

The Old Town Crier

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

Announcing the November Program and Notice of the Meeting

DATE: Wednesday, November 14, 2007
TIME: 7:00 p.m., Socializing with Neighbors; 7:30 p.m., Program
LOCATION: The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street

PROGRAM AGENDA:

- (1) **POLICE REPORT: LT. JAMIE BARTLETT**
- (2) **HUNTING TERRACE DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATION BY IDI**
- (3) **OTCA'S WATERFRONT STANDARDS**

HUNTING TERRACE DEVELOPMENT BY IDI

As you are well aware, Mr. Cecchi, the owner of IDI, intends to redevelop the Hunting Terrace site. The following three letters from the Old Town Civic Association Board of Directors, the Porta Veechio Condo Association and the National Park Service all take exception to IDI's development plans. IDI's plan will be presented to the membership thereby giving you the opportunity to comment and ask questions.

OLD TOWN CIVIC ASSOCIATION LETTER

Dear Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Pepper and Members of Council:

The Old Town Civic Association wishes to express its position regarding the redevelopment of the Hunting Towers/Hunting Terrace complex.

We believe that new development in this critically important area should be guided, at the minimum, by the following principles.

- (1) The integrity of the Old and Historic Alexandria District should be preserved.

Any proposed new structures should be fully consistent with the mass, scale, siting and architectural standards that govern the District, and the process for review and approval of such proposals should be strictly adhered to. New construction should complement the historic character of the neighborhood; alteration or demolition of existing structures should be authorized only in accordance with the governing historical preservation standards. Any suggestion that this area "is not really part of Old Town" is disingenuous. It is part of the Old and Historic Alexandria District, and has been for most of the duration of that District, except for a brief period when it was apparently removed from the District (and later restored) in order to permit an otherwise nonconforming development nearby.

- (2) The applicable height and density standards of the Zoning Ordinance should be rigorously applied

Application of those standards is essential to preserving the modestly-scaled residential and commercial character of the neighborhood, consistent with the historic district. The fifty-foot height limitation and the density standards are especially important to the character of Old Town and of Washington Street.

- (3) The Washington Street Standards section of the Code should be strictly adhered to.

Because of the strategic importance of this site, the application of the Washington Street Standards is essential. If the Standards were not followed here, their application anywhere else on Washington Street would be in doubt, and the City's commitment to honoring its nearly eighty-year-old agreement with the United States through the National Park Service would be in question.

- (4) The special character of this southern gateway to Alexandria should be honored and preserved.

Any new development should be consistent with the unique location of this site, fully recognizing its prominent visibility as visitors and residents enter the city from Maryland, from the George Washington Memorial Parkway to the south, from the beltway to the west, and from the "high ground" of the Freedmen's Cemetery and Washington Street to the north. The mass and scale should be appropriate to that role, and the highest architectural standards should be required.

- (5) The value that Alexandria places on open space and the natural environment should be fully honored here.

Standards regarding setbacks, open space, and preservation of the natural environment are especially important at this site, given its proximity to the George Washington Memorial Parkway and Hunting Creek and to their adjacent parklands, woodlands and wetlands.

The Hunting Creek Stakeholders Group organized by the City has met frequently over the past year to receive presentations and reports on proposed redevelopment projects for this area. Old Town Civic Association has participated actively in the work of that body and followed its deliberations with great interest, because we believe that the decisions that are made about new development here will be extraordinarily important to the character of Old Town, and thus to the city as a whole.

As the Board of Architectural Review, the Planning Commission and the City Council now consider specific applications for new development in the Hunting Creek area, we believe that application of these principles is essential to maintaining the unique character of this important gateway to one of the oldest historic districts in the country.

OLD TOWN CIVIC ASSOCIATION, INC.
Townsend A. "Van" Van Fleet, President



Porto Vecchio

CONDOMINIUM UNIT OWNERS ASSOCIATION

4 September 2007

Dear Mayor Eulle, Vice- Mayor Pepper, and Members of City Council,

This letter is in reference to the IDI application to develop Hunting Creek Plaza.

Thanks to Porto Vecchio being represented on the Hunting Creek Stakeholder's panel, we have been able to gain familiarity with the IDI concept for development of Hunting Plaza which has been most helpful. As we have kept our residents informed, we have noted a growing concern about the massive size of the two high-rise buildings. This concern was brought into sharp focus by the artist renderings presented by City Planning staff at the BAR meeting on May 16. Noting the strength of the reaction, we have concluded that, together with other civic associations, we should formally register that concern.

We do not accept the characterization, by Mr. Carlos Cecchi, speaking for the applicant in the July Stakeholder meeting, of the area south of the Beltway as "an island, not part of Old Town". Many of us work in Old Town or belong to Old Town organizations. We walk or cycle on its fascinating streets and waterfront and we support Old Town charities, eat in Old Town restaurants and buy in Old Town stores. The applicant's characterization is a clear admission that the new development would tend to increase our separation from the rest of Old Town while we want to reduce it. The applicant's statement that the urban deck is the gateway to Old Town is at variance with commitments made for a "Southern Gateway" starting at Hunting Creek Bridge. The urban deck has always been viewed as a means of strengthening our links with the rest of Old Town, not the gateway that shuts us out.

Specifically at issue is the proposed height variance proposed for Hunting Terrace. Summarizing our concerns

- These buildings are out of keeping with the neighborhood and have a negative impact on the appearance of the Southern Gateway that impacts on all those traveling north on the GW Parkway
- The tall towers would significantly impact on the outlook for many of our residents.
- Approval of this concept can be expected to set a precedent which other developers might elect to follow resulting in the complete loss of character for South Washington Street. This would be a serious and permanent detriment, impacting on all residents and visitors in our City.

We are aware that individual residents of Porto Vecchio are already expressing their opposition. We note, also, that Old Town Civic Association has already transmitted a letter opposing the tall towers. That letter sets out a rationale for opposing the current concept that we fully endorse and have not repeated here. The Porto Vecchio Condominium Board stands with these residents and the Old Town Civic Association, and formally states that we are opposed to any concept that does not comply with the standard height and density restrictions. In weighing the level of opposition to the 15 -story concept, we respectfully request due account be given to the fact that Porto Vecchio is the closest neighbor to Hunting Tower/Hunting Terrace.

1250 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314 • (703) 684-3800

By copy of this letter, we are advising Mr. Cecchi of this position. As the developer of Porto Vecchio, Mr. Cecchi has our respect and we would prefer not to be in opposition to him. It is our hope that IDI will be able to evolve a concept that does not require a waiver of height and density restrictions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Robert H. Latiff
President, Board of Directors
Porto Vecchio

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE LETTER

George Washington Memorial Parkway
National Park Service

September 6, 2007 (via e-mail)

Mr. Eric Wagner, Chairman
Alexandria Planning Commission

and

Mr. Thomas Hulfish, III, Chairman
Old and Historic District Board of Architectural Review

Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Mr. Wagner and Mr. Hulfish:

This is in reference to the scheduled joint work session between the Alexandria Planning Commission and the Old and Historic District Board of Architectural Review to be held today September 6, 2007 at 6:00 PM prior to the scheduled Alexandria Planning Commission meeting.

We understand the IDI proposal for the Hunting Terrace site shall be a

topic of discussion. In the context of that portion of your work session, we wish the following deficiencies of the IDI proposal be considered.

The IDI proposal indicates buildings along Washington Street to be measured from a regraded elevation, as determined by cross section, to be above the curb line of Washington Street. Since the current and historic elevation of buildings is, and was, well below the current and original elevations of Washington Street, this new building footprint elevation would be an unacceptable alteration to the historic landscape of the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

The Washington Street portion of the parkway, south of the cemeteries, consists of a ridge or causeway south of the escarpment at the cemeteries. The lands adjoining Washington Street fall away with a resultant landscape that suggests the broad and sweeping setting of Hunting Cove. With the new I-495 construction, including the urban deck, the sense of the terrain south of the beltway becomes even more important to preserve.

Much of the height of these proposed buildings is to accommodate a massive parking structure that would mitigate the impacts upon the Parkway. The radical change in the landscape setting of the area, in the vicinity of Hunting Cove, should not be allowed.

The use of the parkway by non-commercial vehicles depends upon commercial vehicles being allowed to turn around north of the Hunting Creek Bridge. The turn-around in front of Hunting Terrace was in existence at or before 1950 and functioned as a way for the drivers of commercial vehicles and large trucks to turn around and not cross over the bridge. The proposed plan is not clear as to how buses, trucks, and commercial vehicles will turn around north of Hunting Creek. This problem should be addressed by any design.

The proposal suggests landscaping on National Park lands as part of what appears to be mitigation for some of the impacts of the adjacent development. The National Park Service will not participate in such a thinly-veiled commercial use of National Park land and, therefore, the reviewing bodies should direct this be removed from any drawing or proffer since it clearly could not be considered as mitigating the adverse impacts of the proposal.

The bulks and heights of both the buildings abutting the Washington Street Corridor and the building to the west are substantial and inappropriate. The 50-foot building placed upon what amounts to be a fabricated ground plane should not be approved. Any building constructed on the site should be consistent in both height and in setting with the existing buildings, such as Gunston Hall Apartments. The 15-story buildings proposed in the western portion of the tract are entirely inappropriate due to the overwhelming presence and dominance of the whole Hunting Creek area, as well as the singularly oversized visual presence they would present to users of the parklands to the south.

As indicated in our correspondence relating to the Hunting Creek Area Plan, we see no justifiable reason for any building exceeding the height above sea level of the existing Hunting Towers. We have seen little in the way of an analysis of building within the aforementioned Hunting Towers height. We are concerned the applicant is proposing a development well beyond a reasonable and proper solution for this important area to both the City of Alexandria and to the National Memorial to our first President.

The applicant has articulated a rationale for the development of a new roadway labeled Hunting Creek Way as a continuation of a historic road pattern for the City of Alexandria. By doing this, the applicant asserts the proposed new road demarks the limits of the Washington Street Guidelines and associated laws. We suggest the applicant has created this street pattern for his own benefit and cannot show any historical evidence this road ever physically existed or was recorded in the corporate limits of the City of Alexandria. The evidence of a persistent roadway presence that would be an extension of South Alfred Street would be the establishment of the block facing Washington Street. Thus, the design and planning concerns for Washington Street should cover the entire tract east and north of the Alfred Street corridor.

Based upon the above discussion, we suggest the proposal at hand is significantly flawed and should be rejected. Thank you for the opportunity to comment at this time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mr. David Murphy at 202-619-7405, or Mr. Sean McCabe at 703-289-2515. We look forward to a continuing dialogue on this and future plans for the planning district, which includes Hunting Terrace and Hunting Towers.

Sincerely,

David Vela
Superintendent

cc:

Mayor William Euille
Members of the City Council
Members of the Planning Commission
Members of the Old and Historic District Board of Architectural Review

MEMBER SUGGESTIONS ON FUTURE MEETING AGENDAS

OTCA monthly meetings are designed to highlight current issues facing Alexandria. The intent is to focus OTCA member's attention on these issues for informational purposes, to stimulate discussion and determine what course of action OTCA might pursue. The Board of Directors welcomes member suggestions and proposals regarding issues, programs and speakers that might be considered for future OTCA monthly membership meetings.

Please submit your suggestions via regular mail to:

Jon Aaronsohn
821 Rivergate Pl.
Alexandria, Va. 22314
Or e-mail to: jaaronsohn@oldtowncivic.org

ACVA ONLINE RESIDENTS SURVEY

Alexandria's Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA) invites residents to visit www.myalexandriava.com through November 25th to take a brief online survey about their perception of Alexandria as a travel destination. This information will provide helpful feedback and become part of ACVA's ongoing research and planning for future marketing programs.

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

OTCA's Waterfront Committee continued to work on a set of waterfront standards that will be presented to the entire membership at our November meeting. Hopefully, these will eventually assist in guiding the final design of the waterfront by the city. The City will not officially start their planning for the waterfront until early next year...OTCA Board asked the Mayor and City Manager to tell us the current policy relative the passive playing fields in Windmill Hill Park? No answer after three weeks?...Several Board Members attended meetings regarding the redevelopment of the Braddock Metro Station area. The transportation part of this plan is especially important to the citizens of Old Town...

Townsend A. "Van" Van Fleet
President

NEXT OTCA MEMBERSHIP MEETING IS ON THE 9th OF JANUARY 2008