

Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)  
Minutes of the November 28, 2022 Meeting  
Archives & Records Center, 801 S. Payne St.

**Present:**

Jackie Cohan (Archivist), Lynn Jordan (Chair), Cam Cook, Allan Krinsman, Sean Ferguson, Monica St. Dennis

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm.

**Appointment of Secretary:**

Sean Ferguson was appointed secretary.

**Minutes:**

Lynn Jordan made a motion to approve the minutes and Allan Krinsman seconded the motion. The minutes from the November 28, 2022 meeting were approved.

**Facility renovations update:**

As of two weeks ago, the purchasing department had not sent out an award letter. The purchasing department has relatively new staff. Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) is going through a re-accreditation process with the American Alliance of Museums. The Archives and Records Center (ARC) facilities will be visited as part of this process. In preparation, ARC staff are doing some cleaning.

It has been decided that the fire escape will be replaced, likely in 2023.

**Intern and volunteer update:**

ARC is now paying interns. ARC currently has a volunteer from the University of Maryland. This intern will be paid, and ARC is in correspondence with other OHA departments to ensure compensation is similar. An undergraduate recently applied to volunteer. ARC is considering the application and has asked whether the applicant is affiliated with a program. This is ARC's policy that volunteers must be associated with a program.

**Records Center Clerk position:**

A person has been hired for the Records Center Clerk position, and they have begun working. The person is expected to take the mandatory defensive driving class and the Archivist and Records Manager will take the class as well as a refresher. Jackie Cohan would like for this position to become full-time and have the compensation level re-evaluated.

**Discussion on Sean Ferguson's Survey findings on local government archives (and on the future City of Alexandria Archives and Records Management Program Structure):**

Jackie Cohan provided a brief overview of PRAC, indicating the Commission had been formed in 1957 and worked hard to establish ARC, and expressed an interest in PRAC once again sharing its perspective on the direction of ARC during this period of anticipated staff transition.

Sean Ferguson gave an overview of his findings: It is uncommon for municipal repositories to be styled as archives; cities that do have publicly findable

archives emphasize the historic nature of their collections; the majority of these provide researchers with in-person access to their records; municipal archives made records discoverable through digitization, indexes, finding aids, and research guides. Sean Ferguson cited several examples and discussed how different archives handle FOIA: not mentioning it, requiring it only for reproduction, or in some cases requiring it to gain in-person access to materials.

Regarding Sean's findings, commission members discussed:

- How commonly the archives and records management were the responsibility of the same department at other municipalities.
- How researchers accessed records in other repositories: often in-person, with records pulled upon request, but some organizations also make digitized materials available online.

Commission members also discussed:

- The City's cultural barrier to providing in-person access. This is primarily due to City administration being concerned that researchers might accidentally gain access to private or confidential information. Jackie Cohan is well-versed in which records can be safely shared with the public and which might involve risks, such as City Council records.
- How finding aids or indexes could make it easier for researchers to make research requests.
- How property-related requests are the most common kind of request, and those materials, such as permits, are some of the best cataloged. Jackie Cohan would like the permits and plans to be discoverable online, but getting them digitized would require a grant. There is a list of these records already, and it getting them online would be simple.

Next steps:

- Jackie Cohan will investigate getting lists of records online for researchers.
- Draft a list of intentions so that Commission members can review and make their own additions.

#### **HARC report:**

Sean Ferguson shared the following: City Council has requested that HARC provide a list of names of historical figures, so that some existing streets could be renamed; the City oral historian gave a presentation with plans to form a center; HARC continues to debate its composition and PRAC members expressed interest in making sure open seats for non-organization representatives were preserved.

#### **New Business:**

- Vacancies: 1 current Commission vacancy (probably, after Council votes on new applicant December 13, 2022)
- Next meeting: January 23, 2023

The meeting adjourned at 8:40pm

Respectfully submitted,

Sean Ferguson  
Secretary

