



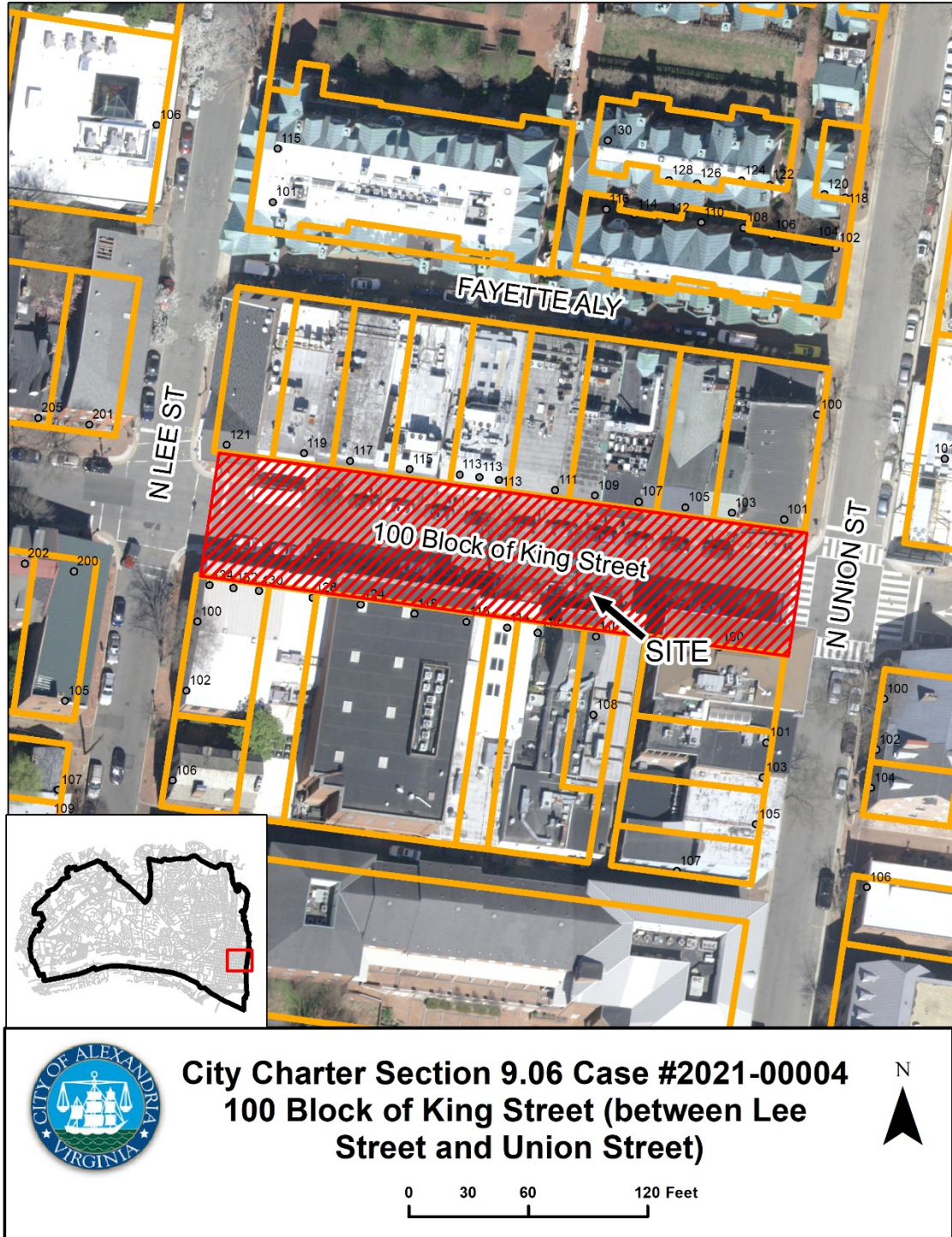
DOCKET ITEM #7
City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2021-00004
100 Block of King Street

Application	General Data	
Request: Review whether the closure of the 100 block of King Street to vehicular traffic is consistent with the City of Alexandria Master Plan pursuant to Section 9.06 of the City Charter.	Planning Commission Hearing:	October 5, 2021
	City Council Hearing:	October 16, 2021
	Zone:	KR
Address: 100 block of King Street (between Union and Lee Streets)	Small Area Plan(s):	Old Town and Waterfront

Staff Reviewers:

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Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission **approve** this request, finding that the proposal is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia, and with the City's Master Plan.



I. DISCUSSION

The City proposes to close the 100 block of King Street, between Union and Lee Streets, to vehicular traffic. Section 9.06 of the City's Charter requires that the Planning Commission review any changes to the use of a public street. The Planning Commission is charged with ensuring that any change is consistent with the City's Master Plan.

II. BACKGROUND

The section of the 100 block of King Street between Lee Street and Union Street is a two-way street heading east and west with parking on both sides of the block. The block is commercial with several restaurants and retail establishments. Prior to the pandemic, many of the restaurants participated in the City's outdoor dining program which allowed restaurant seating on the sidewalk, while maintaining a 5-foot wide accessible path for pedestrians. There are approximately 25 parking spaces on this block that are restricted for 2-hour, metered parking from Monday-Saturday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

In 2015, the City completed the [Lower King Street Multi-modal Feasibility Study](#), which included several design options for reconfiguring traffic, parking, and pedestrian space along the 100 block of King Street. Following that study, in 2019 the Council directed staff to develop a pilot program to test closing the 100 block of King Street to car traffic. In consultation with stakeholders, staff developed a hybrid concept to expand seating and programming along with one lane of traffic, called King Street Place. Staff presented the pilot program to the Council on March 10, 2020, but with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent "stay at home" orders, the pilot was placed on hold.

As the City began the re-opening process, staff developed a Temporary Outdoor Business permit for restaurant, retail, and fitness business to use adjacent parking spaces for conducting business outdoors. Given the concentration of restaurants and pedestrians along the 100 block of King Street, as well as the desire to provide expansive space for pedestrians to safely maintain distance, staff worked with the businesses to modify the King Street Place concept and close the 100 block to all car traffic, which took effect on May 29, 2020. The temporary street closure was later approved by the Council and extended several times. The closure is currently approved through April 1, 2022.

The street closure and additional space for pedestrians has been well-received by the community. Over 2,700 responses were provided on a call for feedback about the temporary street closure. Of resident respondents, 89% had a positive experience with the 100 block street closure and 92% of residents responded that they wanted to see the closure continue into the future. Throughout the closure, 100 block of King Street businesses periodically expressed support for the closure. Most recently at an August outreach meeting, a majority of businesses from the block noted their interest in a permanent closure.

Given the support for this closure, staff has proposed permanently closing this block to vehicular traffic and investing in a more permanent design for the block. As part of this proposal, staff recommends maintaining the existing 22 foot Emergency Vehicle Easement down the center of the street for pedestrians only and adding 5 foot wide pedestrian paths along both sidewalks between the buildings and the curb. The remaining area on the sidewalk and in the parking lane would be available to businesses through a permitting process. If approved, staff will use allocated American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for short term improvements for this block, such as new barricades, street furniture, and signage. A more permanent design for the block would be considered through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget and in coordination with other projects in the Waterfront.

The City Council will consider the street closure at a public hearing in October and will consider the feedback from the Planning Commission, as well as the Traffic and Parking Board and Waterfront Commission who have also reviewed this proposal.

III. CONSISTENCY WITH THE MASTER PLAN

The subject property is within the Old Town Small Area Plan (originally adopted in 1993) and the King Street Retail Strategy (adopted in 2005) boundaries. It is also immediately adjacent to the boundaries of the Waterfront Plan (adopted 2012). Closure of the 100 block of King Street to vehicular traffic is consistent with several goals stated in these plans.

“Increase and improve access to the public spaces of the Waterfront. Pedestrian connectivity along the Waterfront should be continuous.” This block provides a connection to the Interim Waterfront Park and by removing vehicles from this segment, more space is provided for pedestrians to access the park. Additionally, by closing the block to vehicles, new pedestrian space is created which complements the open space directly along the Waterfront.

“Maintain a living, active Waterfront that is a destination that attracts all Alexandrians and visitors and should be integral to the visitor experience in Alexandria.” Over the last year, this block has proved to be a destination that attracts residents and visitors alike. This was particularly important during the early months of the pandemic to send the message that businesses in Old Town were open. By closing this block to vehicles and improving the space for pedestrians, a prominent entrance to the Waterfront can be established that creates an improved visitor experience.

“Provide a variety of uses, themes, activities, and experiences along the Waterfront.” The closure of this block to vehicles and creation of a pedestrian plaza will create a unique experience for people entering the Waterfront. The historically commercial nature of the block provides a different activity from the passive open space along the Waterfront and the expanded areas for the businesses that can result from the closure will further enhance this activity.

“Improve the Waterfront’s vehicular and pedestrian circulation.” The Waterfront Plan calls for minimizing pedestrian and vehicle conflicts. Prior to the temporary closure, this block was particularly challenging for pedestrians given the limited sidewalk space. By eliminating vehicles from this block, the businesses can expand while also creating more space for pedestrians to move through the block along the sidewalk and down the center of the street. Additionally, the intersection of Union and King Street is often congested from vehicles and pedestrians moving through the area. While the closure does not completely eliminate conflicts, eliminating one of the vehicular travel directions does reduce potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. Regarding parking, while this proposal does eliminate 25 parking metered parking spaces on this block, there are several public parking options nearby that accommodate the parking demand from these spaces (3 garages within 1 block, 3 garages within 2 blocks, and 4 garages/lots within 3-5 blocks).

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission finds that the proposed closure of the 100 block of King Street, between Union and Lee Streets, to vehicular traffic is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia and with the City’s Master Plan, including specifically the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

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