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Old Town Civic Association
P.O.Box 1213
Alexandria, Virginia 22313

April 16, 2011

Mayor William D. Euille
City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Donley and Members of City Council:

Re: Draft Waterfront Small Area Plan

The draft Waterfront Plan has been the subject of numerous Old Town Civic Association meetings, surveys and workshops since the membership's adoption of a statement of "Waterfront Planning Principles" back in 2007. However, there is still significant frustration with a planning process that, although years in duration, has not adequately taken into account a number of concerns raised by the Old Town community.

At the March 12, 2011 City Council public hearing, I made this point and asked for more time to work with the City to resolve OTCA issues. The City Council challenged OTCA to come back with a list of specific modifications that we would like to see. These modifications are as follows:

1. **Slow down** – The waterfront plan is likely to undergo significant changes within the next month or two, specifically as a result of ongoing negotiations with the Old Dominion Boat Club and a more realistic assessment of the plan's revenues and costs. There needs to be continued public discussion of the waterfront plan; there will be substantial harm if further comment is foreclosed on a plan that is not yet complete. No Small Area Plan or Text Amendment should be adopted until and unless its fundamental elements are clear and precise and have been made available for public consideration and comment.
2. **Make a stronger commitment to historic/cultural amenities** – The celebration of Alexandria's history and public art should not be limited to a waterfront plan. These civic and cultural amenities should be a central element of any such plan, however—not relegated to mere appendices with no visible means of support.
3. **Set limits on the type of allowable commercial uses** in the waterfront area; unlimited, these uses, specifically restaurant uses, could cannibalize the business and parking supply of existing shops and restaurants in Old Town, especially along King Street, undermining what is presumably must be a principal economic objective of the plan.
4. **Include more open space** – Preservation of parks and open space for the benefit of the general public was a crucial objective of the 1981 and 1983 waterfront Settlement Agreements. Acquisition of additional open, public space on the waterfront should be accomplished to the optimum degree.
5. **Abandon the concept of a building in Waterfront Park** – Such a building is highly undesirable, either as a swap for the ODBC parking lot or as a stand-alone building, because it would take away public space at a critical crossroad location with King Street. No existing open space should be compromised or retroceded; once it's gone, it's gone forever.

6. **Scale back substantially the amount of restaurant space** – The most recent revenue forecast for the plan anticipates 84,140 square feet of new restaurant space, the equivalent of eleven new restaurants in the waterfront area each one the size of the new Virtue restaurant in the old Olsson’s Bookstore building. That amount of additional restaurant space will add greatly to street, sidewalk, and parking congestion in Old Town, especially along Union and King Streets.
7. **Scale back substantially the number of hotel rooms** – The proposed plan includes 625 hotel rooms on the premise that they will generate less traffic and higher tax revenues than currently permitted uses. Hotels, if allowed, should be limited to one “boutique” hotel of modest size which complements the architectural character of its existing neighborhood. Any new hotel should not be a larger, “full service” hotel with restaurants, coffee shops, banquet rooms and conference facilities which would generate heavy visitor and delivery traffic.
8. **Stay within the existing densities** – Densities should not be increased for any reason for the Robinson Terminal, Cummings, and Turner properties. Adding density to generate tax revenues to underwrite public improvements will add traffic and parking pressure to an already congested area of Old Town, overwhelm the historic character of its core area, and increase the value of waterfront property, making it more expensive to acquire land for open-space purposes.
9. **Demonstrate that the Plan is revenue neutral** – Cost and revenue estimates for each development increment must be balanced to avoid residential or specialty tax increases that directly impact Alexandria residents. It is essential that the waterfront plan include all projected capital, operating, and maintenance costs, including expanded sewer capacity; dredging at the proposed docks and piers; and maintenance and eventual rehabilitation and replacement of the proposed infrastructure.
10. **Guarantee the funding sources** - that allow all, or most, of the tax revenues generated by private-sector development in the waterfront area to flow into a fund designated for improvements along the waterfront and not into the City’s General Fund or spent on capital projects unrelated to the waterfront, such as new fire trucks, buses, or public buildings.

The City has asked for public comment, we see no compelling reason to hurry this process, and once again, request a delay in the plan adoption timetable to allow more time to work with the City to finish addressing our issues. There will be no substantive harm to the waterfront or to Alexandria if final Council action on the plan is postponed until a more concrete plan has been formulated and debated publicly.

Respectfully submitted



John Gosling, President, Old Town Civic Association.

Cc: The Planning Commission
James K. Hartmann, City Manager
Faroll Hamer, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning