

1-8-13

Dear Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Silberberg and the City Council,

One of Alexandria's most important resources is the waterfront in Old Town. The Waterfront plan, which was passed a year ago after an incredibly contentious, city-wide fight, has been brought up again and is poised to re-divide our city.

I strongly believe we can do better and, even more strongly, believe that we must.

The plan has some wonderful aspects, including flood mitigation, walking paths, small cafes and restaurants, and the inclusion of the Arts.

The staff and previous Council worked very hard on the plan, and I realize how difficult this may be. It is crucial to the future of Alexandria, however, that we get this right.

And still there is no consensus through all that has played out in the past year. In fact, there are still outstanding lawsuits related to the plan, indicative of the contention.

As I said before the Council a year ago, the Waterfront plan is not ready for "prime time". I have encouraged the Council to pause to get it right. It came to my attention this past week that the National Trust for Historic Preservation appears to be encouraging the same.

Vice Mayor Silberberg seeks to build consensus and to help our city heal while creating a better plan.

A main sticking point has been the change in the zoning along the waterfront necessary to allow the hotels to be built there. The Master Plan from 1994 would be changed as a result. This alone should give us reason to pause.

Old Town and the Waterfront areas have already become more dense than people expected. There is inadequate parking for the current incoming traffic, and it is primarily important to consider accommodating those who are already here.

I would suggest considering an amendment to the current plan, giving

the Council an opportunity to make some changes regarding the number and size of hotels.

All this having been said, there is a bigger responsibility on the table. This pertains to what Vice Mayor Silberberg said at the installation: all of us are privileged to be the temporary stewards of this historic, national treasure called "Alexandria" and it is our duty to ensure that it is cared for in such a way that it remains a National treasure for generations to come.

When we state and steadfastly believe in this over-arching goal together as a community, it is far easier for us to evaluate whether our planning upholds this ideal or tears it down.

Vice Mayor Silberberg is working hard to put together a possible way for our community to come back together, and I applaud this.

Instead of two 150-room hotels, she proposes that the city zone for one small hotel not to exceed 100 rooms, which is the size of a boutique hotel. This would be a compromise.

With regard to the other two sites, she would like the city to reach out to the philanthropic community here and around the country. I feel it is an excellent idea to pursue. That is, engage others who love Alexandria.

We all love Alexandria, and we want and need to take great care of Old Town and our waterfront.

Please consider Vice Mayor Silberberg's compromise proposal, which is supported by me, the Old Town Civic Association, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and others.

Allison will go into greater detail about the growing support. Her ideas and can-do spirit are worth giving a shot. Alexandria, our national treasure, deserves no less.

Patsy Ticer
Virginia State Senator (ret.)