

# *The Old Town Crier*

**The Monthly Newsletter of the Old Town Civic Association, Inc.  
January Program and Notice of the Meeting**

**DATE:** Wednesday, February 11, 2009  
**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**
- 3) **WATERFRONT BRIEFING**

1. *Presentation by Faroll Hamer, Director Department of Planning and Zoning*
2. *Question and answer session*
3. *Comments from invited stakeholders*
4. *Membership Discussion*

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## **Mark Your Calendar: Can't Miss Waterfront Briefing at February 11 Membership Meeting**

The City's waterfront planning process is now officially under way, so it's especially important that all of us understand the details and have an opportunity to ask questions and seek more information.

To this end, Faroll Hamer, Alexandria's director of planning, will brief meeting attendees at OTCA's February 11 membership meeting on the process and the timeline. In addition to Ms. Hammer, OTCA is inviting citywide organizations to participate since the waterfront is special to all Alexandrians. Invited participants will include the Historic Alexandria Foundation, Chamber of Commerce, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Center (ACVA), the Art League, Founders Park Community Association, NOTICe, Northeast Civic Association,

the Federation of Civic Associations, Seminary Hills Association, Harborside, Fords Landing. These organizations and others will be given a few minutes to share some of their positions, if desired.

In preparation for this critical meeting, please visit OTCA's website and reread our waterfront planning documents: questionnaire, questionnaire results, and our waterfront standards that have been vetted throughout the community. These documents represent the basis for our position and have been used to urge the city to prepare a waterfront planning process that is open and inclusive. The city has to some extent decided to proceed in this manner, eliminating the normal handpicked task force methodology.

The city has already briefed its Waterfront Committee and has talked about the Planning Commission having a role in the process. OTCA urged the city to name a member of the Waterfront Committee as project manager, but that was not approved, so it will be interesting to determine whether the Planning Commission's role will be major and in what manner.

In conclusion, as that old famous saw begins...Now Is The Time For All Good ... to come to this meeting to listen, learn and ask questions. See you on Wednesday, February 11, at seven o'clock at the Lyceum on South Washington Street.

Linda Couture  
*Chair, OTCA Waterfront Committee*

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## **Emergency Signage**

While at the meeting, Faroll Hamer wishes to talk about the advertisement boards that were placed in the 100 and 200 block of King Street in order to advertise businesses on the side streets. They were part of an emergency signage program request by the City Council to which the OTCA Board responded to in November.

“Dear Mayor and Members of the City Council

Although we are sympathetic to the impact of economic fluctuations, OTCA is concerned about the lack of public vetting of this change, especially since the temporary often has a tendency to become permanent. The proposed change significantly alters signage in the Historic District, both contextually and process wise. For this reason, and in the spirit of willingness to help during the Christmas season, OTCA accepts the emergency nature of this request, but only if it contains a termination date without possibilities for extension. We request a primo January time frame.

We are, after all, an historic district that ought not to be subjected to the potential permanent changes without deliberate input from the relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, a way finding committee was specifically formed by the City Council to address these issues in a more holistic fashion, and if these changes are worthy of long-term consideration, they must come through that venue.”

The Way Finding Committee has expressed concern about excessive signage creating clutter on King Street. They even suggest that more signage could actually be counterproductive, if not an actual detraction from the historic ambiance that brings the tourist in the first place. This is quite consistent with the Statement of Constraints adopted by the OTCA Board. Notably that “*there is a finite amount of sidewalk space on which pedestrians can walk, window-shop, and dine*”.

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## **Comments to the Motorcoach Draft Report**

Since the Draft Motorcoach report came out too late for us to include our commentary of the report in the last Issue of the Crier, we include it here.

***The report needs to be much clearer and more transparent in its recommendations.***

This is more than likely due to the Committee itself not being clear on what has been proposed. For this reason, a strong executive summary is needed. Although the report covers many of the aspects discussed, it does not in a clear and precise way tie all the loose ends together. We tried, and found it extraordinarily difficult to understand the report and fear that the lack of clarity is really covering up a lack of agreement.

Suggestion : What OTCA would like to see is a statement that the City is embarking on a regulatory regime that ultimately will give the City the authority to control buses in Old Town. Moreover, that this is a firm goal. Furthermore, the report also needs to refine and explain the methodological approach that it is recommending the City use to get the regulatory regime, and describe the regime itself.

Assuming that the City does not have the regulatory authority (an assumption in dispute), the question is to how to best get it. The proposal in the report is to solicit the voluntary cooperation of the Motorcoach Industry. However, in doing so, there are some strings.

1. There will be dispensation for buses dropping people off in Old Town. How do you best do this? No consensus was reached on this point..
  - The Motorcoach industry suggests that there be a system that would determine the quickest way for the coaches to get to their destination.
  - The City suggests that limiting the number of routes makes it easier to control the tour buses.
  - OTCA strongly recommends that very specific criterion be implemented to rank all streets. That way, voluntary permitting would assure a limit on the number of buses on any one street in any one time. In essence, distribute the busses as much as possible.
  
2. After a 3-year study period, the City will seek legislative approval from Richmond to regulate the tour buses. However, nothing is spelled out in the Report as to what that regulation should be. We are left to presume what the regulation would be, meaning whatever the observer thinks will happen likely will not. Specifically, the following items were not brought up, which are at the core of the OTCA's long-term concern.
  - Bus sizes should be limited to fewer than 20 feet (or reasonable alternative), as the current busses are too large and cumbersome for the infrastructure of Old Town.

- Permits should be required to drive in Old Town, and the number of busses should be limited.
- Old Town is a very walkable area in the city, and the historic ambiance is best enjoyed as a pedestrian, not in a motorcoach! The City should take advantage of that ambiance by encouraging more “historic walking” in particular with the young through both education and promotion of Old Town as an historic walking City.

***The Report suggests that the busses would be routed to one of 6 defined streets.***

This merely a designated route scheme in disguise. Although a discussion of criteria is provided, there is absolutely no discussion about tying the choices to these very criteria.

***The Report strongly discourages limiting the size of buses, which is one of the central long-term tenets of the OTCA membership.***

- The dismissal in the Task Force Report of the desirability of using smaller busses does directly contradicts a core OTCA membership position. First, towns like Norfolk have implemented the widespread use of small-scale electric buses in their Downtown area. They are quiet and nonpolluting as well. Hence, the argument that big buses are a prerequisite for “green” is a bit silly.
- Secondly, OTCA has adopted a “statement of Constraints” appended to this statement that very eloquently describes the encumbrances of the small scale encountered in Old Town. To a tee, every one talks about the size of buses, because they loom large as they move slowly down the small Old Town streets.

***No mention in the report of the OTCA desire to control of size and number of busses.***

- There is no discussion about how to get there and no recommendation responsive to the needs of Old Town residents. Why should OTCA support this draft proposal if it is nothing more than a designated route scheme in disguise?
- No mention is made in the report about the natural limits of Old Town’s capacity to accommodate tourist as set forth in OTCA Statement of Constraints. Neither is Charlestown limits its buses to 25 feet in areas comparable to old Town mentioned.

## **Statement of Constraints: With regard to the operation of motor-coaches in Old Town Alexandria**

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. Additionally, 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. These constraints include:

- 1 – Old Town occupies a finite physical land area lying within the Old and Historic District.
- 2 – Within the Old Town area, there are a finite number of street lane miles over which motor-coaches and other vehicles can travel, there are a finite number of motor-coach and other parking places, and there is a finite amount of sidewalk space on which pedestrians can walk, window-shop, and dine.
- 3 – As a practical matter, it is impossible to increase the number street lane-miles, on-street parking places, and sidewalk square footage within Old Town.
- 4 – Due to the physical constraints cited in the preceding sentence, Old Town 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.
- 5 – 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.
- 6 – Large motor-coaches have difficulty traveling on Old Town streets, they add to and impede traffic, and they often experience difficulty in turning onto narrow streets, especially when automobiles are parked on the street close to a corner.
- 7 – Restricting parking near street intersections to make it easier for large motor-coaches to turn a corner reduces the number of parking spaces in Old Town, further trimming an already tight supply of on-street parking places in Old Town.
- 8 – There are few, if any, places in Old Town where additional off-street parking can be constructed.
- 9 – There are few places in or near Old Town which are suitable for building parking facilities for motor-coaches waiting to pick up tourists they previously dropped off in Old Town.

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**Next Meeting will be on March 11 and will discuss preserving historic preservation**

*Poul Hertel, OTCA Board of Directors President*

## Help Boost OTCA's Membership Count

Membership numbers are important in the civic-association world, for they translate into political influence -- the higher a civic association's membership, the greater the impact the association will have on important local issues. For OTCA, those issues include the preservation of Old Town's historic character, waterfront development, motor-coach regulation, and crime and public safety, to name just a few issues. OTCA membership will be especially important this spring as Alexandrians get ready to elect a Mayor and City Council on May 5.

If you are an OTCA member, encourage your neighbors to join. If you are not a member, please join as soon as possible. A membership application is included below; it also can be found online at: [http://www.oldtowncivic.org/Pages/join\\_us.pdf](http://www.oldtowncivic.org/Pages/join_us.pdf). If you have any questions about OTCA membership or your membership status, please contact OTCA's Treasurer, Bert Ely, by calling him at 703-836-4101 or emailing him at: bert@ely-co.com.

Help boost OTCA's influence -- join OTCA today and encourage your friends and neighbors to join, too.

### 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

<b>Dues:</b> 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**