

Old Town Civic Association

Position Statement with regard to the City's Waterfront Plan

May 11, 2011 modified November 9, 2011

1. **Plan comprehensively, not hastily** – The waterfront plan should reflect thorough, careful and conscientious consideration of the recommendations of the Waterfront Plan Work Group, the alternative proposed by Citizens for an Alternative Alexandria Waterfront Plan, the implications of the closure of the GenOn power plant, and the possible outcomes of litigation and negotiations with the Old Dominion Boat Club and the Robinson Terminal Company—rather than any artificial “deadline”. No Small Area Plan or Text Amendment should be adopted until and unless its fundamental elements are clear and precise and have achieved broad public understanding and support.
2. **Make a stronger commitment to historic/cultural amenities** – The celebration of Alexandria’s history and public art should not be limited to a waterfront plan, but should be a central element of any such plan. Support for these civic and cultural amenities should be explicit, tangible and concrete, not merely rhetorical.
3. **Set limits on the type of allowable commercial uses in the waterfront area**; unlimited, these uses, specifically restaurant uses, could cannibalize the business and parking supply of existing shops and restaurants in Old Town, especially along King Street, undermining what must be a principal economic objective of the plan.
4. **Include more open space** – Preservation of parks and open space for the benefit of the general public was a crucial objective of the 1981 and 1983 waterfront Settlement Agreements. Acquisition of additional open, public space on the waterfront should be accomplished to the optimum degree. No existing open space should be compromised or retroceded; once it’s gone, it’s gone forever.
5. **Scale back substantially the amount of restaurant space** – The most recent revenue forecast for the plan anticipates 50,000 square feet of new restaurant space, the equivalent of seven new restaurants each the size of the new Virtue restaurant in the old Olsson’s Bookstore building. That much additional restaurant space would add greatly to street, sidewalk, and parking congestion in Old Town, especially along Union and King Streets.
6. **Scale back substantially the number of hotel rooms** – The proposed plan projects 450 or more hotel rooms on the uncertain premise that they will generate less traffic and higher tax revenues than currently permitted uses. Hotels, if allowed, should be limited to one “boutique” hotel of modest size, complementing the architectural character of its existing neighborhood. Any new hotel should not be a larger, “full service” hotel with restaurants, coffee shops, banquet rooms and conference facilities which would generate heavy visitor and delivery traffic.
7. **Stay within the existing densities** – Densities should not be increased for any reason for the Robinson Terminal, Cummings, and Turner properties. Adding density to generate tax revenues to underwrite public improvements will add traffic and parking pressure to an already congested area of

Old Town, overwhelm the historic character of its core area, and increase the value of waterfront property, making it more expensive to acquire land for open-space purposes.

8. **Demonstrate that the Plan is fiscally sound** – The source and application of funds for each element of the plan should be clear, and should include all projected capital, operating, and maintenance costs, including expanded sewer capacity; dredging at the proposed docks and piers; and maintenance and eventual rehabilitation and replacement of the proposed infrastructure. Cost and revenue estimates should be transparent and indisputable. Public improvements (e.g., flood mitigation, parks and open space) should not be conditioned upon incremental general or special tax revenues attributable to increased density or intensified commercial activity.

9. **Establish specific criteria** for hotel/restaurant/commercial special use permit applications. Without standards for measuring the impact of such uses, the SUP process is no more than a rhetorical exercise—a placebo rather than a safeguard against unwarranted development.