City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 8, 2025

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER

FROM: MICHAEL MOON, INTERIM DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

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

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

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council:

1. Introduce and pass on first reading Tuesday, September 9, 2025, the ordinance (Attachment 2) approving and authorizing the permanent closure of the 200 block of King Street to vehicular traffic; and

2. Set the ordinance for public hearing and final passage on Saturday, September 13, 2025.

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). At the November 16, 2024 meeting, the Council approved a pilot to close the block to vehicular traffic from November 22, 2024, to January 6, 2025, and from March 14 to September 30, 2025.

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 two upper-floor residences. This block also includes the City's Visitor Center at the corner of N. Fairfax Street and King Street. Two of the restaurants on the block participate in the City's parklet program and two others have expressed interest in applying for a permit. Prior to the pilot, there were approximately 17 parking spaces on this block; one was reserved for 15-minute Visitor Center parking and the rest were 2-hour, metered parking from Monday-Saturday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

DISCUSSION: The pedestrianization of the Unit and 100 blocks of King Street has been well received by the community and the businesses on those blocks and the extension to the 200 block is a natural continuation of this pedestrianized space. However, there are some conditions on this block that warranted additional consideration prior to a permanent closure, and staff has used the pilot to experiment with pedestrianizing it and to address the following issues as needed.

- **Traffic:** Since this is the last block of King Street before vehicular access ends at the 100 block, closing this block to vehicles did not significantly impact traffic in the area. The intersection of King and Fairfax Streets is signalized, and the signal and signage were modified to direct vehicles heading east on King to turn right or left on Fairfax Street.

  Traffic studies conducted before and during each phase of the pilot found that there was an average 35% increase in eastbound and 32% in westbound vehicular volumes on Cameron, Prince, and Duke Streets during the pilot on the 200 block of King Street. Although there was a modest increase in traffic volumes on blocks parallel to King, it was fairly evenly dispersed among the street grid and congestion stemming from the closure was not an issue. In fact, westbound traffic congestion on Duke Street even decreased by 1% during the pilot.

  The studies also found that pedestrian volumes overwhelmingly outnumbered vehicular volumes-from five to twelve times as many-at each of the three studied intersections before and during the pilot, demonstrating how dedicating more space for people walking, relative to vehicles along these three blocks of King Street, is an equitable allocation of City right-of-way (Attachment 4).

- **Parking:** Closing this block will permanently eliminate 16 metered parking spaces and 1 short-term space adjacent to the Visitor Center. These spaces can be accommodated in nearby off-street garages, including the Market Square garage on North Fairfax Street, the Torpedo Factory garage on North Lee and North Union Streets, and Courthouse garage on North Pitt Street. Only 13% of the Phase 2 survey respondents chose parking availability as a concern as a result of pedestrianizing the 200 block.

- **Activation and Beautification:** 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. City staff purchased bistro tables and chairs and planters to provide public seating and help beautify the block. Unfortunately, most of the businesses did not activate the space in front of their restaurants or storefronts due to concerns with investing in outdoor furniture and décor if the block did not remain pedestrianized after September and challenges with bringing retail activation outside. If approved to remain pedestrianized, additional funding would be needed to enhance the block in more permanent and uniform ways such as installing platforms on the block as was done on the 100 block. The Unit and 100 blocks of King Street will be permanently improved as part the Lower King Street CIP/Waterfront project, which will involve a full reconstruction of those blocks. However, the 200 block is not included in those plans and any permanent streetscape redesign would be a separate project with dedicated

funding.

- **Deliveries, loading/unloading, and accessibility:** City staff used the Traffic and Parking Board-approved administrative procedure for adding new and elongating existing loading/Pick-up and Drop-off (PUDO) zones around the intersection of King and Fairfax Streets to accommodate deliveries, ridesharing, e-commerce, and other unloading, which has been largely well-received by the businesses on both King and Fairfax. One elongated PUDO zone was shortened back to its original length in June to increase the metered parking supply in the area. Staff continues to explore signage improvements to make it clear these zones are available as a drop-off point for people, including persons with disabilities and rideshare passengers.

- **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 and a 5-foot-wide clear path is required on both sidewalks to provide egress and space for emergency personnel to access buildings. If the block is permanently pedestrianized, City staff would request funding for Fire Department-approved bollards similar to those at King and Union Streets for a more permanent and uniform aesthetic.

Since the start of the pilot in November 2024, staff have conducted ongoing outreach directly to the businesses and residents on and around the block. Staff addressed issues raised related to trash on the block and also procured outdoor seating, planters, and holiday décor for the public to enjoy during the pilot. Staff also worked with the residents of Swifts Alley to reduce cut-through traffic on the private alley, and installed new signs, loading/PUDO zones, attractive barriers, and custom barricade covers on and around the block as requested. While most businesses are in support of the pedestrianization of the block, three of the businesses and the two residents on the block are still not in support of permanent pedestrianization. The concerns they noted included: difficulties with deliveries and access since double parking on King Street was no longer an option, the perceived lack of need for an additional car-free block, and increased noise from buskers and visitors.

Staff collected feedback from the community through an online feedback form this summer. Over 1,800 people responded and 87% supported making the pedestrianization permanent. Attachment 5 summarizes the response and feedback received. Staff also worked directly with the business owners and both residents of the 200 block of King Street prior to and throughout the pilot-in July, 12 out of the 16 business owners on the 200 block stated their support for the permanent pedestrianization of the block.

Staff recommend making the pedestrianization of this block permanent. Overall the pilot has been very well received by the community and is a natural continuation of the popular car-free blocks to the east. The block provides much needed space for the many pedestrians that visit Old Town and creates an attractive connection between the Waterfront and Market Square. .The Traffic and Parking Board reviewed the request at their meeting on July 28, 2025, and unanimously recommended that the Council approve this request. Two speakers attended the meeting and both spoke in support of the proposal.

FISCAL IMPACT: 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 annual meter revenue, and pedestrianizing this 268-foot-long block will result in a decrease of VDOT roadway maintenance payments totaling approximately $1,789 annually (at $17,627 per local lane mile). 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.

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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%.

If the permanent closure to vehicles is approved, staff estimates approximately $200,000 would be requested through the CIP process for potential improvements, including new bollards, a uniform platform along the parking lane, and traffic signal changes. This figure was estimated using the cost of the improvements on the 100 block as a basis. A permanent streetscape redesign similar to what is occurring on the Unit and 100 block would require additional funding that would also be considered through the CIP process.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Ordinance Cover
2. Ordinance
3. Memo from Council
4. Summary of Traffic Study
5. Community Feedback
6. Presentation

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