



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 23, 2016

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of the Receipt of the MGM Readiness Task Force Recommendations.

ISSUE: City Council receipt of the MGM Readiness Task Force Recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION: That Council receive the MGM Readiness Task Force Report (Attachment 1).

BACKGROUND: In late 2016 or early 2017 MGM Resorts will open a \$1.3 billion destination resort casino in National Harbor, Maryland, directly across the river from Alexandria. Projected visitation to MGM is 9 million annually, which would double National Harbor's current visitation, and is roughly 2 ½ times Alexandria's current visitor volume.

Major features of the resort include:

- 125,000 sq. foot casino
- 3000 slot machines
- 140 table games
- 4800 parking spaces
- 120 to 150 shows/year
- 308 hotel rooms (74 suites)
- 12 restaurants (3 featuring celebrity chefs)
- Spa/salon---27,000 sq. ft.
- Upscale retail chains
- Ballroom that seats 800

To prepare for the MGM National Harbor resort opening, the City Manager asked Visit Alexandria to convene a task force to assess the opportunities and risks of this new regional attraction and draft recommendations to

respond to it. The Task Force was to be modeled closely on a similar initiative in 2007 to 2008 to prepare for the original opening of National Harbor. The work of that 2007 Task Force led to Alexandria's creation of the King Street Trolley, marina modernization, enhanced marketing, lighting and aesthetics.

In the fall of 2015, Visit Alexandria convened the Task Force consisting of twenty local leaders, collaborative in approach and diverse in expertise. The team encompassed City staff, economic development partners, business leaders, and citizen representatives. A complete list of the members can be found in Attachment 1. The Task Force divided into five working teams to address five key issues:

1. Activation-Engage visitors and residents in activities and create vibrancy.
2. Aesthetics-Make Alexandria visually attractive and welcoming.
3. Communication/Education-Improve customer service and community understanding/welcome.
4. Marketing-Increase visitation to Alexandria leveraging MGM.
5. Transportation-Make it easier for MGM guests to get to Alexandria and Alexandria residents to get to jobs at MGM. Also recommend projects that will reduce congestion, improve parking and facilitate wayfinding.

The following five goals were established to guide the MGM Readiness Task Force:

1. Communicate MGM scope to Alexandria community.
2. Develop productive working relationship with MGM leadership.
3. Identify collaboration opportunities that support Alexandria residents and businesses.
4. Identify risks that can be mitigated.
5. Assess our strengths/weaknesses-a catalyst for needed improvements in infrastructure and service.

DISCUSSION: The Task Force delivered draft recommendations in a preliminary report to the City Manager in January. The City Manager considered those recommendations in light of other City obligations and projected revenues for FY 2017, and advanced the following initiatives by including them in the proposed FY 2017 Budget:

1) Wayfinding:

Enhance signage and wayfinding to assist visitors with identifying off-street parking options in Old Town. Ensure international travel symbols are fully integrated into City's signage and wayfinding plan. Of the total CIP plan for wayfinding, \$400K is budgeted in FY 2017 and \$515K in FY 2018.

Timing: July 2016-June 2017

Cost: \$200,000 additional funding in FY 2017

2) Retail Training:

Following a similar model to that implemented effectively during the National Harbor opening in 2008, implement front-line staff training for retail, hotels, restaurants and attractions that promote extraordinary customer service, strategic business practice and local area knowledge. Implementation would encompass workshops, in-store counsel and videos.

Timing: October 2017

Cost: \$10,000

3) International Trade Shows:

Coordinate with MGM sales team to attend international trade shows such as IPW and World Travel Market as part of Capital Region USA consortium to raise visibility of the Alexandria-National Harbor area. Develop and distribute collateral material for tour operators. Other than design and printing of collateral, there is little new activity or cost associated with this project—simply coordination of existing efforts to raise visibility and credibility as a combined destination.

Timing: November 2016 & June 2017

Cost: \$5,000

4) Marina Refresh:

Recognizing that the marina will be the gateway for many MGM visitors to Alexandria, this location represents the critical first impression of our community, and is our highest aesthetic priority. Funding would provide new welcome signage, ongoing cleaning of waterfront garbage and debris, and enhanced seating.

Timing: July 2016-June 2017

Cost: \$45,000

5) Public Programming:

Develop a coordinated program of performing arts for the waterfront. This would include: paid performers, curated buskers, public art, historical tours and re-enactments.

Timing: April-June 2017

Cost: \$30,000

6) Tree Wells:

Funding would support plantings and maintenance of trees along King Street for consistent presence and maintenance for the one mile stretch from the King Street Metro to the Waterfront. The King Street Metro is another gateway to Alexandria, so beautification along King Street is key to a positive first impression and maximizing revenue capture for restaurants and retail in this corridor. This is part of overall area tree initiative indicated in the FY 2017 budget.

7) Jobs for City Residents:

While there was money recommended in the task force report for a job fair (\$20,000) it was concluded that existing collaboration between MGM and the City's Workforce Development Center would be more than adequate in addressing the job issue.

FISCAL IMPACT: The total cost of the MGM Task Force recommendations included in the City Manager's Proposed FY 2017 budget is \$290,000 (\$90,000 in the FY 2017 Operating Budget and \$200,000 in the FY 2017 CIP).

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Recommendation of the MGM Readiness Task Force
2. PowerPoint Presentation

STAFF:

Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager

Patricia Washington, President & CEO, Visit Alexandria

Tom Kaiden, Chief Operating Officer, Visit Alexandria

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