

A Mortal Blow To Historic Old Town Alexandria?

By Michael C. Maibach

July 8, 2023

Old Town is one of America's most historic villages, witness to the entirety of our history. People from all over the world come to see our historic homes, walk streets first paved by cobblestones brought by English ships. Blessed with this rich inheritance, we must preserve it for our children's children.

A major threat has arisen. Densification is at the gates of Old Town - north and south. Now Hoffman & Associates and architect Michael Winstanley plan a four-story, 48-unit, 100,000 sq. ft. monstrosity at 301 N. Fairfax Street. It would tower over the 19th-century homes of Queen and Fairfax, forever degrading this colonial-era neighborhood. It would be a mortal blow to the aesthetic harmony and architectural coherence of our inheritance. It will fuel a fire of densification that will surely envelop all of Old Town. Mayor Wilson and the Council, the BAR and Planning Commission must all reject this plan!

Our local history is at stake, written just steps from 301 N. Fairfax. In 1749 the Virginia House of Burgesses asked a young George Washington to survey a new port city. He then named every street from Duke to Oronoco, from Royal to the Potomac River - including the four streets that surround 301 N. Fairfax. On those streets we hold our annual Washington's Birthday Parade, with its turn at 301 N. Fairfax at Queen. Our oldest home is Ramsay House (1751) at N. Fairfax and King. It was the residence of William Ramsay, one of the Scottish merchants who founded Alexandria. Thus, we hold our annual Scottish Christmas Walk. These parades on colonial streets in front of colonial homes remind us each year what we steward today. As Cicero wrote, "Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child." Injecting a 48-unit condominium into this colonial neighborhood is a civic sacrilege.

In 1755 the "Congress of Alexandria" was convened by General Edward Braddock, Commander of the British Army in North America. Governors of five British colonies met with the General in John Carlyle's house (121 N. Fairfax) to plan an attack against New France. George Washington was among the volunteers who marched west on what is now Braddock Road to attack Fort Duquesne. The ensuing battle left Braddock dead and Washington leading the retreat with bullet holes in his coat. In this manner he learned of war. When the American Revolution came, Alexandria's Washington led that 7-year conflict. After victory at Yorktown, a celebration was held in his honor at Duvall's Tavern (303 Cameron). In the 200 block of Cameron is a plaque where the first plot was sold to create our town in 1749. Both are one block from 301 N. Fairfax.

A City Hall plaque reads "On this site in 1785 The Mount Vernon Conference was held". Virginia and Maryland delegates signed "The Mount Vernon Compact," a navigation agreement. This

engendered the Annapolis Convention (1786) where delegates from five states discussed the defects of the Articles of Confederation. Madison then asked Washington to preside over the Constitutional Convention (1787) in Philadelphia. The road to the new Constitution began one block south of 301 North Fairfax. There the Mayor and Council will vote to preserve Old Town or make Alexandria another Crystal City.

On April 16, 1789, a dinner was held at Wise Tavern (201 N. Fairfax) to wish Washington well on his journey to New York to be sworn in as Commander-in-Chief. There he was for the first time addressed as “Mr. President.” In November 1799 Washington gave his last military review at Gadsby’s Tavern (Cameron & Royal), where in 1801 Jefferson held his Inaugural Dinner. Both taverns are steps from 301 N. Fairfax.

In 1791 Old Town was included in the world’s first greenfield capital city, the District of Columbia and remained part of DC until 1846. On August 29, 1814, Alexandrians awoke to find a British naval squadron had captured the city. We had slave markets here. The first two deaths of the Civil War occurred at Marshall House (480 King) on May 24, 1861, the day after Virginians voted to join the Confederacy. The Union officer killed was a friend of Lincoln and laid in state in the White House. A Civil War hospital was located across from City Hall. One block south of 301 N. Fairfax two Black men were lynched - in 1897, and in 1899. **We have no more historically meaningful street than North Fairfax.** It deserves our study and respect, not the numbing and irreversible densification that is proposed. Lose historic places and lose history.

The Alexandria City website proclaims, “The Old & Historic District was... established to protect the City’s colonial heritage.” Will Mayor Wilson and his Council preserve Old Town by honoring those words, or are these words meant only to amuse us? In 1977 the city unwisely allowed an office at 301 N. Fairfax. Let us reverse that error, not double the densification. We must preserve Old Town’s historic neighborhoods and traditions. There is no other responsible civic path.

Michael C. Maibach has lived in the 300 block of Queen Street since 1997. He gives historic walking tours for his neighbors and friends. They begin in his kitchen, which was built in 1790 when Old Town was 41-years-old, and our 234-year-old Constitution was but one year old.

From: [Preservation](#)
To: [Lanning J Blaser](#)
Subject: Fw: [EXTERNAL]301 N Fairfax
Date: Friday, June 23, 2023 8:10:45 AM

From: Thekidphr <thekidphr@aol.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 22, 2023 11:56 PM
To: Preservation <Preservation@alexandriava.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]301 N Fairfax

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Board of Architectural Review

As a resident of 411 N Fairfax, I have serious concerns regarding the consideration given to a proposal for a large condominium building very close to my home in the historic district. The plans for 301 N Fairfax which I have seen propose to build a very ordinary appearing structure, albeit massive in height and width dwarfing all adjoining buildings, without any architectural features characteristic of Old Town. Aside from such a modern minimalist style blighting the esthetic of our neighborhood, the proposal which I have learned intends 50 residential units with on site parking for 69 vehicles, ALL COMPACT CARS. Such a plan challenges the capacity of the city infrastructure for water and sewage management as well as traffic and parking.

I am strongly opposed to this plan for these proposed condominiums. Please support your neighbors in ensuring the beautiful esthetic Alexandria represents. Please continue to be an agent of responsible management of city services for our neighborhood.

Respectfully
Phillip H. Reeder MD
411 N Fairfax
254 722 4511

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Board of Architectural Review
City of Alexandria, Virginia
June 22, 2023

We recently (Feb 8, 2022) purchased a townhome at 411 N. Fairfax. We are so excited to be part of such a beautiful and historic area.

We planned the updating and remodeling. We went through all the proper procedures. We were required to submit our plan to the BAR, even though none of the changes were visible from the street. We added a room with a dormer on the backside. The Zoom meeting with the BAR was over 90 minutes, where you debated the esthetics of our addition, although not visible to the public. The main reason we purchased our property in Old Town was due to the esthetics and beauty of the historic or reproduction of housing in the area. We did not mind the debate, as we knew this was keeping Old Town as it is. This was the primary reason we purchased here, and not elsewhere. Other places were less costly, but did not have the esthetic appeal as this area. We carefully followed all the rules and requirements to maintain the integrity of Old Town.

Recently we learned that 301 N. Fairfax, the next block over, is being demolished and new housing replacing it. While the existing building isn't historical, at least it blends in. Height, brick and windows are complementary to the area. We were shocked when we saw the projected size and appearance of the new building. What has happened in the last year that completely changed the focus of the esthetic and historical vision of Old Town? This awful non-descript building could be in any city, anywhere. There is nothing at all unique or historic looking about it.

We also noticed that it will have 50 residential units with ONLY 69 compact parking spaces. We already have difficulty with parking when having friends over, sometimes with them having to park several blocks away. When a special event is going on downtown, it becomes even worse. We have actually gone to their homes to pick them up and return them! If these projected condos have at least 2 people each living in them, wouldn't they need a minimum of 100 parking spaces? What about their own visitor parking? What about the typical "oversized" SUV's? Where will they park on an already crowded street?

I am shocked, disappointed and angry that the same principles that were applied to our remodel, just one year ago, are not being considered for this project. If this is the case, I regret purchasing and paying a premium for our property in Old Town, as this projected type of new construction is just so common. There is nothing a unique or historic looking about this planned construction. Go to

any city and look at their new construction-it is the equivalent. We did not move to Old Town for its modern construction. We fell in love with the beautiful streets, historic-type housing and atmosphere. With this large new construction and its closer proximity to the popular King Street, and being very visible, it is incomprehensible that this type of housing construction could even be considered in the historic district.

The increased parking needs, stress on the busy streets, and utilities is not what this area needs right now.

Keep Old Town's historic appearance- and please do not allow this type of common, "trendy" and non- historical appearance construction be built.

Elizabeth Wilson Reeder
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