


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 3, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF CONTINUATION OF THE KING STREET TREE LIGHT DISPLAY

ISSUE: Whether or not to continue the King Street tree light display.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council determine whether or not it wishes to extend the street tree lighting period in the King Street area at this time by selecting one of the following options. Options 2 through 4 would require an allocation from Council's FY 2011 Contingent Reserves. Council could also select Option 1 and wait to make a determination on expanding this program as part of the FY 2012 budget process:

1. End the tree lighting program immediately;
2. Maintain the tree lighting program through the end of March (\$9,000);
3. Maintain the tree lighting program through the end of June (\$22,500); or
4. Maintain the tree lighting program until next season's tree lighting program begins (\$43,500)

BACKGROUND: The City of Alexandria installs lights in approximately 250 trees along the King Street corridor from the Potomac River to the King Street Metro station, including: the 100 blocks north and south of King Street on Washington and Union Streets, and around City Hall on North Royal, Cameron, and North Fairfax Streets. In FY 2011, the lighting program was established to begin the week before Thanksgiving and end in January. Extending the program beyond January has an impact on electrical expenses and strand replacement as lights burn out or strands break. The holiday program consists of the King Street lighting program, holiday trees for Market Square and additional decorations for public spaces. At its last legislative meeting, Council requested that lights be kept on until Council could make a decision on this issue on February 8.

This year RPCA installed approximately 2,100 strings of lights in street trees. Based on charges from Dominion Power, the daily cost of keeping the lights on is approximately \$150/day or \$4,500 per month. The total expenditures for the current FY2011 lighting program is \$81,085 with most if the cost related to removing old light strings and installing new ones.

There are a number of options available for Council to consider. While keeping the lights on is consistent with the Council adopted Strategic Plan Goal 1- King Street vibrancy vision, funding for this and other Strategic Plan initiatives is constrained by budget limitations. Four key options are listed below:

- 1. End the tree lighting period immediately at no further cost to the City.** As part of recent budget reductions the tree lighting program which had been extended to a full year as a National Harbor initiative in 2008 was reduced back to a mid-November through January program. Ending the lighting at this time is consistent with Council's budget reductions which were part of a citywide effort to trim the budget during the last few years. The FY 2012 proposed budget does not contain any budgeted funds for extension of the current tree lighting program.
- 2. Maintain the tree lighting program until the end of March at an added cost of \$9,000 for FY 2012.** This extension will keep the program operational during the months of the year when sunset is the earliest and the days are shorter. This extra lighting helps keep the streetscape brighter and more inviting. This time period is also when the businesses in Old Town experience a slow sales period. Any extension now does not commit the Council to extending the program in FY 2012, as this is a program where one can literally "pull the plug" and end the program. Any expansion in FY 2012 could be made as part of the upcoming FY 2012 budget process.
- 3. Maintain the tree lighting program until the end of June, which is the close of FY 2011, at a cost of \$22,500.** This time period extension would keep the lights on until Council decides whether or not to add more funds to the tree lighting budget for FY 2012. This limited extension would make the full-year extension decision an item that would have to compete for funding with other FY2012 budget requests, which could not be funded in the FY2012 base budget. This enables Council not to make a long-term commitment out of sync with consideration of the many other budget needs which are not funded in FY 2012. An extension until the end of FY 2011 does not commit the Council now to extending the program in FY 2012.
- 4. Maintain the tree lighting program until the next tree lighting season begins in November of 2011 at a cost of \$43,500.** Under this program the only added cost would be for electricity, because as light strings broke or became inoperable no repairs or re-stringings would be done. This is how the prior twelve-month tree lighting program was handled.

FISCAL IMPACT: An additional allocation to the tree lighting program would be necessary to continue the program. The range of costs for the above discussed extension options would be \$9,000 to \$43,500. The funds to cover the extension cost that Council may wish to allocate could derive from Council's FY 2011 Contingent Reserves which has a current undesignated balance of \$507,314 (including \$350,000 not needed for WMATA subsidy increase in FY 2011). Any contingent reserves not expended in FY 2011 become funds available for FY 2012.

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

James Spengler, Director- Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Roger Blakeley, Deputy Director- Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

John Noelle, City Arborist- Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities



COA Contact Us: Keeping the "Christmas " lights on throughout the year

william.euille, frank.fannon, kerry.donley,
Sally Evans to: alicia.hughes, delpepper, paulcsmedberg, rose.boyd,
jackie.henderson, elaine.scott, rob.krupicka,
linda.owens, elizabeth.jones

02/03/2011 10:27 PM

Please respond to Sally Evans

16
2-8-11

Time: [Thu Feb 03, 2011 22:27:01] Message ID: [27409]

Issue Type: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members
First Name: Sally
Last Name: Evans
Street Address: 1225 Martha Custis Drive, Unit 520
City: Alexandria
State: VA
Zip: 22302-2019
Phone: 703-578-1067
Email Address: sallyce1@hotmail.com
Subject: Keeping the "Christmas " lights on throughout the year
Dear Mayor Euille and members of the City Council,

I read an article in today's paper and learned that Councilwoman Del Pepper is supporting a move toward year-round lighting for the tiny Christmas tree lights that adorn the trees in Old Town. I have a great deal of respect for Councilwoman Pepper and have voted for her every time she has been a candidate. I have had several occasions to call upon her for support of neighborhood issues and have always received the time and attention my concerns deserved. It is, therefore, difficult for me to raise opposition to her efforts to keep the tree lights burning year-round. Yes, they are pretty and yes, they add to the general ambiance in Old Town. However, spending \$200,000 to do this is ridiculous. Old Town streets have more than adequate illumination from the lovely street lights. I frequently shop and dine in Old Town and I do not notice that restaurants and shops are underpatronized. The variety and quality of the food and wares in the shops draw the business, not the

sparkling lights. In this economy, and in an age when we are urged to conserve our use of electricity and to "go green" whenever possible, this seems out of sync. While \$200,000 may be small potatoes in the scheme of the over-all budget, as a homeowner, and taxpayer, I think it is both wasteful and counterproductive. I am certain that amount of money could be spent on less frivolous, more pressing issues. I urge Councilwoman Pepper to reconsider this move and I urge the remainder of Council members to refrain from supporting it if/when it comes to a vote.

Respectfully,

Sally C. Evans



COA Contact Us: King Street tree lights

Fred Parker to: william.euille, frank.fannon, kerry.donley,
alicia.hughes, delpepper, paulcsmedberg, rose.boyd,
jackie.henderson, elaine.scott, rob.krupicka,
linda.owens, elizabeth.jones

02/08/2011 04:09 PM

Please respond to Fred Parker

16

2-8-11



Time: [Tue Feb 08, 2011 16:09:29] Message ID: [27546]

Issue Type: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members
First Name: Fred
Last Name: Parker
Street Address: 408 Jackson Place
City: Alexandria
State: Virginia
Zip: 22302
Phone: 703-836-2077
Email Address: fredp@hardtimes.com
Subject: King Street tree lights
Please leave the King Street tree lights on.

The lights are good for
business.
Business is good for taxes.
Comments: Taxes are good for the
city.
The Hard Times thanks you for your consideration.
Fred



COA Contact Us: holiday lights

David Hammond to: william.euille, frank.fannon, kerry.donley,
alicia.hughes, delpepper, paulcsmedberg,
rose.boyd, jackie.henderson, elaine.scott,
rob.krupicka, linda.owens, elizabeth.jones

02/08/2011 02:46 PM

Please respond to David Hammond

16

2-8-11

Time: [Tue Feb 08, 2011 14:46:41] Message ID: [27543]

Issue Type: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members
First Name: David
Last Name: Hammond
Street Address: 1120 King Street
City: Alexandria
State: VA
Zip: 22314
Phone: 7038675270
Email Address: manager@vermillionrestaurant.com
Subject: holiday lights

Good afternoon Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Donley and Council Members.

I

wanted to write a brief letter in support of the year round use of Old Town's holiday lights. I understand that current economic conditions require us to take a hard look at how every dollar is spent. I am also sure that there are several other legitimate & worthwhile requests for every dollar in the budget. And while there may be no accurate way to calculate the positive economic impact of year round lighting, I can relay

Comments: what my guests have told me which has always been overwhelmingly positive.

In fact, the only negative comments I received were when the lights were dark.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope that you will consider leaving the lights on.

Sincerely,
David Hammond, General

Manager - Vermilion Restaurant

16
2-8-11



COA Contact Us: Tree Lights

Joseph Egerton to: william.euille, frank.fannon, kerry.donley,
alicia.hughes, delpepper, paulcsmedberg,
rose.boyd, jackie.henderson, elaine.scott,
rob.krupicka, linda.owens, elizabeth.jones

02/08/2011 02:26 PM

Please respond to Joseph Egerton

Time: [Tue Feb 08, 2011 14:26:54] Message ID: [27541]

Issue Type: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members
First Name: Joseph
Last Name: Egerton
Street Address: 1117 King Street
City: Alexandria
State: VA
Zip: 22314
Phone: 703 838 9785
Email Address: artsafire@artsafire.com
Subject: Tree Lights

Your Honor and Honorable Council Members,

I am writing to inform you

that I'm very much in favor of keeping the street lights on as long as possible.

The importance of street illumination has been pointed out many times by the expensive retail studies the city has invested in. If the experts advocate as much night time lighting as possible, the commercial businesses and the city should listen and comply. Most businesses keep lights on in their stores at considerable expense...it's good for business.

Comments:

We want tourists and visitors alike to feel comfortable on the streets at night, and show off the town. I would love to see (as study recommended) the trees wrapped with lights that would better illuminate the streets at night.

Please consider this when deciding the cost of keeping the lights going.