

From: George Kotarides gkotarides@yahoo.com 

Subject: Letter from Atlantic Avenue Association

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To: Ronald H. Williams Jr. rwilliams@vbgov.com

Cc: Chris Neikirk shechris@smartmouthbrewing.com, Chris Kyriakides sfkyriakides@gmail.com, Michael Mauch mikemauch@yahoo.com, Clark Winslow clark@sunnydayguide.com, Stephan Gordon shg225@hotmail.com, Bill Gambrell rightcoastconsulting@cox.net, Deepak Patel ramcorp84@yahoo.com, Bill Dillon bill@abbeyroadpub.com, Lynn Hightower director@atwildfowl.org, Lynn Hightower atlanticwildfowl@rcn.com, Stephan Michaels oceansidellc@gmail.com

GK

Good morning, Ron.

Thank you for your time meeting last week. With so much change at all levels in the city, I realize that you face many daunting challenges and are over-the-top busy. So, in advance I apologize for the length of this letter, but there's a lot to say to encapsulate everything.

Please don't interpret this letter as impatience on part of the Atlantic Avenue Association. We're merely clarifying what AAA sees as the *next* top priority resort (CIP) investment that needs to be in the queue and the urgency felt by resort stakeholders.

The three items below are priorities presently on the table to help accomplish our shared mission to activate Atlantic Avenue, and as far as we can see, #1 and #2 seem to be moving forward with all due diligence:

1. Mobility study - includes accessible, convenient, easy, inexpensive, well communicated parking (Hopefully, this would take no more than 6 months, and we've started vetting consultants.)
2. Central management entity
3. Central Atlantic Avenue improvements (Ref AAA FY 2020/21 \$30M Budget Request to *transform* the 15th-25th Street public space, starting with 2 blocks.)

Re #3: With 8000 hotel rooms and the beach a block away, the Central Atlantic Avenue area is arguably the most highly visited place in our city - our city's *front porch* - but it's caught in an embarrassing, unattractive time warp and in many ways dysfunctional. Revenue data shows the decline. This hurts not just our resort but our entire city.

AAA is hopeful nearby Dome Site, Sport Center, 17th St, 18th St, 19th St, Pacific Ave, and 31st St/Laskin Road improvements that are budgeted or underway will help spur activity and investment all over our city, not just the resort. However, what's missing on the list is Atlantic Avenue, and we are asking for inclusion.

The concern we have is this unique, high impact area of Virginia Beach needs much, much more than the tweaks a few hundred thousand dollars will allow. The Central Atlantic Avenue corridor needs millions over the next 1-5 years to be the place we all want it to be, a **wonderful destination that reflects the talent, art, fashion, food, culture and history of Virginia Beach. Imagine an excellent, spectacular public street-venue to show off our city's uniqueness and diversity.**

With significant and long overdue public investment, private investment will flourish, and the core resort area will begin to attract and sustain locally-driven, higher-end retail (Members of AAA have spoken to numerous higher-end retailers, local chefs and

restaurateurs about locating on Atlantic Avenue, but they balk because of what we all see there now - a degraded promenade.). Beautifying the area will also help improve behavior and the unfortunate homelessness situation. Locals will start to embrace *their* fun, exciting resort amenity again, not just during big festivals. Most of all, Virginia Beach's image in the world as a progressive, unique destination will shine more than ever.

As Jonathan Souther summarizes in his University of Richmond Master's Thesis, "Twixt Ocean and Pines: The Seaside Resort at Virginia Beach, 1880-1930," **community and regional support** (spurred on by advertising to "Norfolkians" in the Ledger-Star instead of just advertising to "rich Northerners"), as well as **accessibility**, are what changed Virginia Beach the most back then (A hundred years ago the big change in accessibility was paving a dirt road called Virginia Beach Blvd. Today, the accessibility challenge is lack of affordable parking, perceived or real.).

After decades of asking by resort stakeholders, AAA is overjoyed that marketing the resort to the regional 757 community has finally begun. We hope you agree the funding for much needed **local/regional advertising should increase from \$100k, and whether codified or not, remain forever in the budget.** AAA is also working closely on the private side with landlords and tenants to upgrade a demonstration block, and when successful, we will encourage business and property owners on other blocks to do the same. Incentives will help here. We are thankful for that program and hope it increases. But, public perception will not begin to shift until we *transform* the Atlantic Avenue community public space.

In conclusion, presuming #1 and #2 above will soon be in-process, what's next is clear. Virginia Beach, like your home and ours, deserves a wonderful front porch. 17th Street just got \$28M budgeted, and other projects all around the Central Atlantic Avenue corridor are being constructed or in the budget queue. In all fairness, would you encourage Council to make room in the budget for #3 in FY 2020/21, to be completed in FY2024/25 or sooner?

Like Virginia Beach did in 6 months with SITW, let's show the world how talented we are by rallying city and community resources to remake the Central Atlantic Avenue corridor in a big, unrecognizable way!

United we stand ...



*Helping To Build
A Great Community*

George Kotarides

President, Atlantic Avenue Association

757-469-0031

CC - AAA Board



