

Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)
Minutes of the January 23, 2023 Meeting

Present: Jackie Cohan (Archivist); Cam Cook; Lynn Jorden; Sean Ferguson; Monica St. Dennis; Allan Krinsman; Dennis McDonald

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

Appointment of Secretary: Lynn Jorden was appointed secretary.

Minutes: The minutes of June 21, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously with no corrections or additions.

New Member: Dennis McDonald was introduced as the newest member of PRAC. Jackie gave an overview of the department, its history and current challenges.

Renovations: At long last, Archives Center renovations are scheduled to start at the beginning of March 2023. Those renovations include replacement of the HVAC system, replacement of all sprinkler heads, replacement of doors and windows, and upgrading the elevator. Most of this should be done by July 2023, except for the elevator which is scheduled to be worked on later in the fall. The fire escape still needs to be replaced, but that is a separate project and probably won't happen until at least next year. The cost of renovations is estimated to be \$1.64 million and will be conducted by AP Construction Company.

One concern Jackie has is the closing up of windows, which would cut off sources of natural light in offices and in the stairwell—a particularly hazardous move in the event of an electricity blackout.

This project is likely to disrupt the operations of the Archives Center. Certain boxes and other records will have to be removed or specially protected. All the Voter Registration equipment will have to be moved as well.

Staff Updates: Annette is likely leaving the Records Manager position within the next year, and her departure will leave a big gap in the department, both in skill and institutional knowledge. Jackie has written a job description for her replacement and is hoping to hire as soon as possible. Jackie noted that with both she and Annette soon leaving, there was an opportunity for PRAC itself to have more strategic direction and input over Archives. Jackie described the City hiring process and suggested that perhaps one of the PRAC members may want to sit on the interview panel. Jackie noted that the department has to do a lot of their own HR duties, and that may slow the hiring process. Jackie will have to be handling this hiring and performing her other duties at the same time, so it's imperative that the process go expeditiously.

Jackie is hoping whoever is hired for this position would take over as Records Administrator & Archivist when Jackie leaves, so it's even more important to find a qualified candidate. Ideally, this candidate would have 3-5 years of records management supervisory experience. Sean thought it might be prudent to discuss requiring applicants to have a master's degree, in order to ensure experienced candidates. Jackie said she would ask about it.

Future of the Archives & Records Management Program: Sean has drafted a letter/statement of intent laying out PRAC's vision for the future of the Archives & Records Center, with major recommendations including retention and expansion of staff, review of the City's FOIA practices, and methods to make records more readily accessible with finding aids and digitalization. Sean also sought to highlight the Archives' strengths and record of excellent records management. It was agreed that Sean's letter was well-thought and captured PRAC's thoughts and objectives.

PRAC then discussed how this letter, and/or the thoughts and recommendations contained within, would be used. It could possibly be sent to the City Council, or to the City Attorney's office since they have the most jurisdiction over FOIAs. Sean said we should share it with Gretchen Bulova first, so that Archives and OHA were on the same page.

Dennis emphasized that we need to set forth how Archives can help the City and the people of Alexandria accomplish their goals—which needed to be defined—and whether Archives can be proactive or should be reactive. Cam offered that perhaps we weren't at the point of setting forth concrete priorities, but that this letter should articulate a larger vision for the program, seeking buy-in from OHA, the City Council and others. It was agreed that PRAC would continue this discussion and offer additional thoughts to Sean's letter.

PRAC further discussed the obstacles that stood in the way of records access, including the wide range of regulations and exemptions, the cautiousness of the City Attorney's office, and the location of certain records in separate entities, such as police records.

HARC Report:

- There were new leadership elections for HARC, including PRAC's own Sean Ferguson as HARC Vice Chair. New leadership wants to undertake a new strategic planning initiative.
- HARC is about to submit a new letter urging the City to put forth an already-prepared plan to get the Torpedo Factory designated as a National Historic Landmark.
- The City Council has asked HARC to compile a list of important figures, events and places that could be used by the City to rename streets with problematic names.

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be on February 27, 2023, in person.

Adjourn: Monica made a motion to adjourn at 8:37 PM; Sean seconded.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Jorden