

## RESTORE “FITZGERALD SQUARE” TO WATERFRONT PARK

On St. Patrick’s Day, March 17, 2018, the very day set aside to remember Irish heritage, the City of Alexandria without provocation or explanation, stripped the name “Fitzgerald” from the Waterfront Park Plan in Old Town Alexandria. Revolutionary War Veteran Colonel John Fitzgerald was part of the City’s Waterfront Plan for over eight years! This was the first City project to recognize Irish Americans who contributed to the City, the waterfront, and our military. Instead of celebrating Alexandria’s deep Irish and patriotic past, the City renamed the park after a street recalling our colonial subjugation.



Interim Fitzgerald Square Park  
Concept Scheme

For months we have asked the City to identify who changed the name in secret, and why that decision was made. Now, after 6 months, we know who is responsible, **City Manager Mark Jinks**. That the change was made without warning and implemented on St. Patrick’s Day displays incompetence, disrespect for an open process, and an air of racism and bigotry.

As has been discussed in previous meetings during the Waterfront’s development, Col. John Fitzgerald repelled a British attack on Alexandria City’s waterfront, served as President George Washington’s aide-de-camp, a mayor of Alexandria City, built a library and a bank in Alexandria, and was one of our earliest members of City Council. A leader of religious freedom, Col. Fitzgerald was a Founding Father of the first Catholic Church in Virginia, the now Basilica of St. Mary, with over 7000 parishioners.

Following are key quotes from the City Waterfront Plan, clearly indicating the plan to name the park for Col. John Fitzgerald:

**A.6 Alexandria Waterfront Plan-Alexandria, A Living History** document, dated 2010, found on Alexandria City’s website:

([https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/Waterfront/A6\\_History%20Appendix\(1\).pdf](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/Waterfront/A6_History%20Appendix(1).pdf))

**Page 59:** “5) On south side of King Street, interpretive artwork about the importance of immigration to Alexandria’s growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. **Recognize the Irish who created this wharf and traded here.**”

**Page 98:** “Fitzgerald’s Wharf (foot of King Street, south side)

**John Fitzgerald, an Irish immigrant of the Revolutionary Generation, banked out to create the land in the 100 and 0 blocks of north side of King Street with Valentine Peers after returning from the war. Distrusting the British, both Fitzgerald and Peers had contributed their trading profits to help Bostonians during the English blockade before the War. Another Alexandrian close to George Washington, he served as the general’s aide-de-camp and was at Valley Forge. Washington wrote a letter supporting Fitzgerald as the Collector of Customs in 1791. A committed citizen and businessman, he was a founder/director of the Alexandria Library, Bank of Alexandria, Potomac Company, and a Catholic who helped in the creation of St. Mary’s Church and cemetery. He imported Irish linen with fellow Irishman Peers and exported wheat and then moved on to a wide assortment of European goods and wines. He was also involved in the Wales Brewery located on the 100 block of South Union Street and was a partner with Daniel Roberdeau in a distillery on Wolfe Street. Fitzgerald’s Warehouse stands at the southeast corner of King and Union streets and is the oldest**

*structure to survive on the waterfront. Fitzgerald's Wharf is now the Old Dominion Boat Club parking lot east of the Strand. \*Medallion of the 1803 Plan of Alexandria"*

Recognizing the contributions by Col. Fitzgerald and other Irish American immigrants, the City's Waterfront Plan was developed by multiple Alexandria City Historians, mayors, council members and Pat Troy for over 8 years. Multiple City meetings and newspapers articles ensured that the community's citizens were educated on this project.

The city has offered multiple conflicting reasons for renaming the park. They have included citing a need to make the park's name more relevant to the location so that people could find it. Given that King Street is Old Town's "Main Street" and the Potomac is the waterfront, how much more information does a visitor need? A recent article cites complaints that Col. Fitzgerald owned black servants. This claim cannot be conclusively established with existing records. Col. Fitzgerald employed Irish indentured servants. In the same article, **City Manager Mark Jinks** says that slavery, "had nothing to do with it" and that "the name has to go through the naming process." Recently, City officials have mentioned other names to replace Fitzgerald Square. The lack of a clear process and an explanation as to why the name change must be addressed.

The RENAMING process has not been transparent, nor has it been published. Multiple citizen groups/organizations support Fitzgerald Square, not limited to, the Basilica of St. Mary, Alexandria Ancient Order of Hibernians, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Daughters of America, the Ballyshaners, citizens and local business owners. The Ancient Order of Hibernians has obtained over 1700 signatures of supporters of Fitzgerald Square (<https://chn.ge/2GHI6MS>), including 300 plus signatures obtained at the recent Alexandria Irish Festival.

Repeatedly, citizens have asked for information about how the naming process works with no response. Instead, we have received only conflicting messages of which council members are on the Naming Committee. Never was there a mention of a Naming Committee meeting. Mysteriously, a meeting was posted on the City website on short notice for a meeting on Wednesday, September 12 at 4pm, ensuring a weak turnout. Fortunately, someone happened upon the meeting notice. At this meeting, Waterfront Commissioner Jack Browand stated that **City Manager Mark Jinks** ordered him to remove Fitzgerald Park and rename the park King Street Park at the Waterfront. This is the same **Mark Jinks**, who is notorious for making secret decisions like the recent Metro Scandal. City Spokesman **Craig Fifer** was full of apologies. He apologized for announcing the renaming of the park on St. Patrick's Day. He also apologized for Washington Post article by Patricia Sullivan which he stated reported a false reason for name change that triggered race baiting. **Craig Fifer** said he asked the Washington Post to change the article but was turned down. **Fifer** stated that a lot has changed since the park was named after Col. Fitzgerald. What has changed? History? No, City management has changed, making decisions in secret, without community input.

The Basilica of St. Mary Church, adding to Alexandria's tourism, would not exist without Col. Fitzgerald's dedication, the support of its citizens, including President George Washington.

Alexandria prides itself on its history which is why "Old Town Alexandria" exists. Its unique role in the founding of the United States of America draws tourists to Old Town. Now, we appear to be working toward removing our historic role in America's history. Alexandria residents respect their noble history and do not want one of its undisputable local heroes removed from the Waterfront Plan.

Terry Riley, President, Ancient Order of Hibernians