

*CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA*

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**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: SEPTEMBER 27, 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: ELEANOR BREEN, CITY ARCHAEOLOGIST

FROM: IVY WHITLATCH, COMMISSION CHAIR

SUBJECT: FY 2024 COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

**Purpose of the Annual Report:** This Annual Report provides a summary of the activities undertaken by the Alexandria Archaeological Commission during FY 2024 (from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024). The report includes a summary of activities by the Commission for the fiscal year, specific goals for the coming year, upcoming recruitment and leadership plans, and the commissioners' attendance.

**Background:** The Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC) was established in 1975 to establish goals and priorities to promote Alexandria Archaeology (AA), encourage volunteerism, and to advise on the preservation and interpretation of Alexandria's extraordinary sites and collections.

The Commission is comprised of 15 members serving 4-year terms. The Commission includes the following representatives:

- 5 Members at-large
- 1 Citizen member from each of the three Planning Districts
- 1 Member from the Alexandria Association
- 1 Member from the business community
- 1 Member from the Visit Alexandria Board of Governors
- 1 Member from the Alexandria Historical Society
- 1 Member from the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage or an equivalent organization
- 1 Member from the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology
- 1 Member from the Historic Alexandria Foundation

**Membership and Appointments during FY 2024:** Ivy Whitlatch was elected as Chair, Esther White as Vice Chair, and Elizabeth Vehmeyer as Secretary, and, following her resignation, John Oldfield.

The roster and appointment expiration date are listed below (\*indicates new member in FY2024):

Chair	Ivy Whitlatch	Planning District I	December 2026
Vice Chair	Esther White	Planning District II	December 2025
Secretary	John Oldfield	Member at Large	September 2026
Members	*Jason Roberts	Member at Large	December 2027
	Ralph Rosenbaum	Member at Large	January 2025
	Seth Tinkham	Historic Alexandria Foundation	April 2025
	Richard Owens	Friends of Alexandria Archaeology	April 2026
	Dylan Colligan	Area Business Community	October 2026
	Edward Pulliam	Alexandria Association	March 2027
	Robert Vierick	Alexandria Historical Society	October 2026
	Vacant	Visit Alexandria	April 2025
	Nicholas Dienna	Member at Large	October 2025
	Ann Greer	Member at Large	September 2025
	Paula Whitacre	Planning District III	October 2025
	Michael Johnson	Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage or equivalent	September 2026

**Upcoming Recruitment Plans for FY 2025:** The AAC plans to recruit a Visit Alexandria Board of Governors representative to fill the existing vacancy.

**Attendance:** During FY 2024, a total of 10 regular meetings were held. The Commission did not meet during the months of December and August. A quorum was met for all regular meetings. The average attendance throughout FY 2024 was 11 Commissioners, plus staff. All of the voting members of the AAC attended at least 75 percent of the meetings.

**Role of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission:**

The responsibilities of the AAC include:

***1) Advocate for archaeology across multiple platforms and audiences***

- Through the annual budget process, as a participant in the Torpedo Factory Stakeholders Task Force, and with discussions with members of City Council, the AAC has advocated for the need to address the anticipated Spring 2026 return of the conserved Ship Hull remnant discovered in 2015 on the waterfront at the current site of the Indigo Hotel. This is both an immediate storage need and a future exhibition need.

This is the most critical issue to be addressed by the AAC. The Commission looks forward to discussing, with City Staff and partners, both the implementation of the approved Museum Feasibility Study (funded in FY2022) and the monthly storage of the ship timbers while the timbers are waiting to be reconstructed and exhibited.

- As noted in a joint letter to City Council signed by the three preservation commissions (Alexandria Archaeological Commission, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission,

and Public Records Advisory Commission) in November of 2023, there is an extreme and urgent need to address the Storage Shortfalls for artifacts and documents.

- AAC members have followed, advised, and participated in multiple aspects within Alexandria that focus on the city’s history. Most notable in FY24 include:
  - Served as a consulting party on the Section 106 process for Samuel Madden Homes redevelopment and advised on mitigation strategies.
  - Spearheaded the efforts of an ad hoc committee to launch the historic interpretation signs along the African American Waterfront Heritage Trail.
  - Continued representation on the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission and the Waterfront Commission.
  - Continued advocacy for the Alexandria Archaeology Museum in City discussions on the Torpedo Factory Art Center.
  - Represented the history and archaeology communities during development of Comprehensive Plans for the Murray Dick Fawcett House and Freedom House.
  - Volunteered a total of 364 hours in its commitment to review, advise, and advocate to Council for both recognition of the areas and stories of historical importance that exist throughout Alexandria and acknowledgement of Alexandria’s many important past archaeological discoveries, as well as its potential for many important future discoveries.
- As the oldest and first commission of its kind in the country, the AAC is in the planning stages of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration. The City of Alexandria leads the country in its approach to preserving and stewarding archaeological sites and sharing scientific findings with the public. Plans include arranging for statewide recognition, preparing press releases, inserting anniversary information in professional publications, and recognizing, at the annual Volunteer Party in February 2025, all who have served as a Commissioner.

## ***2) Supporting the Archaeology Program and Museum***

- The Commission receives quarterly updates on the Protection Code activities being reviewed by Alexandria Archaeology. These updates keep Commission members informed and allow them to provide feedback to Alexandria Archaeology.
- The AAC participated in Alexandria Archaeology’s “museum without walls” approach through the installation of the Buried Ships exhibit at Robinson Landing.
- Through continued partnership with FOAA, the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology, the AAC strives to educate and inform residents and visitors about archaeology and history and assist in membership recruitment efforts.
- The AAC continues to advocate for an archaeology contingency fund to support the preservation of archaeological sites and collections.

### *3) Community recognition for contributions to archaeology*

Annually the AAC, in conjunction with Alexandria Archaeology, presents the Ben Brenman Awards to those individuals or organizations that have demonstrated exceptional involvement with city history. In October 2023, the Ben Brenman recipients were recognized for their significant contributions to educating future generations of archaeologists.

- Alexandria Archaeology Summer Camp Counselors received the award for Outstanding Educators. Recent camp counselors, Christina Eure, Tara Jennings, Cathryn Kinde, Hannah Lemon, Julianne White, Margaret “Maggie” Winter, and Melissa Thiringer were recognized for their professionalism, patience, and commitment in educating and training the next generation of Alexandria archaeologists. They taught careful research, excavation, and cataloguing methods, imparted the importance of the scientific method, ultimately energized light bulb moments through interpreting Alexandria’s significant history, and, thereby, enriched the lives of Alexandria residents and visitors for years to come.

## **Major Initiatives during FY 2024:**

***1) Advocacy for the ship timbers that are currently under conservation at Texas A&M with an anticipated return date to the City of Alexandria in Spring 2026.*** The AAC remains committed to working with City staff and partners to find a location to showcase Alexandria’s early seaport history in a way that educates and entices residents and visitors.

As yet, there has been no discussion concerning the location of the ship hull and related artifacts or the alternatives of storing, exhibiting, or relocating them. This neglect represents a significant concern of the Commission. As noted in our November 1, 2023 budget request letter to the City Manager, in order to resolve this issue, there are three items that must be addressed:

- The contract with Texas A&M includes reconstruction for exhibition or storage if a suitable space is found. The contract also specifies if a storage or exhibition space is not secured by the time the ship is ready to return, the monthly storage fee at Texas A&M is \$5000 per month.
- Immediate consideration and execution of the Museum Feasibility Study, for which budget was approved in FY2022.
- The Museum Feasibility Study should focus on the opportunities to exhibit the ship within the Torpedo Factory.

***2) Formation of a Cemetery Committee to explore the potential of a National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex.*** If the Commission decides to apply for a National Register Nomination, the Wilkes Street Complex would be one of the first in the nation to recognize a complex that includes a pauper cemetery (Penny Hill), an African American cemetery (Douglass Cemetery), multiple historic religious cemeteries, and the first national military cemetery.

***3) Advocacy for the creation of a scholarship in the recognition of the historic relevance of the Madden Homes.*** As part of the Section 106 consultation process, the final Memorandum of Agreement for Madden Homes stipulates: “ARHA (Alexandria Regional Housing Authority) and/or its assignees will establish a scholarship fund with seed funding of \$20,000 to benefit ARHA residents pursuing careers that impact the built environment. This may include training for a skilled trade career, or degrees in areas such as historic preservation, urban planning, archaeology, architecture, engineering, or others. The scholarship fund will be managed by an independent third-party non-profit organization to be selected by ARHA Board of Commissioners in consultation with the City.”

***4) Continued participation in key task forces and initiatives within the City that focus on historic preservation,*** including the Torpedo Factory Stakeholders Follow Up Meetings, Freedom House Comprehensive Plan process, preservation of Douglass Cemetery, Murray Dick Fawcett Comprehensive Plan, and representation on the Waterfront Commission and Historic Alexandria Resources Commission.

**5) Preparations for the Commission's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.** As the first archaeological commission in the country, the AAC is planning to celebrate with events and awards that recognize the accomplishments and initiatives it has contributed to the City of Alexandria over the years.

**FY 2025 Goals:** The AAC is expected to advise on the following funding items during FY 2025.

**1) The key initiative that will be requested for funding focuses on the future of the ship hull currently being conserved at Texas A&M.** As noted in the November 1, 2023 letter either the City needs to secure storage for the ship hull OR pay for storage at Texas A&M at a monthly rate of \$5,000. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT DISCUSSION BEGIN WITH CITY STAFF TO ASSESS THE OPTIONS FOR STORAGE AND FUTURE EXHIBITION OF THE SHIP HULL. If needed, a copy of the November 1, 2023 letter is attached which details the additional concerns AAC has raised regarding the future of the ship hull.

**2) Initiatives and goals of the AAC for FY 2025 that do not require funding are:**

- Support for innovative solutions for the storage, exhibition, conservation, and accessibility of maritime and other artifacts including collaborative efforts with other City preservation commissions.
- Support for the continued leadership, staffing, and professional development of Alexandria Archaeology, including education, museum upgrades, and lab facilities, to remain one of the country's leading archaeology programs.
- Continue to advocate for a sustainable budget in support of a viable archaeological program for the City and seek new funding sources to support the work of the program.
- Celebrate the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the AAC with partners including City Council and State representatives.
- Remain vigilant and outspoken, in partnership with the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology, about Backyard Archaeology activity (bottle digging) that is destroying Alexandria history one buried privy and well at a time and continue to educate members of the community about this threat to Alexandria history.
- The AAC plans to explore the possibilities of creating new ways that Alexandria Archaeology can continue to be a model for urban community archaeology programs.
- Successful collaboration on and implementation of the Waterfront History Museum Feasibility Study.
- Continued interpretation of the African American story of Alexandria through the support of initiatives like Freedom House and other sites, projects, and collaborations.
- Recruit diverse membership to the Commission to fill vacancies.

APPROVED:

Ivy Whitlatch, Chairperson

## ATTACHMENTS



*Alexandria Archaeological Commission*  
*America's First Archaeological Commission*



November 1, 2023

James F. Parajon  
City Manager  
Alexandria City Hall  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Parajon,

The Alexandria Archaeological Commission appreciates the opportunity to submit input for the FY2025 budget. As you requested in your September 14, 2023 letter, our highest priorities for funding in FY2025 focus on the stewardship of Alexandria's archaeological collection and future display and interpretation of artifacts for the benefit of Alexandria residents, visitors and scholars. The following points identify the urgent needs the AAC has identified that warrant budget consideration.

- 1) **First and foremost, accessibility and curation** of the conserved remains of the ship from the Hotel Indigo site is the critical issue for the Commission. It is our goal for the ship to be a key driver of economic development, visitor revenue, and central to the interpretation of the waterfront.

As noted in our letter from last year, the return is anticipated to coincide with city's 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – but is 'currently without a place for display or storage.' We feel it is important for the City of Alexandria to be aware of two things regarding this urgent plea that have yet to be addressed:

- a) Once the ship is completely conserved, which is anticipated to be December 2025, the next phase of the City's ship conservation contract with Texas A&M University is to prepare the timbers for reassembly and exhibition or, **in lieu of a suitable storage or display facility, be stored at Texas A&M at a cost of approximately \$5,000/month.** There is not a suitable storage or display facility under review or consideration.

This is why the AAC recommended a Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study, which received funding in the FY2022 CIP budget. We anticipate that the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study will begin soon so that there is time for a budget to be developed and recommendations enacted to minimize storage costs and achieve what will truly be a magnet exhibition for our redeveloping waterfront. The AAC appreciates any support from the City Manager's office to hasten the contracting of the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study.

*Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3227*  
*Phone: 703/746-4399*

- b) There is space within the Torpedo Factory Art Center to display this ship from the Hotel Indigo site and to enhance the exhibition and visual storage and lab functionality of the Alexandria Archaeology Museum. This location should be a primary consideration for the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study, as it would minimize construction and relocation costs, add to the vibrancy of the Torpedo Factory, and serve as an economic driver for the small businesses that benefit from the multitude of visitors who seek out Alexandria's unique heritage tourism experiences.
- 2) As stated in the AAC budget request letter for FY2024, one of AAC's most pressing and critical issues has been artifact, archives, and museum collections **storage** – both physical and visual storage – which would interact with visitors and volunteers. This, however, is not unique to Archaeology. It is critical among the commissions that support various functions of the Office of Historic Alexandria. Shortly, the City Manager's office will be receiving a letter from **all** the commissions that focus on historic preservation for the city; Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, Public Records Advisory Commission, and Alexandria Archaeological Commission, highlighting the unanimous concern for this need and urgent request.

As always, we request that the FY2025 budget maintain the \$50,000 contingency fund for Alexandria Archaeology to continue to meet unexpected needs for conservation, storage, documentation, and research.

We are grateful for your management and foresight in budgeting for the opportunities Alexandria Archaeology's work will bring to Alexandria for residents, visitors, scholars, and businesses.

Sincerely,



Ivy E. Whitlatch  
Chair, Alexandria Archaeological Commission





Alexandria, Virginia

## *Historic Alexandria Resources Commission*

*220 North Washington Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2521  
(703) 746-4554*



October 17, 2023

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of City Council,

On behalf of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC), the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC), and the Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC), we request that the City Manager and elected officials prioritize the critical storage needs for Alexandria's important historical documents, collections, and archaeological materials as part of FY2025 general fund and capital improvement budget planning.

These historic items provide powerful and tangible evidence of the lives of those who lived and labored in Alexandria in the past and allow us to evolve the historical narrative toward previously underrepresented communities in our city's history. As such, it is critical all historical documents, objects, and artifacts are properly stored and preserved for current and future generations.

OHA has twice achieved accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums for their professionalism and museum management. Managing historic buildings and their contents, including a collections storage facility, is crucial to retaining this top recognition. By OHA's account, collections storage will be at capacity by January 2024. We urge you to prioritize funding to extend storage resources for our city's historic collections to avoid the irreversible loss of precious historic treasures that cannot be recouped.

OHA is currently applying for a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant to conduct a storage needs assessment for their collections. This assessment will provide a roadmap for the City that details the specific needs of the many historic collections – including paper, objects, digital records and images, and archaeological artifacts. The study will include HVAC, security, and other important recommendations. We would be happy to share updates on these findings to better equip you with the scope of what is immediately needed for these crucial preservation efforts.

**In closing, we urge you to prioritize funding for the City's museum collections through additional storage as part of FY 2025 budget planning. HARC, AAC, and**

PRAC are closely following the success of the NEH grant and will prioritize advocacy for OHA collections storage and associated budget requests in FY2025 and beyond.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue for the City's cultural heritage.



Shawn Eyer  
Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC)



Ivy Whitlatch  
Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC)



Lynn Jorden  
Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)

Cc: Jim Parajon, City Manager  
Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager  
Gretchen Bulova, OHA