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A statement by Bert Ely to the Alexandria City Council regarding the Interim Plan for Fitzgerald Square

May 13, 2017

Madam Mayor and members of Council I am Bert Ely, I live at 200 South Pitt, and I am speaking only for myself.

I am here today to propose an alternative interim plan for Fitzgerald Square that will maximize the use of existing facilities, notably the Old Dominion Boat Club building, meet pressing parking needs in the immediate waterfront area, and cost much less than the proposal before you.

As a Boat Club member, I am quite familiar with the Club's well-maintained facilities. The large room on the ground floor could provide space, for example, for the Seaport Foundation's boat-building activities and offices. Archeological finds related to the waterfront, such as timbers recovered from the Indigo hotel excavation, could be displayed there, too.

There is a well-equipped kitchen on the ground floor, which broadens the range of potential uses for that floor. Bathrooms could be installed accessible to the public from outside the building. The ballroom on the second floor could be utilized as public meeting space or rented out for private events. There is a small, but recently updated kitchen on the second floor, bathrooms, and a separate bar and lounge area with great views of the river. Perhaps that space could be leased to a food-service operator, generating income to help cover building operating and maintenance costs.

With the ongoing loss of parking in the waterfront area and increased parking demand due to new restaurants, there is a desperate need for additional parking in the lower King Street area. Therefore, the existing Club parking lot should be converted into a pay lot operated by a contractor in a manner comparable to the existing riverfront lot on Strand Street. The profits from the lot would help cover the costs of maintaining the clubhouse building and park facilities on the site. Some spaces in the lot could be reserved for City employees who now park on nearby residential streets.

The boat launch ramp on the east side of the parking lot could be utilized for launching kayaks, rowboats, small sailboats, pedal boats, etc. Perhaps there could even be a boat-rental facility there. That ramp also would continue to be available for launching emergency rescue craft.

Removing the existing fencing on the club property would extend the present King Street Park to the area in front of the clubhouse building. Removing that fencing would integrate the Club site with Waterfront Park while permitting the construction of a riverfront promenade from the park to the Torpedo Factory.

In closing, given its seriously constrained finances, the City should maximize the use of existing facilities at the bottom of King Street rather than bulldozing what exists and then discovering that it lacks sufficient funds to build an attractive replacement. Adopting this interim proposal would not bar the eventual construction of a permanent park at the bottom of King Street, but it would make effective use of what is there today.

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