



# *The Old Town Crier*

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

**DATE:** Wednesday, March 10, 2010  
**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**
- 2) REPORT FROM THE ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMITTEE**
  - 1. Townsend Van Fleet*
- 3) HISTORIC TIME PERIODS AND BUILDINGS ON THE WATERFRONT**
  - 1. Presentation by Lance Mallamo*
- 4) THE ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT COMMITTEE PLAN FOR A CITY MARINA**
  - 1. Presentation by Chairman Nathan Macek*
  - 2. Stakeholder presentation of views*

---

The Office of Historic Alexandria and the Archeology Department of the City of Alexandria have put together a fantastic presentation on the history of the Waterfront that describes not only the evolution and important periods, but also details the historic buildings that can be found there today. We residents sometimes take for granted the centuries of history that surround us in Old Town and more specifically along our Waterfront. From its beginnings as a busy Colonial port until today, our waterfront neighborhood has been at the center of much that is still taught in American history textbooks

Amazingly, a number of historic buildings remain standing on the Waterfront. Some of these buildings have been camouflaged over the years with modern

veneers, but they still stand as if ready to shout out the significance of the waterfront.

Now, when those who don't think it's "sufficiently vibrant" are eyeing the waterfront," is a good time to remember the history and the buildings in which the history took place. So, come see the presentation by Lance Mallamo, the head of Alexandria's Office of Historic Alexandria, as he gives a short lecture slide show of the history of the Waterfront.

**T**he Alexandria Waterfront Committee has developed a draft proposal for the City to consider what to do with the City Marina - should it expand, intensify or be left alone? The Marina is an integral part of the Waterfront and warrants your attention. Nathan Macek, the Chair of the Committee will give a presentation on their proposal to be followed by a panel discussion that will give various stakeholders an opportunity to present their concerns.

The Alexandria Waterfront Committee is an advisory body to the City Council and to the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities. The function of the Committee is to consider issues relating to the Waterfront and present recommendations to the City Council, the City Manager and appropriate departments.

---

*What did Tarzan say when he saw the elephants coming over the hill?  
"See all those elephants coming over the hill!"*

*What did Tarzan say when he saw the elephants coming over the hill  
wearing sunglasses? Nothing, he didn't recognize them.*

This common children's joke, is quite revealing about conditions in Alexandria vis-à-vis changes that City forces seem intent on bringing to Old Town. The City is seeking wholesale changes on numerous fronts masquerading as a need for vibrancy. This will likely have significant consequences that are disregarded in the process. Our efforts to inject scientific approaches in dealing with change are not resonating, or they are being ignored because they inconveniently point out serious flaws and inconsistencies in the City's narrative for change.

Unfortunately, far too many people have bought into not seeing the elephants because the elephants are wearing vibrant sunglasses.

It would be far too easy for me to let the elephants symbolize businesses pressures, but it is more realistic to let the elephants represent fear of the impact from the economic downturn on the City revenues. This fear is allowing the notion of business is business, without regard to the long-term negative consequences take hold in the thinking of the City staff and leadership. This is a shame, because this is a really nice place to live.

We have here an iconic small town that people from all over the world come to see and enjoy. They do so because it is unique in having kept not only the original buildings intact, but also the original feel and ambiance of the history that reside on every block of Old Town. In addition, one can go as far as to say that the cultural heritage dating back to the founding fathers has been kept alive here, and there just aren't many places like that around any more.

Since we last meet, two significant proposals have come forward that will significantly effect Old Town, neither of which is understandable, despite efforts to bring out the sunglasses.

## **TORPEDO FACTORY**

The first issue relates to proposed changes for the Torpedo Factory, which the OTCA membership specifically voted to keep intact as a cultural center in Alexandria. Unfortunately, as you will recall from the debate that raged last summer, members of the City Council appointed a Long-Term Sustainability Implementation Committee<sup>1</sup>, along with a City-hired Retail Consultant suggested that the Torpedo Factory could be a wonderful anchor for retail. Although apologies were abound after these statements, the City decided to hire a consultant to prepare a report on “necessary changes” instead.

---

<sup>1</sup> Despite the nomenclature, the Long Term Sustainability Committee (LTS) was appointed by the City Council with the task of ensuring the continued unsustainable spending predicated on the speculative bubble that went bust. The LTS Implementation Committee meets “openly” but never announces when or where. The committee has two council members Smedberg and Donley the latter replacing Krupicka after the last election.

## Old Town Civic Association Statement

After generating a discussion about how much the Torpedo Factory is costing the City, and by inference, questioning its continued use, a report paid for by the Stimulus Package has come out that broadly supports its existence. However, in it may be the seeds that will undermine the very essence of the Torpedo Factory model. Specifically, the key proposal

*-- That the Torpedo Factory should be operated for profit as a retail center--*

This is antithetical to the purposes for which the center was established, as is the proposal to do away with the artist's cooperative as the governing structure.

The reason why the Torpedo Factory is viewed as a cultural icon that beckons tourists from all over the world to come see it is the live interaction between the visitor and the artist. However, the report waits until page 87 to present this.

*"Visitors learn by seeing the creation of art in progress"*<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, before getting there, the report devotes a considerable effort trying to degrade the effect of the Torpedo Factory on the City of Alexandria. Although questionable assumptions are made and inconsistent approaches used, the report ultimately has to conclude, albeit without explicitly spelling it out, that the Torpedo Factory is a phenomenal asset to the City.

*"One can therefore assume that slightly less than one-fourth of all of the total cultural tourism spending in the City estimated by this study was attributable to the Torpedo Factory Art Center"*<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the report continues to emphasize the money the City could receive if it rented out the space to retailers. By inference, that is the goal that the report is recommending the Torpedo Factory pursue. Furthermore, in order to make more sales, the report advocates some significant changes. Notably the relinquishing of the control from the artistic community to a City Council appointed body that would have more retail sales oriented directives. In effect, the dissolution of the very reason that it is a cultural icon by focusing more on sales and less on the creative and interactive phenomena.

Herein lies the problem, the inability of the proponents to see why cultural events are unique and why sales events are not and why for that reason, the changes being sought are unwise, if not outright dangerous, to the Torpedo Factory's standing and resultant tourist draw that has taken so many years to build.

---

<sup>2</sup> Page 87

<sup>3</sup> Page 9

## Statements Taken From the Torpedo Factory Report

1. “The City now has a significant policy decision to consider: should it continue to invest in the art center in its present form? Furthermore, how can Torpedo Factory be more self-sustaining and provide a greater benefit to the City and community?”<sup>4</sup>
2. “The prime building space the art center occupies represents an estimated “opportunity cost” of \$1.7 million each year for the City”.<sup>5</sup>
3. “However, today the community’s needs and expectations are changing with the harsh realities of a new economy With many essential public services and community programs competing for a shrinking budget, City policy makers must decide whether or not to continue subsidizing the Torpedo Factory to the same degree as in prior years. It seems apparent that there is a mounting expectation that the art center and its tenants should be self-sustaining and contribute more to the economy of the City”.<sup>6</sup>
4. “The overall economic picture of this report shows a business model that has declined and will continue to struggle if it remains the same”<sup>7</sup>.
5. “There is mounting evidence that the time is right to put in place a new structure that is more flexible to change”.<sup>8</sup>

However, they also find that

1. The Torpedo Factory provides more than \$16.2 million in direct revenues and receives some 400,000 visitors annually<sup>9</sup>.

### ***Findings and Recommendations***

“The rules regarding the sale of quality reproductions should be revisited and possibly removed.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***Archeology Museum***

“The City should undertake a study to locate a new space for this Museum and its offices”<sup>11</sup>

### ***Strategies & Recommendations***

“A fundamental change in governance to a mixed board with more community participation is recommended to manage the facility and implement long-term improvements. The City should appoint a new advisory board to report directly to the City.”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Page i

<sup>5</sup> Page i

<sup>6</sup> Page 1

<sup>7</sup> Page 2

<sup>8</sup> Page 2

<sup>9</sup> Page i

<sup>10</sup> Page 54

<sup>11</sup> Page 20

<sup>12</sup> Page 73

## FOOD CART PROGRAM

The second vibrancy plan can be found in the segment of the proposed strategic city plan that is devoted to promoting growth<sup>13</sup>, and it certainly has generated strong objections. The plan is for the City to place between five and eight “food carts” around and next to the water fountain on Market Square. The food carts will have parasols and the City will provide temporary seats and tables for people to sit. These will be the same as are found by the “HAT sculpture”.

### - CITY RATIONALE

When tourists come up from the end of King Street, they encounter a dead zone and go back without seeing the rest. By creating a “vibrant” area, they will be attracted to and proceed further up King Street. In addition, the carts will be “upscale” and serviced by select restaurants.

### - RESPONSE

While business proposals are not necessarily incongruent or incompatible with successful public spaces, they certainly can be. Specially, when viewed in the context of Market Square in the heart of the Historic District. I am not aware of anything of this scale and style being able to integrate into and accentuate the public space successfully rather than detract from it.

The details also work against the proposal. First, the so-called dead zone is actually located by the Monaco Hotel, so why are we looking at Market Square? The City manager has jurisdictional control over Market Square, which means he can put this program in place there without going through the usual process. That reminds me of the guy who came up to a person that was looking for his wallet and asked him where he lost it. “Over there.” he answered. “So why are you looking here?” “The light is better here,” he replied. Moreover, let us finally dispense with the nonsensical notion that the Market Square is boring.

Secondly, we had an opportunity to see pictures of the “upscale” carts. While polished steel might add to the expense, it certainly does not make it more compatible, specially, not when their multiplying numbers encircle the entire water fountain.

Thirdly if this is a pilot program, why is the City not looking at promoting it on the Waterfront where the Zoning Law already allows food carts.

*This proposal will be going to public hearing before the City Council on Saturday March 13 at 9:30 AM.*

---

<sup>13</sup> Goal group number 1 chaired by Kerry Donley and Paul Smedberg

## WATERFRONT

Thank you all for the amazing turnout, civility and earnestness demonstrated at our January meeting, where the membership unanimously adopted the Waterfront proposal presented by the Board. You asked how you could help in conveying our Waterfront position to the City Council. - OTCA board members have written the excellent sample letter containing the salient points in a well-crafted—and concise—synthesis of many pages and much discussion that have preceded it . Please read it and then send your own letters and e-mails to the Mayor and Council members. Hearing from many OTCA members on this topic is vital to our success, because Council will be more receptive to believing that our adopted plan has wide support. To reach the Mayor and Members of City Council, see the contact information below. An electronic copy is available at our web site under NEWS or directly at the following link.

[http://www.oldtowncivic.org/Pages/News/Crier/2009-2010/suggested\\_letter.doc](http://www.oldtowncivic.org/Pages/News/Crier/2009-2010/suggested_letter.doc)

Mayor Euille	<a href="mailto:william.euille@alexandriava.gov">william.euille@alexandriava.gov</a>	Alternatively, write to
Vice Mayor	<a href="mailto:kerry.donley@alexandriava.gov">kerry.donley@alexandriava.gov</a>	Councilmember_____
Councilmember	<a href="mailto:frank.fannon@alexandriava.gov">frank.fannon@alexandriava.gov</a>	301 King St., Room 2300
Councilmember	<a href="mailto:alicia.hughes@alexandriava.gov">alicia.hughes@alexandriava.gov</a>	Alexandria, VA 22314
Councilmember	<a href="mailto:council@krupicka.com">council@krupicka.com</a>	
Councilmember	<a href="mailto:del.pepper@alexandriava.gov">del.pepper@alexandriava.gov</a>	Tel: 703.838.4500
Councilmember	<a href="mailto:paulcsmedberg@aol.com">paulcsmedberg@aol.com</a>	Fax: 703.838.6433

---

*Poul Hertel*

**Next meeting will take place on April 14.  
City Staff will present the City Waterfront Plan.**

OTCA Web Site: <http://oldtowncivic.org>

### *MEMBERSHIP*

If you have not renewed or joined the Civic Association, please consider doing so by contacting Bert Ely at [bely@oldtowncivic.org](mailto:bely@oldtowncivic.org) or downloading an application from our membership page at

[http://www.oldtowncivic.org/Pages/membership\\_form-09-10.pdf](http://www.oldtowncivic.org/Pages/membership_form-09-10.pdf)

Membership is important, because it is a way of getting and being involved in 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. Moreover, the cost of mailing to non-members precludes us from doing so in the future