

The Old Town Crier

The Monthly Newsletter of the Old Town Civic Association, Inc.

October Program and Notice of the Meeting

DATE: Wednesday, October 8, 2008
TIME: 7:00 p.m., Socializing with Neighbors; 7:30 p.m., Program
LOCATION: The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street

PROGRAM AGENDA

- 1) ANNOUNCEMENTS
 - 2) POLICE REPORT: LT. JAMIE BARTLETT
 - 3) MOTORCOACHES
 1. *Panel Discussion*
 2. *Membership discussion and facilitator session*
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1. MOTORCOACHES, YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A VOICE

The meeting on October 8 will be dedicated to hearing from the membership. A panel of experts will give brief presentations and answer questions from the audience. After the experts are excused, a facilitator will try to capture the concerns, and possible solutions.

Motorcoach task forces have either existed or been in the offing for many years. This year is no different, yet as representatives from the various groups sit down to discuss the future disposition of this matter, they seem to derive more common themes than differences compared to previous task forces.

Bert Ely, the Transportation Chair of OTCA suggests instead that;

“Properly addressing motor-coach issues as they have arisen in Old Town Alexandria requires the recognition of certain physical constraints in and near Old Town.

- Old Town occupies a finite physical land area lying within the Old and Historic District and that as such, has a finite capacity at any one time of motor coaches and other vehicles moving and parking, and of people walking, window-shopping, or dining on Old Town sidewalks.
- Old Town contains a substantial number of older, irreplaceable structures, which give Old Town its unique historical character that attracts permanent residents to Old Town as well as businesses and visitors, including tourists.
- The presence of an excess number of motor-coaches, other types of vehicles, and pedestrians in Old Town has a deleterious impact on the ambiance and quality-of-life, particularly for Old Town residents, and the physical integrity Old Town's historic structures.”

The panelists are:

Enforcement: David Baker, Police chief, Alexandria Police Department: Chief David P. Baker holds an Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice, a Bachelor's degree in Leadership and Criminal Justice Management and a Master's Certificate in the Administration of Justice. He is a graduate of the FBI National Academy, and the Police Executive Leadership School at the University of Richmond's Jepsen School of Leadership.

Tourism : Stephanie Brown, President & CEO , Alexandria Convention & Visitors Association . The ACVA is a 501 (c) (6) organization whose mission is to generate tourism and conventions that increase revenues and promote the City of Alexandria and its assets. The mission is carried out through a program of work that includes marketing, advertising, media relations, research and analysis, public education, and visitor services.

Citizen Issues: Bert Ely is a long-time OTCA member and currently serves as its Treasurer and Chair of the Traffic Committee. He presently represents OTCA on the City's Ad -Hoc Motor Coach Task Force.

Historic Aspects : J. Lance Mallamo, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria. Previous to that appointment he held positions on Long Island as Executive Director of the Vanderbilt Museum and Planetarium in Centerport, New York, and was Director of Cultural and Historic Services for Suffolk County, New York. Director Office of Historic Alexandria

Industry: Victor Parra, President & Chief Executive Officer, United Motorcoach Association. Mr. Parra joined the UMA team in 1998. He has over twenty-five years

of association management experience. As head of UMA's staff, he serves as chief spokesperson for UMA and manages the daily business of the Association.

2. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Congratulations to the two newest Board members of the OTCA. They were nominated by the President and approved by the Board, as required by the bylaws, to fill unexpected vacancies. Allan McCurry was elected to serve the South of Franklin District, and former Vice Mayor Andrew Macdonald, was elected to serve as the recording Secretary. Note the controlling by-laws section.

By Laws ; “Should any vacancy on the Board occur due to death, resignation, or otherwise, the President shall appoint a person to fill the vacancy subject to the subsequent approval of the appointee by the Board”

3. POLICE REPORT

Numerous crime reports are raising concerns about safety. These must be treated in a more systematic and comprehensive manner than the Police reports allow. To that end, we formed a safety committee headed by Tim Elliot and Allan McCurry who will work with the police department. We will also be dedicating the entire November meeting to a complete overview of security conditions in Old Town so we can come forward with wide ranging recommendations

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP PARTY TURNS OUT BEAUTIFULLY

The OTCA’s annual membership party took place aboard the Cherry Blossom on September 21, and turned out to be the perfect end of summer party. The lovely weather provided a perfect setting to complement the leisurely cruise on the authentic paddle cruiser up the Potomac River to Haines point. Approximately 200 took part in the cruise.

Many thanks for Vice Mayor Del Pepper, Councilmember Ludwig Gaines, and Councilmember Paul Smedberg for joining us.

Many thanks to our Old Town neighbors and merchants who contributed door prizes to add to the festivities. Mayor Bill Euille, Andrew Macdonald's Potomack Studio, Carlyle House Historic Park, Lee-Fendall House, David Martin's Goldworks, Enchanted Florist, Dr. Bob Knapp Chiropractic Physician, Trastevere Antiques, Jim Ambigio's Birkim Yoga, Sumpter Priddy Antiques, The Little Theatre of Alexandria, Elder Crafters of Alexandria, Alexandria Symphony Orchestra and The Winery all contributed prizes. In addition, the following restaurants contributed complimentary meals, Gadsby's Tavern, Trattoria da Franco, Pat Troy's Ireland's Own, and Chadwick's Restaurant.

Many thanks are due the OTCA board members for their enormous efforts to ensure a successful party. They donated labor and time, but also generously helped to sponsor the event and deserve a big round of applause. Also, many thanks to the TC Williams Jazz Band who provided us with great music during the entire cruise. Thanks to Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet for donating and setting up the flowers and to Don Dean, Mike Hobbs and Carolyn Roehrenbeck for assisting at the sign in table.

The biggest round of applause goes to our hosts Willem Polak and Charlotte Hall of the Potomac Riverboat Company, who contributed in countless ways to the success of the event. Without their support, it would simply not have been possible.

Please show your appreciation by patronizing the good friends and neighbors who were kind enough to support our event. The next time you are in one of their restaurants or shops, thank them in person for their support.

CITY PROPOSES CHANGES TO THE RESIDENTIAL PARKING PROGRAM¹

We have specific concerns with the recommendations suggested by the City Staff that developments approved under the Special Use Permit (SUP) process with reduced or no parking, should be allowed temporary parking permits.

¹ <http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/tes/info/Residential%20parking.pdf>

The most controversial proposal is the suggestion that Special Use Permits may be altered without going through the SUP Process. While the report suggests that this is a mere clarification, it is in reality a significant change, if not a subversion of approved Special Use Permits.

The Zoning ordinance is quite specific regarding how much parking and visitor parking that developments are supposed to provide on their property. However, some developers have been given dispensation by the City from the visitor-parking requirement. The developers made a specific trade off, exchanging the ability to park visitors on site, in return for benefits such as more density or some other consideration.

Changing that provision will undermine existing approvals (or should we say agreements) with the community, and will potentially remove, if not destroy the credibility of Special Use Permits.

The last sentence in the staff report just accentuates this concern². The sentence suggests that here is a loophole that can be exploited by those wishing to alter the conditions of the Special Use Permit.

PROPOSAL TO CHANGE RESTAURANT SUP PROCESS IN OLD TOWN

This was a proposal borne out of the small business task force appointed by the City Council. The idea was to simplify and standardize the approval process for restaurants by having uniform administrative SUPs across the City .

Tim Elliot, Chairman of the OTCA small business Committee, and Mike Hobbs, former OTCA president, represented us extraordinarily well, which resulted in the City Staff recommending that the SUP process remain unchanged for Old Town.

Notable issues were;

Only three years ago, as part of the king Street retail study, both the Planning Commission and the City Council turned down a similar proposal. What, if anything, has changed that would warrant a revisit?

² Page 3 “Future special use permits should specifically indicate if visitor parking would be provided on City Streets with temporary parking permits”

The residents of Old Town are different from the rest of the City, because they themselves are subject to restrictions in the historic district.

Even on King Street, the blocks differ significantly, putting into question the homogeneity assumption.

SUPs might be a poor policy tool, but it is imprudent to remove them until the City develops a workable alternative.

Finally, King Street in particular, and Old Town in general, is the result of a symbiotic relationship that exists between the residents and the small businesses. The City should be very careful about making changes that diminish, or even destroy that link, and the SUP process is an important vehicle for dialogue.

The Planning Commission voted 7-0 for not changing the Restaurant SUP process in Old Town. The City Council will be considering the matter on October 18.

HUNTING CREEK HUNTING TOWERS

The developer is still asking for the zoning change that would allow him to pursue the four 150 foot tall buildings at the Southern entrance to Alexandria on Washington Street. There are several approvals he needs, the most important being the change of height from 50 to 150 foot limit. However, in recognition that it is by no means a done deal, they are also coming in with a “by right proposal” that would be limited to 50 feet. The proposal is scheduled to go before the Planning Commission on October 7 and the City Council on October 18.

This Gateway must fill many roles, and the character of the public gateway and the private gateway at its margins is of great concern to the City. Among the aspects of this Gateway that are important are the nature of the transition from the natural areas south of the City to historic Old Town, and the scale, character, design and use of buildings along the Parkway.

Specifically, the plan must meet the Washington Street Standards, which are an ordinance with extraordinary specificity as to what can and cannot be built. According to the City staff, the tall buildings proposal misses the standards by a very wide margin.

The developer wishes to ignore this requirement and intends to make the case that this is not a significant area, and that by putting in a road, a new lot is created that is not subject to review. However, this conspires against the intent of the parkway and the zoning ordinance. In addition, artificially splitting up the property requires more than just an artificial road. Furthermore, the height and density bonus is itself subject to the Washington Street Standards as per page 33 of the Hunting Creek Small Area Plan.

Under affordable housing on Page 33 of the Hunting Creek Small Area Plan “3.4.3. In order to retain affordable and workforce housing in the City, the City may consider a zoning text amendment or zone change to allow additional height and density with setbacks appropriate to the project and the site, and **in conformance with the Board of Architectural Review’s Washington Street Standards and Guidelines**, with SUP approval, if the project provides for extraordinary affordable housing, including but not limited to the acquisition by the City, or by a nonprofit housing corporation, of units at the project.”

The George Washington Memorial Parkway, is not a neglected stepchild, but rather the genesis of the entire Historic District. It puts us on the tourist maps, which is exactly why city leaders worked to have it created decades ago. It inculcates a heritage that warrants sharing with the world as it makes a pilgrimage from Washington D.C. to Mount Vernon to pay its respects to the Father of this Country. The Parkway also represents a trust placed on the City by the Federal Government that we would maintain the highway for the purpose and dignity it that was envisioned to convey. The proposed 146-Foot tall buildings will stand out as a glaring beacon to our disservice to the nation and to the father of the nation, and to the commitments city leaders made when the parkway came into being.

On the affordable housing side, the idea was to save the Hunting Towers current income group renting there, not just current renters. However, as the Planning Commission showed, the proposal missed its mark there as well, and according to our calculations, by a whole lot.

Recall, that VDOT used eminent domain to acquire one of the Hunting Towers in order to demolish it as part of the WW bridge project. When the owner could not get

insurance for the remaining two, VDOT was forced to acquire them as well. According to Roberto Fonseca-Martinez, the Division Administrator for the Federal Highway Administration, VDOT purchased the hunting Towers with Federal money, and VDOT is required to sell it at market rate, unless VDOT requests that it be used for social, environmental, or economic mitigation.

Furthermore, the 2004-2005 General Assembly approved a measure that allows local jurisdictions to totally abate property taxes for not- for profit groups that seek to provide rental units as Hunting Towers does today.

We encourage the City, State, and federally elected officials to pursue this alternative rather than the potential damaging the Historic District.



OTCA Board members were very busy this summer with countless meetings, and they deserve a lot of credit for their efforts. However two meeting stand out.

The Board of OTCA met with Mayor Euille for substantive discussion regarding the overwhelming changes the City is asking Old Town to take. The discussions have set in motion dialogues that will permit more proactive, rather than reactive positions.

The Waterfront Committee met with the Chamber of Commerce to discuss our respective visioning plans for the waterfront. The two plans share many common themes, and we agreed to further our collaborative efforts.

IGNACIO PESSOA City Attorney Ignacio Pessoa announced that he will be stepping down come January. Since I had the pleasure of working closely with Ignacio on numerous issues, I can truly testify to his principled approach. He demonstrated true devotion to the City and the common good. His departure is very saddening and will seriously affect the development processes in the City.

Next meeting will be on November 12

Poul Hertel, President OTCA Board of Directors