



The Old Town Crier

The Monthly Newsletter of the Old Town Civic Association

Announcing the October Meeting of the Old Town Civic Association

DATE: Wednesday, October 11, 2006
TIME: 7:00 p.m., Socializing with Neighbors; 7:30 p.m., Program
LOCATION: The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street

PROGRAM AGENDA: (1) COMMUNITY POLICE REPORT

(2) JONES POINT PARK PRESENTATION

(3) KING STREET PEDESTRIAN PLAZA

(4) ELECTION OF A NEW BOARD MEMBER

ASSIGNMENT OF POLICE LIAISON OFFICER

Under the Alexandria Police Department's community liaison program, officers of the department meet regularly with civic and other community groups to keep us informed about law enforcement matters in our neighborhoods, and to hear and respond to citizen questions. Lieutenant James Bartlett, who has been recently appointed by Chief David Baker to be our community police liaison officer will brief us on matters of current interest, and address any questions or concerns that members may have.

JONES POINT PARK

The National Park Service (NPS) has just released its environmental assessment regarding the future of Jones Point Park. They will present the four alternatives considered by both the NPS and the City and their resultant preferred solution. Citizen comments can be forwarded to the National Park Service prior to the 18th of October. A portion of the OTCA remarks, as delivered by OTCA's President Townsend Van Fleet at the NPS open hearing at the Radisson Hotel on the 13th of September were: "The Old Town Civic Association agrees with the National Park Service Environmental Assessment which stresses the preservation of the natural resources, environmental values and historical character and heritage of Jones Point Park to the maximum degree possible. We also agree with the National Park Service that all other considerations should only be given secondary weight, if any, and only to the extent that it does not impair the achievement of that primary objective. The National Park Service is fully aware that impervious surfaces and the lack of trees and other vegetation will only increase flooding during violent weather thereby potentially becoming a serious a threat to the citizens living close to the park. These neighborhoods have already suffered the brunt of the damage done by building the world's

widest bridge through the middle of Jones Point Park; they should not be required to bear substantially more damage. Therefore, the Old Town Civic Association urges the approval of the Environmental Assessment which represents the best balance that can be achieved at this site between active and passive recreation, historical and natural values, and stewardship for the environment”.

KING STREET PEDESTRIAN PLAZA

The idea of dedicating a portion of Lower King Street to a “pedestrian plaza” has been discussed at times in the past, but has never been implemented. Last year’s “King Street Retail Study” focused increased attention on possible strategies for strengthening the commercial sector on Old Town’s “Main Street,” and the pedestrian plaza concept has since been the subject of renewed interest. A trial program was conducted for four weekends in June and July; however, the City has approved an additional eight week trial program of closing the 100 block of King Street to vehicular traffic on weekends and reserving the street for pedestrians only. In order to be successful, a pedestrian plaza in Old Town would need to be beneficial to residents, businesses and visitors alike, and to create a distinctive amenity for the City. If the proposal were to go forward, what portion of each weekend should the street be closed? Every weekend, or just during the peak pedestrian seasons? How much parking would be lost on King Street, and how would that impact businesses and nearby residents? Would new traffic be brought to the lower King Street neighborhood, and how would it be accommodated? Would increased pedestrian flow benefit restaurants, retail shops, or both? How could the visual design be managed to preserve the quality and character of King Street? Should outdoor entertainment be part of the plan? OTCA members are encouraged to come out and share their views and advice on the proposed trial program. An OTCA survey will be sent by e-mail to a large number of members. In addition, copies will also be provided at our 11 October membership meeting.

CONCERNED ABOUT HISTORIC PRESERVATION?

Do you have an interest in historic preservation? Do you believe that Old Town can be a better steward of its architectural history? If so, there’s a way to get involved and make a difference. The Old Town Civic Association has identified five critical areas that it believes are at the top of our city’s list of historic preservation needs. OTCA is looking for city residents who are interested in historic preservation to help develop and implement plans to address these issues.

The five items are:

- 1) Prompt maintenance of city owned historic buildings and city historic sites open to the public. A number of city owned historic structures as well as city historic sites open to the public are in need of maintenance not provided for in the city budget or through private sources of funding.
- 2) Creation of a long term residential streetscape plan for the Old & Historic District. A hodgepodge of varying materials and objects has taken root in our streets over the years to form what has arguably become a somewhat blighted urban view shed. A comprehensive plan is now needed to create a streetscape that is not only more historically accurate, but also pleasing to the eye.
- 3) Development of a plan to create a more ambient Washington Street. In 1999, the Washington Street Standards were written into law as a way of governing height, mass, scale and other design considerations along this gateway to the city. Today, processes need to be created to assure that city agencies follow the Standards in reviewing applications for new development along

Washington Street. In addition, a proactive look needs to be taken at enhancing the appearance of some of Washington Street's existing buildings and the streetscape itself.

4) Determination of the ways in which historic structures can be protected from demolition or alteration. The need for expanded protections became evident this past year with the razing of two historic buildings in the 1500 block of King Street. Topics of discussion include updating the national and state listings for the Old and Historic area, amending the list of buildings to include structures of historic significance that are more than 50 years of age, and enhancing the ongoing city plan to broaden the historic district to include the area of Cameron Street between North Patrick and Harvard Street by adding that area to one of the two districts.

5) Review of the standards and procedures used by the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Planning Commission and the Board of Architectural Review. It's essential, as experience and changing conditions dictate, to periodically update the standards and procedures used by these agencies to make decisions.

Although the implementation of solutions to these issues will fall largely to the city, it is important that we, as citizens, inform the process. Through solid community involvement, an effective plan can be prepared and through effective advocacy, it can be implemented. If you are interested, please contact John Johansen, Chairman of the OTCA's Historic Preservation Committee, at 703-836-5651 or makeadifference@comcast.net.

TUTORS FOR LYLES CROUCH

Amy Harris-White is a teacher at Lyles-Crouch School and the coordinator for this year's tutoring program. The school is seeking volunteers to work with our struggling students. The tutoring will occur after school from 2:30-3:30. Tutors are needed for either Tuesday or Thursday. Tutoring of the K-2 students takes place on Tuesday and tutoring grades 3-5 takes place on Thursday. This program will begin on October 17th and it will run through May. Are there any Old Town Civic Association members who would like to become involved with a school that is located within our boundaries? Feel free to call Amy at either school 703-706-4430 or at her home number 703-838-8347.

FLOOD WATERS INUNDATE RIVER FRONT

The torrential rains hitting Alexandria in early July have led to a serious deterioration of the Potomac River at the southern tip of Old Town. Large amounts of silt have been swept down Hunting Creek and have settled in the river directly in front of Porto Vecchio, causing a drastic change in appearance especially at low tide. There is even an upturned automobile visible in the accumulated silt. The City is responding to this event by consulting with the US Corps of Engineers and with Fairfax County authorities. It would appear that a massive and expensive undertaking may be required to restore this portion of the river to its original condition. Also a study of the entire watershed including Cameron Run is needed to prevent repeat occurrences of serious flooding during future storms. Porto Vecchio residents cooperated in an annual volunteer effort to remove unsightly debris from the Potomac River directly in front of their building.

OTCA INITIATES A NEW SEASON ON THE CHERRY BLOSSOM

The Old Town Civic Association held its annual membership gala aboard the Cherry Blossom on the 17th of September. Our largest gathering (236) ever participated in this fun event. Music by the fabulous TC Williams Jazz Band was indeed the highlight of the evening. In addition to the food catered by The Mary Moore Company, Landinis, Ville da este and The Union Street Public House all provided additional treats enjoyed by all. A record 24 prizes were awarded during the raffle portion of the program. They consisted of Redskin Tickets donated by Tim Elliott; dinners

for two provided by a number of restaurants: Theismanns, Gadsbys, The Wharf, Nina's Dandy, Monroes, Pat Troys, Eves, A La Lucia, Faccia Luna, Southside, Asian Bistro, Hard Times, Chadwicks, Mango Mikes, Union Street Public House, Landini Brothers and Trattoria da Franco. In addition gift certificates were donated from the Xmas Attic, Metro Stage, Barkley Square, Missy Schotta and the Potomac River Boat Company. When you visit any of these establishments please thank them for their support of OTCA. A BIG KUDO for Teresa Miller who again directed the entire festivity and Charlotte Hall who made it all happen aboard the great paddle boat, The Cherry Blossom.

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

During the last four months, your Board of Directors has been busily engaged in a number of projects. We developed a Proclamation regarding the potential moving of the George Mason Post Office, asking the Council to intervene with the US Postal Service (USPS) to find a new location close to the old one and close to the center of the Old Town business district. The Council sent our Proclamation along with one of their own to the USPS. The Board developed a Proclamation regarding the Washington Street Standards wherein all construction on Washington Street has to comply with the law, which specifically mandates that new and reconstructed developments on Washington Street had to comply with our historic preservation standards. This is extremely important, because there are many other new developmental projects scheduled for the future on Washington Street. The Board sent a letter to the Mayor and Council regarding the renovation work that will be performed on the Wilkes Street Tunnel. We are directly involved in this project and have a meeting with the City Staff on the 4th of October. Another letter was sent to the Mayor regarding the state of disrepair of Gadsby's Tavern restaurant, a city owned property. The Mayor and City Manager are now fully aware of what needs to be done to bring the restaurant back to its historic character. We have prepared a survey regarding the King Street Pedestrian Plaza which will be used to elicit comments from our membership on the whether or not the 100 Block of King Street should be shut down from traffic on the weekends. We presented our position regarding Jones Point Park at the National Park Service's open hearing at the Radisson Hotel on the 13th of September. Lastly, OTCA sent a letter to the Mayor and Council encouraging them in their nuisance suit against the MIRANT Plant which continues to contaminate our air quality.

WEB SITE NOW OPERATIONAL

Thanks to our Treasurer, Mike Zarlenga, our web site is again operational. The new web site URL is www.oldtowncivic.org

*Townsend A. "Van" Van Fleet
President*

NEXT MEETING OF OTCA IS 8 NOVEMBER AT THE LYCEUM