



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 16, 2020

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of a Resolution to Request that the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Official Name be “Potomac Yard - VT” Metrorail Station. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of “Potomac Yard-VT” Metrorail Station as the official name of what is now known as the “Potomac Yard” Metrorail Station.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council endorse the attached resolution formally requesting that WMATA begin the process to consider “Potomac Yard-VT” as the name for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station.

**BACKGROUND:** In spring 2020, Virginia Tech expressed its interest to the City in changing of the name of the “Potomac Yard” Metrorail Station to include reference to the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus. WMATA has an established policy, “Metro System Station Names” that articulates the requirements for station names and the process by which jurisdictions and WMATA must advance proposals. WMATA’s policy includes a host of requirements including that names be less than 19 characters. For naming stations after universities, the policy states that a university must have more than 5,000 students, the campus must be within 0.5-mile of the station, and the university needs to have a significant classroom presence at the campus location. City staff have discussed this proposed name in detail with WMATA staff and have been given enough encouragement by WMATA staff to proceed that City staff bringing this forward for Council endorsement.

Council considered this item at its September 8, 2020 meeting and deferred it to the September 22, 2020 meeting. One specific question at that meeting was a request for more clarity on the process. If Council adopts a formal resolution supporting and requesting a name change, WMATA will then conduct a market survey (requiring up to 120 days, but which WMATA indicates can take considerably less time) to determine public perception of multiple aspects of the proposed name change. The policy states that, after reviewing the results of the customer research, the local jurisdiction(s) proposing the new station name or station name change shall decide whether or not to move forward with the proposal. At that stage, jurisdictional bodies are generally choosing one of several proposals to bring forward to the WMATA Board. WMATA has indicated that they do

not require Council to make multiple resolutions of support to advance a single proposed name change.

Staff are bringing this proposal to City Council now to prevent delays or increased costs as part of the construction of the new station. The WMATA project manager for the Potomac Yard station has indicated that WMATA Board approval must occur in December to enable the timely development of proofs for WMATA review and approval prior to ordering signage for the station. A delay may impact the budget and/or schedule for the station.

**DISCUSSION:** Virginia Tech will construct its Innovation Campus at the north end of Potomac Yard, adjacent to the North Pavilion Entrance. The planned campus will be larger than all other Virginia Tech facilities in Northern Virginia combined and serve as its flagship campus in the region. The first building is scheduled to open by 2024 and the school plans to have a classroom presence of approximately 3,000 students by 2028. Virginia Tech will also establish executive office space in Potomac Yard prior to construction. WMATA staff consider this buildout a significant classroom presence of a University with a total enrollment of well over 5,000, as required in the policy. Given the role that the Innovation Campus anticipates playing in the area, the proposed primary name of “Potomac Yard” with secondary name “VT” can help enhance the placemaking of the new station area.

Having Virginia Tech locate what will be one of the more cutting edge technology higher education graduate schools in the United States in Alexandria near a Metrorail Station (first Oakville and now Potomac Yard) was part of the incentive to entice Amazon to locate its second headquarters nearby in Arlington. It was also one of the reasons that the State provided \$50 million to the City so that a South Entrance to the Metrorail Station could be built. AEDP expects that the positive economic development impact to the City (jobs, tax base growth, educational opportunities, collaborating with ACPS, etc.) of Virginia Tech will be substantial. By having “VT” added to the station name, the value to the City of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus presence will be leveraged to the City’s benefit.

Although the proposal is largely consistent with WMATA Policy 4.1.4 “Metro System Station Names,” the WMATA Board will have to approve an exception to the policy because the campus is not anticipated to meet the criteria for a “significant classroom presence” at the time of the station opening in 2022. However, WMATA staff have not flagged this issue as a material barrier to this naming request. WMATA staff have indicated that this proposal would meet the policy guidance but for the timing of the station opening and WMATA staff are working collaboratively with the City on advancing this request to seek an exception.

Between May and July 2020, the City conducted outreach to 25 groups located, or with vested interest or activity, within a one-half mile radius of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station. The Federal Transit Authority (FTA), which did not take a position or express concerns, communicated that a name change would not cause National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)-related issues. All other responses received by the City supported Virginia Tech’s request, including from the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, developers in the area, National Industries for the Blind, and a member of the Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee. See Attachment 2 for the letters and emails.

On July 24, the City issued a press release, notifying the entire community of the proposal and this meeting date for Council consideration.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** City and WMATA staff anticipate there will be no impact to the station construction schedule or costs (since wayfinding signage and material costs are built into the project budget) if the name change occurs now. However, if the City wishes to change the name later, the estimated cost for changing a

station name (which impacts every WMATA map, flyer, and multiple places where stations are names are listed in their railcars and stations) is estimated at over \$1 million if not done in conjunction with a map update. If done with a map update, the current cost estimate is over \$350,000. These numbers could be higher in future years.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Resolution
2. Correspondence
3. WMATA station naming policy

**STAFF:**

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