



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 2, 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 a resolution for naming the “Potomac Yard-VT” Metrorail Station as the official name of what is now known as the future “Potomac Yard” Metrorail Station.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council endorse the attached resolution (Attachment 1) formally requesting that Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) begin the process to consider “Potomac Yard-VT” as the name for the future 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 and limitations for station names and the process by which jurisdictions and WMATA can 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.

If Council adopts a formal resolution to request a name change, WMATA will then conduct a market survey to determine public perception of multiple aspects of the proposed name change. This information will then be reviewed by WMATA and the City before a final determination is made whether to submit the request to the WMATA Board of Directors for approval.

**DISCUSSION:** Virginia Tech will construct its Innovation Campus at the north end of Potomac Yard, adjacent to the North Pavilion Entrance to the Metrorail Station. 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 the Potomac Yard area prior to construction.

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.

Although the proposal is largely consistent with WMATA Policy 4.1.4 “Metro System Station Names,” (Attachment 2) 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. 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 in activity within a one-half mile radius of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station. The Federal Transit Authority (FTA), which did not take a position, communicated that a name change would not trigger 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, a large employer, and a member of the Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee. See Attachment 3 for the engagement log, which summarizes all feedback, and Appendix C for the original 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 is estimated at over \$1 million if not undertaken 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. WMATA station naming policy
3. Correspondence

**STAFF:**

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