



City of Alexandria

City Council Chambers at
Del Pepper Community
Resource Center
4850 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22311

Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 2024

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER

FROM: ADRIANA CASTAÑEDA, DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

DOCKET TITLE:

Public Hearing, Second Reading and Final Passage of an Ordinance Approving and Authorizing the Temporary Closure of the 200 Block of King Street to Vehicular Traffic. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

ISSUE: Consideration of the temporary closure of the 200 block of King Street to vehicular traffic.

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council:

1. Introduce and pass on first reading Tuesday, November 12, 2024, the ordinance (Attachment 2) approving and authorizing the temporary closures of the 200 block of King Street to vehicular traffic; and
2. Set the ordinance for public hearing and final passage on Saturday, November 16, 2024.

BACKGROUND: In 2021, the City Council approved the permanent closure of the 100 block of King Street, following a temporary closure that had been implemented to provide additional space for pedestrians and outdoor dining during the pandemic. In 2022, after a similar temporary closure, the Council approved the permanent closure of the unit block of King Street and a portion of the Strand. At the September 10, 2024, City Council meeting, the Council requested staff to explore expanding the street closure to the 200 block of King Street through a temporary pilot program that could help evaluate the merits of a permanent closure (Attachment 3).

The 200 block of King Street is a two-way street headed east and west with parking on both sides of the street. Similar to the 100 block of King, the block is predominately commercial. However, this block has a greater mix

of retail and restaurants as well as some residences on upper floors of buildings. This block also includes the City's Visitor Center at the corner of N. Fairfax Street and King Street. One of the restaurants on the block participates in the City's parklet program and two others have expressed interest in applying for a permit. Approximately 17 parking spaces remain on this block; one is reserved for 15-minute Visitor Center parking and the rest are 2-hour, metered parking from Monday-Saturday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. This block has a significant slope from west to east and the west end of the block terminates at a four-way traffic signal.

DISCUSSION: The street closure and pedestrianization of the unit and 100 blocks of King Street have been well received by the community and the businesses on these blocks. The extension to the 200 block is a natural continuation of this pedestrianized space and has been occasionally closed for short periods in connection with special events. However, there are some conditions on this block that warrant additional consideration prior to a permanent closure. Through this ordinance, staff are proposing two phases of temporary closure, to experiment with the closure and address specific issues as needed.

The first phase will cover the upcoming holiday season and run from November 22, 2024, to January 6, 2025. The block would be reopened for the remainder of January and February during colder weather to allow for tweaks to the closure and address issues that arose during this first phase. The second phase closure would begin March 14, 2025, and run through September 30, 2025. This would allow time for more robust community engagement and if permanent closure was supported, the Council could review the necessary ordinance in September 2025 prior to expiration of Phase 2.

Staff has, and continues, to coordinate with many internal and external stakeholders to address specific conditions for this block and the closure. The following provides an overview of the primary issues being considered during this closure:

- **Emergency Vehicle Access:** Similar to the other two blocks, a 22-foot-wide clear zone is required for the length of the block for emergency vehicle access. No structures can be located within this zone, including movable furniture, but pedestrians are permitted. Additionally, a five-foot wide path is required on both sidewalks to provide egress and space for emergency personnel to access buildings in an emergency. This also has the benefit of providing more visibility for retail storefronts.
- **Traffic:** Since this is the last block of King Street before vehicular access ends at the 100 block, closing this block to vehicles will not significantly impact traffic in the area. The intersection of King and Fairfax Streets is signalized, and the signal and signage will need to be modified to direct vehicles heading east on King to turn right or left on Fairfax Street. This may improve traffic by keeping vehicles on Fairfax Street as opposed to turning at Lee Street which is narrower and more residential.

Staff will be collecting data on vehicle and pedestrian volumes during the closure to determine if changes to traffic circulation need to be made. This pilot closure presents the opportunity to test various traffic scenarios that could provide information about how a permanent closure could operate. Staff will update the Traffic and Parking Board if changes to the traffic flow are implemented as part of this pilot.

- **Parking:** Closing this block will eliminate 16 metered parking spaces and 1 short term space for the Visitor Center. These spaces can be accommodated in nearby off-street parking, including the Market Square garage on North Fairfax Street. Since vehicles will be forced to turn at Fairfax Street, the garage will be a convenient option. Additionally, new garage signage indicating spaces available have been added to the City's garages, which provides additional information about parking availability.

- **Activation:** The current parklet and outdoor dining/retail program is available to all the businesses on this block and staff is working with the businesses to encourage participation. Staff have amended the Parklet Requirements to allow the Director to waive the requirement for a platform during the temporary street closure, which removes a potential barrier for participation. For the areas that are not being used by businesses, staff will be coordinating with Old Town Business on ways to introduce some pop-up activities and additional seating area.
- **Transit:** Closure of this block does not impact transit routes since the bus and trolley currently turn north on Fairfax Street prior to this block. Some improvements to the existing bus stops on the 100 block of North Fairfax Street may be required to improve turning movements and pedestrian visibility, particularly if there may be more pedestrians in the vicinity.

The Traffic and Parking Board reviewed the request at their meeting on October 28, 2024, and recommended that the Council approve this request.

The Planning Commission will review the proposal for consistency with the Alexandria Master Plan as required by Section 9.06 of the City Charter at their meeting on November 7, 2024. Staff will also provide a written update to the Waterfront Commission.

Staff also met with Old Town Business and residents on the block. Staff will continue to coordinate throughout this pilot with Old Town Businesses and residents.

FISCAL IMPACT: If the temporary closure is approved, staff anticipates up to \$20,000 to implement various short-term improvements on the block, including purchase of planters, plants, lighting, barricade covers, signage, traffic signal changes, and additional street furniture.

Since the closure eliminates 16 metered parking spaces, there will be a slight reduction in meter revenue. In 2023, this block collected approximately \$50,000 in meter revenue. However, as part of the parklet program, any businesses using the parking spaces would be required to obtain a permit. The permit fee is \$21 per square foot in the parking lane and \$1.50 per square foot on the sidewalk. A business using one (1) parking space, and the corresponding sidewalk would pay approximately \$3,000 per year.

Expanding the pedestrian area and promoting Lower King as a destination is expected to generate a positive revenue impact from additional meal and sales taxes collected from businesses on this block. While it is challenging to quantify the exact amount, comparisons with the 100 block of King Street are helpful to consider. This block had a 41% revenue increase from FY 2019 to FY 2024. In comparison, citywide revenue from meals and sales taxes during the same period grew by 36%.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Ordinance Cover
2. Ordinance
3. Memo from Council
4. Presentation

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