

Sept 1, 2025

Madam Mayor and City Council,

I'm writing to express my profound concern over the city's contemplated use of \$145M in taxpayer funds to partially reduce periodic waterfront flooding along a couple of blocks of Old Town adjacent to the river. The oversized pump station proposed for construction at Waterfront Park does not provide an acceptable return on investment for the city's citizens or businesses. Spending \$145M in taxpayer money to abate occasional, hours-long flooding of less than 2 blocks of the waterfront is not reasonable on its face. It should not be pursued by the city.

The periodic flooding at the foot of King, the foot of Prince, and portions of The Strand and Union Street is a nuisance to be sure, but an inconvenience at worst. I have lived in the southeast quadrant of Old Town for more than 30 years and also run every morning along the waterfront. I'm acutely aware of the frequency, extent, and duration of waterfront flooding:

- Frequency: Flooding occurs approximately 40 days each year according to Matt Landes, project manager for the Waterfront Flood Mitigation Project, in a Patch article on April 16 of this year
- Extent: Only the foot of Prince Street and areas of the waterfront between the foot of Prince and King Street Park are affected
- Duration: The water typically recedes within hours UNLESS the flooding results from an extreme weather event like the residual effects of Hurricane Erin in late August, then the duration of the flooding lasts longer

Flooding at this frequency, extent, and duration is certainly a nuisance, but not one that merits spending \$145M in taxpayer money to construct a large pump station. Moreover, this expenditure is projected to address only 85% of flooding events. The extended duration of flooding from Hurricane Erin, for example would not even be addressed by the wasted taxpayer money and eyesore constructed on Waterfront Park.

I'm also a professional environmental scientist and appreciate the very real concerns about the impact of climate change on the frequency, extent, and duration of flooding along our waterfront, but even with this knowledge and background I don't believe the expenditure of taxpayer money and construction of an objectively oversized (and objectionable) pump station at Waterfront Park is a reasonable response to nuisance flooding and certainly not an acceptable return on investment of finite city resources.

There are other reasons not to pursue the pump station:

- The very businesses impacted by periodic flooding have written letters to the editor and circulated petitions signed by thousands objecting to the pump station as an eyesore in the city's limited greenspace and the construction project as an existential threat to their survival ("*The waterfront needs balance*" in a letter to the Alexandria Times on August 20). These businesses also reinforced the minor, nuisance nature of the periodic flooding, asserting that "There was no damage nor costly cleanup" after a significant flooding event in 2021.
- In "*NPS agreement limits pump station*," an August 7 letter to the editor in the Alexandria Times identified the proposed size of the pump station as a clear violation of the city's 1981 Waterfront Park agreement with the National Park Service. According to the letter, "this agreement conveyed a scenic easement to the NPS and stipulated that Waterfront Park must be used as an open space public park area and listed six restrictions. One of these restrictions is that "Permanent buildings or structures may not exceed 15 feet in height." The proposed pump station would stand more than 30 feet tall – double the permitted height – and occupy about one-third of Waterfront Park's open space."

Both of these objections are reason enough to discard the plan to build a large pump station in Waterfront Park. No one is asking for this - not even those most directly impacted - and it would be a violation of a city agreement with the National Park Service. It's hard to understand just based on these two objections why the city believes that this is a reasonable plan to pursue. And to amplify the first objection, who is even asking for this?

But the basis of both of these objections fails to address the larger issue for city residents: spending \$145M in taxpayer money to prevent some - not all - of these periodic, nuisance flooding events is not an acceptable return on investment for the city. Such a proposal should be summarily discounted and discarded by any good steward of city taxpayer funds.

Thank you for your consideration of these factors in determining how to move forward on the increasingly unpopular pump station proposal.

Kevin Connell