


City of Alexandria, Virginia

26
3-11-08

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 6, 2008
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 
SUBJECT: CREATION OF A TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

ISSUE: Consideration of the creation of a Transportation Commission.

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council:

- (1) Determine the composition of the proposed Transportation Commission; and
- (2) Request the City Attorney to draft the necessary ordinance to establish a Transportation Commission as described below and docket the ordinance for introduction at Council's April 8 legislative meeting.

BACKGROUND: A request to establish a Transportation Commission for the City was submitted to City Council on November 25, 2003. In response to this request, Council directed the City Manager to appoint a Transportation Commission Working Group to further consider the need for and functions of such a body, and its relationship to other bodies. Through the City Manager, the working group recommended that a special task force first be appointed to prepare a new transportation plan to replace the transportation element of the City's Comprehensive Master Plan that was adopted in 1992. Following completion of that work, the matter of creating a transportation commission or board would then be further considered.

The Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force was subsequently appointed and has submitted a recommended transportation plan for consideration as an amendment to the City's Comprehensive Master Plan. At its meeting on October 23, 2007, Council asked that the Ad Hoc Transportation Task Force also consider the matter of creating a new City commission or board for transportation. The task force, in consultation with the Directors of T&ES and P&Z, considered this matter at meetings on December 17, 2007 and January 23, 2008, and reported the following consensus recommendations to Council during its work session on February 12, 2008:

1. *A Transportation Commission be created* to make recommendations to the City Council regarding transportation programs, policies and projects; prioritization of spending from all revenue sources; and on other matters relating to or furthering the

implementation of the transportation master plan, strategic plan and other relevant city plans and policies; recommend amendments to the master plan for transportation to the Planning Commission; and consider other issues referred to them by Council.

2. ***The Transportation Commission should seek public input*** through public meetings, work sessions and hearings as appropriate to ensure adequate opportunity for the community to have a voice in proposed transportation improvements, including decisions by City, regional and State entities and the positions of City Council members who represent the City on regional and State bodies.

3. ***Membership of the Transportation Commission*** should include seven to nine members, of which two should be from the Planning Commission, one from the Traffic and Parking Board, and one from the Environmental Policy Commission, to provide continuity and coordination with land use, planning, design, environmental and parking issues. The remaining three to five members should represent different communities and constituencies within Alexandria, and one should be knowledgeable about transportation planning or other related fields. Members should be appointed by the City Council.

4. ***Adequate City staff should be provided*** to schedule meetings, provide notice, agendas and dockets, write staff reports with substantive analysis, findings and recommendations, and assist the commission with creating rules of procedure and implementing such rules.

Following receipt of the Transportation Task Force recommendations, Council asked that staff prepare a memorandum for implementing the task force recommendations.

DISCUSSION: Alexandria, as well as the region itself, has undergone a tremendous amount of redevelopment in the last seven years, and this trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. The total amount of redevelopment that has been recently planned or is expected to be planned within the next few years exceeds 25 to 35 million square feet, and ultimate opportunities for redevelopment exceed even that number.

As the pace of growth has accelerated, transportation issues have become more urgent. The need to improve mobility within the City and region is now one of the Council's highest priorities. There is a need to emphasize this aspect of the Council's Strategic Plan and to elevate the importance of all modes of transportation in Alexandria.

It is generally acknowledged that as the city has become more urbanized, the traffic generated by redevelopment must be accommodated by the existing street network as there are few, if any, opportunities for new streets or street widening in Alexandria. Therefore, it is incumbent on the City Council to use other means to mitigate the congestion and to provide adequate and satisfactory transportation for its citizens. While new development has in many ways provided benefits in terms of overall tax dollars as well as specific community benefits - new parks, streetscape improvements, retail and much more - the additional traffic created by the new development in the City and in adjacent jurisdictions must be managed on a city-wide and regional basis in order for Alexandrians to maintain their high quality of life.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that significant funding for transportation projects will likely become available, possibly from multiple sources, over the next 15 years, and that it is now critical to begin prioritizing transportation expenditures to correspond to the City's priorities for growth and policy goals for economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, historic preservation, housing, and new public facilities.

It would be the mission of the proposed Transportation Commission to recommend policies, programs and projects that implement the Vision and Guiding Principles adopted in the Transportation Master Plan. The Transportation Commission would not review or make recommendations on regulatory cases. Any recommendations with major long-range land use or urban design impacts would be forwarded through the Planning Commission to the Council.

Considerations

Attached, in the form of a summary charter, are staff's specific recommendations for the charge, responsibilities, composition and staffing of a Transportation Commission for the City.

There are those who will question the need for a new board or commission in a City where the plethora of such bodies is often noted. It is important that the mission of the new body be clear, and that it be distinguished from the mission of other boards and commissions.

A key consideration is to ensure that the link between land use and transportation is strengthened and not weakened by this new commission. The Planning Commission is charged by the City Charter with both transportation and land use planning. The new body cannot be given a mission that duplicates the Planning Commission's responsibility for transportation and land use planning. The tasks anticipated for the new body fall within the category of master plan implementation, not long-range comprehensive planning. However, it should be noted that there is no bright line between the planning function and the implementation function. They are on a continuum, and that has to be recognized and accommodated in the functions of the new group.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that the new Transportation Commission will from time to time make recommendations to the Planning Commission concerning the need for transportation master plan amendments, or for other planning or policy directions that would best implement city-wide and regional transportation goals.

It should also be noted that City land use and transportation goals and policies should be kept in congruence. Whether it is through periodic joint work sessions, a yearly retreat, field trips or regular meetings, a systematic way to ensure good communication between the Planning Commission, the Transportation Commission and the Traffic and Parking Board must be established. It will be important to recognize the mutual impacts that

decisions on land use, urban design, transportation, parking, the environment, and historic preservation have on one another, and to keep these policies in alignment.

A second consideration is the number of members and their appointments. In order to include representatives from related boards and commissions, and provide adequate community representation, staff recommended that the Commission have nine members. Two would be appointed from the Planning Commission, one from the Traffic and Parking Board, and one from the Environmental Policy Commission. The remaining members would be at-large appointments representing the different communities, both residential and business, within Alexandria. In particular, if Council decides to adopt the add-on commercial real estate tax to use for transportation purposes, then one or two members of this commission should be from the business community.

Under a proposed alternative membership structure, the Commission would have nine members, two from the Planning Commission, one from the Traffic and Parking Board, one from the Environmental Policy Commission and one from the Alexandria Transit Company Board of Directors. Two members would be residents with qualifications in land-use, transportation and/or municipal finance, one residing east of Quaker Lane and one residing west of Quaker Lane. City Council's representative to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments/Transportation Planning Board (MWCOC/TPB) and its representative to either the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTAA) or the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) would be ex-officio, non-voting members of the Commission.

Staff is comfortable with either of the proposed membership structures. Under either structure, members would be appointed by City Council for staggered three-year terms and, as a body, provide:

- Broad, city-wide perspective;
- Commitment to developing balanced, multi-modal transportation;
- Appreciation of transportation, land use and environmental interactions;
- Representation for both community and business viewpoints;
- General understanding of transportation and urban planning; and
- General knowledge of urban transportation systems.

Another important consideration is staffing. Without adequate staffing, the Commission cannot properly function. The role of staff would be similar to that for the Planning Commission and Board of Architectural Review:

- Create rules of administrative procedure;
- Prepare schedules and dockets;
- Prepare agendas;
- Provide notice;
- Research and write staff reports and recommendations;
- Prepare action agendas; and
- Provide minutes of the meeting.

The quality of the Transportation Commission's decisions, and of their recommendations, will depend heavily on the quality of staff support. It is strongly recommended that the Commission be staffed by both the Department of Planning and Zoning and the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services. T&ES will take the lead concerning administrative tasks and providing technical analysis and advice, (life safety, engineering, and technology). Planning will have a strong role concerning recommendations that relate to urban design, community-building and conformity with the City's 1992 Master Plan and its many amendments.

FISCAL IMPACT: Primary staffing would be provided by Transportation and Environmental Services. Technical staff support is estimated to require a 0.25 FTE CE IV level position and administrative support will require a 0.25 FTE clerical level position. This staffing will be provided by currently budgeted T&ES staff at an estimated cost of \$35,000 per year.

ATTACHMENT: Summary Charter for a Transportation Commission

STAFF:

Richard J. Baier, P.E., Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services

Faroll Hamer, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning

ATTACHMENT

SUMMARY CHARTER FOR A TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

1. The Transportation Commission is created to advocate and promote development of balanced transportation systems for the City through oversight of the implementation of the transportation element of the City's Master Plan.
2. The responsibilities of the Commission include:
 - Maintaining a comprehensive transportation development program that identifies the City's long-range transportation needs.
 - Recommending on an annual basis a transportation improvement program for the upcoming six fiscal years.
 - Recommending priorities for project requests that are to be submitted for funding through state, regional and local transportation funding programs.
 - Approving and prioritizing project requests to be submitted for funding through federal and state grant programs.
 - Receiving reports and findings on transportation project development studies and recommending follow up actions.
 - Recommending transportation projects for addition to or deletion from the MPO and regional long-range transportation plans.
 - Recommending amendments to the transportation element of the City's Master Plan as may be necessary or desirable.
 - Preparing periodic reports on the City's progress in implementing its long-range transportation plan.
 - Providing upon request input to and support for the City's representatives to regional transportation bodies and serving as a public forum for matters these representatives may refer to the Commission.
 - Considering other related matters as may be referred to the Commission by Council or other bodies.
3. The Commission will receive public input through public meetings, work sessions and hearings as appropriate, and consider such input in its deliberations and recommendations.

4. The membership of the commission will consist of nine members, of which two will be appointed from the Planning Commission, one from the Traffic and Parking Board, and one from the Environmental Policy Commission. The remaining members shall be at-large appointments representing different communities within Alexandria.

or

The membership of the commission will consist of nine members, of which two will be appointed from the Planning Commission, one from the Traffic and Parking Board, one from the Environmental Policy Commission and one from the Alexandria Transit Company Board of Directors. Two members will be residents possessing qualifications in land-use, transportation and/or municipal finance, one residing east of Quaker Lane and one residing west of Quaker Lane. City Council's representative to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments/Transportation Planning Board (MWCOC/TPB) will be an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Commission. City Council's representative to either the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) or the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) will be an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Commission.

In aggregate, commission members should provide:

- Broad, city-wide perspective;
- Commitment to developing balanced, multi-modal transportation;
- Appreciation of transportation, land use and environmental interactions;
- Representation for both community and business viewpoints;
- General understanding of transportation and urban planning;
- Knowledge of urban transportation systems.

Members shall be appointed by the City Council for staggered terms of three years.

5. That staffing for the commission shall be provided by the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (lead) and the Department of Planning and Zoning (support).

Docket Item 26
***Creation of a
Transportation Commission***

City Council
March 11, 2008

Purpose

The Transportation Commission is created to advocate and promote development of balanced transportation systems for the City through oversight of the implementation of the transportation element of the City's Master Plan.

Responsibilities

- Maintaining a comprehensive transportation development program that identifies the City's long-range transportation needs.
- Recommending on an annual basis a transportation improvement program for the upcoming six fiscal years.
- Recommending priorities for project requests that are to be submitted for funding through state, regional and local transportation funding programs.
- Approving and prioritizing project requests to be submitted for funding through federal and state grant programs.
- Receiving reports and findings on transportation project development studies and recommending follow up actions.

Responsibilities (continued)

- Recommending transportation projects for addition to or deletion from the MPO and regional long-range transportation plans.
- Recommending amendments to the transportation element of the City's Master Plan as may be necessary or desirable.
- Preparing periodic reports on the City's progress in implementing its long-range transportation plan.
- Providing upon request input to and support for the City's representatives to regional transportation bodies and serving as a public forum for matters these representatives may refer to the Commission.
- Considering other related matters as may be referred to the Commission by Council or other bodies.

Public Input

The Commission will receive public input through public meetings, work sessions and hearings as appropriate, and consider such input in its deliberations and recommendations.

Membership

Alternative 1: 9 Members

- 2 from Planning Commission
- 1 from Traffic and Parking Board
- 1 from Environmental Policy Commission
- 5 at-large representing different communities in Alexandria.

Alternative 2: 9 Members

- 2 from Planning Commission
- 1 from Traffic and Parking Board
- 1 from Environmental Policy Commission
- 1 from Alexandria Transit Company Board
- 2 residents - 1 residing east of Quaker Lane and 1 residing west of Quaker Lane
- Council representative to MWCOG/TPB
- Council representative to NVTA or WMATA Board

Qualifications and Appointment

- Broad, city-wide perspective
- Commitment to developing balanced, multi-modal transportation
- Appreciation of transportation, land use and environmental interactions
- Representation for both community and business viewpoints
- General understanding of transportation and urban planning
- Knowledge of urban transportation systems

Members appointed by Council for staggered terms of three years

Staffing

Department of Transportation and
Environmental Services (lead)

Department of Planning and Zoning (support)