

CAMERON STATION CIVIC ASSOCIATION, INC.

Ingrid Sanden, President
5238 Bessley Place
Alexandria, VA 22304
703-505-6997
iasanden@gmail.com

August 28, 2008

Mayor Bill Euille
Members of City Council
City of Alexandria
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of City Council,

We have been approached by several members of the Council, community, and leadership of various civic associations in Alexandria regarding our request to Mayor Euille earlier this month to support and sanction an independent investigation into the Norfolk Southern ethanol transloading facility.

There seems to be a misconception among some that we are “going after” someone either on council or within city staff in some way. To the contrary, our civic association’s only goal is to find out what happened throughout this process and what systemic issues arose, and make sure it never happens in this city again.

There are several reasons we support such an investigation:

- The community needs closure. To do that, people need to feel a neutral, objective, professional party has given them all the relevant facts, and that all systemic issues have been addressed.
- The stated explanations for what happened throughout this process aren’t well supported by the FOIA material. The FOIA material suggests there could also be other explanations, or that no explanation so far seems evident. With gaps in the record, there is no way of “connecting all the dots.” An investigator could resolve the open issues through interviews.
- With the lack of a written record on important points (e.g. no notes from anybody on key meetings), the logical way to find out what was discussed and concluded is to have an investigator interview people who were at the meetings.
- Some stated actions or inactions seem out of character with the way intelligent people would think or act.

- As it stands, few people (actually nobody I've talked with) believes the City website "position" or that Council in whole or in part was unaware. The way to counter those beliefs is with sunshine and fresh air, i.e. an independent investigation that lays out the actual facts based on a complete record and interviews.
- Some staff people may have important information to give, but haven't been asked for it. They may also need to be given assurances that they are protected from retaliation for furnishing information.
- The goal of this process is not a "witch hunt" to identify a "guilty" party. We need to find out what happened, what should have happened, what didn't happen, and why. We need to address the system and systemic problems that an investigation would reveal. An independent outside investigation would provide that information and would be viewed by the public as reliable.
- Once Council became aware of the facility, it took action to correct the harm by pursuing regulatory action through the STB and legal channels in Federal court, involvement of the Department of Homeland Security, and involving our Congressional delegation in seeking legislative action. But that also begs the question of why staff didn't involve Council earlier to take these actions. An investigation will shed light on this important question.
- Although they may not recognize it, it is also in Council's interest to support an outside investigation. It would help restore their credibility and people's trust. Otherwise, people are free to speculate and believe what they wish. Council could be irrefutably harmed if their purported explanation turns out in the future to be incorrect.
- It may appear to some that Council has something to hide if it doesn't support an independent, outside investigation or that it is a party to a cover-up or whitewash.
- We don't ask for an outside, independent investigation simply because we "want" it as a personal request, rather the situation demands it to put community concerns at rest and to restore trust and confidence in the City government.
- Some City employees will no doubt welcome an outside, independent investigation as a way to remove any "cloud" that may surround their professional reputations. Also if the City Manager proposes now to discipline an employee, the employee could claim (probably successfully) that he or she is being singled out without there being a complete investigation by an objective party of all the facts surrounding the situation. Unfortunately the City Manager is not viewed as a neutral party because of his connection to the events.

- As it is now, it appears that Council and the City Manager are the ones who write the script of what happened, in spite of the fact that is the appearance of a conflict of interest and tainted objectivity. At least four of them are persons who an outside, independent investigator would want to interview:
 - Mayor Euille: He was the first person to meet with NS, then he met with the City Manager in the summer of 2006 to discuss his meeting with NS (along with other subjects); although there is an agenda for the meeting and an uncompleted worksheet, there are no notes or other documents that explain what was discussed or concluded.
 - Council members Krupicka and Gaines: They were members of the Local Emergency Preparedness Committee (LEPC) at the time Emergency Preparedness staff briefed the LEPC about the facility in December, 2007.
 - City Manager Jim Hartmann: He met with the Mayor in the summer of 2006 to discuss Norfolk Southern's plans. He has no records of the entries on his meeting worksheet for follow-up actions or assigned responsibilities, and has no notes of the meeting; also because he seems to possibly not have acted on information that was made available to him in the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008.

The purpose of this letter is not to overwhelm but to expand on our previous request for an independent, outside investigation into this situation. This investigation would not only help bring a sense of clarity to this situation, it would also return a sense of trust in city government to residents throughout the city of Alexandria.

Sincerely,

Ingrid Sanden
President, Cameron Station Civic Association