

submitted by
Boyd Walker
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Re: Robinson Terminal North

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council,

I am fully aware that this is for final approval of the Robinson North Terminal site, and it is as envisioned in the Waterfront plan, a plan I opposed. I am also aware that we have had elections, and the Waterfront plan was even brought back for a re-vote, but as this is one of the last opportunities to speak to this plan, I hope you will appreciate a little historical perspective.

I like to think of this spot not as Robinson Terminal North but as West Point where West's warehouse once stood. This is where the oldest structure in Alexandria once stood, and indeed we may find the remains of this structure beneath the asphalt that covers the site, much as we were lucky to find so much archeology intact at the Freedmans cemetery. The Tobacco taxing warehouse that was here was why Alexandria was established, as it was the furthestmost navigable point on the Potomac and a natural place to roll hogsheads of tobacco from Virginia farms to the port down Rolling Road where they could be inspected and shipped. It is what made Virginia Tobacco an important product and brought commercial activity to the Virginia side of the river.

It is also the point where the earliest wharf, essential to this commerce, was located. It was at this wharf that troops arrived to join General Braddock to fight in the French and Indian War and head up Braddock Rd. to Ft. Defiance where somewhere along the way Gen. Braddock lost his life. I like to imagine that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson stood at this site looking out as the troops arrived. We know the early configuration of land at this site from the map that George Washington's brother drew when describing this as an ideal location for a port. Robinson Terminal was one of the two points of the original bay that formed Alexandria before infill began, which is one of the reasons why a settlement agreement with the United States government was reached early and easements were placed by the US Government that would govern its future development, easements I hope this development honors.

This point is surrounded by two parks, that if it were not for early advocates of open space and history like Ellen Pickering, would not be here. She and Bob Montague led the fight to keep a high rise development out of Founders Park, known as Watergate on the Potomac, by citing the unsettled title stemming from 1790 when Alexandria became part of the District of Columbia and when it was returned. We were only given back what was given, not all the land that was acquired between 1790 and 1846. Ellen also stopped dumping into Oronocco Bay on the North side of Robinson Terminal. Thankfully, the planning director at the time, Engin Artemil, helped negotiate a deal between Texaco, and the United Way that created Oronocco Bay Park. I would like to propose a new name for this corner of Alexandria that owes so much to one person: Pickering Point.

But my larger point is that a lack of imagination and lack of alternatives have determined what is being proposed at this site. In the height of the Waterfront fight there was an alternative proposal that would have created park land instead of commercial development, connecting

Founders Park and Oronocco Bay Park, which are divided now and will be further seperated by this development. This proposal, unlike the millions of dollar put into the development plan, was hand drawn on a piece of paper and never truly considered. It was only presented after more than 1,000 signatures were submitted against the rezoning of all three development sites. But this is the most important of the three sites and the one that comforms the least to the character, quality of the surrounding neighborhoods and will have the biggest impact, creating a new commercial area where none exists now. It will bring the traffic, deliveries and parking problems that don't exist here. The plan on the table lacks creativity and vision.

This site is where the story of Alexandria began and where it would be best to tell it. If any of you, like I, envision a waterfront where we celebrate our history and have tall ships on a daily basis this would be the site. Instead, the best we can do is a hotel and additional residential development, squeezing in the maximum amount of square feet onto this historic site. Often, opponents of projects, get accussed of being against things without proposing a vision or an alternative. I always envisioned Founders Park as our central park that would lead to a beautiful museum where our maritime heirtage would be celebrated. This would bring activity and a point of interest essential to Waterfront development without the negative impacts. It could be linked to Metro using the existing railroad tracks. This is a project worthy of a partnership with the Smithsonian, which has no waterfront access, or support from the State legislature. In the past few years since we have been discussing this plan, we have had the Voyage of John Smith stop on our shores, 400 years after Jamestown, and more recently a visit by the Hermione, the ship that brough Lafayette to our shores. I wish we had more opportunities to showcase the role Alexandria played in the founding of the United States.

There are many reasons this plan should and could still fail including the remote chance that any of you will vote against it today. But it also includes the chemicals that have been spilling into the Oronocco outfall, the discovery of archeological finds, or a failure to finance this huge project. I sincerely hope this project fails and that we have a chance to reimagine this site. If we don't, I hope we consider the missed opportunities here and look down river at the GenOn site, not for how much development can we fit there, but what can be done with the site that would truly add value to Alexandria, such as a cultural center, a musuem, or a place where students can study our shoreline. I also hope that we will look to preserve and expand the set aside for the Washington to Mt. Vernon Bike trail that was started right here in Alexandria by Ellen Pickering and Barbara Lynch. I hope we don't loose another opportunnity to enrich lives, instead of just enriching developers.

Boyd Walker