

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** DECEMBER 5, 2012

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER /s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

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Consideration of the Union Street Corridor Study Recommendations.

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of a report on the Union Street Corridor Study and recommendations.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That Council: (1) approve the Union Street Corridor Study short-term recommendations detailed in this memorandum; and (2) approve the direction of the proposed long-term recommendations subject to further refinement.

**BACKGROUND:** The approved 2012 Waterfront Small Area Plan recommended that a comprehensive transportation study that addresses vehicular (parking, bicycle, trolley, delivery truck loading, Motorcoach, etc.) pedestrian and other impacts along the Union Street corridor be completed prior to approval of any new development in the area. The goal of the study was to: (a) identify and examine parking, traffic and circulation conditions along the Union Street Corridor in order to generate improvement alternatives that are aligned with Complete Streets principles including balancing roadway space and intersections to prioritize vulnerable users; (b) increase pedestrian safety and strengthen intermodal connections (pedestrian, bicycle, Trolley, Metro, Water Taxi); (c) provide better signage and public information about vehicular parking and travel options, and (d) enhance curb-space management.

**DISCUSSION:** The study area included the entire length of Union Street from Pendleton Street to Jones Point Park. The study was conducted in coordination with a number of previous studies including the 2012 Alexandria Waterfront Small Area Plan, 2008 Transportation Master Plan, the 2008 Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Plan, the Old Town Area Parking Study, and the Motorcoach Task Force Report. In addition, the Union Street Corridor Study considered the Wayfinding Guidelines, the Potomac River Waterfront Flood Mitigation Study, and the Windmill Hill Park Concept Plan.

**Public Input:** Civic engagement was an important element of the study. Extensive stakeholder interviews were conducted to consider the impact of existing parking and traffic conditions on

residents, businesses and visitors. Stakeholders interviewed included: The Waterfront Commission, Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), The City of Alexandria's Police Department (Old Town Patrol Division), Potomac Riverboat Company, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA), Union Street Public House and representatives of the Old Town Civic Association. In addition, trail intercept surveys were collected to gather Mt. Vernon Trail bicyclists' on-street route preferences through Old Town and their opinions on the Union Street corridor.

The Waterfront Commission, which is the City's advisory body for Waterfront Small Area Plan implementation, received two presentations on June 21, 2012 and August 23, 2012 regarding data collection, existing conditions and preliminary concepts. These meetings were open to the public and provided an opportunity for the Waterfront Commission and members of the public to provide input. At a third meeting of the Waterfront Commission, held on September 27, 2012 revised concepts were considered and approved by the Commission (Attachment 2). Additional citizen input was received at a public meeting held on September 19, 2012 and presentations were made to the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) on September 19, 2012 and the Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA) Commission on September 20, 2012.

At the August 23, 2012 meeting, members of the Waterfront Commission filled out a Concept Idea Questionnaire to gauge the comfort level with the ideas presented at that meeting. The results of this questionnaire are summarized below. The percentages are determined using the total number (9 total responses) of Waterfront Commission members responses to a concept idea questionnaire distributed at the end of the meeting. These responses indicate that the Waterfront Commission recognizes that some change is needed and they are open to recommendations along Union Street that prioritize providing more space for pedestrians.

- 100% agreed that the "Current conditions on Union Street are not good enough; some change is needed. 89% felt that it is important to maintain the historic character of Union Street.
- 78% felt that the entire length of Union Street should not be made one-way and 56% felt that not even a portion should be made one way.
- 78% agreed that pedestrians should be the priority on Union Street.
- The Waterfront Commission was divided on removing on-street on all of Union Street, while 78% were comfortable with removing a portion of on-street parking at selected locations.
- 100% felt that more police enforcement is needed (for parking, loading, stop sign compliance).
- 67% were comfortable (45%) or open to the idea (22%) of pedestrians share space with motor vehicles and bicycles.
- 78% agreed that widening the existing sidewalks where there are the greatest pedestrian volumes is a critical outcome of the projects.
- 78% felt that removing the trees can be considered to meet other objectives, as long as trees are replaced and given better growing conditions.

Data Collection: The study collected extensive data including parking counts and traffic counts for all modes (i.e. pedestrian, bicycle, vehicular, delivery trucks and motorcoaches), crash data and video behavioral analysis, was collected and analyzed in May through July 2012.

Multi-modal intersection counts reveal how users today are using Union Street. Intersection counts were conducted for the morning, midday and afternoon/evening peak hours on a weekday (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday) and the midday and afternoon/evening for a Saturday. These counts show that the intersections of Union & King Street, Union & Cameron and Union & Duke Street are the busiest. The counts also show that pedestrians significantly outnumber motor vehicles and bicyclists at the intersection of King & Union Street. Pedestrian volumes at Union & Cameron Street equal, or slightly exceed, motor vehicle and bicycle volumes. Additionally, Friday and Saturday have the highest volumes for all modes compared to Tuesday-Thursday. The key findings from the analysis of these traffic volumes are that based on the usage patterns of Union Street, recommendations should prioritize pedestrians in the core (between Duke and Queen Streets) and that different solutions may be appropriate during different times of day and days of the week.

Based on the analysis of the existing parking and traffic data, trail intercept surveys and stakeholder interviews, a series of concept alternatives were developed to provide a better balance of space allocation along Union Street and to minimize intermodal conflicts and support and promote a safe, lively and compelling waterfront where pedestrians, bicyclists and all users can feel safe and comfortable.

Initial concept alternatives were presented to the Waterfront Commission on its August 23, 2012 meeting. The concepts were divided into short-term site-specific improvements that could each be constructed in 6 to 12 months and longer-term corridor concepts. The proposed recommendations were then refined based on the input received from the Commission. The refined concepts were presented to the public at a public meeting on September 19, 2012.

Final recommendations were presented to the Waterfront Commission on September 27, 2012.

**A. Short-term Recommendations:** These are specific immediate actions and would take six to twelve months to implement each improvement contingent upon availability of funding.

1. Mount Vernon Trail connection improvement:

This improvement addresses the concerns at this location including the connection of the Mt. Vernon Trail to Pendleton Street for bicycles and the connection of Oronoco Park to Founder's park for pedestrians. The recommendations provide a designated space for bicyclists to make left-turns onto Pendleton Street to the Mt. Vernon Trail and vice versa. The recommendation also eliminates the crosswalk at the intersection of Union Street and Pendleton Street and provides a designated walking corridor on the east side of Union Street between Oronoco and Pendleton Streets. The space for the designated walking corridor is achieved by reducing the travel lane widths and shifting the parking lane to the west. In the short term, the pedestrian walking corridor would be delineated using flexible posts and striping. In the long-term, a curb and sidewalk would be constructed.



2. Bike lane/shared-lane marking transition:(intersection of Queen Street and Union Street)  
Currently, there are bike lanes striped on Union Street between Queen and Oronoco Streets and shared-lane markings south of Queen Street. This recommendation includes new pavement markings at the intersection of Union Street & Queen Street to clearly communicate to both bicyclists and motorists how to transition between the bike lanes and shared-lane marking.

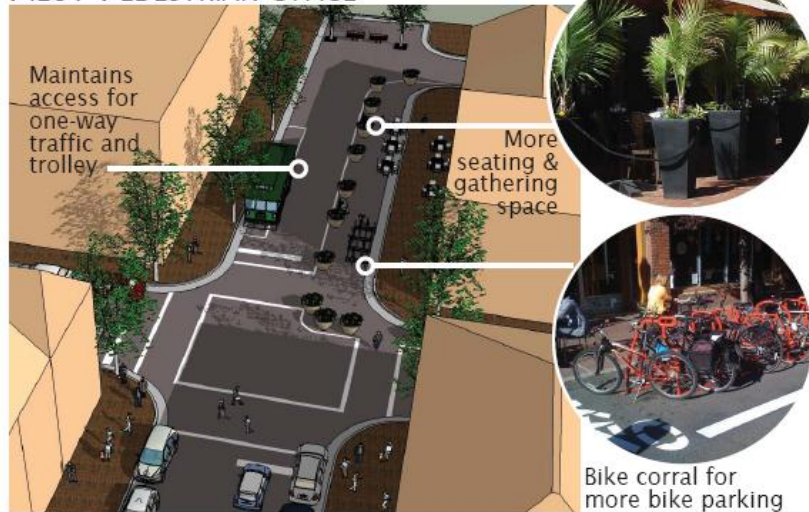
3. Pilot part time parking on Union Street between Prince and King Streets:

The multi-modal traffic counts conducted indicate that pedestrian volumes are highest during the afternoon/evening and on Fridays and Saturdays. Recommended part-time parking restrictions offer an opportunity to reclaim some of the street currently used for parking for pedestrian circulation during peak pedestrian hours.

4. King and Union Street improvements and pilot turn restrictions:

A major concern in the study area is, conflicts between motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians, crowding on the corners and delay for motorists at the intersection of King & Union Streets. Additionally, the Unit Block of King Street has great potential to provide additional space for pedestrians to walk and congregate. Several improvements are recommended to be implemented in the short-term to address these concerns: (1) widened and textured crosswalks both raise the pedestrian priority and provide more space for pedestrians to cross, increasing the opportunities for a gap for motorists to pass the intersection, (2) no left turn-restrictions would be piloted and evaluated to see potential benefits of reducing conflicts between motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, and (3) a pilot of a pedestrian plaza on the south side of the Unit Block of King Street could be achieved using pavement markings, planters, tables and benches. A specific design would need to be developed and shared with the community.

## PILOT PEDESTRIAN SPACE



### 5. Windmill Hill Park improvements:

Windmill Hill Park is bisected by Union Street and this section of Union Street sees higher speeds than sections of Union Street closer to King Street. The Wilkes Street Tunnel exits mid-block between Wolfe and Gibbon Streets on Union. There are two recommendations at this location which would be to construct: (1) a raised Crosswalk at the intersection of Union and Gibbon Streets and, (2) a raised crosswalk with landscaping at the mid-block crossing of Union Street.



**B: Long-term Recommendations:** The core of Union Street between Cameron and Prince experiences the highest volumes of pedestrians and many conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles. The long-term recommendation for the core section of the corridor between Cameron and Prince is a shared street which would provide more pedestrian space and encourage bicyclists and motorists to travel slowly. This concept is consistent with the vision in the Waterfront Plan and would need to be designed in coordination with other ongoing and future Waterfront related studies such as the Flood Mitigation Study and the Waterfront Park Landscape Plan.

The principle design element of the shared street concept is that both the street and sidewalks are flush from building face to building face, textured pavement and banding treatments would delineate pedestrian-only spaces with motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians all sharing the roadway space. This configuration allows the most flexibility in terms of programming of the space and is a more efficient and balanced use of the street.

The long-term concept would require a considerable amount of future capital funding and would likely be constructed in the five to ten year timeframe.

**C: Commission Approvals:** The Waterfront Commission, on September 27, 2012, voted 11-1 to recommend approval of the Union Street Corridor Study recommendations. The Transportation Commission, on November 7, 2012, voted 6-0 after holding a public hearing to recommend approval of the Union Street Corridor Study recommendations. The Planning Commission, on November 8, 2012, voted 6-0 after holding a public hearing to recommend approval of the specific Union Street Corridor Study short-term recommendations as well as approved the direction of the long-term recommendations subject to further refinement.

**D: Next Steps:** If approved by Council, staff will include a budget request for the short-term improvements for consideration in the FY 2014 CIP budget. Some of the short-term improvements will require additional design and engineering (such as the Windmill Hill Park improvements), while others can be implemented without further design (turn restrictions and striping). Some of the short-term improvements that would affect parking will need to go before the Traffic and Parking Board.

The long-term concept for the shared street will be advanced and further refined through the design work for the flood mitigation and park landscape design as part of the implementation of the Waterfront Plan.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Design of the short-term improvements is estimated at \$150,000 and construction of all of the short-term improvements is estimated at \$675,000. This would be considered for inclusion in the FY 14 CIP and will have to compete for funding among many other needed and meritorious projects. The long-term recommendation will be advanced through the flood mitigation and park landscape design work at which time cost estimates will be developed. The long-term recommendations will also have to compete for future CIP funding.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment 1: Recommendations
- Attachment 2: Letter from Waterfront Commission
- Attachment 3: Letter from Transportation Commission

**STAFF:**

- Rich Baier, Director, T&ES
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