

# **ALEXANDRIA HISTORICAL RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

## **REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL**

July 2022 to June 2023

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 2022 through June 2023, the Commission met eleven meetings in total.

### **COMMISSION ACTIVITIES**

The activities of the Commission fell within the following topics:

- Easements-established criteria for accepting easements
- Advocacy
- Outreach
- Bi-yearly inspections of easements
- Setting goals for the year

### **Historic Preservation Easements**

Under its authority to hold easements 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.

In light of the Commission's experience with easements in recent years, policies continue to be 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. The Commission closely monitored activities associated with the Freedom House renovation, the Lloyd House renovation, and the Heritage Project on the outskirts of the Parker-Gray Historic District. We testified at the zoning commission against a request for a variance on South Lee Street.

The Commission continues to serve as the lead in the inventory of the alleys in Old Town. The alley survey has been completed and is on file at the Lloyd House.

### **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 several Trustees of Historic Alexandria Foundation—with which the Commission jointly holds several 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. 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. During this year, the commission developed two-sub committees—one committee focuses on increasing its number of interior easements, and the other to increase the number of easements on sites with historical meaning to the African American community. The Commission hired a professional photographer to showcase four interior easements and is in negotiated with two local publications to publish those photos. The *Alexandria Times* cooperated by publishing several articles on Preservations.

### **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. The lease was renewed in July 2023.

### **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 continue a schedule of inspections to assure that easements the Commission holds are being scrupulously followed. Commission members were able to visit 25% of the easements. 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. Finally, the commission will finish the policies that will assist current and future easement holders. All of this requires substantial technical support. We are debating how to best update and preserve our records.

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. 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.

During the term from June 2022 to July 2023 the Commission established two goals 1) Pursuit of Interior easements on homes that qualify and 2) Identification of sites relevant to our African American heritage. A highly successful seminar on interior easements was held at the Lyceum on April 19, 2023. As a result, we have had numerous requests about interior easements and are working on them. Efforts to identify properties relevant to our African American heritage have not been as successful.

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 three new members to the Commission. The State also appointed a new member to the commission to complete a previous appointment. 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 2022), Susan Horne has the duties of chairperson. 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. We have several vacant seats and are actively recruiting.