

1. Pass this proposed ordinance (Attachment 2) on first reading on Tuesday, April 5, 2022; and
2. Schedule the ordinance for public hearing, second reading and final passage on Saturday, April 23, 2022.

BACKGROUND: The unit block of King Street between the Strand and Union Street is a one-way street heading west with parking on one side of the block. On the other side, it previously hosted the King Street Trolley terminus and layover area until this was moved to Market Square with the closing of the 100 block of King Street. The block is commercial with several restaurants. Before the pandemic, these 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. Two (2) parking spaces on this block are restricted to 2-hour parking from Monday-Saturday from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The northern portion of the Strand, between approximately Wales Alley and King Street, is a two-way street heading north and south with parking on one side of the block currently under a month-to-month lease with the city. On the other side is the newly designed Waterfront Park. The block is commercial with two restaurants and a currently vacant retail space. Before the pandemic, one of these 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. Another restaurant participates in outdoor dining along Wales Alley.

In 2012, the City Council adopted the Waterfront Small Area Plan, which, among many things, recommends closing the unit block and the Strand north of the parking garage entrance to traffic (except EMS, fire, police, etc.) to make a pedestrian plaza. In 2019 the Council directed staff to develop a pilot program to test closing the 100 block of King Street to car traffic following recommendations from the Lower King Street Multi-modal Feasibility Study. In May 2020, the City temporarily closed the 100 block of King Street to vehicular traffic to support the first phase of business recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Closing the street enabled businesses to use additional sidewalk space for outdoor dining while meeting public health guidelines for social distancing. As a part of that closure, the City installed temporary pick-up and drop-off zones along the adjacent cross streets (Union St. and Lee St.) to facilitate deliveries to businesses via alleys running parallel to the 100 block of King Street.

As the City began the re-opening process during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff developed a Temporary Outdoor Business permit for restaurant, retail, and fitness businesses 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 business to close the 100 block to all car traffic, which took effect on May 29, 2020. In October 2021, the Council permanently closed the street to traffic.

DISCUSSION: Following the closure of the 100 block of King Street, there has been an observable decline in through traffic on the unit block. This decline, and the popularity of the new Waterfront Park, has led to an increase in pedestrian volume on the Unit block and the Strand. In addition, based on the success of the closure of the 100 block, staff has received requests from the businesses along the unit block to assess the feasibility of closing this block as well.

An advisory group made up of staff from various departments, APD, Fire and the Old Town Business Association, has met several times between November 2021 and February to determine details of the closure. Transportation impacts, including parking, traffic, and transit routes, have been considered as part of this closure.

Similar to the closure process of the 100 block, staff is considering a temporary pilot project to close the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand. At the February 28th meeting, the Traffic and Parking Board recommended that closure be allowed between April 1 and November 20 (consistent with the dates prescribed in the King Street Outdoor Dining regulation). Based on input from the adjacent businesses, the start date of the actual pilot project closure will likely be Memorial Day weekend (May 28-30) through Labor Day weekend (September 3-4). Staff is recommending that the pilot closure be authorized through September 4, while giving the City Manager authority to extend it for 30 days, to October 4, if sufficient community support warrants an extension.

The Waterfront Commission reviewed this proposal at their meeting on February 15, 2022 and voted to support this temporary closure (Attachment 5) with recommendations to install a crosswalk in the middle of the intersection across Union Street between the unit block and the 100 block of King Street, reconsider the placement and quantity of bicycle parking, and ensure efficient loading.

On April 7, the Planning Commission will review the proposal for consistency with the Alexandria Master Plan as required by Section 9.06 of the City Charter.

FISCAL IMPACT: If the closure is approved, there will be minimal costs associated with installing temporary barriers, signage, and striping. All of these costs can be handled with existing budgets. There will be costs associated with ending the month-to-month parking leases. This revenue will amount to \$7,200 per year, or \$600 per month. In addition, the costs of the public bathrooms will be approximately \$233 per week, or \$3,500 for the duration of the pilot project. Also, since there will be two metered spaces eliminated along the Waterfront Park to provide turnaround space, this will total approximately \$4,000 per year, or \$333 per month.

There is a positive revenue impact from additional meal taxes collected as this closure will allow restaurants to expand their seating outdoors. While exact estimates are difficult to project, providing more space for this will help restaurants maintain and possibly increase business.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1: Ordinance Cover
- Attachment 2: Ordinance
- Attachment 3: Draft Concept Plan for Closed Block
- Attachment 4: Draft Operations Plan
- Attachment 5: Alexandria Waterfront Commission Endorsement
- Attachment 6: Presentation

STAFF:

- Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager
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