

# **ALEXANDRIA HISTORICAL RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

## **REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL**

July 2017 to June 2018

The Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission (AHRPC) was created and is governed by an Act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1962, as subsequently amended. The general purpose of the Commission is to promote historic preservation throughout the City. It consists of nine members, two of whom are appointed by the Governor and seven of whom are appointed by City Council. These members are broadly representative of persons throughout the City who are committed to maintaining strong support for a vital approach to historic preservation in Alexandria.

During the period July 2017 through June 2018, the Commission met at scheduled sessions every month at Lloyd House, its property at 220 North Washington Street.

### **COMMISSION ACTIVITIES**

The activities of the Commission fell within the following topics:

- Easements
- Advocacy
- Outreach
- Property Management

### **Historic Preservation Easements**

Under its authority to own real property within the City of Alexandria, the Commission is the grantee of approximately 40 residential, commercial, and public properties. These easements cover facades, interiors, and contextual open spaces of historic significance.

During each year, the Commission oversees the inspection of a selection of these easement properties to assure that they are being maintained according to the specific terms of their easements. The selections are made so that all properties are viewed within a reasonable period. The inspections are carried out by members of the Commission at times mutually agreeable to the property owners. Subsequent to an inspection, a report is filed in the easement record and the property owner is notified of the results by letter.

The Commission also maintains a list of the historic preservation-related easements on properties throughout the City of Alexandria whether the Commission is the grantee or not. Efforts continue to ensure that the list is as complete as possible and that the City real estate records cross-check with the Commission list. The Commission has become a substantial source on specific easements and their provisions for the Planning and Zoning Department, as well as other City staff.

As part of its easement program, the Commission helps grantors develop proposed changes in their properties that may be required legally or needed by the owner but that will also be consistent with the terms of the easements on the properties. If the work is also subject to review and issue of a certificate of appropriateness by the Board of Architectural Review, the Commission works with the Planning and Zoning Staff to assure that the results are consistent both with the terms of the easement and the considerations the BAR must take into account. This may sometimes involve a second round of deliberations if the initial proposal causes collateral effects that may well need to be reviewed for consistency with the easement. These generally involve the Commission's passing on each stage before the related work can be scheduled to begin. During this period, the Commission reviewed a project at 409 East Custis Avenue. Also, as part of the rehabilitation work at 213 North Fairfax Street, the Commission and the owners agreed to record a preservation easement that protects the entire exterior of the building; the remaining encapsulated portions of the masonry wall on the east elevation; and historic interior features that include the flooring in the first floor two front parlors and entire third story (excluding landing), period reeded casings on the first floor (arched opening, front door, and front parlor), fireplace mantles in the first floor two front parlors; and the original interior paneling on the basement stair. Prior to the execution of the preservation easement, both parties agreed that the AHRPC will photograph and document the existing conditions of the features covered by the easement before and after construction. This project is still ongoing and the easement will be executed in 2019.

In light of the Commission's experience with easements in recent years, policies are being developed to better inform, educate and provide technical guidance to existing and future easement holders. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources easement policies were used as a model.

### **Advocacy**

The Commission strongly supports historic preservation efforts throughout the City and presents its preservation positions before formal procedures of the City Council, Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and the Boards of Architectural Review. It participates in periodic forums created by City offices and non-government groups consulting in the development of preservation policies that will be espoused in its presentations. It also supports the City's preservation programs as occasions arise.

The Commission devotes a substantial effort to determining when it should intervene in formal proceedings before the Boards of Architectural Review, the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Planning Commission, and the City Council. Occasions for such intervention may arise during the course of any year involving preservation issues raised in proposals to demolish and/or develop properties the Commission believes warrant treatment appropriate to their specific historic character and their contribution to the historic character of the City. Aside from the continued development along the waterfront and the ongoing planning efforts for the construction of the Metro station in Potomac Yard, the Commission closely monitored activities associated with the Alfred Street Baptist Church, Route 1 Housing Authority, and the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) tunnel.

The Commission continues to serve as the lead in the inventory of the alleys in Old Town. Working alongside other Commissions' members, City Planning staff, and citizen volunteers, members of AHRPC held several meetings during this period and carried out survey outings to record the existing conditions

of the alleys. Also, during this period all alleys were documented and the alley group is presently developing treatment recommendations that will assist the city in managing the historic alleys. Finally, alley group members provided presentations to various civic organizations and public, which included at the Lyceum in September 2017; Old Town Civic November 2017; and to the BAR in November 2017.

### **Outreach**

During the year, the Commission maintained liaison with the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, with regular membership on it to keep in touch with its various initiatives and to share in developing a broader range of contacts to promote historic preservation throughout the City.

Through common members, the Commission is also in constant contact with the Board of Trustees of Historic Alexandria Foundation—with which the Commission jointly holds a number of easements—and the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission. Active participation in these other organizations is particularly helpful in developing supporting positions and actions to promote preservation in the Old and Historic Alexandria District.

Contacts continue with citizen associations and City staff to explore ways in which the Commission might help to develop cooperative programs for maintaining enthusiasm and energy for historic preservation throughout the City as well as in the two local historic districts and the other National Register Historic Districts. As part of Preservation Month in May 2018, Mike Comisso served on a panel discussion called *Preservation Incentives: Easements and Tax Credits*. Looking at both preservation easements and rehabilitation tax credits, attendees obtained a better understanding of how easement programs operated and an opportunity to ask the panelists. Other Panelists included Ross Bradford (National Trust for Historic Preservation), Paige Pollard (Commonwealth Preservation Group) and Elizabeth Tune (Virginia Department of Historic Resources).

The Commission maintains a regular meeting agenda to discuss improving the ways for communicating with (1) new home owners about the responsibilities of living in an historic district and (2) existing home owners whose property has an easement on it and the need to convey the latter's terms to succeeding buyers.

### **Property Management – Lloyd House**

The Commission owns Lloyd House and leases it, at no fee, to the City. The Commission believes this is a “partnership” highly advantageous to both parties. The City houses the administrative offices of the Office of Historic Alexandria in Lloyd House and has very attractive open space and meeting facilities for City use there. The City also rents these Lloyd House facilities to private groups for meetings, receptions, and a range of other functions. In turn, the Commission is able through this arrangement to fulfill its stewardship responsibilities for this architecturally very beautiful and important 18<sup>th</sup>-century historic structure. The Office of Historic Alexandria provides administrative assistance to the Commission.

Under the terms of the lease, the City has continued to maintain the structure and gardens of the property in a highly satisfactory fashion.

## GOALS

During the coming year, the Commission intends to continue the main lines of the programs that it has been following to implement its general mission to promote historic preservation throughout the City of Alexandria. It will strive to maintain a **robust easement program** wherein it will work to encourage owners of historically relevant properties in the City to donate easements that will reinforce the official City preservation efforts. It will develop a schedule of inspections to assure that easements the Commission holds are being scrupulously followed. The intent will be to make personal visits to at least 15 of these properties within the next six months. The Commission will also continue to maintain a list of all the properties within the City that have recorded preservation/conservation easements, including those held by organizations other than the Commission. This will need to be a cooperative arrangement with the Recorder's office, and it will involve reconciling the Commission's list with the data in the property assessment files.

The Commission will actively continue its **advocacy role**. Besides closely monitoring the agenda of the BARs, the BZA, the Planning Commission, and the City Council, it intends to follow the various citizen working groups engaged in new developments such as within the waterfront planning area and the Potomac Yard Metro station. As it has done in the past, it will take positions arguing for protecting important historic resources that may be compromised or threatened by proposals before these bodies and developments as they proceed.

Finally, the Commission intends promoting an **outreach effort** more aggressively, in cooperation with like-intentioned organizations. This effort will be directed at applying the principles of historic preservation where relevant throughout the City. It envisions, among other approaches, participating in meetings of local citizen associations to explore whether and how these principles may apply in their areas of interest.

## COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP RECRUITING AND LEADERSHIP PLANS

The Commission is relatively small in numbers and relies heavily on individual members to help execute its program. During this year, the City Council appointed one new member to the Commission. Commission members continue to be aware that it is incumbent upon them to encourage applications for these positions by Alexandrians who are vitally interested in the preservation of the City's historic resources.

At the end of this period (June 2018), Mike Commisso continues to assume the duties of chair. Elections will occur in the fall of 2016. Because matters such as the easement program involve developing human capital on some of the legal and other issues that may arise, transitions will be carefully executed to help build to the qualities needed. The Office of Historic Alexandria staff continue to be an indispensable resource for effecting a satisfactory transition.