



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** NOVEMBER 2, 2022

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

**THROUGH:** JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER /s/

**FROM:** YON LAMBERT, INTERIM DEPUTY CITY MANAGER

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Introduction and First Reading. Consideration. Passage on First Reading of an Ordinance Approving and Authorizing the Permanent Closure of the Unit Block of King Street and Northern Portion of the Strand to Vehicular Traffic.

**ISSUE:** Should the City permanently close the unit block of King Street and northern portion of the Strand to vehicular traffic and allow outdoor dining parklets on the unit block of King Street?

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

1. Introduce and pass on first reading, the proposed ordinance (Attachment 2) approving and authorizing the permanent closure of the unit block of King Street and northern portion of the Strand to vehicular traffic.; and
2. Schedule for second reading, public hearing and final passage on Saturday, November 12, 2022.

**BACKGROUND:** Following City Council guidance in April 2022, the unit block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand were temporarily closed to make space for a pedestrian zone. This was to be a pilot project between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. Because of its success, the pilot was extended through November 20, the date through which the temporary closure is approved.

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. During the pilot program, restaurants were allowed to use the space

along the curb for outdoor dining as well, and one restaurant expanded its seating into the street. Previously, two parking spaces on this block were restricted to 2-hour parking from Monday through 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 and had parking on one side of the block under a month-to-month lease with the City which was terminated in April 2022. On the other side is the newly designed Waterfront Park. The block is commercial with two restaurants and a currently vacant retail space. During the pandemic, one of the restaurants expanded outdoor dining into the parking spaces it leased, which it is currently using. Another restaurant participates in outdoor dining along Wales Alley.

In 2012, 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.

**DISCUSSION:** The street closure and additional space for pedestrians have been well-received by the community. Over 1,800 responses were provided on a call for feedback about the temporary street closure. Of resident respondents, 91% had a positive or very positive experience with the pedestrian zone, and 89% of residents responded that they wanted to see the closure continue. In addition, businesses have expressed support for the closure and recommended maintaining the pedestrian zone. An advisory group comprised of staff from various departments, including T&ES, Planning and Zoning, Police, Fire and the Old Town Business Association, also recommended permanently maintaining the pedestrian zone.

**Traffic:** Prior to the pilot, the one-way traffic along this section had reduced significantly because of the closure on the 100 block.

**Parking:** Closure of this segment originally eliminated two on-street metered spaces on King Street, five privately leased spaces, and two metered spaces along Waterfront Park. Through the pilot, two more spaces were eliminated along the waterfront to accommodate parking for Police vehicles. There is parking availability in nearby garages. Demand for bicycle parking was high, and during the pilot staff increased the available bicycle parking from 10 to 20 spaces. In an additional effort to offset residents' parking concerns and drive visitors to available garages, pay-by-phone rates were increased on nearby blocks.

**Motorcoach parking:** There was previously motorcoach parking allowed along the unit block of King Street. Staff is now directing motorcoach operators to park along Market Square, and there have been no reported issues.

**Deliveries and loading/unloading:** The Traffic and Parking Board, at its February 28<sup>th</sup> meeting, approved replacing the parking along the 100 blocks of North and South Union Street with loading zones for deliveries and pick up/drop off zones. Restaurants have reported that has been sufficient, and it will continue.

The Waterfront Commission reviewed this proposal at their meeting on October 18 and voted to support this permanent closure (Attachment 3). The Traffic and Parking Board also reviewed the request at their meeting on October 24 and recommended that City Council approve this request. The Planning Commission reviewed the proposal for consistency with the Alexandria Master Plan as required by Section 9.06 of the City Charter on November 1, 2022. They voted to approve the request, finding it consistent with the Master Plan and the goals of the Waterfront Small Area Plan.

If approved at the public hearing on Saturday, November 12, the permanent closure will go into effect immediately.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** If the closure is approved, there will be minimal costs associated with updating parking signage and refreshing striping. These costs can be handled with existing budgets. The four metered spaces eliminated along the Waterfront Park to provide turnaround space and parking for police will total approximately \$8,000 per year in lost parking revenue.

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 outdoor seating will help restaurants maintain and possibly increase business.

With the closure, the City will also receive revenue from businesses as part of the Parklet Program fees to compensate for the use of public space and to support any additional operational impacts that may occur because of the street closure. This would total between \$3,450 and \$12,000 annually depending on restaurant participation.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1: Ordinance Cover

Attachment 2: Ordinance

Attachment 3: Alexandria Waterfront Commission Endorsement

Attachment 4: Presentation

**STAFF:**

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