see the plaza expanded to include 200 block.
- However, I believe that the program should only be on weekends and not move away from that concept to a full time one. I would also not be in favor of a plaza in the winter.
- It needs some tweaking though. It could work well.
- For another trial period only.
- There did seem to be more people milling about.

NOT IN FAVOR:

- It has hurt our summer business. We have been on the 200 block of King St. for 12 years and it has been a long time since our business has been this adversely affected. Traffic flow too restricted.
- Business was down; customers were unhappy; parking was taken away (we cannot expect pregnant mothers with toddlers to park blocks and blocks away).
- The plaza was not an improvement to the Old Town experience. It made this 100 block inaccessible to customers, the elderly and stroller traffic. The lack of parking prohibited customers from coming to this block.
- Kept local customers and tourists away. In addition, shoplifting increased fourfold during the plaza weekends.
- Festivals & parades attract tourists – after 54 years, it is clear to me that my customers avoid King Street during these times.
- Absolutely not.

3. What did you like about the pedestrian plaza program?

- The flowers and plants along the sidewalk during the week make the street more appealing.
- The comfort to pedestrians and the overall ambiance.
- I liked the benches and potted plants along the sidewalks.
- The freedom to relax without worry of traffic
- Seeing people so happy; enjoyed walking around.

- I liked the benches and potted plants along the sidewalks. I would like to see this aspect continued but *without* the street closure.
- Nothing good about this program; its hurting businesses.
- Absolutely nothing.
- We enjoyed nothing.
- The 'look' was nicely done – planters, flowers, benches, and canopies.
- Liked the European feel. Social aspect of eating and drinking outside. Relaxing.

4. What would you like to see changed?

BETTER COMMUNICATION WITH THE CITY:

- We would like to have an opportunity to voice our opinions before launching another project like this
- Better advertising and promotion might bring even more shoppers to Old Town.

ENTERTAINMENT

- More entertainment. More organized and planned events.
- We need to bolster activities for local residents. Push to become a tourist destination does not really benefit local businesses.

ALTERNATE LOCATION

- Special events and activities that are pertinent to the community, move this whole pedestrian plaza idea to Market Square.
- EXPAND TO 200 BLOCK
- Include the 200 block of King St.
- ALTERNATE TIMING
- Should happen during a busier month, like September or October.
- Close for extended periods of time (longer than just the weekend) and make it a destination place.
- STREETSCAPING
- Replace asphalt with a different paver; i.e., brick, cobblestone, etc.
- OUTDOOR DINING
- I would like to see the restaurants take their table off of the sidewalks because it is much too narrow to walk through with so many tables out. Put outdoor dining tables in the middle of the street to avoid clogging up the sidewalks.
- Moving dining tables to the center of the street would make it appear much more European, but more importantly, it would be more attractive and encourage people to stay longer.
- TRASH
- Do not put garbage cans in front of shops.
- DISCONTINUE ALTOGETHER
- Take it away!
- I would like to forgo the whole thing. I can see how it would benefit the restaurants, but seeing as they are already allowed outdoor seating on our sidewalks, I think it is perhaps time to look into what might be beneficial for the retail stores.
- Why can't we have a downtown that is commercially exciting each day –clean, safe, attractive with classy businesses (some days, lower King Street looks more like a beach boardwalk.

- Alexandria's outdoor public events need to be held at our public outdoor gathering place, Market Square.

5. Please give ideas you would like to see concerning improved streetscape.

- More planters and flowers.
- More planters and flowers, benches and tables, and public art.
- More entertainment.
- More tables for dining.
- Flowers looked great! Extend this idea to every single block of King St.
- Jersey walls and a few tents do not make a festive shopping atmosphere. If you are going to make a permanent commitment, design needs to be taken into consideration.
- Cleaning the street immediately before and after street closing.
- Benches and planters should be lining all of King St., from the metro to the river.
- Food, arts and crafts, improved transportations, support for local business.
- Europeanize it!
- Nothing. No improvements can make this a good thing.

EXHIBIT NO. 1

City of Alexandria, Virginia

28
6-13-06

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 8, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A PROPOSAL TO HAVE A TRIAL PROGRAM FOR A WEEKEND PEDESTRIAN PLAZA IN THE 100 BLOCK OF KING STREET

ISSUE: Council consideration of a proposal to establish a trial program for a weekend pedestrian plaza along the 100 block of King Street for four weekends during the summer of 2006.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve a proposal to establish a pedestrian plaza along the 100 block of King Street on a trial basis for four weekends during the summer of 2006 as outlined in this report;
- (2) Authorize closing the 100 block from Friday at 3:00 p.m. until Monday at 6:00 a.m. on four weekends: two in June and two in July; and
- (3) Allocate \$10,000 from the FY 2006 contingent reserves to pay for the expenses of this proposal.

BACKGROUND: The idea of closing a block, or blocks, on King Street to vehicular traffic has been discussed for many years, and has been put into effect occasionally in conjunction with special events, such as the fall Festival of the Arts. The adopted King Street Strategy recommended that a pilot program with a pedestrian plaza on the 100 block of King Street be initiated. As part of the implementation of the Strategy the concept of creating a pedestrian plaza on the 100 block of King Street has been discussed with business owners, property owners, and residents, and the City has received general support from these groups to undertake a pilot trial program during the summer of 2006.

Pedestrian plazas can offer numerous benefits to a commercial district and to the surrounding neighborhoods by creating a relaxing environment for walking or for respite. The 100 block of King Street, with its existing high volumes of pedestrian traffic, and its location as an essentially quasi 'dead-end' street (with King Street terminating at the waterfront) conceptually lends itself well to the concept.

In order for a pedestrian plaza to be successful along King Street, it would need to be judged as beneficial to three groups of stakeholders: residents, businesses and users. To create a plaza atmosphere that would best balance the needs of these groups, staff is recommending a four-weekend trial program of a pedestrian plaza that would be uniquely Alexandrian – a relaxing and

upscale block where people may stroll or enjoy outdoor dining without the accompaniment of vehicles or traffic noise. This four-weekend limit to the pilot program was generally supported by the Old Town Civic Association with limitations on hours and uses as outlined below when City staff met with them to explain the proposed pilot program.

DISCUSSION: Following is an overview of the major points recommended for a King Street Pedestrian Plaza, encompassing the proposed timing, fixtures, procedures and events.

TIMING: The pilot program will run for four consecutive weekends during the summer of 2006, from mid-June through mid-July.

Dates: The four weekends of the pedestrian plaza will include the following dates:

- Friday, June 16 through Sunday, June 18
- Friday, June 23 through Sunday, June 25
- Friday, June 30 through Sunday, July 2
- Friday, July 7 through Sunday, July 9

Due to the possibility of extended inclement weather during one or more of the above weekends, staff recommends that we offer two "rain date" weekends in the event that pedestrian plaza activities are curtailed due to bad weather. In the event that this occurs, staff recommends that the City Manager have the discretion to use the following two weekends in July as rain dates to compensate for significant inclement weather.

- Friday, July 14 through Sunday, July 16 (if the pedestrian plaza event for one of the previous four weekends is substantially curtailed due to inclement weather).
- Friday, July 21 through Sunday, July 23 (if the pedestrian plaza event for more than one of the previous four weekends is substantially curtailed due to inclement weather).

Times: The starting and ending times for the pedestrian plaza are proposed as the following:

- Start time: Friday afternoon, 3:00 p.m.
- Ending time: Monday morning, 6:00 a.m.

On all four weekends, the pedestrian plaza will start at 3:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon. In order to effectuate the removal of parked vehicles from the street in time for the street closure, the City will place Temporary No Parking signs along the street, indicating that parking is prohibited starting at 3:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon. These signs will be removed once the street itself is closed. The City will relocate any cars remaining on the block at 4:00 p.m.

BARRIERS: The closing of a street for use as a pedestrian plaza requires street barriers that are movable in case of emergency but sturdy enough not to be casually moved. Barriers should be very attractive to create an inviting “place” to fit with the high quality character of King Street as generally depicted in the attachments. Initially, barriers will be supplemented with signs and other elements to aid in visibility for both daytime and nighttime. If this pilot succeeds, the City will identify barriers that are appealing and contribute to the King Street ambiance.

The barrier location at the west end of the pedestrian plaza (King and Lee Streets) will also include a directional parking sign pointing motorists to off-street parking at the nearby Torpedo Factory garage.

PARKING AND TRAFFIC: The closing of a City street will result in some interruptions to existing parking and traffic patterns. On the 100 block of King Street, parking and traffic are intertwined issues. Because the street ends at the river, there is not a large volume of through traffic – most vehicle traffic likely has a destination in the immediate area, and much of the traffic is likely searching for parking opportunities.

Parking Impacts: Approximately 27 parking spaces are currently provided on the 100 block of King Street. Two of these spaces (in front of 108-110 King St.) are used as a loading zone from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Three spaces (in front of 100 King St.) are used as part of a valet parking service from 6:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.; the valet service will relocate as described later in this report.

Traffic Impacts: The Department of Transportation and Environmental Services measured vehicle traffic on the 100 block of King Street for two weekends in April, 2006 – starting at 8:00 a.m. on Friday mornings and continuing through Monday at 12:00 a.m. The traffic counts produced the following observations:

- (a) *Average Hourly Vehicle Count:* On an average weekend hour, the 100 block of King Street sees 283 vehicles (traveling both eastbound and westbound). This equates to 4.7 vehicles per minute or one vehicle every 13 seconds.
- (b) *Peak Hourly Vehicle Count:* Peak travel hours for all three weekend days occur in the early evenings – 7:00 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday and 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. At 7:00 p.m. on Saturday, the heaviest traffic hour, an average of 389 vehicles traveled on the 100 block. This equates to 6.5 vehicles per minute or one vehicle every 9 seconds.
- (c) *Signage:* The Department of Transportation and Environmental Services will place traffic control signage along with the barriers at the intersections with Union Street and Lee Street. To mitigate potential traffic and parking impacts, in addition to control signs the City will place directional signage at the intersection of King and Lee Streets directing drivers to nearby off-street parking.

VALET PARKING: As of this spring, the 100 King Restaurant on the southwest corner of King and Union Streets offers valet parking per a City administrative permit. Under normal

circumstances, this valet service occupies three spaces directly in front of the restaurant on the south side of King Street. A valet parking service can be a helpful element in reducing parking demand for the 100 block; however, because these spaces would be off limits to vehicles during a pedestrian plaza event, the valet service would need to be relocated to an appropriate nearby location.

ACTIVITIES: The atmosphere that is being sought is of a relaxed and casual plaza, and the activities envisioned for the plaza would reflect the desire to achieve such a subdued environment. Activities that would take place within the street and sidewalks of a pedestrian plaza would include outdoor dining from restaurants on the 100 block, activities sponsored by Alexandria-based organizations such as The Art League, and a limited number of other non-retail activities sponsored by Alexandria businesses. The pedestrian plaza would also include subdued, non-amplified musical and/or theatric accompaniment that would be in keeping with Old Town's character.

While there will be entertainment and outdoor dining, In order to ensure a pedestrian plaza of high quality befitting Old Town, there would be no retail activities on the pedestrian plaza.

Details of the proposed outdoor activities are as follows:

- (a) **Outdoor Dining:** The six restaurants on the 100 block of King Street that currently offer outdoor dining would continue to do so during pedestrian plaza weekends. We propose that during the first two weeks of the trial program, outdoor dining areas would remain in their current locations. For the following two weekends, restaurants could place their existing number of approved outdoor dining seats in the roadway, within eight feet of the curb. This alternate location may provide for additional visual appeal and would afford more pedestrian space on the sidewalks. Using both sidewalk and roadway outdoor dining arrangements will enable the City to determine if there is an optimal set-up for pedestrian plaza outdoor dining. In all cases, the total of number of outdoor seats that a restaurant may offer during a pedestrian plaza event may not exceed the existing number of outdoor seats permitted via an existing outdoor dining permit.
- (b) **Non-Amplified Accompaniment:** In order to add a unique element to a pedestrian plaza event in keeping with Old Town's character, staff proposes the inclusion of subdued musical and/or theatric accompaniment. This accompaniment will consist of musicians and performers with whom the City already has an established business relationship. The details of activity are being worked out by City staff.
- (c) **Other Non-Retail Activities:** Non-retail activities, particularly by Old Town based organizations or businesses would be encouraged in limited levels and for temporary durations during any given weekend. For example, The Art League is interested in participating somehow with art events (demonstrations, etc.) and some other businesses may be interested in participating with other types of non-retail activities. A KSMET-led subcommittee consisting of businesses and residents will be working on this activity.

The Police Department will provide off-duty officers or parking enforcement officers to address traffic and other issues that may arise during the four weekends of the pilot program.

FOLLOW UP:

As stated earlier, the program would be considered a success if it is regarded as beneficial to both residents and businesses. During and following the completion of the trial program, the City will gather information and opinions from residents, businesses and users as to the benefits and drawbacks of the program and will use this information in determining the course of future activities in this regard. We will return to Council in the fall with a recommendation on future street closings in the 100 block.

FISCAL IMPACT: City cost for a pedestrian plaza trial program would largely consist of the cost of paying for off-duty police officers, parking enforcement officers and honoraria to the performers scheduled to accompany the pedestrian plaza. For the four pilot weekends staff efforts will be handled by reallocating some existing staff time in various city departments. However, there will be some out of pocket costs for paying for performers which is the primary reason the \$10,000 allocation from FY 2006 council budget is proposed. Other costs borne by the City will be minimal, as the City is using existing inventories of barriers and utilizing the resources of KSMET and the local business community for other costs. The City will use barriers that are already in inventory and there would be minimal material costs associated with a trial program. Most furniture and other improvements would be supplied by local businesses or the KSMET business organization.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1. Example of movable barriers
- Attachment 2. Illustration of pedestrian plaza

STAFF:

Eileen Fogarty, Director, Planning and Zoning
Eric Forman, Urban Planner, Planning and Zoning



"chall"
<chall@potomacriverboatco.com>
08/23/2006 02:20 PM

To <Janet.Barnett@alexandriava.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject

Dear Janet:

On behalf of KSMET, please accept this memo as our endorsement to extend the "pilot program" of the Pedestrian Plaza during the weekends, beginning the evening of Friday, September 15 through Monday, January 1, 2007. It was a great collaborative effort between the merchants and the City, and we are interested in creating the Pedestrian Plaza again for a longer period of time, i.e. more than four weekends.

Thank you and your staff for your continued efforts in assisting us with revitalizing the 100 block of King Street, which also creates an ambiance which flows throughout Old Town.

Sincerely,
Charlotte
President, KSMET – representing Old Town Businesses from the River to the Rails

*Charlotte A. Hall
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