



The Old Town Crier

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

DATE: Wednesday, May 12, 2010
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) REPORT FROM NOMINATING COMMITTEE**
 - 1. Charles Trozzo*
 - 3) POLICE REPORT**
 - 4) REPORT FROM THE CITY WATERFRONT COMMITTEE**
 - 1. Townsend "Van" Fleet*
 - 5) THE CITY WATERFRONT PLAN**
 - 1. Faroll Hammer*
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The Waterfront sets the tone for the public realm in the heart of Old Town. Not only is most of our history tied to the banks of the Potomac, but it is also a defining character for Old Town and the City of Alexandria. Although OTCA has looked very hard at the Waterfront, I can honestly say that, as this Crier is going to print, we can only speculate what the City Staff is recommending to the community.

The Director of the City Planning Department, Ms. Faroll Hamer, will be at the meeting to give a presentation on the current vision that they are recommending that the City pursue. We cannot overemphasize the relevance of your presence at this meeting.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT; election process and schedule

The Nominating Committee is pleased to submit the following slate of nominees for election to terms beginning at the June 2010 Annual Meeting:

Officer Nominees

		<i>TERM</i>
President	John Gosling, 208 South Fayette Street	2010-2011
Vice President	Timothy Elliott, 422 South Fairfax Street	2010-2011
Treasurer	Ivy Whitlach, 700 Chetworth Place	2010-2011
Corresponding Secretary	Bert Ely, 200 South Pitt Street	2010-2011
Recording Secretary	Elizabeth Spar, 206 Wolfe Street	2010-2011

Director Nominees

At Large	David Olinger, 100 Prince Street	2010-2012
South of King Street, West	Vincent "Chip" Carlin, 1302 Prince Street	2010-2012
South of Franklin	Alan McCurry, 706 South Union Street	2010-2012

The following Directors are completing the first year of their two-year terms and thus will continue in office:

North of King Street, West	Christa Lyons, 818 Cameron Street	2009-2011
North of King Street, East	John Kester, 313 North St. Asaph Street	2009-2011
Central	Ignacio Pessoa, 618 South Pitt Street	2009-2011

As provided in the Bylaws, additional nominations of eligible members may be made by nomination from the floor at the May 12, 2010 Members Meeting, if supported by a written petition signed by five Members eligible to vote and accompanied by the written acceptance of each such additional nominee signifying his or her willingness to be a candidate, and received by the Corresponding Secretary (Linda Couture, 505 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314) in person or at her regular address prior to the May meeting. The election will take place at the June 9, 2010 Annual Members Meeting, among the nominees submitted by the Nominating Committee and any additional members nominated from the floor at the May meeting; no other nominations (including nominations from the floor at the Annual Meeting) are in order.

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Board and other members of the association for their advice and suggestions for its work, and to its nominees for their agreement to stand for service to OTCA and to our community.

2010 Nominating Committee

Charles Trozzo, 209 Duke Street	(Chairman; Central)
Bob Feldkamp, 1250 South Washington Street	(South)
Michael Hobbs, 419 Cameron Street	(Past President)
Charles Huettnner, 218 South Fayette Street	(West)
Susan Pettey, 220 North Royal Street	(North)

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Members of Old Town Civic Association, Inc., for the election of officers and directors and the transaction of such other business as may properly come before it, will be held on June 9, 2010 at the Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, beginning at 7:30 p.m. The Board of Directors has fixed May 28, 2010 as the record date for the meeting; all persons who are members of the association as of that date will be entitled to receive notice and to vote at the Annual Meeting.

The Old Town Civic Association thanks the nominating committee for their hard work in putting together a slate for the year 2010/2011.

DISCUSSION WITH PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Thank you for taking time to discuss the overwhelming interest in converting retail space into restaurant space that is potentially altering the balance between the residential, restaurants, retail and commercial in Old Town.

The 1992 Small Area Plan was very specific in curtailing the proliferation of the restaurants by not allowing any new ones. This was reasonably amended by allowing for new ones under the condition that the City takes into consideration, not only parking, drunkenness, trash but also diversity. Furthermore, the amended plan accentuates this further by requiring that the City Council separately adopt criteria for determining the extent to which each criterion is met. This was set in place to ensure that the vision of Old Town would prevail namely

POLICIES FOR, OLD TOWN

Old Town is unique in that it maintains a very fine residential area in close proximity to the commercial establishments on King and Washington Streets. While both the residential and the commercial areas are currently strong, there is a fragile balance which must be preserved if both are to remain strong and if the ambience of Old Town is to be preserved. Further, the commercial areas contain a mix of activities that is unique within the metropolitan area, and that mix needs to be protected if the character of Old Town is to be preserved.

A criterion that was included in the King Street Retail Strategy that was adopted in 2004.

Since being adopted in 1993, there have been no attempts at quantifying how each group has evolved over the years. As a result, assumptions as to whether or not the diversity and balance has been compromised rests on anecdotal evidence. (The Parking Study is a good beginning to understand the availability of such, but we will get back to that later)

What is not in dispute is the economic and social benefit of the small retailers that inhabit Old Town as has been demonstrated in numerous studies across the country. Keep in mind that Old Town became “Old Town” only after King Street was reinvented and populated by the small retailer.

By adopting the King Street Retail Strategy, the City embarked on a restaurant friendly policy, first by encouraging the apportionment of the public realm to the restaurants by allowing them to increase in size through administrative sup. Then by adopting the Small Business Facilitation Plan that encouraged the increase in the interior size through administrative Special Use Permits (SUPS). However, we do recognize and appreciate that Old Town did retain an SUP for new restaurants and in so doing is allowing us to have this conversation.

While the City might have embarked on a “vibrancy quest” that under current market conditions strongly favors restaurateurs, it has set in motion a process that discards the market mechanism by discouraging the pricing component from clearing the rental market. Instead, the policy encourages restaurants to take over valuable retail space in favor of restaurants as witnessed by the plethora of SUP applications for just that purpose. Moreover, once it is gone, the retail space has a hard time coming back.

A speculative bubble in restaurant usage is not inconceivable, rather, likely to be taking place already. Although ultimately leading to cannibalism among the group, in the long term it will also diminishes the vitality of the retail if it has not already done so by crowding them out both physically and economically.

The Parking Study, is a good beginning, but is too narrowly focused on the restaurant hours and geographically diffuse to provide a realistic appraisal of how much activity can reasonably be handled in specific areas of King Street in order to maintain a balance between the users.

If Old Town is to remain the heart and soul of the City, we must not only respect the public realm, but also ensure that do not become just a restaurant destination, but keep the diversity alive.

5 points were brought up at the meeting that are well suited to gage the evolution In Old Town and could serve as guide for adhering to the 92 Small Area Plan as amended in 93.

1. *Inventory of conditions*
2. *Information*
3. *Metric system*
4. *Restaurant Frontage guide*
5. *Policy discussion group*

During the discussion, it became clear that the City has does not have an inventory except for the bottom two blocks of King Street, which they agreed to forward to us, point #2. However, even there, they do not know the evolutionary trajectory. Therefore, while they work at figuring that out, we urged them to follow the following points, such as.

Use of simple industry standards for parking requirements in conjunction with the knowledge of available parking, which could set the stage for understanding just how much of each grouping can reasonably be handled in any one area.

Furthermore, that this should be tied to the

Use of the simple concept of measuring the percent of restaurant frontage and comparing the result to a goal that can be easily quantified by asking the following question; if you could develop from scratch how much restaurant frontage would be reasonable for the Old Town King Street area. (Some jurisdictions actually codify the amount of restaurant frontage allowed)

The City should also form a policy discussion group to look at the overarching issues emanating from the market conditions or departure from the rudimentary matrix evaluations from the parking Matrix or the restaurant frontage rule.

SPEECH TO THE BAR REGARDING USE OF FAUX MATERIALS

Mr Chairman and members of the Board of Architectural Review, my name is Poul Hertel, and I am the president of the Old Town Civic Association and I am here to represent the Board. The Old Town Civic Association strongly objects to the application before you tonight.

Before I continue, let me emphasize that the following statements refer to the collective actions and is in no way intended to detract or diminish the individual preservation effort by either persons or groups.

However, I do not believe the majority of Alexandrians realize how relatively recent the Old Town of today is. When people talk about the 300-year history they tend to believe that it was always this charming little town. Maybe 200 years ago, but in between then and today it was a decaying City that retained its original buildings only because the economic upturns eluded it over the years.

Back in the late 1830s, those venturing on the “patriotic pilgrimage “to Mount Vernon had to pass through Alexandria and described it as a quaint, dilapidated little town where “no one wishes to linger”¹

In 1888, Mayor Smoot advocated for the creation of the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway to run through Alexandria, because the City had many original buildings dating back to George Washington that were intact since “Alexandria had not been encumbered by growth”.

The City created the Historic District only to protect the George Washington Memorial Parkway because the Federal Government was threatening to move it away from Washington Street.

In the 60s, the City reached the point where they thought urban renewal was a preferable alternative. That lunacy was only stopped because one person filed the right lawsuit.

So, the Old Town of today is a recent phenomenon that only dates back to Mayor Beatley and his efforts to transform King Street. Bill Hurd, Ed Braswell, Ellen Pickering, Jean Caldwell all attested to just how different the City was all those years.

In essence, historic preservation is, as Seinfeld would put it, about preservation; and that is ultimately is about restricting the choice of building material and environment. While the market seems to have taken care of it for the most part, that is no longer true.

The events of the 60s helped elevate the consciousness of the City regarding the importance of historic preservation as a cultural, historic and beneficial element.

¹ From the POETRY OF TRAVELLING IN THE UNITED STATES. BY CAROLINE OILMAN. WITH ADDITIONAL SKETCHES, BY A FEW FRIENDS; AND A WEEK AMONG AUTOGRAPHS, BY REV. S. OILMAN. 1838. Page 18

Moreover, the ordinance specifically references protecting historical and cultural resources, educating about the city's cultural and historic heritage; and promoting local historic preservation efforts.

A key element was that by ensuring everyone participated Old Town would become unique in its own right. . . And they were proven right.

But herein were also sown the seeds for individuals wanting to game the system, more commonly referred to as the free rider problem. This is why we rely on the BAR to uphold the precepts and ideals set out in the ordinance.

However, this case opens up a bigger issue by supposing that if alternative products are available you cannot make the applicant use the historically correct one. Yes, we can, because the applicant needs a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Furthermore *under Matters to be considered in approving certificates and permits.*

10-105 2)(b) specifically references the retaining of historic materials as criteria.

Now, pseudo and debunked eco arguments, along with hardship, property rights ones are trying to get what the free rider always wanted, but this time it comes with the end of the uniqueness that is Old Town by ensuring everyone games the system.

Old Town is unique, and because of it, educates Alexandrians, Americans and people from all over the world. The United States is a young nation with few places like this. Let it continue to be one by not walking through this door opened by the application.

This is follow up to the case described in the April Crier that was appealed to the City Council, who remanded it back to the BAR to consider putting faux Slate on an 1870 Queen Anne Victorian House. The case went before the BAR on April 7, who voted 7-0 to oppose the application. The Applicant could have appealed to the City Council once again, but choose not to.

Next meeting will be June 9 and the topic will be historic preservation.

Poul Hertel