The Old Town Crier

Newsletter of the Old Town Civic Association

OLD TOWN CIVIC ASSOCATION WISHES YOU

A HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL NEW YEAR!

WE ARE STARTING THE NEW YEAR WITH AN OLD TOPIC: PARKING!

LOCATION: The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street

Date: Wednesday January 10, 2018

7:00 p.m.: Gathering 7:30 p.m.: Program

Updates from the President

This past fall, OTCA continued its reorganization and renewed its advocacy efforts.   In December, Van Van Fleet, past President of OTCA, stepped down as our representative on the Waterfront Commission after many years of vital service. I would like to thank Van for his tireless effort on behalf of Alexandria, Old Town, and OTCA, and look forward to hearing his input in the future. The new OTCA representative to the Waterfront Commission is Robert Cvejanovich, who has an extensive background as an architect and engineer. Robert and his experience will be a welcome addition to our team, and to the commission.

Also in December, City Council appointed an OTCA representative to the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC). OTCA has not had direct representation on HARC for some time, although members have been appointed in other capacities. Our representative is Kelly Spradley-Kurowski. Kelly is a NPS historian and preservationist assigned to their maritime section. As Alexandria moves forward with the waterfront plan and the Waterfront History Plan (now part of the city's strategic plan), the additions of Robert and Kelly are timely and fortunate.

OTCA also appointed representatives to the reformed Combined Sewer System committee, including past president Yvonne Callahan and Chuck Weber.

As part of our reorganization, the OTCA board also voted to expand our membership meeting schedule. We will now meet 12 months a year, still on the second Wednesday of the month. We took this step to strengthen our year-round presence and also to give members greater opportunity to interact with the board, our representatives, and each other as we debate issues important to our community. We expect the August and December meetings to be more open discussion, though, as always, our agendas are driven by current city challenges. The Crier, and subsequently the website as it migrates, will also offer more information about the topics and presentations connected to the meetings.

If you have been following the papers, you already know that OTCA took positions on a few historic preservation cases before the two BARs and Council – most notably requests for after-the-fact approval for siding and painting unpainted masonry. I will not review the cases here, but these are part of a growing issue in the city (and beyond Old Town) concerning permitting and process. OTCA, as a key preservation organization in Alexandria, has long supported the BAR and historic districts guidelines (there are multiple). We also recognize that dissemination of those guidelines and enforcement has been a major challenge for the city. The board and I believe that OTCA can and should play a stronger role in promoting outreach and education about preservation and the various guidelines.   For now, Yvonne, Bob Pringle, and I will be helping to organize our preservation advocacy committee, and we look forward to including as many volunteers as would like to participate. We have already reached out to the Office of Historic Alexandria and the Planning staff to set up a smoother flow of information, and to push for a comprehensive preservation guide for property owners, improvements to the frequency and means of communications, and workshops to help residents. HARC and Alexandria Archaeology also will participate.   I look forward to hearing your suggestions about this complicated topic and to working with members and city staff to find solutions.

- Indy McCall

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COMMERCIAL STANDARDS PARKING UPDATE

Old Town Civic Association will be getting an update from Katye North, Principal Planner with the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services, on an ongoing project to study and make recommendations regarding parking for office, hotel, retail, and restaurants throughout the city.

Katye is a Principal Planner with the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services. She is the chief city manager for parking policy issues and has worked for the City for twelve years--the last three in her current position. Prior to moving to T&ES, Katye was an Urban Planner with the Department of Planning and Zoning, charged with reviewing development applications. She received her Master's in Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her undergraduate degree in Environmental Policy and Planning at Virginia Tech.

At our January meeting, we will be talking about <u>commercial parking requirements,</u> not residential parking requirements; however, the two are obviously intertwined. It certainly can be argued that this update of commercial parking standards is long overdue-- the last update was in 1963.

Much has changed since that time, without doubt. For starters, everyone has had a chance to see how the automobile has taken over the urban landscape of planning—at least until recently. Nothing was constructed for decades that did not assume without question that the automobile would rule the transportation landscape for a very long time, if not forever. Metro has had an impact, certainly, but it has hardly changed the daily life of many who live and work in Old Town.

Only recently we are seeing the push—and hardly a successful one overall – to get people out of their own cars and into other modes of transportation.

Right now, 10% of land space of Alexandria is composed of parking lots, and that doesn't even count garages or street spaces. The consequences of encouraging cars over any other transportation option has ruined our environment, created gridlock, led to a downward spiral in the quality of life, not to mention lead to the undermining of other means of transit.

We have all seen this in Old Town for years. It is often said that parking is the biggest issue that has affected the daily life of everyone who lives in Old Town, who wishes to open a business here (or keep one going), or who wishes to patronize the businesses that already exist and that we want to keep.

All too often residents feel as if they are fighting City Hall on the issue of parking rather than looking to City Hall for answers to the ongoing issue of new developments, new renovations, etc., that are still an issue in and certainly around Old Town. To name but a few examples, we have the development along the waterfront—such as Robinson Landing, the Giant site at the north end of Old Town, and numerous hotels.

It is important to note that the commercial parking standards task force does recognize this fact in its report, where it is noted that "Old Town has different parking conditions." It also must be acknowledged that the impact of the recommended changes to commercial parking requirements will have a greater impact on places in Alexandria other than Old Town, In fact, it is arguable that the biggest changes will occur in Del Ray, another community that is seeking to remain "small" while economic forces press for "much larger." We know that fight.

As this newsletter is being prepared, the task force recommendations are due to be presented to the Planning Commission at its meeting in early January of next year (before our members' meeting) but one can safely predict that little, if any, changes are likely to be proposed or modified by the commission, which as a whole has never met a reduction in parking that it didn't like. Forty percent of all commercial developments in the past five years requested a decrease in parking requirements. <u>All</u> such requests were granted by the Planning

Commission and subsequently approved by City Council. (However, it must be pointed out that 2/3 of those parking reductions were under a Special Use Permit (SUP), not a Development Special Use Permit (DSUP), so most reductions were associated with small businesses.)

The task force has concluded that many new developments might still have too much parking, and that future trends and needs must look to the necessity for putting in less, not more, parking. There are tools to be explored here: shared parking, ride sharing, "on-street management of parking"—to name but three that the report references. Indeed shared parking (basically the use of commercial spaces that are now not open to the public) is almost the only way to increase parking availability in Old Town. As far as "on street parking management" is concerned, we are looking at the Pango creep, now extending up Prince Street onto South Lee Street.

Other major takeaways from the task force report, as Katye will explain to us:

Many commercial parking lots now average 59% peak occupancy.

32% of hotel guests travel there via Uber, Lyft, or taxi.

52% of restaurant patrons do not drive there.

Really?

We hope that this is all true---but, why doesn't that seem to be the case in Old Town?

One recommendation in the report seems sound: establishing a parking range with a minimum to ensure some parking is provided and a maximum to prevent overbuilding of parking. This also allows for flexibility among different tenants and locations, as noted in the report.

So, the issues to be stressed-- from an Old Town point of view-- require a careful look at how these changes apply to new development. Are we putting more cars on the street, or not? What kind of support can be generated for shared parking and how can more be encouraged in Old Town? (Hint: mandate that new developments make just such provisions, as a condition of the DSUP.)

What exactly does the city mean when it refers to "on-street management"?

Finally, we can ask Katye directly whether this is really a giveaway to developers.

Come and listen to the planned proposals and get some of these questions answered!

A NEW DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL ON THE WATERFRONT

The IDI Group Companies is pursuing redevelopment of the three properties located at 203, 205 and 211 Strand Street in Alexandria and has submitted a DSUP application to the City, which is scheduled to be heard by the Planning Commission and City Council in February. IDI's redevelopment complies with the Waterfront Plan and includes the following key elements:

First, Chadwick's full-service restaurant will continue to operate in its current configuration. That is very good news for many Old Towners—we love Chads.

Second. the existing office at 205 Strand (formerly the Potomac River Boat Company location) will be renovated and a third floor added. It will be converted into one retail space on the ground floor with two luxury condominium residences in the two floors above.

Third, a new mixed-use building will replace the existing retail strip on the southern edge of the property (built in 1978) and on the surface parking lot. The new building will feature two retail spaces on the ground floor facing South Union and Strand Streets, and will contain 16 luxury condominium residences in the four floors above. The entrance to the parking garage will be from South Union, and two parking spaces will be provided for each of the 18 residential units. The parking will be located on the ground floor of the new building and screened from view behind the retail spaces and residential lobby. Therefore, the residential component of this project will be "fully parked", as the jargon goes. Two spaces per residential unit had been the norm, at least until recently.

While the IDI project is in the Central Business District, it overall size does not make it qualified for the parking exemptions allowed within the CBD. Here is where it gets a bit tricky. IF the City approves the proposed changes to the City Parking Ordinance to .025 spaces per 1,000 square feet for retail space, as Katye will be discussing, then IDI's parking reduction request would be reduced to 2 spaces. IF the City does not approve the proposed changes the parking reduction request would be for 20 spaces.

In addition, this new project will preserve enhanced access to and some views of the Potomac River by creating or expanding two new pedestrian alleys. First, it will double the width of the new alley adjacent to the Indigo Hotel on the south side of the property, and will also create a new 16-foot pedestrian alley on the north side of the new building. These two new alleys that span between South Union Street and Strand Street will reflect Alexandria's tradition of mid-block alleys and its maritime history and will allow for more outdoor seating and general public access.

Preliminary design viewings show that the project as a whole will provide for scaled transition from the Indigo Hotel on the southern end of the block to the historic warehouse buildings on the northern end of the block. The proposal appears to contain a number of

elements of the Rust Orling building on the 100 block of South Union Street—the southern side—which is considered by many Old Towners to be one of the best of the new development in the lower King Street area as it contains appropriate fenestration, brick work, and generally friendly mass and scale.

We will keep you posted on this new development, and…will be careful to make sure that the project develops as it has been advertised.

CITY TO VISITORS: GO AHEAD AND PARK IN FRONT OF RESIDENCES

IT'S FREE!

On November 18, OTCA member Bert Ely disclosed to City Council at open mike a remarkable example of City double-talk on the issue of residential parking and other parking in Old Town. We believe this is a very important issue and wish to spread the word as far as possible.

Here is what Bert said in his remarks:

As you know there is a tremendous ongoing competition between Old Town residents and Old Town visitors for parking spaces on Old Town streets, with residents often the losers. The intense competition for on-street parking spaces led Council to authorize pay-to-park on specified blocks, if residents in that block petitioned for it. Recently pay-to-park has been authorized for the 100 blocks of Prince and Duke and the 200 block of South Lee. The divisive effects of pay-to-park will soon become evident.

Imagine my dismay when I discovered recently that this divisiveness is being fueled by the advertisement of free parking on Old Town residential streets. I found four websites with web pages promoting that free parking.

Only after I pointed it out in a letter-to-the-editor in the November 9 issue of the Alexandria Times was a reference on this City website to free parking on Old Town residential streets deleted: https://www.alexandriava.gov/recreation/info/default.aspx?id=12490. However, the deletion in the third paragraph on this webpage was done so hurriedly that a sentence fragment was left in the paragraph. Someone should clean that up. However, free parking on residential streets in Old Town is still advertised on these websites:

> http://blog.visitalexandriava.com/alexandria-va-parking/ See 4. "Off King Street: park in a postcard." The photo below on this website is the north side of the 400 block of Queen Street.

https://www.visitalexandriava.com/plan/parking/   See the paragraph under the headline Street Parking.

https://www.tripsavvy.com/parking-in-old-town-alexandria-1039425   It had this to say about free parking in Old Town:

> On-street parking in Old Town Alexandria is available at meters and in free spaces with posted time limits. Most free parking is limited to two hours, from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m., Monday through Saturday, and 11 a.m. Sunday until 2 a.m. Monday.

All true, but by advertising free on-street parking in Old Town, not only are these websites exacerbating parking problems for Old Town residents, they also are diverting cars away from paid parking on city meters and in city garages, which is costing the City who knows how much in lost revenue.

City staff should contact the owners of these websites, as well as any other websites promoting free on-street parking in Old Town, to request that they drop any references to free on-street parking. Hopefully Visit Alexandria would be especially receptive to that request since, as I understand it, it is partially funded by the City.

Reducing visitor parking on residential streets in Old Town will make more parking spaces available for residents, especially at times of peak demand, which in turn will reduce the likelihood that residents will petition for pay-to-park on their block.

Thank you, Bert, for bringing this matter to our attention!