

The Old Town Crier

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

November Program and Notice of the Meeting

DATE: Wednesday, November 12, 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) PUBLIC SAFETY FORUM
 1. *Membership Discussion*
 2. *Neighborhood Civic Association Reporting*
 3. *Police Department*

1. OTCA Public Safety Forum

Are you concerned about the increase in crimes against people and property in Old Town? Have you nearly been hit by a bicyclist who fails to stop at a **Stop** sign? What about the cars who roll or accelerate through the **Stop** signs? Have you wondered what the police department is doing or can do about these things? Have you thought about how you can help make Old Town a safer place in which to live, walk, and drive?

IF SO, the November 12 Meeting of OTCA is one you need to attend. It will be devoted to your questions and concerns about crime in Old Town, about fast bicycles that fail to heed pedestrians or **Stop** signs. Chief David Baker of the Alexandria Police Department will be at the meeting to hear you, and to respond to your questions. We also welcome any suggestions you may have to assist the citizens and police in making our town safer for us, our children, our grandchildren, and our guests.

We have decided to alter our usual format to assure that your concerns and questions are heard. The first part of the program will be the chance for you to ask questions, make suggestions, and inquire about recent events and on-going problems. We will then ask representatives from other Alexandria civic associations for any ideas they have and concerns they have experienced; next we are asking the Police Chief to respond to the questions you have raised and the ways the police have worked in the other parts of town, as well as what the police are doing in Old Town to alleviate any problems. We also are asking the Police Chief to advise us on what the citizens can do to make things better and hold crime to a minimum in Alexandria.

Be sure to attend to make your voice heard.

Tim Elliot, Co- Chair Safety Committee

2. ANNOUNCEMENTS

CITY COUNCIL REJECTS HEIGHT CHANGE FOR THE GW PARKWAY

On a motion made by Councilman Paul Smedberg and seconded by Councilman Ludwig Gaines, the City Council voted unanimously to deny the developer's request to change the zoning height from 50 to 150 feet. As this was a requirement for the four 150 foot tall buildings at the Southern entrance to Alexandria on Washington Street, the project will not be built.

Thanks to everyone who sent in his or her concerns to the City Council; it really helped buttress the case for preserving the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Aside from the historic considerations, the motion stated that the project lacked enough specificity regarding the affordable housing provision to warrant the consideration of such a drastic change.

The developer will instead proceed with a more limited development that is confined within existing zoning of 50 feet and more appropriately designed (see drawing). To this end, they hired Architect Jonathan Rust who helped create the Washington



View of new proposal when entering City from South Washington Street

Street Standards, and is well regarded within the historic community for his sensitivity to the historic fabric of Washington Street. The renderings of the new proposal can be seen on the City web site at the following link.

<http://dockets.alexandriava.gov/icons/pz/bar/ohad/cy08/110508/di18.pdf>

With respect to Hunting Towers, the Old Town Civic Association Board wishes to express its strong support for the proposal submitted by Lewis Simon “*A Possible Solution*” in the Alexandria Gazette and in the Alexandria Times Thursday, October 02, 2008 concerning the disposition of the Hunting Towers, to wit:

“The Virginia Housing and Development Agency (VHDA) in coordination with (or independently) the Federal Housing and Urban Development Agency (HUD) must take ownership of the Hunting Towers property. Virginia state law allows state entities the ability to transfer possession of property from one entity to another, or to other municipalities. VDOT should transfer ownership to the VHDA, HUD, or the City of Alexandria Department of Housing. This transfer of ownership will allow each group of aforementioned Stakeholders the capability to satisfy their goals.”

Transferring the Hunting Towers to a non-profit entity that will keep the Towers as rentals is not only a possible solution, but also the only one that will make sure that Alexandria will retain the affordable units for the income group currently residing in the Towers. Remember, there is a huge difference between making "overtures" to the current residents, notably Alexandria households that make about 50 percent of median income, versus "making sure" that the same income group continues to live in affordable units.

Therefore, we urge that the community take a serious look at the suggestion provided by Mr. Simon that the Federal Highway administration has already stated is quite doable:

“When the Hunting Towers property is no longer needed for the project, VDOT is required to sell it at fair market value unless VDOT requests and we approve, an exception to that requirement for social, environmental, or economic mitigation purposes. According to Federal regulations, the exception would have to be in the overall best public interest.”

Roberto Fonseca-Martinez Division Administrator FHA

RESTAURANT SUP PROCESS IN OLD TOWN STAYS INTACT

The City Council voted to keep the Old Town SUP process intact as recommended by the Planning Commission and City Staff.

MEMBERSHIP SPEAKS ON MOTORCOACHES

At the last Old Town Civic Association (OTCA) meeting, the membership was asked to give their views on motor coaches in Old Town. OTCA gathered a diverse panel that briefly laid out their perspectives, and then were questioned by the membership. OTCA wanted this panel to first lay out the diverse interests that relate to motorcoaches. The interests and representatives were:

<u>Enforcement:</u>	David Baker, <i>Police chief, Alexandria Police Department</i>
<u>Tourism:</u>	Stephanie Brown, <i>President & CEO, Alexandria Convention & Visitors Association</i>
<u>Citizen Issues:</u>	Bert Ely, <i>Chair of the OTCA Traffic Committee.</i>
<u>Historic Aspects:</u>	J. Lance Mallamo, <i>Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria.</i>
<u>Industry:</u>	Victor Parra, <i>President & Chief Executive Officer, United Motorcoach Association</i>

All the presentations were to the point, and the audience proceeded in a calm rational manner to clarify differences in their and the presenters viewpoints.

This was followed by an extremely productive session in which the members were asked to comment on their concerns and possible solutions. The concerns were presented in a respectful manner that underscored the understanding of other stakeholder groups concerns, yet the members conveyed in 1 hour what the task forces took years to accomplish. Many thanks are due Linda Couture, member of the OTCA Board, for the very professional manner she went about facilitating the session.

The concerns voiced by the membership can be divided into distinct categories that lend themselves to specific solution sets offered by the membership.

The concerns:

“Idling and crawling on residential streets, General idling, too many buses, routes, pollution, pedestrian safety, noise and vibration from the buses, discharging in non designated areas, Buses too big or too tall, rude drivers, trash being dumped and signage.”

Solutions proposed by membership:

1. Educational efforts aimed at teaching bus drivers, businesses, and the business association about the rules and regulations in the City of Alexandria. This would help familiarize visiting motorcoaches with the laws, and give them a better

understanding of the problems and constraints facing Old Town. The membership also pointed out the need to educate residents about the issues.

2. Enforcement of existing laws was thought to be lacking. Therefore, if the City put more effort to ensure that it is done in a more comprehensive manner, it would piggyback nicely on the proposed educational program above.
3. Designated routes and parking areas were brought up as a way to protect sensitive areas of Old Town, but the membership emphasized the need for criteria based choices and expressed concern about concentrating the problems in designated areas. A suggestion was also put forth to look into the viability of designating no drive streets instead.

The next set of solutions encompassed new and creative transportation solutions for the modal split.

4. Old Town is a very walkable city and the historic ambiance is best enjoyed as a pedestrian, not in a motorcoach! The City ought to take advantage by encouraging more "historic walking" in particular with the young through both education and promotion of Old Town as an historic walking City.
5. Limit the bus sizes to fewer than 20 feet, as the current busses are too large and cumbersome for the infrastructure of Old Town.
6. Require permits to drive in Old Town, and limit the number of busses.
7. Use trolleys in efforts to come up with creative transportation solutions modal split requiring that visitors change from bus to trolley in order to drive around Old Town. The members were enthusiastic about trolleys as the "neat" way to go-- meaning people like them because they think trolley rides are "fun."

OTCA's ROLE IN THE CITY'S WATERFRONT PLANNING PROCESS

By: Linda Couture, Chair, OTCA Waterfront Planning Committee

The city has commenced its long-awaited waterfront planning process and quite frankly, OTCA board members are nonplussed and concerned. The process the city has chosen is raising serious questions. One is why the city's Waterfront Committee not the project manager, why a consultant has been hired simply to gather information and ascertain stakeholders, and why OTCA's publicly vetted planning process was not even disclosed to the consultant.

OTCA has worked diligently over the past year and a half to create a planning process that was open and fair and publicly available to all residents of Alexandria. All of this information is available on our website including the

questionnaire sent to over 500 members, the responses in metric terms and finally the member-approved Waterfront Standards adopted and endorsed by other civic associations, including Founders Park Community Association, Rivergate, NOTICe and Harborside. Additionally, OTCA met with the Chamber of Commerce who also developed a waterfront vision (as did a historic group) and discussed where our two organizations are in concert.

This piece of our city is so valuable in terms of history, quality of life, tourism and its unique geographic location across from our nation's capital and up river from Mt. Vernon. It is far too valuable to be planned by a few when it will affect so many. The city needs to adopt the most open and inclusive process and citywide representatives need to be at the table as they were for Windmill Hill Park—for many of the same reasons given above.

The process needs to be fixed immediately by eliminating this fact-finding expensive consulting firm, endowing the city's Waterfront Committee as the lead agency and getting all parties to the table immediately, including OTCA, the Chamber, ACVA, AEDP, Parks and Recreation, the Office of Historic Alexandria, historians, landscape architects, etc. We have lots of talent in this city—and we can create a waterfront vision that will benefit all and leave behind a legacy for many generations to come.

Editors note;

The very decision by a government body to declare or select a geographical area as a special economic zone can be controversial. In some cases, the source of conflict is the competition for the expected benefits, but in many the spatial distribution of harm is at stake.

The group most likely to be harmed in the process is the nearest neighbors and the negative effects may never make it to the public agenda at all. Ideological premises may prevent their recognition, because appropriate conceptual categories to recognize them are lacking or because the dominant political coalitions have an interest in framing the issue in a different way.



Next meeting will be on January 14

Poul Hertel, OTCA Board of Directors President

OLD TOWN CIVIC ASSOCIATION, INC.
2008/2009 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND RENEWAL FORM

To Join or Renew: Please complete the information below. For membership, the dues period begins each September 1 and ends each August 31. Dues paid after July 1 are applied to the dues for the next period.

Contact Information:

Name: _____
(For a Household Membership, please list up to two persons)

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip+4: _____

Telephone: _____ Email address: _____

In an effort to keep dues low, we are trying to produce as few paper copies of our monthly newsletter as possible. Can we send you our monthly newsletter by email? [] Yes [] No

Dues:

Single (\$12.00)	\$ _____
Household (\$20.00)	\$ _____
Additional Contribution	\$ _____
Total Dues Enclosed	\$ _____

Remittance:

Please make checks payable to "OTCA." Mail the Completed Form and your check to:

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

Suggestions:

Please provide us any programming ideas you would like to have at a Monthly Membership Meeting.

About Old Town Civic Association, Inc.:

Originally founded in 1951 as The Old Town Civic Association, Old Town Civic Association, Inc. is the oldest preservation organization in the City of Alexandria. Old Town Civic Association, Inc. has as its purpose "to further the common good and general welfare of the people of the community of Old Town in the City of Alexandria, Virginia, particularly through the preservation of the historical and residential character, architecture, and traditions of that community."