

Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations

A City-wide non-partisan coalition of civic associations working together for a better Alexandria.

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3-8-22

March 6, 2022

Mayor Wilson
Vice Mayor Jackson
Councilman Aguirre
Councilwoman Bagley
Councilman Chapman
Councilwoman Gaskins
Councilman McPike

Dear Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Jackson, and Members of the City Council:

The Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations, hereafter referred to as the Federation, respectfully requests that City Council modify staff's proposed composition of the Duke Street Transitway Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to include voting representatives from the neighborhoods that will be most impacted by this project.

According to Ms. Hilary Orr, on March 8, 2022, Transportation & Environmental Services will ask Council to approve a nine-member ad hoc advisory committee composed of: one Federation representative; one member of the Transportation Commission; one member of the Planning Commission; one member of the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities; one member of the DASH Bus Riders Group; three at-large community representatives, whom Ms. Orr described during a Feb. 23 Federation meeting as "students, renters, businesses, minorities, adjacent neighborhoods and non-driving households"; and one representative of the development community.

The Federation respects the work that T&ES staff have put into transitway planning and the concept of the ad hoc committee as the means to gather input for and select a transitway design. We greatly appreciate staff's designating a seat on the committee for a Federation representative. The Federation is deeply concerned, however, that T&ES's proposal does not also reserve seats for the neighborhoods along Duke St. that will be most directly affected by this project.

To strengthen the ad hoc committee and improve the outcome for the Duke St. corridor, the Federation asks Council to adopt the following, more balanced distribution of seats. To ensure that neighborhoods that directly connect to Duke St. (i.e., physically abut the roadway and/or must use Duke to access their footprints) are adequately represented, the committee would allocate three voting seats to representatives from relevant civic associations and homeowners associations, and one seat to a resident of a rental complex. To fulfill the city's promise of equity, the owner of a small, independent business whose premises sits on Duke St. – rather than a commercial realty services company or other large business – would serve as the business community representative. The Federation, Transportation Commission, Commission on Persons with Disabilities, and DASH Bus Riders Group would fill the remaining four seats.

To conform to Ms. Orr's framework of a nine-member committee the Planning Commission's and developers' representatives would be eliminated. The Duke Street Transitway is a transportation project, funded by taxpayer dollars routed through the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority. The Planning Commission will have other opportunities to review the selected alternative and offer its opinion to Council. Given the ad hoc committee's small size, the presence of a developer, who is likely to focus on maximizing development potential and future financial gain rather than what works best for the roadway and its communities, also is unwarranted at this juncture.

Understanding and respecting our city's many neighborhoods are crucial to positioning Alexandria for success. Mayor Wilson and Councilor Chapman have previously indicated they support this sound approach, assuring members of the Strawberry Hill and Wakefield-Tarleton Civic Associations that residents of these communities would hold voting seats on any body charged with Duke Street Transitway design and decision making. As an operating precept, the Federation supports a City process that prioritizes the needs, ideas and choices of the constituents who will be most affected.

Again, the Federation appreciates the opportunity to provide one of the new voices that will shape the Duke Street Transitway. We look forward to joining a diverse ad hoc advisory committee that reflects the corridor's neighborhoods and residents.

Sincerely,

Pete Benavage
Co-Chair

Carter Flemming
Co-Chair

Copy to:

Mr. James Parajon, Alexandria City Manager

Mr. Yon Lambert, Director, Department of Transportation & Environmental Services

Ms. Hillary Orr, Deputy Director of Transportation

Ms. Gloria Sitton, Alexandria City Clerk