City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: **July 24, 2019**

TO: **Chair & Members of the BAR**

FROM: **Al Cox, Historic Preservation Manager**

SUBJECT: **Sidewalk Paving Materials in the Historic Districts: DRAFT**

Sidewalks have been paved with brick in Alexandria since the 18th century and were required by the Town Council to be installed by the abutting property owner or were sometimes paid for by lottery. By the early-20th century, sidewalks throughout the city were paved with less expensive concrete. By the mid-20th century, segments of the earlier brick sidewalks were also replaced with concrete.

BAR staff has observed that concrete sidewalks require more frequent replacement, largely because of displacement by street-tree roots in Old Town that cause concrete to heave and crack, whereas brick sidewalks tend to move more gradually and naturally "ramp" over the roots. In addition, repairs for utilities, such as new gas lines, tend to be more localized and existing brick can be reinstalled for a virtually invisible patch. On the other hand, individual bricks are often displaced during the winter during periods of freeze/thaw or when shoveling snow and these sidewalks require regular maintenance, as well. Loose bricks can be a trip hazard and present a challenge to persons with disabilities. Today, concrete sidewalks cost approximately half that of brick because of the requirement for more skilled labor to install brick, though opinions vary on the long-term maintenance and life-cycle cost difference.

As part of a broader BAR discussion of public infrastructure in the early 1990s, T&ES agreed that they would retain existing stone curbs and repair brick sidewalks with brick but they would not replace existing concrete sidewalks with brick unless the abutting property owner paid the difference in cost between the two materials. Since the 1970s, they have also, somewhat reluctantly, permitted developers to install the more attractive brick sidewalks in front of new projects at the developer's initial expense. However, this has given many sidewalks on our most historic blocks a patchwork quilt appearance and has created a situation where 1970s townhouses have brick sidewalks and 1870s townhouses have concrete sidewalks, confusing the public about which buildings are historic. (Figure 1) Recently installed concrete curb ramps at street intersections for handicap accessibility, driveway or alley approaches, and concrete pads for new bus shelters are also visually jarring on blocks with historic houses. (Figure 2)

Figure 1: Queen Street brick sidewalk with concrete section

Figure 2: New concrete curb ramps in brick sidewalks at Princess and North Columbus streets

When the *Alexandria Complete Streets Design Guidelines* were being developed in 2016 https://www.alexandriava.gov/localmotion/info/default.aspx?id=91090, T&ES and P&Z staff agreed that concrete sidewalks in need of repair would be replaced in the future with brick if the majority of the structures on that block-face were historic. This informal agreement required a definition of "historic" and a survey of the existing sidewalks and structures districts. Now that the Parker-Gray District and the Old and Historic Alexandria District have both defined the periods of architectural significance as 1749-1932 and 1934, respectively, P&Z staff has surveyed all of the blocks within the two districts and developed the following criteria that were used to produce

the attached map. This criteria will be incorporated in the BAR's new design guideline for Infrastructure in the Public Right-of-Way this fall and the map will be posted in the City's GIS system for use by T&ES' maintenance staff.

The attached map, titled *Sidewalk Paving Materials in the OHAD and PG Districts*, has Early (pre-1932) buildings shown in red and Later (post-1931 buildings) shown in blue based on the 1931 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Sidewalk materials are indicated by colored lines with solid red being brick on a predominantly historic block-face; a dashed red line being existing brick on a later block-face or sidewalks that have urban design significance; and green being existing historic concrete sidewalks on a block-face of later buildings.

To be clear, T&ES does not have funding to proactively remove existing concrete sidewalks and replace them with brick. This policy is only to establish what materials should be installed on individual blocks when sidewalks are being installed or replaced as part of a development project and what materials will be used to replace existing concrete sidewalks or curb ramps, etc., when those features must be replaced. This will require additional funding for T&ES maintenance operations or may delay some sidewalk replacement schedules in the future. At the present time, the map and criteria are in final review by T&ES and BAR staff and is being shown to the BAR for comment and endorsement only.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Criteria for Determining the Locations of Brick or Concrete Sidewalk Paving Material in the OHAD and PG Districts
2. *Sidewalk Paving Materials in the OHAD and PG Districts*

ATTACHMENT #1

Criteria for Determining the Locations of Brick or Concrete Sidewalk Paving Material in the OHAD and PG Districts

July 24, 2019

1. Historic cobblestone streets, alleys designated in the *Old Town Historic Districts Alley Inventory*, stone curbs, brick and cobble gutters, and existing exposed brick streets will be preserved and repaired to original historic condition when maintenance and repairs are necessary.

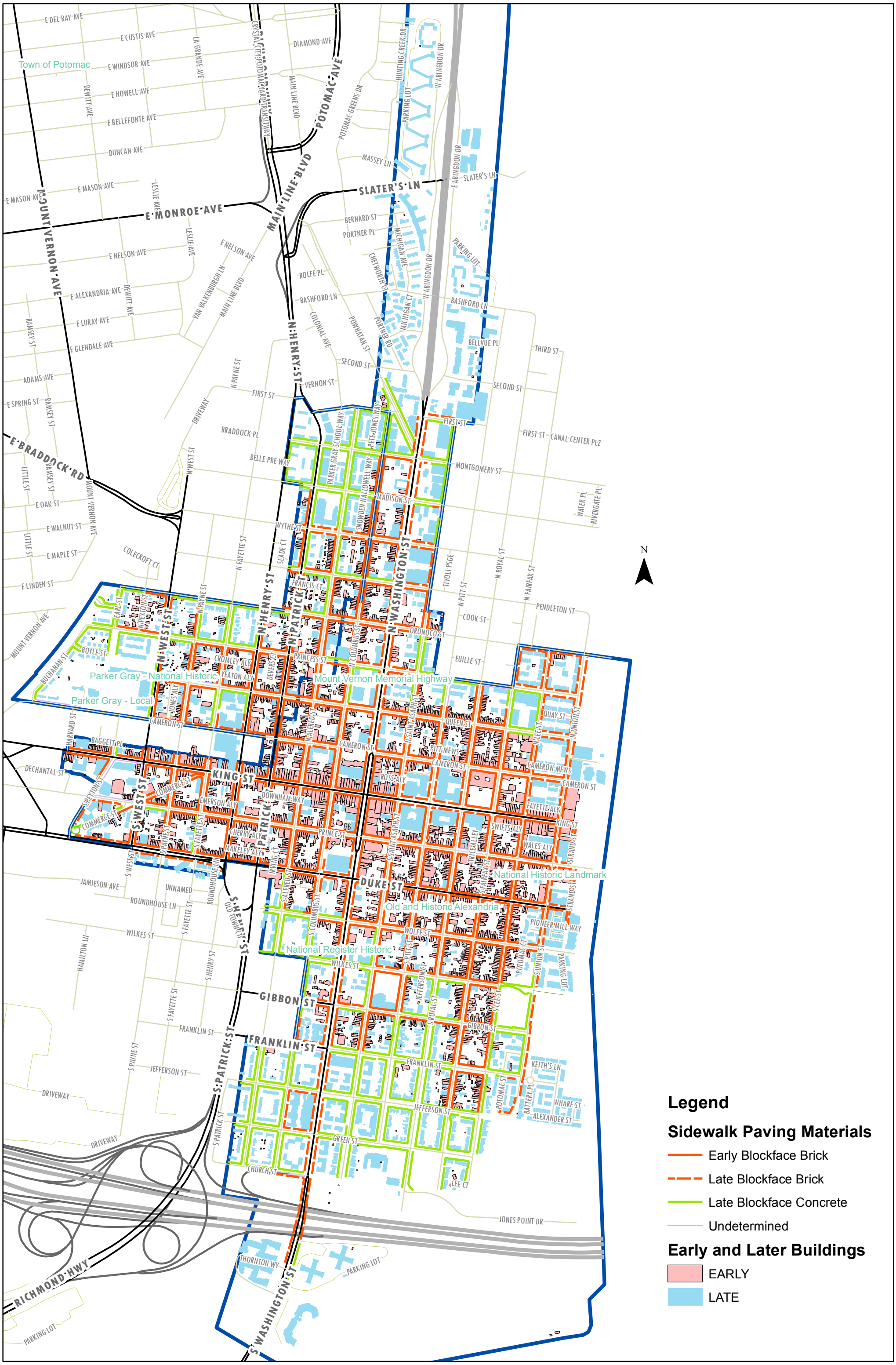
2. Sidewalks on block-faces where the structures are predominantly historic will be paved with City standard red brick. This includes driveways, alley approaches and bus shelter pads. Predominantly historic, or "Early," block-faces are defined as those where at least half of the existing structures were constructed prior to 1932, based on the presence of those structures on the 1931 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. (*shown on the sidewalk map as a solid red line*)

3. Sidewalks on streets shown in an approved Small Area Plan to have special pedestrian paving will also be paved entirely in whatever material was specified in the plan. Examples include King Street from the Potomac River to Callahan Drive; Strand Street; Washington Street from the Urban Deck to First Street; Wythe Street from the Waterfront to the Metro; and Fayette Street between King Street and the Braddock metro station. (*shown on the sidewalk map as a dashed red line*)

4. Existing brick sidewalks throughout the historic districts on "Later" (post -1931) block-faces will remain and be repaired with brick, regardless of the age of the buildings on the block-face. (*shown on the sidewalk map as a dashed red line*)

5. Existing concrete sidewalks on "Later" (post -1931) block-faces will be remain concrete and be repaired with concrete. *(shown on the sidewalk map with a green line)*

6. Accessibility curb ramps at street intersections will be constructed or replaced with brick where both of the intersecting block-faces are "Early" (pre-1932) and with concrete where one or both block-faces are designated "Later" (post -1931.)



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