

*CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA*

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**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: OCTOBER 3, 2025

TO: MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: ELEANOR BREEN, CITY ARCHAEOLOGIST

FROM: IVY WHITLATCH, COMMISSION CHAIR

SUBJECT: FY 2025 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 2025 (from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025). 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 2025:** Ivy Whitlatch was elected as Chair, Esther White as Vice Chair, and John Oldfield as Secretary.

The current roster and appointment expiration date are listed below (\*indicates new member in FY2025). Resignations included Nicholas Dienna, Jason Robert, and Ralph Rosenbaum.

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	Cynthia Boren*	Member at Large	April 2029
	Kim Abraham*	Member at Large	February 2029
	Seth Tinkham	Historic Alexandria Foundation	September 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	Vacant
	Raymond Eresman*	Member at Large	May 2029
	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 2026:** The AAC plans to recruit a Visit Alexandria Board of Governors' representative to fill the existing vacancy and work with City Council to ensure that the Historic Alexandria Foundation reappointment is approved.

**Attendance:** During FY 2025, a total of 11 regular meetings were held. The Commission did not meet during the month of August. A quorum was met for all regular meetings except October. The average attendance throughout FY 2025 was 9 Commissioners, plus staff and visitors. 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 2027 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.
- AAC members have followed, advised, and participated in multiple aspects within Alexandria that focus on the city's history. Most notable in FY25 include:
  - Section 106 Waterfront Flood Mitigation.
  - Section 106 Heritage.
  - 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.
- Volunteered a total of 226 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 planned a range of ways to honor 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. The AAC received recognition in the following ways:
  - January 31, 2025 - Virginia State Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker presented AAC Chair, Ivy Whitlatch, with House Joint Resolution no. 433 in honor of the anniversary. Patrons of the resolution also included Delegate Charniele Herring, Delegate Alfonso Lopez, and Senator Adam Ebbin.
  - February 25, 2025 – City Council recognized the AAC with a proclamation.
  - February 25, 2025 – Senator Mark Warner presented the AAC with a flag flown over the U.S. Capitol building in recognition of the anniversary.
  - May 28, 2025 – The Alexandria Historical Society presented the AAC with the T. Michael Miller Alexandria History Award due to its significant contributions to the preservation and protection of the City of Alexandria archaeology and history over the past 50 years.
  - June 24, 2025 – City Council presented the Alexandria Archaeological Commission with the Commission of the Year Impact Award recognizing 50 years of service in the city.
- Formed an Advocacy Committee

## ***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.
- 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 wrote a letter of support for OHA grant applications including the Commonwealth History Fund grant through the Virginia Museum of History & Culture to study the history of the City Hall/Market Square block.

## ***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 2024, the Ben Brenman recipient was recognized for her significant contributions to the City of Alexandria and Alexandria Archaeology.

- Marian Van Landingham received the Ben Brenman award for Outstanding Visionary Partner in recognition of her over 50-year commitment to activating Alexandria's historic waterfront with art and archaeology through her Torpedo Factory Art Center vision; creating a sense of purpose and a feeling of home for creators and scientists by adaptively reusing the concrete hulk of a former industrial building; being an early proponent that City archaeology should be on public view for appreciation and engagement as both a laboratory and a museum; and, thereby, enriching the lives of Alexandria residents and visitors for decades passed and decades to come.

### **Major Initiatives during FY 2025:**

***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 2027.*** 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 decision 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.**

***2) National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex.*** For its June 2025 meeting, AAC organized a "walk about" meeting to Ivy Hill to have a tour of that historic cemetery and learn more about their National Register application process. The AAC confirmed City Manager support for the nomination.

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

**FY 2026 Goals:** The AAC is expected to advise on the following funding items during FY 2026.

***1) The key initiative is continuing to work to find an exhibition space for the ship hull currently being conserved at Texas A&M and ensuring funding for short-term storage.***

***2) Additional initiatives and goals of the AAC for FY 2026 include:***

- Support for storage, exhibition, conservation, and accessibility of maritime and other artifacts including collaborative efforts with other City preservation commissions.
- Submission of a preliminary information form for a National Register Nomination for the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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, 2024

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

Dear Mr. Parajon,

The Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit input for the FY2026 budget. The following points identify the urgent needs the AAC has identified that warrant budget consideration.

- 1) First and foremost, analysis of the immediate storage and future exhibition of the conserved remains of the ship from the Hotel Indigo site. This 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 for years to come. But planning for storage needs, expense and alternatives is imminent.

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 has completed conservation, which is now anticipated to be Spring 2026, the next phase of the City's ship conservation contract with Texas A&M University, the conservator, is to prepare the timbers for reassembly and exhibition OR, in lieu of a display facility, be stored. The cost to do so at Texas A&M is approximately \$5,000/month. At the current time, there is not a suitable storage within Alexandria's city facilities under review or consideration.
- b) There is space within the Torpedo Factory Art Center to display the ship hull from the Hotel Indigo site and to enhance the exhibition and visual storage and lab functionality of the Alexandria Archaeology Museum. The Torpedo Factory should be a primary focus for the FY2022 budget approved Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study, as it would minimize construction and relocation costs, add to the vibrancy of the Torpedo Factory, has potential to be a revenue source for 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.

We believe that focusing the analysis of the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study within the Torpedo Factory will provide ample evidence of the benefits

*Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street, #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3217*  
*Phone: 703/746-4329*



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



Attn: Matt Landes, Division Chief  
Department of Project Implementation  
301 King Street, Suite 3200  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

February 25, 2025

Dear Mr. Landes and Department Staff,

The Department of Project Implementation (DPI) has been assigned the responsibility of undertaking historic interpretation along the waterfront in connection with the Waterfront Flood Mitigation Project. In that regard, illustrations of different options for landscape design at Waterfront Park were circulated at the November 25, 2024, Flood Mitigation Project open house and are available online. They show places in the park where the project's pump house might be located. They also show that DPI and its subconsultants have selected an historical theme, "Boat Building," that they plan to interpret in the park. Illustrations of Options 1B and 2D show a feature labeled "Boatwright's Passage," and Option 2B shows a feature labeled "Boat builders seating/climbable sculpture."

A theme related to boat building, however, *does not agree with the historic and archaeological record for Waterfront Park*. There are two reasons for this disagreement: first, the principal watercraft Alexandrians built were not boats but ships. Pleasure craft tied today at Alexandria docks are boats. The important watercraft Alexandrians built were ships capable of carrying large amounts of diverse cargo up and down the coast and across the Atlantic, like the first ship recorded as built in Alexandria, the *Ranger*, 154 tons, built for a firm in Whitehaven, England.

Secondly, according to a recent study of documents related to the waterfront that was completed for Alexandria Archaeology, ships were not built on the Waterfront Park block. They were built one block south at Point Lumley. With all its historic wharves, Waterfront Park's historical activity that was extremely important to Alexandria was shipping – receiving and sending a large variety of goods to and from a wide geographical area over a long period of time.

In undertaking historic interpretation, we anticipate that DPI will take advantage of the research and planning that has been done in this area in the History Plan that is part of the Waterfront Small Area Plan adopted by City Council in 2012 and the 2013 report of the city's Art and History Waterfront Plans Implementation Committee (available on the city's website under "Art-History Plan"). Both plans contain descriptive history and detailed planning valuable for historic interpretation on the waterfront and proposals to commemorate in the park the extensive shipping activity that took place there over a long period of time, and they provide ideas for doing so.

*Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street, #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3217*  
*Phone: 703/464-3322*

of this location for exhibition of this truly unique Alexandria archeological treasure and create a space that will be a substantial draw for artists, residents and visitors.

- 2) As stated in previous AAC budget request letters, the AAC wants to continue to advocate for the need for the city's artifact, archive, and museum collections **storage** – both physical and visual storage. This, however, is not unique to Archaeology. It is critical among the commissions that support the Office of Historic Alexandria

As always, we request that the FY2026 budget include 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





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*America's First Archaeological Commission*



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Department of Project Implementation  
301 King Street, Suite 3200  
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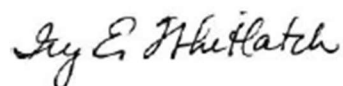
*Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street, #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3217  
Phone: 703/746-4399*

The Commission appreciates that the current priority of DPI's waterfront mitigation staff now is the location and design of the stormwater project. When historic interpretation becomes DPI's focus, we would like to encourage accessing the significant resources available for historical interpretation available through existing research and planning and the expertise of the Archaeology staff. We are greatly appreciative that DPI already is coordinating with Archaeology on historic preservation related to the Flood Mitigation Project and believe it would be advantageous to continue to work with its staff on historic interpretation.

We also urge DPI to continue its meetings with the public regarding historic interpretation at Waterfront Park.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these points.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ivy E. Whitlatch". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Ivy Whitlatch  
Chair, Alexandria Archaeological Commission