

DOCKET ITEM #8
City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2022-00002
Unit block of King Street
and the northern portion of the Strand

Application	General Data	
Request: Review whether the closure of the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand to vehicular traffic is consistent with the City of Alexandria Master Plan pursuant to Section 9.06 of the City Charter.	Planning Commission Hearing:	April 7, 2022
	City Council Hearing:	April 23, 2022
	Zone:	KR and WPR
Address: Unit block of King Street (between Union Street and the Strand), and the Strand (between Wales Alley and King Street)	Small Area Plan(s):	Old Town and Waterfront

Staff Reviewers:

Christopher Ziemann, Transportation & Environmental Services,
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Jack Browand, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities, jack.browand@alexandriava.gov

Michael Sharpe, Alexandria Fire Department, Michael.sharpe@alexandriava.gov

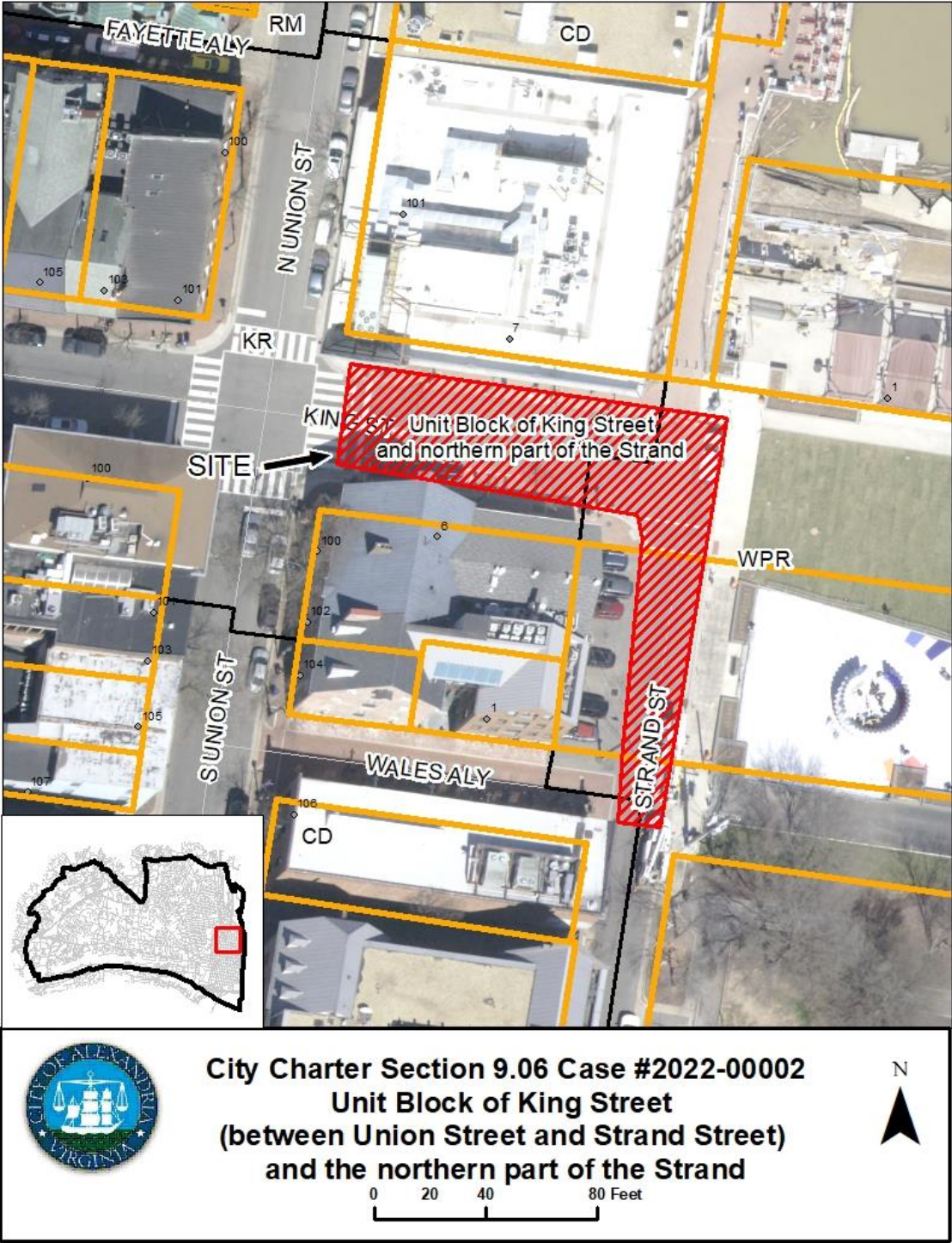
Thomas Ground, Alexandria Police Department, Thomas.ground@alexandriava.gov

Ryan Staab, Alexandria Police Department, ryan.staab@alexandriava.gov

Matt Landes, Department of Project Implementation, matthew.landes@alexandriava.gov

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.

City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2021-00002
Unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand



I. DISCUSSION

The City proposes to temporarily close the unit block of King Street, between Union Street and the Strand, and the northern portion of the Strand, between Wales Alley and King Street, to vehicular traffic between May 28 and November 20, 2022. Section 9.06 of the City's Charter requires that the Planning Commission review any changes to the use of a public street. The Planning Commission is charged with ensuring that any change is consistent with the City's Master Plan.

II. BACKGROUND

The unit block of King Street between the Strand and Union Street is a one-way street heading west with parking on one side of the block. On the other side, it previously hosted the King Street Trolley terminus and layover area until this was moved to Market Square with the closing of the 100 block of King Street. The block is commercial with several restaurants. Before the pandemic, these restaurants participated in the City's outdoor dining program, which allowed restaurant seating on the sidewalk while maintaining a five-foot wide accessible path for pedestrians. Two (2) parking spaces on this block are restricted to two-hour parking from Monday-Saturday from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The northern portion of the Strand, between approximately Wales Alley and King Street, is a two-way street heading north and south with parking on one side of the block currently under a month-to-month lease with the city. On the other side is the newly designed Waterfront Park. The block is commercial with two restaurants and a currently vacant commercial space. Before the pandemic, one of these restaurants participated in the City's King Street Outdoor Dining Program for dining seats on the sidewalk. During the temporary outdoor business program, this restaurant provides dining seats in leased parking spaces behind the restaurant. Another restaurant participates in outdoor dining along Wales Alley.

In 2012, the City Council adopted the Waterfront Small Area Plan, which, among many things, recommends closing the unit block and the Strand north of the parking garage entrance to traffic (except EMS, fire, police, etc.) to make a pedestrian plaza. In 2019, the Council directed staff to develop a pilot program to test closing the 100 block of King Street to car traffic following recommendations from the Lower King Street Multi-modal Feasibility Study. In May 2020, the City temporarily closed the 100 block of King Street to vehicular traffic to support the first phase of business recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Closing the street enabled businesses to use additional sidewalk space for outdoor dining while meeting public health guidelines for social distancing. As a part of that closure, the City installed temporary pick-up and drop off zones along the adjacent cross streets (Union St. and Lee St.) to facilitate deliveries to businesses via alleys running parallel to the 100 block of King Street.

As the City began the re-opening process during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff developed a Temporary Outdoor Business permit for restaurant, retail and fitness

businesses to use adjacent parking spaces for conducting business outdoors. Given the concentration of restaurants and pedestrians along the 100 block of King Street, as well as the desire to provide expansive space for pedestrians to safely maintain distance, staff worked with the businesses to close the 100 block to all vehicle traffic. The closure required the inclusion of a 22-foot wide Emergency Access Easement (EVE) in the center of the street to allow for emergency vehicles. The temporary closure took effect on May 29, 2020. In October 2021, the Council permanently closed the street to traffic, maintaining the EVE.

Following the closure of the 100 block of King Street, an observable decline in through traffic on the unit block resulted. This decline, and the popularity of the new Waterfront Park, has led to an increase in pedestrian volume on the unit block and the Strand. In addition, based on the success of the closure of the 100 block, staff has received requests from the businesses along the unit block to assess the feasibility of closing this block as well.

An advisory group made up of staff from various departments and the business community (Police, Fire, Planning & Zoning, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities and the Old Town Business Association) has met several times between November 2021 and February to determine details of the closure. Transportation impacts, including parking, traffic and transit routes, have been considered as part of this closure.

Similar to the closure process of the 100 block, staff is considering a temporary pilot project to close the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand. At its February 28 meeting, the Traffic and Parking Board recommended a temporary closure between April 1 and November 20 (consistent with the dates approximating the King Street Outdoor Dining regulations).

The Waterfront Commission reviewed this proposal at its meeting on February 15, 2022 and voted to support this temporary closure (Attachment 5) with recommendations to install a crosswalk in the middle of the intersection across Union Street between the unit block and the 100 block of King Street, reconsider the placement and quantity of bicycle parking and ensure efficient loading.

The City Council will consider the street closure at a public hearing in April and will consider the feedback from the Planning Commission, as well as the Traffic and Parking Board and Waterfront Commission who have also reviewed this proposal.

III. CONSISTENCY WITH THE MASTER PLAN

The subject property is within the Old Town Small Area Plan (originally adopted in 1993) and the King Street Retail Strategy (adopted in 2005) boundaries. It also is in the boundaries of the Waterfront Plan (adopted 2012). Closure of the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand to vehicular traffic is consistent with several goals stated in these plans.

Waterfront Plan: Three separate recommendations in the Waterfront Small Area Plan refer to pedestrianizing the unit block of King Street and the Strand:

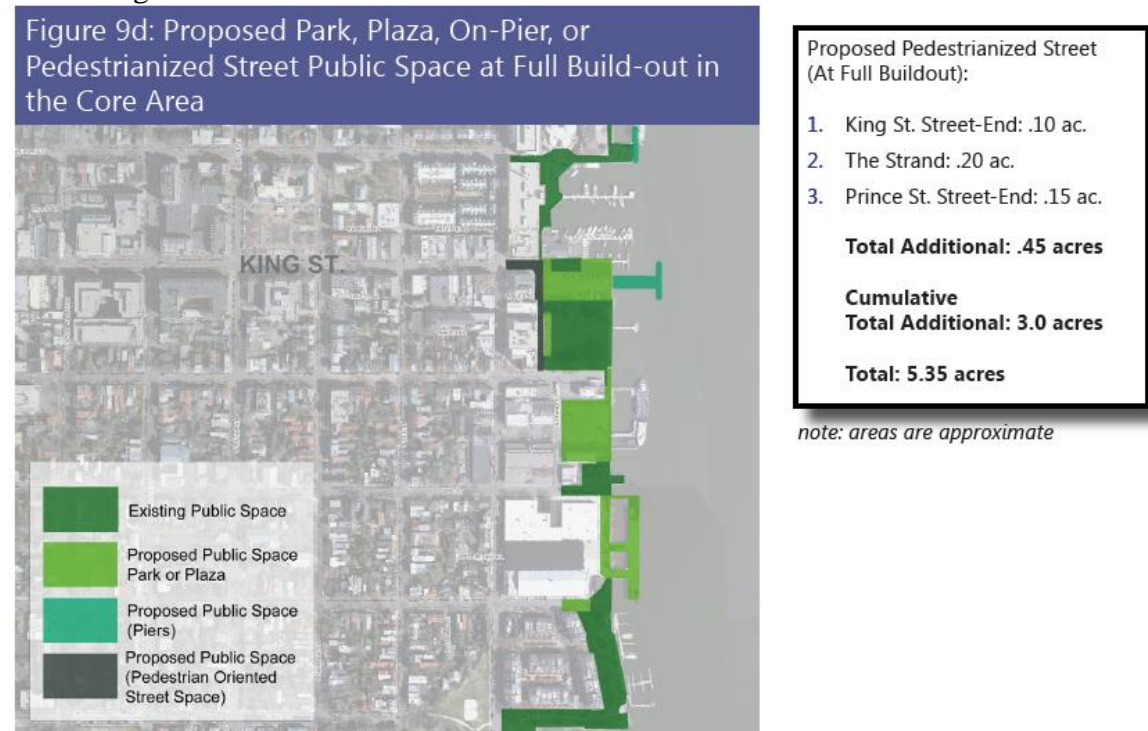
3.67: Implement the vision of the Plan for King Street at the river, Waterfront Park, and the City marina. The component elements of this vision are outlined below but the sequence and timing of the elements will vary based on the unique challenges and opportunities of each element. Phasing is also addressed in Chapter 5 of this Plan; Element 1 - Pedestrian Plaza from Union Street to the River; Marina Repairs and Upgrades

3.68: Limit vehicular access to the unit block of King Street and The Strand between Prince and King Streets to emergency vehicles, deliveries (limited hours), motorcoaches, and the King Street Trolley. The Strand would also be open to vehicles accessing the parking garages and lots that have entrances on this block of The Strand.

3.91: Create a comfortable pedestrian-focused zone along The Strand from King Street to Point Lumley, limiting vehicular access where possible. Open alleyways and other east-west links between Union Street and the river.

In addition, the plan contains the following references:

P. 23 – Figure 9d



P. 131 – Fitzgerald and Waterfront Park Phases

“... Elevate King Street and The Strand slightly; repave, creating a pedestrian-oriented plaza or square in the unit block of King Street; ...”

Finally, the plan includes the following references to support the pedestrian nature of these Blocks:

“Increase and improve access to the public spaces of the Waterfront. Pedestrian connectivity along the Waterfront should be continuous.” This block provides a connection to the Interim Waterfront Park and by removing vehicles from this segment, more space is provided for pedestrians to access the park. Additionally, by closing the block to vehicles, new pedestrian space is created which complements the open space directly along the Waterfront.

“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.” Over the last year, this block has proved to be a destination that attracts residents and visitors alike. By closing this block to vehicles and improving the space for pedestrians, a prominent entrance to the Waterfront can be established that creates an improved visitor experience.

“Provide a variety of uses, themes, activities, and experiences along the Waterfront.” The closure of this block to vehicles and creation of a pedestrian plaza will create a unique experience for people entering the Waterfront. The historically commercial nature of the block provides a different activity from the passive open space along the Waterfront and the expanded areas for the businesses that can result from the closure will further enhance this activity.

“Improve the Waterfront’s vehicular and pedestrian circulation.” The Waterfront Plan calls for minimizing pedestrian and vehicle conflicts. These blocks are particularly challenging for pedestrians given the limited sidewalk space, lack of traffic, and desire that by visitors to walk in the street. 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. Additionally, the intersection of Union and King Street is often congested from vehicles and pedestrians moving through the area. While the closure does not completely eliminate conflicts, eliminating one of the vehicular travel directions does reduce potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. In addition, and in connection with the closure of the 100 block, with pedestrians crossing across Union Street in the middle of King Street, they are more visible to traffic when large trucks are parked close to the corner. Regarding parking, while this proposal does eliminate two metered parking spaces and two unmetered spaces, there are several public parking options nearby that accommodate the parking demand from these spaces (three garages within one block, three garages within two blocks, and four garages/lots within three to five blocks).

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission find that the proposed closure of the unit block of King Street, between Union Street and the Strand, and the northern portion of the Strand, between Wales Alley and King Street, to vehicular traffic between May 28 and November 30, 2022 is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia and with the City's Master Plan, including specifically the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

STAFF: Karl Moritz, Director, Planning & Zoning
Ann Horowitz, Planning & Zoning
Christopher Ziemann, Transportation & Environmental Services
Katie North, Transportation & Environmental Services
Bob Garbacz, Transportation & Environmental Services
David Kurtz, Transportation & Environmental Services
Alton Weaver, Transportation & Environmental Services
Jack Browand, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities
Michael Sharpe, Alexandria Fire Department
Thomas Ground, Alexandria Police Department
Ryan Staab, Alexandria Police Department
Matt Landes, Department of Project Implementation



Alexandria Waterfront Commission

Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

1108 Jefferson Street

Alexandria, Virginia 22314

February 18, 2022

Honorable Mayor and members of City Council:

Re: City's Proposal to Pilot the Closure of the Unit Block of King Street

The Waterfront Commission offers this letter of endorsement for a pilot program to open the unit block of King Street to pedestrians, as well as establishment of permanent curbside pickup/loading zones in the 100 blocks of North and South Union Street. This letter describes specific suggestions for improving proposed concepts to implement each proposal.

The Waterfront Commission supports the proposed temporary closure to traffic of the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the strand. Opening these streets to pedestrian traffic will better link Waterfront Park to the existing pedestrian zone in the 100 block of King Street. This proposal is consistent with the Waterfront Small Area Plan, which included three separate recommendations to increase pedestrian access between the Waterfront and King Street.

We offer the following specific recommendations to improve this proposal:

- Center crosswalks and reconsider placement of barricades to facilitate pedestrian access to cross Union Street in the middle of King Street.
- Reconsider the placement of bicycle parking, to ensure it is sufficient and appropriately positioned to maximize access to the waterfront.
- Facilitate access by delivery vehicles servicing adjacent businesses by designating delivery hours and parking locations with a commitment by the City to enforce established regulations and pick-up/loading zone parking limits.

We encourage study of the pilot to inform a proposal to permanently open the unit block of King Street to pedestrians.

The Waterfront Commission also supports approval of permanent curbside pickup/loading zones in the 100 blocks of North and South Union Street. However, we encourage the City to adjust the boundaries of the parking zone to prohibit vehicle parking at existing spaces immediately adjacent to the intersection with King Street. This, coupled with refinement of crosswalks as described above, will provide for greater visibility of and for pedestrians crossing Union Street.

The Waterfront Commission is generally supportive of proposed refinements to the 100 block of King Street and appreciates continued efforts to optimize the features of this block.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen Thayer", with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Stephen Thayer, Chair
Alexandria Waterfront Commission

cc: Traffic & Parking Board
Alexandria Waterfront Commission
James F. Parajon, City Manager
Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager
Debra Collins, Deputy City Manager
Yon Lambert, Director, Transportation & Environmental Services
Karl Moritz, Director, Planning & Zoning
James Spengler, Director, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
Don Hayes, Acting Police Chief, Alexandria Police Department
Jack Browand, Staff Liaison, Alexandria Waterfront Commission

**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
TRAFFIC AND PARKING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2022, 7 P.M.
VIRTUAL MEETING**

M I N U T E S

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman, William Schuyler, Vice Chair, James Lewis, Jason Osborne, Annie Ebbers, Ann Tucker, Lavonda Bonnard and Casey Kane

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: T&ES - Alex Block, Principal Planner, Ryan Knight, Civil Engineer IV, Cuong Nguyen, Civil Engineer III, Hillary Orr, Deputy Director of Transportation, Katie North, Division Chief of Mobility Services, Chris Ziemann, Division Chief of Transportation Planning, Alex Carroll, Complete Streets Coordinator, and Max Devilliers, Urban Planner II. Alexandria Police Department: Lt. Jason North, Sgt. Dan Schultz

1. Announcement of deferrals and withdrawals: None.

2. Virtual Meeting Resolution:

BOARD ACTION: Mr. Lewis made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kane to approve the virtual meeting resolution. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of the November 15, 2021, Traffic and Parking Board meeting minutes:

BOARD ACTION: Ms. Ebbers made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kane to approve the minutes of the November 15, 2021, Traffic and Parking Board meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

4. **WRITTEN STAFF UPDATES:** The Board received written staff updates on Cedar Street Turn Restrictions and the Capital Bikeshare program. Mr. Kane asked staff for an update on when the maps in Capital Bikeshare stations will be replaced.

5. **WRITTEN PUBLIC HEARING FOLLOW-UP:** The Board received a written update on turn restrictions at the intersection of Seminary Road and St. Stephens Road. Mr. Kane, Ms. Ebbers, and Mr. Osborne did not support the addition of a “when pedestrians are present” sign at the intersection and asked instead for a specific time restriction. Ms. Orr noted the City’s current policy is driven by resident requests, but Staff could revisit this in the future.

6. **PUBLIC DISCUSSION PERIOD:** Ms. Babette Smith spoke about parking issues on N. Early Street and expressed concerns about future parking impacts from the Minnie Howard school expansion plan. Ms. Clare Skarda asked questions of the Board regarding the City’s process of evaluating traffic volumes on Duke Street. Mr. Zach DesJardins spoke against “where pedestrians are present” language for right turn on red restrictions,

and noted that removing right turn on red would be safer. Mr. Alex Bryant spoke about safety concerns at the intersection of Pegram and Taney Streets.

CONSENT ITEMS

BOARD ACTION: Mr. Lewis made a motion, seconded by Mr. Osborne to remove item 7 and item 8 from the Consent items list. The motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING

7. **ISSUE:** Consideration of an amendment to the City Code to increase fines for heavy vehicles parked in commercial business areas with multiple open citations

DISCUSSION: Mr. Block presented the item to the Board, noting that the Staff recommendation had changed from the recommendation in the docket. Staff now recommend escalating fines of \$40 for the first violation, \$100 for the second, \$250 for the third and any subsequent violation, and immobilization or removal of the vehicle for the fourth and any subsequent violation. Mr. Kane asked if these violations are only occurring on S. Pickett Street; Mr. Schultz of APD affirmed, but also identified Wheeler Avenue as a hot spot.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: Mr. Art Impastato, President of the Cameron Station Civic Association spoke in support of the proposed ordinance, but asked for higher fines. Mr. Greg Hillson, resident of Cameron Station, also spoke in support of the ordinance and appreciated the revised staff recommendation.

BOARD ACTION: Vice Chair Lewis moved to recommend approval, but with a lowest fine of \$100 and fines escalating from that point. Mr. Kane seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

8. **ISSUE:** Consideration of a request to implement the residential pay by phone program on the 300 block of S. Pitt Street.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Devilliers presented the item to the Board. Mr. Schuyler noted that many of the applicants are his immediate neighbors and asked about the criteria to remove these restrictions; Mr. Block noted the Code requires the same 50% petition threshold. Mr. Schuyler asked if the Board has any discretion to reject an application that meets all the criteria; Ms. North noted the program is modeled after the existing Code. Mr. Kane asked if the program has improved enforcement; Ms. North noted that it has.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: Ms. Yvonne Callahan does not support the application, and questioned the current procedure of making a single site visit to verify the application. Ms. Shannon Watson, the applicant, spoke in support, assuring the Board that there is a parking problem on the block. Mr. Stephen Milone wanted to clarify the Docket report's comment about support from the Old Town Civic Association, and feels that the program is divisive.

BOARD ACTION: Mr. Kane moved and Ms. Ebbers seconded the staff recommendation to approve; the motion carried unanimously.

9. **ISSUE:** Consideration of an amendment to the City Code to allow the City Manager to reduce speed limits below 25 miles per hour in business and residence districts

DISCUSSION: Ms. Carroll presented the item to the Board. Mr. Kane asked how speed limits and traffic calming projects might interact. Ms. Carroll said they would, with implementation depending on resources. Ms. Carroll also noted the City is planning a pilot neighborhood slow zone project in the Lynhaven neighborhood.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: Mr. Patrick Wise expressed strong support for the ordinance and for traffic calming projects. Mr. Stephen Milone spoke in favor, and expressed an interest in a 15 mph limit for most Old Town streets. Mr. Oscar Gonzalez spoke in support. Mr. Brian Shankman spoke in support.

BOARD ACTION: Ms. Ebbers made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lewis to recommend the Council adopt the ordinance. The motion carried unanimously.

10. **ISSUE:** Consideration of a request to temporarily close the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand, temporarily remove up to four parking spaces, and temporarily remove motorcoach parking on the unit block of King Street.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Ziemann presented the item to the Board. Mr. Kane suggested crosswalk improvements at the King/Union intersection and asked if the existing bike parking would remain; Mr. Ziemann said it would, but may be relocated. Mr. Osborne asked about the end of the pilot if successful; Mr. Ziemann noted any longer-term closure would come back to the Board for review. Ms. Ebbers asked if a Capital Bikeshare station is planned; Mr. Ziemann said not at this time.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: Mr. Patrick Wise provided strong support for the project, and emphasized the need for plentiful bike parking. Mr. Oscar Gonzalez spoke in support, noting the need for crosswalk improvements at the King and Union intersection.

BOARD ACTION: Mr. Kane made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lewis to approve the temporary closure and parking removal. The motion carried unanimously.

11. **ISSUE:** Consideration of a request to revise the No Parking restrictions in Fayette Alley and add curbside loading zones at North and South Union Streets and North and South Lee Streets.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Block presented the item to the Board. Mr. Kane asked about use of the existing zones and if the City would evaluate their effectiveness. Mr. Kane also noted the existing illegal in-street loading from large trucks along Union Street.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: No members of the public spoke on this item.

BOARD ACTION: Ms. Tucker moved to accept the staff recommendation, seconded by Ms. Ebbers. The motion carried unanimously.

- 12. ISSUE:** Consideration of a request to add five on-street parking spaces along the east side of the 500 block of Mount Vernon Avenue.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Devilliers presented this item to the Board. Mr. Kane expressed disappointment there wasn't more thought about the CurbSpace Prioritization Framework, noting that parking was lower on the priority than other items. Mr. Kane suggested perhaps in-street bike parking or some additional safety improvements might be warranted.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: Dina-Marie Deringer, the applicant, spoke in favor of the request, and also expressed support for the idea of a bike corral as a part of the project.

BOARD ACTION: Mr. Kane moved to defer the item to a later meeting and ask staff to investigate other options. Ms. Ebbers seconded the motion. The motion carried 5-2, with Mr. Schuyler and Mr. Osborne opposed.

END OF PUBLIC HEARING

BOARD ACTION: Ms. Ebbers moved to close the public hearing, seconded by Mr. Lewis. The motion carried unanimously.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- 13. STAFF UPDATES:** Mr. Block provided the Board with a status update on the curbside pickup zones implemented during the pandemic, and collected feedback from the Board about a future process for assessing those zones.

COMMISSIONER UPDATES: Mr. Kane updated the Board on the Transportation Commission meetings in January and February. Mr. Schuyler announced to the Board that he is approaching ten years of service on the Traffic and Parking Board, and that the March meeting will be his last.