



Alexandria Archaeological Commission
America's First Archaeological Commission



December 28, 2020

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of City Council,

As Chair of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC), I am reaching out to provide our input on the Torpedo Factory Art Center Action Plan for Vibrancy and Sustainability. We applaud City Council and City Staff's dedication to the future of this unique gem and a source of great pride for Alexandria. We would like to thank Diane Ruggiero and Brett Johnson for their time and efforts to engage the public with the details of this plan, including accepting our invitation to present at our November Archaeological Commission meeting.

Our initial input on the current draft plan includes the following three points.

1. Any plan for revitalizing the Torpedo Factory should recognize the *historical* significance of the building as a key element of the plan. We support future efforts to preserve and interpret the historic character and evolution of the Torpedo Factory building and continue to tell its history – including and highlighting its African American history, its development into the unique Arts Center it is today, and Alexandria's role in our national defense decades ago.
2. The Torpedo Factory houses the Alexandria Archaeology Museum and the Archaeology division. The museum contributes to the vibrancy of the Torpedo Factory by increasing visitation and telling the story of Alexandria to visitors of all ages. The plan should *recognize Archaeology* and the role they play in future revitalization efforts.
3. The original vision of the Torpedo Factory was "*Artists at Work, Archaeologists at Work.*" We want to continue to expand that concept and the exhibition and volunteer opportunities it presents. Since the museum was established in 1984 and even before that, the partnership of artists at work and archaeologists at work has resulted in unique collaborations and experiences for residents and visitors.

In closing, we continue to have one request, as stated at the City Council meeting in 2018 when this initiative was discussed. As a division of the Office of Historic Alexandria, Alexandria Archaeology is an integral part of the historic preservation of the city and the Torpedo Factory. For this reason, we ask that as the planning moves forward on the Vibrancy and Sustainability Plan for the Arts Center, a member of the Alexandria Archaeology Commission be considered as a primary stakeholder in the process. We only see an exciting future for Archaeology in Alexandria and the future of the Torpedo Factory is part of the excitement.

Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street, #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3217
Phone: 703/746-4399



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Thank you for considering our input on the Action Plan.

Sincerely,

Ivy E. Whitlatch

Ivy Whitlatch
Chair, Alexandria Archaeological Commission

Cc: Mark B. Jinks, City Manager
Gretchen Bulova, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria
Eleanor Breen, City Archaeologist, Office of Historic Alexandria
Diane Ruggiero, Deputy Director, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, Office of the Arts



December 10, 2020

TO: Diane Ruggiero
FROM: Melynda Wilcox, President
Alexandria Symphony Orchestra Board of Trustees

Comments on "Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability at Torpedo Factory Art Center"

The Alexandria Symphony Orchestra (ASO) is pleased that the City is taking steps to address the future of the Torpedo Factory Art Center (TFAC) and is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the recent Action Plan.

The ASO fully endorses the three core strategic directions outlined in the Action Plan and would add a fourth: **Maximize the potential of the Art Center in *placemaking*, an approach to creating spaces in which people want to work, live, play, learn and invest.** As you know, many developers are focused on the concept of placemaking because that strategy not only improves an area's quality of life but also enhances its economic vitality. With the transformations that Amazon, Virginia Tech and National Landing are bringing and will continue to bring to our city, placemaking is a timely and urgent consideration as the City works to attract new businesses and prospective employers. Many of the comments provided by commercial developers in the helpful memo from the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership align with the concept of placemaking.

Within the context of placemaking, the ASO urges the City to consider a broader role for the Art Center and to envision the Art Center as the hub and destination for all forms of artistic expression—performing arts as well as visual arts. Imagine, for instance, orchestra musicians playing from the second level balcony while modern dancers perform choreography that weaves among Art Center visitors on the main level; a tour group gathering at a welcoming new waterfront entrance for an architectural walking tour; a flower-arranging demonstration outside in the public space; a cookie-decorating or musical-instrument-making class for kids being taught in a classroom; and patrons purchasing art and jewelry from local artists while waiting for their table at the rooftop restaurant or beer garden. All of this or a myriad of other creative uses could be happening simultaneously, fully realizing the Art Center's potential as the crown jewel on Alexandria's waterfront.

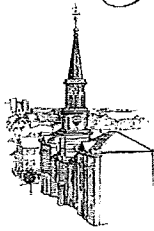
Turning to the content of the Action Plan, the ASO is disappointed that there was not more consideration given to specific strategies for making the Art Center financially viable and sustainable, as the title of the report suggests. The Action Plan could have benefited from some examples around the U.S. or the globe of similar art centers or public spaces that have resulted from successful public private partnerships.

Under the current rental/special event rate schedule, use of the facility is cost-prohibitive to arts groups within the city. If the Art Center is truly to be a hub for local arts nonprofits, then a plan for financial viability (perhaps via a public private partnership) must take this into consideration. In the meantime, the ASO requests that the City evaluate the feasibility of setting a nominal nonprofit rate for off-peak hours or designating one evening each month when local arts organizations are featured. Another option is a recurring festival that showcases multiple arts groups from several disciplines.

The ASO strongly supports a re-jurying process for studio lease holders that results in a more diverse mix of both artists and art forms.* Again, it would have been helpful for the Action Plan to have included examples of artist selection processes that are highly-regarded and have been successful elsewhere. To help alleviate the concerns of current lease holders, the City might explore other locations where transitional studio spaces could be leased at affordable rates, such as the Durant Center, City Hall, Building Momentum, or one of the many coworking sites.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Action Plan. The ASO looks forward to being an active participant in the next steps for reimagining the Art Center's vibrancy and sustainability.

*As part of the ASO's own strategic plan to open doors to adventurous music-making, we are committed to presenting works by forgotten, undiscovered and underrepresented voices.



Alexandria, Virginia

Historic Alexandria Resources Commission

*220 North Washington Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2521
(703) 746-4554*



December 4, 2020

Mayor and Members of the Council
City of Alexandria

RE: Torpedo Factory Arts Center Action Plan

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of the City Council:

Your interest in ensuring the future of the Torpedo Factory and its contribution to the City's identity, vitality, and worldwide recognition as a tourist destination has prompted us to write to you on behalf of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC). We write in furtherance of our mission to advise and support the City Council, City Manager and staff on "responsible stewardship of this unique, historic city" by such means as "preserving its historic cultural diversity," maintaining its "historic integrity," and "building a sense of community identity and continuity," as well as preserving historic sites and buildings.

In many ways, the Torpedo Factory is the anchor of continuity for our waterfront. Special praise must be afforded Marian Van Landingham for her leadership in transforming a deteriorating waterfront factory into today's incredible arts center.

The "Action Plan for Vibrancy and Sustainability at Torpedo Factory Art Center" prepared for the City by the SmithGroup provides a menu of potential action items that could significantly change aspects of the building. We applaud and support the effort to enhance this iconic structure which has been a leading example of adaptive reuse since its inception as an artist collaborative drawing hundreds of thousands annually to Alexandria and its waterfront. However, we assert that the absence of elements acknowledging the fascinating history of the building is a significant oversight.

Construction as a torpedo factory by the Navy began in 1918, and the building was revitalized in World War II for the same purpose. During the war, the complex expanded to eleven buildings employing about 5000 munitions workers. Today it stands not only as an internationally recognized Art Center but also as an iconic 100 year-old building which is one of the last remaining examples of this important period of industrialization in Alexandria.

We applaud efforts to reinvigorate the Torpedo Factory as an artistic magnet for visitors and residents alike. We urge that, in the process, the importance of its history be acknowledged and preserved. Indeed, we believe that the history of the building and the groundbreaking artists collaborative which has occupied it for many years comprise an asset that is unique and should be highlighted and celebrated. Visitors to the Torpedo Factory Art Center who are not aware of

its history might notice the torpedo and the historic photographs and text — but possibly not. There is no literature or even a sign directing interested people to a website.

The Action Plan's "Core Strategic Direction #2: Curate the Building, with a Focus on the First Floor, for Improved Visitor Experience and Artist/Studio Program" should include elements focused on the history of the Torpedo Factory. Possible ideas include providing a brochure or rack card about the origins and evolution of the building or setting up equipment to screen the excellent historical video produced for the centennial of the building.

It is important to state clearly in project planning documents that this is a significant historic building and to specify that project plans should meet applicable historic preservation standards and guidelines. It makes good and efficient planning sense to design the new project to meet the standards from the start, rather than have changes made during a review process. The Action Plan already cites the need to meet best business and industrial standards; the plan and its implementation should also be guided by historic preservation standards.

HARC shares your vision that history and its significance for our city is about more than the structures and vistas; it is the ongoing product of the people who have worked and lived here over the years – in this case thousands of workers in a plant critical to national security and then as a cutting-edge artists collaborative that became a model for similar institutions around the world. We would be pleased to provide additional suggestions going forward with the objective of recognizing and promoting that history as a key element of the Action Plan and other efforts to ensure the future of the Torpedo Factory Art Center. We believe that doing so will enhance and enliven this singular historic resource to benefit all residents of our city, as well as visitors and researchers from around the world.

Respectfully,

Danny Smith and Linda Lovell, Co-Chairs
Historic Alexandria Resources Commission

Cc: Mark Jinks, City Manager
James Spengler, Director, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Gretchen Bulova, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria

From: Judy Heiser <judyheiserart@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2020 2:55 PM
To: Brett Johnson <brett.johnson@alexandriava.gov>
Subject: Re: Happy Holidays

Hi Brett,

Thank you for the holiday note. The Action Plan looks quite interesting and is an inspiration to TFAC's future. I hope to help make an impact and look forward to new and optimistic developments.

Happiest of Holidays.
Judy

From: [EDWARD PULLIAM](#)
To: [Diane Ruggiero](#)
Cc: [Ivy Whitlatch \(ivveliz@comcast.net\)](#) ([ivveliz@comcast.net](#)); [Eleanor Breen](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Comments on Torpedo Factory Plan I was unable to give at Zoom
Date: Friday, December 11, 2020 12:55:26 PM

Diane,

I was on your Zoom meeting on the Torpedo Factory plan just now when the screen froze as Martha from, I believe, the Historic Alexandria Resource Commission was talking. I then got knocked off the meeting and could not rejoin it. Maybe something went wrong with my computer.

I did want, however, to make a couple of points on behalf of the Alexandria Archaeology Commission:

1. Any plan for redesigning the Torpedo Factory, as you all mentioned, should preserve the historic character of the Torpedo Factory building and continue to tell its history in the building itself. This would reinforce the point Martha was making when I was knocked off the meeting.
2. The Torpedo Factory contains the Archaeology Museum, of course. The museum contributes to the vibrancy and the amount of visitation of the Torpedo Factory. Archaeology welcomes the opportunity to collaborate on all Torpedo Factory planning.
3. The original vision of the Torpedo Factory was "Artists at Work, Archaeologists at Work." We certainly want to continue that partnership and exhibition opportunities.

Also, a couple of my own thoughts that are not necessarily supported by Archaeology:

1. I welcome your plan's continued emphasis on the Torpedo Factory as an Art Center. Northern VA does not need another restaurant and shopping mall as has been suggested. Not unique, not a draw. Example, people at Washington Harbor would not need to come to Alexandria for such a facility – they have all of that there.
2. The ship found at what is now the Indigo Hotel is being preserved and will return to Alexandria in a year or so. I suggest that it be displayed on the roof of the Torpedo Factory. That would be a unique attraction for this area and a good draw to the Torpedo Factory.

Finally a question: How do you plan to include the community input you have received in what you present to the City Council?

Sorry I was not able to present these points and question to you all as part of the meeting. Thanks, though for holding the meeting and for your work.

Ted Pulliam

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Alexandria Waterfront Commission

Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

1108 Jefferson Street

Alexandria, Virginia 22314

December 22, 2020

Honorable Mayor and members of City Council:

Re: This letter summarizes the views of the Waterfront Commission regarding the Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability at Torpedo Factory Art Center (TFAC)

The Waterfront Commission agrees with the motivation for this study as outlined in City Council's November 17, 2018 resolution: to develop, via a public process in coordination with stakeholders, a TFAC Vibrancy and Sustainability Plan; and bring that plan to City Council for consideration. However, we are concerned that the Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability at TFAC, as drafted, does not fully address Council's directives, as described in this letter.

Highlights of the study with which the Waterfront Commission concurs include the following recommendations:

- Maintain the TFAC as a center for the arts, which the Commission views as an asset to the City, a key anchor, and longtime essential element of the City's waterfront;
- Create a lively draw for visitors to the City and Alexandria residents, including those who frequented the center prior to the pandemic as well as those who have visited less frequently;
- Construct an open, primary entrance to the TFAC from Torpedo Plaza and the City Marina, drawing on the significant foot traffic at the center's rear door while still maintaining an entrance on North Union Street; and
- Continue the role of working artists as a major feature of the TFAC

The Waterfront Commission offers the following recommendations to fully provide for vibrancy and sustainability of the TFAC:

- **Revisit the City approach to management of the center and other Waterfront amenities.** City Council's 2018 directive affirmed that the City of Alexandria Office of the Arts will continue as the long-term managing entity responsible for management and operations of the TFAC. The Waterfront Commission has long advocated for a dedicated City agency or public/private entity as studied in the March 2015 Waterfront Governance Models' Analysis which focused on managing and programming the City's waterfront public spaces. Such an entity, if established when fiscal resources permit, could support management of the TFAC, as well as the City's new Waterfront parks and open space, in which significant investment is being made. It would provide a cross-cutting, integrated approach to managing these facilities, drawing support from Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (including the

Office of the Arts); General Services; Transportation and Environmental Services; the Office of Historic Alexandria; and other relevant City departments. Without an entity charged with coordinated management of Waterfront attractions—the crown jewel of the City’s public spaces—these facilities will continue to be managed at the margins of individual City departments.

- **Reimagine what the TFAC could be by considering a complete mix of uses the center could serve.** While broadly described as an “arts center,” the TFAC contains many discrete uses, including working artist studios, an art school, galleries, City archaeology museum, art store, event space, and public restroom facilities. The study does not address the amount of space devoted to these uses, nor consider other uses the center could or should accommodate to serve as a 21st century arts center. For example, the center houses many visual, graphic and sculptural artists, but there is no permanent presence for the performing arts. Any plans for the future of the center should fully consider the range of potential uses the center could accommodate, and the space to be allotted for each use. As described further below, the study should include a detailed accounting of the costs of potential renovations for each use and ongoing operating costs, as well as potential funding sources. In addition, the study should consider constraints on various uses posed by the building’s site and design, including thick, torpedo-proof walls and location in a flood plain subject to ever more frequent flooding as a result of climate change.
- **Provide a series of alternatives for community consideration.** The Action Plan for Vibrancy and Sustainability provides one vision of future use of the TFAC. It is a short report, with little background describing the basis for its recommendations. Because it did not involve original research but was rather based on a “study of studies,” it provides an operating plan for improving the function of the center as it presently exists but does not question the broader vision of what the TFAC should be. The Waterfront Commission believes that any study on the future of the center should provide discrete alternatives for community consideration. This process would identify and evaluate a range of additional uses the center could house—including new arts uses, performance spaces, and potentially, commercial uses—providing an informed basis for public input on the center’s future vision.
- **Investigate the costs and economic impacts of the center.** City Council’s 2018 directive requested that the vibrancy and sustainability plan recognize that substantial capital funding, in the order of \$10 million to \$15 million, will be required in the decade ahead in order to address current and future TFAC facility deficiencies, as well as to address to-be-determined future program needs. The Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability does not address the cost of City contributions to the TFAC in any way. The Waterfront Commission believes that both a financial and economic analysis of the TFAC is warranted, to understand the magnitude of future capital and operating costs the center is likely to incur, as well as the economic impact of any potential uses to the City. These analyses would help in distinguishing the fiscal impact of various alternative visions for the TFAC, as City resources

to support the center are limited. The Waterfront Commission also notes that considerations of sustainability should apply to all the Waterfront's public assets and amenities as well as to the TFAC.

- **Ensure that artists have a voice in the affairs of the center.** Recent changes in the management of the center have minimized control by the TFAC's resident artists, turning over most of its functions to the Office of the Arts, a division of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities. The City is now responsible for jurying in new artists, setting and collecting rents, hiring the director, allocating studio spaces, managing events rentals, and making other decisions regarding use of the space. While some of those functions may well be appropriate for the City to manage, others may be more appropriate for the artists themselves. For the center to thrive and be a draw for visitors and residents alike, the artists must have a meaningful, collaborative role in the center. They should not be reduced to simple tenants with little say in its affairs.

Finally, we are concerned that the draft study was written without the input of key constituencies—including City boards like the Waterfront Commission, TFAC artists, civic associations, local business organizations, Visit Alexandria, and the general public—until after the draft study was released. We believe the initial draft of this study would have been improved if broader community input were provided up-front. We are pleased that broader outreach regarding the Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability is now being conducted, and hope that the input being provided is incorporated into a revised plan.

The Waterfront Commission appreciates the opportunity to provide these recommendations to City Council and looks forward to continued collaboration to rejuvenate the Torpedo Factory Arts Center.

Sincerely,



Stephen Thayer, Chair
Alexandria Waterfront Commission

cc: Alexandria Waterfront Commission Members
Mark Jinks, City Manager
Debra Collins, Deputy City Manager
Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager
James Spengler, Director, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
Diane Ruggiero, Deputy Director, Office of the Arts (RPCA)
Jack Browand, Staff Liaison, Alexandria Waterfront Commission (RPCA)