

**A statement by Bert Ely to City Council on behalf of
Friends of the Alexandria Waterfront regarding potential
flooding effects from waterfront property development**

December 12, 2015

Mr. Mayor and members of Council I am Bert Ely, a co-chair of Friends of the Alexandria Waterfront (FAW). I am speaking today on behalf of FAW with regard to potential waterfront flooding effects from the forthcoming waterfront development. I also am a member of the Ad Hoc Monitoring Group on Waterfront Construction. While other members of the Monitoring Group share my concerns that I am about to express, I am not speaking on behalf of the Group.

As you know four major development projects have begun or will soon begin along the Alexandria waterfront. They are Robinson Terminal North (RTN), the Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC), the Carr hotel now under construction, and Robinson Terminal South (RTS). RTN will have two large buildings on either side of North Union Street, ODBC will consist of one building as is true of the Carr hotel, while RTS will consist of three new condominiums, the retention of the RTS office building, and six rows of townhouses.

In all, thirteen sizeable new structures will be constructed in the waterfront flood plain while three sizeable structures will be demolished – two at RTN and one at RTS – along with the much smaller Potomac Arms building, two smaller buildings on Strand, and the present ODBC clubhouse. Finally, the City plans to build a substantial flood-mitigation infrastructure along the central portion of the waterfront. There also will be changes in the docks and piers extending into the river.

All of these additions, subtractions, and other changes to structures and building elevations on the waterfront will, when completed, dramatically change how flood waters flow along the river and through the waterfront area, yet neither City staff nor anyone else knows what the combined effect of all of these changes will be on those flowing waters.

While the proposed floodwall may, or may not, minimize nuisance flooding, the next Isabel, and there will be another Isabel, will overtop the proposed floodwall. Consequently, floodwaters will course through Old Town streets, notably flowing southward along Union and Strand, while water from heavy rains will pour down the east-west streets. Those flood waters will likely cause significant damage to presently existing structures and even to some of the new structures as well as to the public infrastructure, notably streets and parks. It will be a gigantic mess!

I and others, including recognized experts in these matters, such as Tony Kupersmith and Randy Randol, have raised these concerns at Monitoring Group meetings, most recently at last Monday's meeting. To date, our concerns have been, to put it politely, blown off. Although certain developments, notably RTN and RTS, have to be elevated to meet FEMA requirements, we were told on Monday by City staff that FEMA's "standard of care" only applies within the floodplain and not to areas adjacent to the floodplain.

Adjacent property owners, such as along South Union and in Waterford Place and Founders Park, were told that they should buy flood insurance, as if flood insurance would be affordable or even available given the ongoing deficit in the federal flood insurance program that Congress may someday stop subsidizing, leading the much higher flood-insurance premiums.

Such a cavalier attitude by staff is unacceptable. Instead, the City should stop all waterfront construction until a comprehensive floodplain model has been developed that incorporates all changes planned and anticipated along the waterfront for the foreseeable future. To proceed otherwise will simply be an irresponsible act by the City.

Thank you for your time today – I welcome your questions.

Mr. Mayor, members of council -

I am here this morning to speak to your proposal to vote yourselves a pay raise, as reported in (the November 30th edition of) the Washington Post, and the RedBrickTown blog (of December 11th). It is reported that the mayor's salary would increase by TWO-THIRDS (from \$30,000 to \$50,000), while the salaries of council members would rise by nearly that much - not quite 62% (\$27,500 to \$45,000), and that these raises would take effect almost immediately, in January.

I want to point out that the City sponsored several public forums this year, at which City employees explained that the budget would be very tight, and citizens were invited to suggest ways to either increase revenue or decrease spending in order to balance the budget. I heard many thoughtful suggestions and discussions, but I do not recall any citizen suggesting that the council should raise its own salaries.

Please consider: Alexandria Police officers received a 9% raise in the last budget, after years of being paid at well below the rates of officers in our comparator jurisdictions. Alexandria firefighters are still waiting to receive either the market rate adjustment or the years of service adjustments, which the council has had before it for several years. More than a dozen medics have resigned this calendar year to move to positions in other departments.

I feel certain that the Alexandria schools and other departments of the City government could tell their own histories of positions eliminated and raises delayed.

According to the Post article, Virginia law prohibits the current council from raising its own salaries, so the raise will be delayed ... until January, when the new council takes office. Given that the majority of the members of this council will also be members of the council in January, I suggest that IF the council chooses to approve this raise, that implementation of the raise be delayed until after the next election for council positions. This would allow the voters of Alexandria to decide if these raises are the best use of their taxes.

My name is Cathy Kroohs. I am recently retired from a career as a medic with the Alexandria Fire Department. I am a member of the Alexandria Professional Medics Association and Local 2141 of the International Association of Firefighters, although today I am speaking only for myself.

I HAD INTENDED TO SPEAK TO ITEM #17.

BECAUSE THAT HAS BEEN TABLED, I WILL HOLD
MY REMARKS UNTIL IT IS AGAIN UNDER CONSIDERATION.

C. Kroohs
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