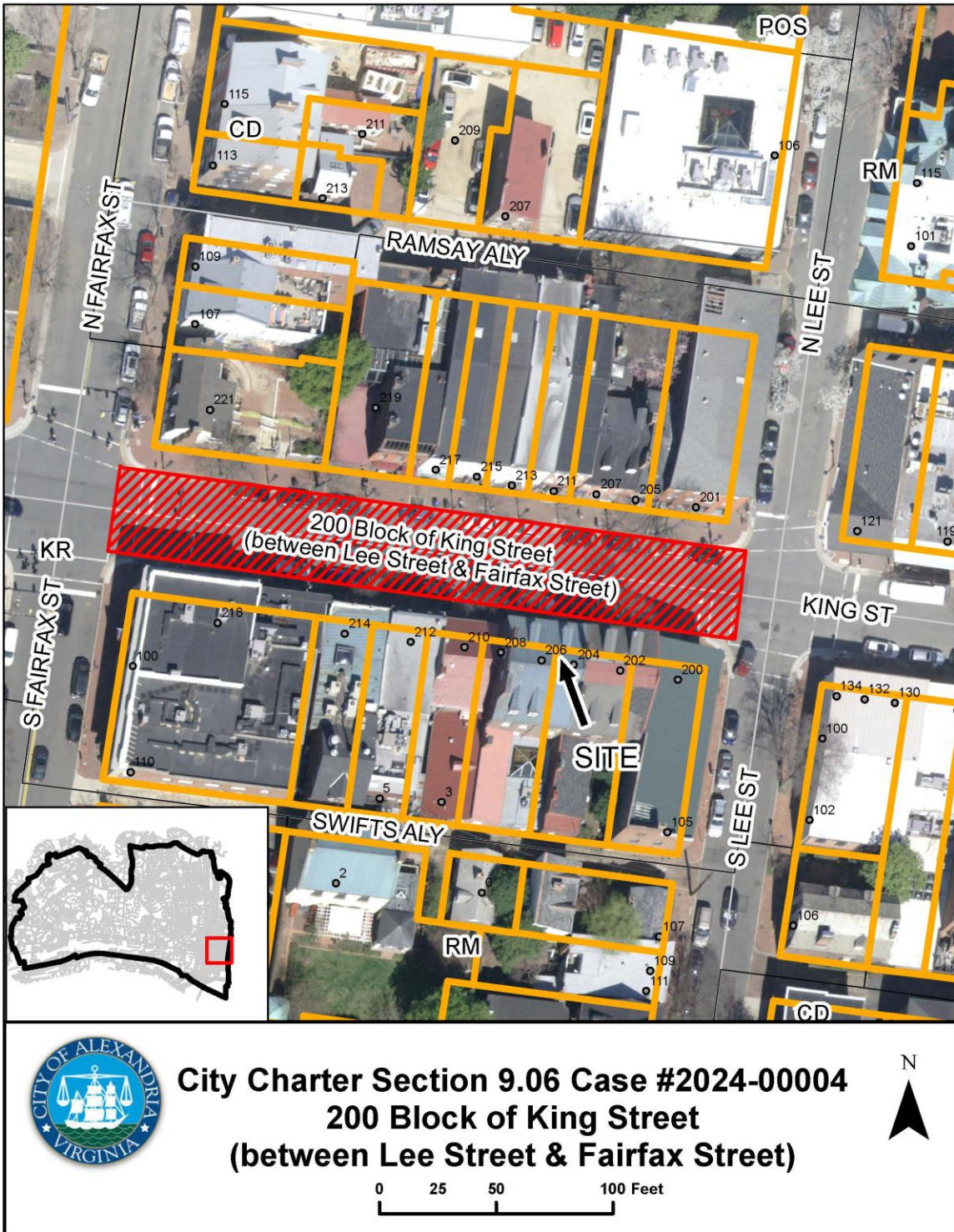




DOCKET ITEM #4
City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2024-00004
200 block of King Street

Application	General Data	
Request: Review whether the closure of the 200 block of King Street to vehicular traffic is consistent with the City of Alexandria Master Plan pursuant to Section 9.06 of the City Charter.	Planning Commission Hearing:	November 7, 2024
	City Council Hearing:	n/a
	Zone:	KR
Address: 200 block of King Street (between Lee Street and Fairfax Street)	Small Area Plan(s):	Old Town

<p>Staff Reviewers: Katie North, Transportation & Environmental Services, katie.north@alexandriava.gov Sheila McGraw, Transportation & Environmental Services, sheila.mcgraw@alexandriava.gov Max Devilliers, Transportation & Environmental Services, max.devilliers@alexandriava.gov Michael D’Orazio, Planning & Zoning, michael.dorazio@alexandriava.gov Carrie Beach, Planning & Zoning, carrie.beach@alexandriava.gov Hillary Orr, Transportation & Environmental Services, hillary.orr@alexandriava.gov Adriana Castañeda, Transportation & Environmental Services, adriana.castaneda@alexandriava.gov Karl Moritz, Director, Planning & Zoning, karl.moritz@alexandriava.gov</p>
<p>Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve this request, finding that the proposal is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia, and with the City’s Master Plan.</p>



Project Location Map

I. DISCUSSION

The City proposes to temporarily close the 200 block of King Street, between Lee Street and Fairfax Street, to vehicular traffic. This will occur in two phases: Phase 1 from November 22, 2024 to January 6, 2025, and Phase 2 from March 14, 2025 to September 30, 2025. The City Council may determine at a future date if the closure should be made permanent after considering the results of the temporary closure.

Section 9.06 of the City's Charter requires that the Planning Commission review any changes to the use of a public street, such as this proposed change to restrict vehicles. The Planning Commission is charged with ensuring that any change is consistent with the City's Master Plan. For the purposes of this review, the Planning Commission should consider this proposal as both a temporary and potentially permanent change.

II. BACKGROUND

The 200 block of King Street is a two-way street headed east and west with parking on both sides of the street. Like the 100 block of King, the block is predominately commercial. However, this block has a greater mix of retail and restaurants as well as some residences on upper floors of the buildings. This block also includes the City's Visitor Center at the corner of North Fairfax and King Streets. One of the restaurants on the block participates in the City's parklet program and two others have expressed interest in applying for a permit. This block has a significant slope from west to east and the west end of the block (Fairfax Street) terminates at a four-way traffic signal.

In 2021, the City Council approved the permanent closure of the 100 block of King Street, following a temporary closure that had been implemented to provide additional space for pedestrians and outdoor dining during the pandemic. In 2022, after a similar temporary closure, the Council approved the permanent closure of the unit block of King Street and a portion of the Strand.

At the September 10, 2024, City Council meeting, the Council requested staff explore expanding the street closure to the 200 block of King Street through a temporary pilot program that could help evaluate the merits of a permanent closure. Staff has coordinated with several internal and external stakeholders, including Police, Fire, Transportation Engineering, Planning & Zoning, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, and the Old Town Business Association to discuss key considerations for closing the block to vehicles, including parking, emergency vehicle access, traffic, and transit routes.

Following a similar process that was used to close the unit and 100 blocks of King Street, staff is proposing a temporary pilot to close the 200 block of King Street in two phases over the next year. The Traffic and Parking Board will review the temporary closure and supported changes to parking and the traffic signal that are necessary to implement this closure at their October 28 meeting.

The City Council will consider an ordinance approving the temporary street closure on November 12 and 16, and will consider the feedback from the Planning Commission. If the temporary closure is successful, the Council will be required to approve a new ordinance to make the closure permanent.

III. CONSISTENCY WITH THE MASTER PLAN

The subject property is within the boundaries of the Old Town Small Area Plan (adopted in 1993) and the King Street Retail Strategy (adopted in 2005). Although it is not within the boundaries of the Waterfront Plan, this block does link to the existing pedestrian area on the unit and 100 blocks of King Street and will provide an additional connection to the Waterfront. Closure of the 200 block of King Street to vehicular traffic is consistent with several goals and principles stated in these plans as explained in more detail below:

Old Town Small Area Plan: Although this plan has not been substantially updated in several decades, there are several goals and objectives from the Plan that are valid in considering this proposal.

Land Use – Develop the Potential of the Waterfront (page 10): The closure of the 200 block connects to the existing pedestrianized areas on King Street that leads to the City’s Waterfront.

The Future – Goals and Objectives (page 48):

- *Route through traffic away from established residential areas.*
- *Provide a continuous pedestrian pathway and bikeway along the entire Waterfront.*
- *Encourage the tourist potential of the historic and architectural aspects of Old Town.*
- *Visual awareness of the waterfront should be preserved.*

Several of the goals and objectives identified in the original Plan lend support to the current proposal to pedestrianize the 200 block of King Street. This closure will shift traffic from Lee Street, which is residential north and south of King Street, to Fairfax Street, which is better suited for more traffic and provides access to Market Square Garage. It also provides a continuous pedestrian path from Market Square to the Waterfront, which supports tourism and enhances views to the waterfront.

King Street Retail Strategy: This Plan was adopted fifteen years before portions of King Street were closed to vehicles, but support for pedestrianizing King Street was included in the vision and principles. *“The Vision for King Street is one that looks forward and enhances the existing environment to ensure an attractive, vital pedestrian place serving local residents and visitors alike.”* (page 1-2) The closure of the unit and 100 blocks of King Street to vehicles has created an attractive space for visitors and residents to gather, dine, and shop. Continuing this success to the 200 block will expand this space and further support the vision for King Street.

In addition, several of the Guiding Principles within the Plan directly or indirectly support closing this block to vehicles. These include:

Urban Design - Maintain and enhance the visual elements that terminate the views at the east/west ends of King Street and provide visual boundaries for the street (page 4-3): By removing vehicles from the 200 block, businesses and pedestrians can expand into space previously occupied by cars, creating an enhanced vista to the east towards the river and Waterfront.

Urban Design - Establish standards and an expedited approval process that will encourage outdoor dining along King Street (page 4-7): Closing the block provides new space for outdoor dining and retail. The outdoor dining and parklet programs include standards to ensure high quality design for these uses and a clear approval process.

Urban Design - Create seating opportunities for pedestrians along the length of King Street (page 4-9): Since the 200 block has fewer restaurants than the 100 block, there will be additional spaces on the block to create public seating areas. This is particularly valuable on this block given there is limited space for public seating on the sidewalks due to narrow sidewalk widths.

Urban Design - Explore options for closing portions of King Street for activities and pedestrian circulation (page 4-18): Closing the 200 block directly supports this principle and expands upon the success of the unit and 100 block closures.

Waterfront - Link the waterfront and other areas with existing and potential new trails for biking, walking and recreation to bring people (not cars) to King Street, as envisioned in the City's open space planning (page 8-2): The 200 block provides a direct link to the Waterfront from Market Square, which is the drop-off point for many tourists traveling to Old Town via DASH or private motorcoaches. By pedestrianizing this block, the space for people walking to and from the waterfront is expanded and enhanced.

Waterfront Plan: This Plan included specific references to pedestrianizing the unit block of King Street. However, several references within the Plan also support the expanded pedestrianization of King Street on additional blocks, including:

Increase and improve access to the public spaces of the Waterfront. Pedestrian connectivity along the Waterfront should be continuous. (page 18): This block provides the final link in a pedestrian connection from Market Square and City Hall to the Waterfront and improves access to the public spaces at both ends.

Maintain a living, active Waterfront that is a destination that attracts all Alexandrians and visitors and should be integral to the visitor experience in Alexandria. (page 18): Over the last few years, Lower King Street and the Waterfront has proved to be a destination that attracts residents and visitors alike. By closing the 200 block to vehicles, this further improves the space for pedestrians, and creates a prominent entrance to the Waterfront and an improved visitor experience.

Improve the Waterfront's vehicular and pedestrian circulation. (page 19): The Plan calls for minimizing pedestrian and vehicle conflicts. The success of the Waterfront Park and Lower King Street has drawn more people to the area. The 200 block is particularly challenging for pedestrians given the limited sidewalk space. Additionally, the ability to walk in the middle of the street on the unit and 100 blocks of King encourages pedestrians to continue in the street as they walk to and from Market Square. By eliminating vehicles from these blocks, the businesses can expand while also creating more space for pedestrians to move through the blocks along the sidewalks and down the center of the street.

Regarding vehicular circulation, closing the 200 block to vehicles will force cars to turn at Fairfax Street which is better suited for traffic than Lee Street and provides more visibility for Market Square garage. Additionally, it may also reduce the volume of traffic on Union Street, which will help in managing pedestrian/vehicular conflict points at intersections near the Waterfront.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission find that the closure of the 200 block of King Street, between Fairfax Street and Lee Street, to vehicular traffic is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia and with the City's Master Plan, including specifically the Old Town Small Area Plan, King Street Retail Strategy, and the Waterfront Plan.

STAFF: Karl Moritz, Director, Planning & Zoning
Carrie Beach, Planning & Zoning
Michael D'Orazio, Planning & Zoning
Adriana Castañeda, Transportation & Environmental Services
Hillary Orr, Transportation & Environmental Services
Katy North, Transportation & Environmental Services
Sheila McGraw, Transportation & Environmental Services
Max Devilliers, Transportation & Environmental Services