



The Old Town Crier

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

DATE: Wednesday, June 9, 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) ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR THE 2010/2011 YEAR**
- 3) POLICE REPORT**
- 4) HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

- a) Ted Pulliam: The history of historic preservation in Alexandria.*
- b) Lance Mallamo: The importance of The Historic District*
- c) Al Cox: Proposed changes for the Historic District*

Mark your calendars for June 9, when we will celebrate, venerate, and inculcate the wonder that is the history of Alexandria. Although, the battle scars have a way of blinding us, it is time to remind ourselves just how majestic it is to have the history of our Town re-lived at every step we take. Walking around, we get to see these buildings and Christ Church as George Washington saw them. We see the Lee boyhood house and other delightful prisms to the times of yore, continuously reminding us of glory past.

Here we have the historic charm, or is it the historic ambiance so cherished, that beckons tourists from all over the world. Why it is so, people ask? Because it so authentically ties us to the past, and it gives life to a young nation's history and cultural heritage. Yet, so many are so readily willing to change it, without realizing that in doing so, they sever the cord to the past, and in effect, the historic ambiance.

Therefore, we have by fate, by chance, and by hard perseverance accomplished to create a monument to the past that few communities can boast. To understand where the preservation came from; where it is now, and where it is going, we have gathered a distinguished guests for our June membership meeting. So come and be part of the dialogue.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Robin Elisabeth Dattel¹ writes, “The United States Conference of Mayors sponsored a Report on Historic Preservation in 1966. According to the report, the Country suffered from "a feeling of rootlessness" associated with the Postwar building boom and a high mobility rate. The Preservation Movement could assuage that feeling and could provide American society with "a sense of orientation" by using "structures and objects of the past to establish values of time and place." The report proved to be influential. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 incorporated many of its ideas, including the specific charge to create a sense of orientation for Americans through the Preservation Movement, into Federal Law.”

In essence, the emphasis of Historic Preservation in the Federal Law rested in the importance of creating a sense of place, a theme that will reoccur throughout this article. The author further elaborates that:

“The sense of orientation inspiring present-day efforts at historic preservation differs from the motivations of earlier preservationists, whose main lessons were patriotism and a respect for the accomplishments of their for-bears. In pursuit of goals of stability, identity, and environmental control, current preservationists follow four imperatives: to retain diverse elements of the past, to perpetuate the distinctive identities of places, to involve amateurs in landscape care, and to practice a conservative approach to environmental change.”²

Old Town chose a policy that not only created a strong sense of place, but did so by conforming the entire District to certain standards as opposed to just doing an historic Building Code.

“Ordinances for historic districts in the three metropolitan areas did not require new buildings to be designed in historical revival styles, although some architectural review boards like the one in Alexandria interpreted their mandates that way. What was needed was architectural design that related to its context and region.”³

As to whether or not that policy will continue is very much up in the air because there is a significant push for creating far greater distinction between the historic buildings and the ones that will be deemed not historic. That begs several questions; first what is historic, second, why did we do districts in the first place; and third, what will happen to sense of place?

The answer to these questions are all interrelated into what constitutes a evolutionary road map that successful cities ought to follow, and here there is general consensus. If

¹ Preservation and a Sense of Orientation for American Cities Author(s): Robin Elisabeth Dattel Source: Geographical Review, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Apr., 1985), pp. 125-141 Published by: American Geographical Society page 125

² Ditto

³ Ditto page 131

you can feel where in the world you are by the architecture, it works. As Edwin Heathcote points out “where most of the fabric is contemporary- a certain homogeneity has crept in. This makes it difficult to discern a sense of place”¹. As an example, if one were to look at Saul Center in Alexandria and an Office Park on Route 28, they are indistinguishable.²

That is why the community recoiled from the Saul Center and the “21st Century warehouse motif” that the City wanted to put at the Old Colony Inn location. With the help of Ed Braswell, Stew Dunn and the unanimous recommendation of the Washington Street Task Force, we did manage to change the ordinance for Washington Street to read:

That buildings must be similar to and compatible with existing buildings of Historic Architectural merit found on Washington Street.

However, there is no such ordinance for the remainder of the Historic District, which must therefore rely on policy interpretations for protection, and those are only as strong as the resolve of the citizens to keep the Historic District from evolving into a historic building code for “historic buildings”.

What is historic is at the discretion of the interpretive authorities, which ultimately means the City Council. If you recall, the Urban renewal in which the City wanted to destroy ten City blocks, apparently no buildings were “historic enough” to be saved in the face of short-term “opportunities.” Although that particular tear down is today viewed as a major mistake by the City, it is too late.

Why did Old Town want to protect the District instead of individual “historic houses”? Given the shock of the urban renewal, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the fear of change prevented an acceptance of change, but it would be a wrong to draw that conclusion.

First, the report from the conference of Mayors and the Federal Law itself, both strongly urged the creation of a sense of place, and they recommended the formation of districts to accomplish that. The other reason is that it is a lot easier to maintain a historic district for two reasons. One is fairness, as everyone is treated equally, the second is that the free rider problem is eliminated (those who try to get by with doing nothing while everyone else pays).

Historic preservation and the creation of sense of place worked extremely well in Old Town, but it is only as viable as the willingness of everyone to partake in preservation, and there are powerful forces (think economic) working very hard to undermine that effort. Ultimately, it is up to the residents, who decide by the actions they take.

¹ Financial Times Wednesday May 19 2010

² I actually went down there and took pictures of an identical building that the same developer built.

50 years ago, practically to the day,

The City of Alexandria launched the process of “Urban Renewal” which was initiated by an overeager and fearful multitude of forces that were willing to literally “kill the Village in order to save it” as you can see in insert of the July 19, 1960 Alexandria Gazette article provided by Ted Pulliam. Although the scope was eventually reduced by public pressure, there was nevertheless a lot of support for the idea of Urban Renewal as told by Ben Hayman below.

The reduced version was passed by the 1969 City Council on a motion by a 4 to 3 vote to do away with 10 City Blocks on King Street despite Council Member Jack Ticer’s earnest attempts to stop it. Even Old Town Civic Association seems to have drunk from the Kool Aid and appears to have supported the idea.

Eventually only 6 blocks of pristine American history were destroyed, because a lawsuit was filed that stopped the whole process according to Ed Braswell. Included in the destruction was, as Patsy Ticer points out, an opera house and several other notable historic buildings.

Fear and group think are a dangerous combination, as Socrates would say, but the question to be asking is if the City is repeating history? What would Old Town have looked like if sanity had not prevailed, and will it prevail in today’s environment? So go back, read the Gazette article carefully, and see if the same themes are not rationalizing the radical changes currently being advocated for Old Town.

From the Office of Historic Alexandria “Oral History” With Ben Hayman and Jimmy Hayman, February 24, 2001(Hayman Stores)

AH: Oh great, all these, "Urban Renewal Advisory Committee." You were on the Committee for the City.

Ben Hayman: Yes, and we selected the streets that we thought would be torn down. And we did a pretty good job. And we got a lot of awards for it. I will show you those.

AH: When you were on that Committee -- well I did a little research and I understand that there was a consultant that wanted to tear down 20 blocks of Old Town?

Jimmy Hayman: Well, Frank Mann was Mayor, and he wanted to do an Urban Renewal project up at the—.

Ben Hayman: Upper King Street, Henry Street.

Jimmy Hayman: Daddy, Henry Street, Duke Street area going west towards Union Station. And there was a number of battles about that location using Urban Renewal location. Eventually that idea was dropped and they then talked about going on to Old Town.

Ben Hayman: Well, the Committee was the one who made it drop.

AH: So the Committee, you got it down to just the three blocks? The three, four, and five hundred blocks?

Ben Hayman: Five, four, and three hundred right.

Jimmy Hayman: More than—.

AH: So the Committee—.

Jimmy Hayman: There was a huge public meeting at George Washington High School. At that point in time there was a public hearing, and at the end of the public hearing Council voted on whether they were going to do an Urban Renewal project on the area West of Henry Street and it got turned down. But the idea of Urban Renewal was not turned down up and by itself. And the City said, “Where, if we’re not going to go up there, where will we do our Urban Renewal?” And that’s when they located here.

Nearly 100 Per Cent Razing Of Large Area Downtown Is Proposed

New Business Edifices, High Apartments Seen

By John A. Reichmann
Gazette Staff Writer

A master plan for reviving a dying downtown Alexandria by razing it of all but the most authentic of historic buildings and replanting a brand new business district and a high rise apartment development flanking Queen Street was made public today.

The \$18 million project, which would cost the city but a little more than \$3 million, was placed before City Council and the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority by John Beggs, expert consultant on urban renewal matters and ordered released.

Officials in disclosing the "schematic plan" to reporters this morning emphasized that it was purely tentative but represents conclusions reached by Mr. Beggs and his colleagues after a study of the area.

They had available to them a detailed report of the structural quality and use of each building in the 24 block Gadsby area. They had the financial status of every resident and business.

On these conclusions they produced a plan which is expected thoroughly to shock residents of the old town. Officials indicated that opposition will be met by the question "If not this, then what?"

Briefly the plan provides:

All of downtown King Street section east of Washington Street through the 300 block north and south would be wiped out. Under one plan, King Street would be widened and divided by a landscaped strip. Parking spaces would flank the thoroughfare and commercial establishments would line Prince Street to the south and Cameron Street to the north.

Entry to the commercial plates

Project

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

would be from King Street or from flanking streets.

The area contained by N. Washington Princess N. Royal and Cameron streets would be reserved for high rise apartments to house an estimated 750 family units with wide, green lawns and landscaping around them.

St. Asaph and Pitt streets between Prince and Princess streets would be eliminated.

The west side of N. Royal Street from Cameron Street to No. 224 would provide off street parking. The entire block bounded by Queen, N. Royal, Cameron and N. Fairfax Street would be given over to parking excepting for an auditorium on the northwest corner of Cameron and Fairfax streets.

In all it is anticipated to provide between 1500 and 1700 off street parking spaces under the new plan.

A great motor hotel is envisaged for the southeast corner of Washington and Oronoco streets, complete with swimming pool, restaurant and public rooms.

Of the old residences only those along the north and south sides of Queen Street, excepting for the block on the south side of Queen between Royal and Fairfax streets, would be eliminated. The Queen Street houses, while including many deteriorating structures, are held to be capable of rehabilitation.

Buildings of acknowledged historic and architectural value would be kept. These include the Fawcett House on Prince Street—possibly the city's oldest house—the Stabler and Leadbeater Pharmacy, Gadsby's Tavern, the Lee Houses on Cameron and on Oronoco streets and City Hall.

Officials who described the plan to reporters emphasized that details were by no means final. Their disclosure, however, was expected to set off a storm of protest from old town residents who came to Alexandria to get away from it all and now see it "all" catching up with them.

All officials present this morning concurred that nothing less drastic is likely to do the job of saving the downtown area from becoming a business and residential slum.

V. Ward Boswell, chairman of the ARHA, declared this is a must. King Street has been going down for the past 20 years. This project can't be done in less than three, four or five years.

"Alexandria must do something to save itself one way or another. There are vacant stores all along King Street and no one is going to move in unless something is done."

To bolster this position City Manager Edward G. Heatwole, in whose office the press conference was held, and Stuart Morrison, planning aide, cited current tax figures.

The meeting brought acknowledgement, previously denied, that because of declining business, King Street properties are being gradually devalued for tax purposes.

Charts shown indicated that the business district between Prince and Cameron streets in the eight block area from the 300 through the 600 blocks, paid business taxes of only \$51,730 last year. This is less than seven per cent of the total business tax revenue received by the city.

These figures also showed that 69 merchants did less than \$50,000 a year in business and 76 paid less than \$101 a year in taxes.

The real estate taxes paid the city totaled only \$113,630, or 2.25 per cent of the total city receipts.

John Y. Kerr, secretary general of the ARHA, gave the estimate of \$18 million for the whole project. This, he said, would represent the cost of acquiring the needed land and razing it.

Revenues from the sale of the land to private developers, as required by federal law, he said, would represent about \$4 million.

The city would be given credit for land donations and other contributions in lieu of cash to bring its share to around \$3 or \$4 million.

Before proceeding with any part of the plan, Mr. Kerr noted, it will be necessary to await public approval, Council's affirmative action, an analysis of potential economic development including land values for purchase and sale, the possible return to the city in taxes and potential rental values.

Mr. Heatwole expressed the opinion that the Alexandria Citizens Development Committee, commonly known as the Committee 77, would be reactivated to explain the plan and as a sounding board for public reaction.

TODAY

The City has sometimes suggested that the Old Town is too old, without realizing that the very essence of Old Town is its direct connection to the past, whether by adhering to historic district discipline or a small area plan that, as an example, includes a required balanced approach between the residents, retailers and restaurants.

The *Financial Times* recently ran a whole section on the future of cities and was unabashed in saying that the successful cities were those that adhered to “Building on the past” because it gave “hope for the future”. Furthermore, much like the “Historic Preservation Act” also emphasized the “sense of place” based on the past as uniquely determining the successful cities.

So let us start with the restaurants. John Gosling has written extensively about the concern that putting ever more of them at the end of King Street will draw away energy from the rest of the street and thereby jeopardizing the small retailers. But, another issue is that because the metro pizza, metro burger, metro Gastro pub, could be anywhere, they fall prey to the homogeneity that destroys sense of place. Old Town fought chains for all these years precisely because it provided a homogeneity that detracts from the sense of place.

Furthermore, there is this idea circulating around that what we actually need more restaurants, because that will bring in more people with nothing else to do but eat at restaurants. That might work in malls, but not so well in established cities, plus it gives credence to those who suggests that the City is trying to either imitate or compete with the restaurants at National Harbor.¹

The Waterfront Plan has many good ideas, but three issues stand out that need to be addressed. First is the taking of half of the Waterfront Park to use as a parking lot, compounded by putting a 3-4 story building on top and using it as a restaurant. The membership clearly dislike the idea and for good reasons. Let me just mention one, though. I recently had the opportunity to see the Waterfront Park from the Potomac River perspective. The Park framed by the arches of the Pinkish John Rust building on The Strand created a significant sense of place rooted in a historic city. (*It must be told that John is one of the few architects, who I know, that respects and knows how to use the past, precisely to create a sense of place in keeping with Old Town.*) This they want to cover up with a new restaurant.²

The open space is not fully worked out yet as it is still a concept plan. However, so far, it could be anywhere or nowhere, without any semblance of a sense of place. Many suc-

¹ There is anecdotal evidence that the restaurant patronage was declining before the economic downturn.

successful waterfronts draw on a successful integration of the historic and cultural that very much enhances a sense of place.

From the cultural perspective, it is very likely that the Torpedo Factory and its artists have contributed to the regeneration of Old Town. But, the City Council is taking the Torpedo Factory away from the Torpedo Factory Artist Association and handing it over to a board run by “business experts” who “will determine how the artists are to contribute to the goals set by the new board”¹.

There are so many opportunities just beckoning to reinforce and strengthen Old Town and the City, unfortunately the City seems to be taking paths that lead away from what is great about Old Town and the City. Does anyone think about Maine Avenue in DC as a serious destination, even though it has all those restaurants on the water? Finally, as the *Financial Times* put it with respect to successful waterfronts, “cultural driving force wins the day”.

Those who do not learn the lessons of history are destined to make the same mistakes and far too many are not appreciative of just how the short-term economic forces are constantly working toward getting Alexandrians to adopt a sense of place that is incompatible with the past or that could be anywhere. Urban renewal is a good example that ended up being just another dead end shoot. So, I will end by asking everyone to strive for that “sense of place” that is rooted in our past, because it will make long-term economic sense and ensure the success of our City.

This is the last Crier under my responsibility, and let me express my deepest gratitude for having been given the opportunity to serve you for the past two years. It has been a honor representing you and writing these many articles. However, before I put the pen down, there are two Stalwart board members who have opted to step down from the Board who need to be recognized.

***Linda Couture** has been elected the president of the Founders Park Community Association and will be stepping down after 8 years of faithful service to the OTCA.*

***Doug Thurman** likewise has been extraordinarily active in the OTCA fighting for Historic Preservation. He serves on numerous preservation boards and wants to devote more time to that effort.*

On Behalf of OTCA I give you our heartfelt thanks for your devoted service.

And so, I hand over the Crier to John Gosling with the best of wishes.

Paul Hertel



¹ I got into hot water for mentioning this at a meeting, but that is what the document handed out by the committee setting this up stated.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS OF THE BOARD

The Nominating Committee Slate was presented at the last membership meeting and there were no other nominations from the floor.

Therefore, the election will take place at the June 9, 2010 Annual Members Meeting and only the nominees submitted by the Nominating Committee are eligible for election. No other nominations (including nominations from the floor at the Annual Meeting) are in order.

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

TERM

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