

Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)  
Minutes of the April 24, 2023 Meeting

**Present:** Jackie Cohan (Archivist); Cam Cook; Lynn Jorden; 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 March 20, 2023 meeting were approved unanimously with no corrections or additions.

**Landscaping:** Major and necessary landscaping work has been done around the Archives Center. In the future, some money will be set aside from the ARC budget to maintain the landscaping.

**Renovations:** Renovations for the Archives Center have been pushed back to June 2023. Voter Registration, which was scheduled to move into a room in the Archives Center, is now moving to a different building, which means the shelving in that room will not have to be disassembled. It also means that some of the museums in the department will not have to move their things off-site.

**Volunteers:** Jackie noted the interest in volunteer activity at ARC. She noted that ARC doesn't really have time to manage high school-aged volunteers, and although there was some interest through the city volunteer portal, Jackie wanted volunteers to be affiliated with a program of study. Jackie also hoped to have an intern in the fall. In recent days, ARC has been using laborers from a temp agency to help do some moving or cleaning.

**Open Data/Future of ARC:** PRAC has been discussing how our goals intersect with the IT Committee's larger plan for Open Data, with the ultimate goal of making records more accessible to the public. Jackie made a list of the kinds of records she would like to see made available online, including construction records, records relating to zoning, architectural review and planning, and primary governance (including City Council meeting transcripts, if possible). Some of these records have already been digitized but are not publicly available at this time. Some of those records have been already digitized but are not publicly available at this time, or need to be redone because of material disintegration.

Jackie noted that 95% of FOIA requests were for building or construction records, so the first thing she would want digitized would be those records. Those include permits, architectural plans, and plats. Jackie brought up how Virginia does not require municipalities to keep building records for the life of a building, other than the certificate of occupancy, which is fairly useless to many requesters. At one point, ARC had over 10,000 architectural plans. However, they made the decision to keep only the ones from before about 1995 (not including ones from the City's historical districts). So many of records from 1995 have been destroyed. Jackie does not like this policy and does not think it's a good idea to destroy building plans while the building is still standing.

Dennis reported from his conversations with the IT Committee. That Committee is working on an Open Data resolution for City Council to review, but it won't be ready until later in the summer. However, that gives PRAC time to contribute to the Open Data plan. Dennis feels that the IT Committee Chair shares our goals in making public records more accessible, and understands the challenges of data ownership, a challenge Dennis reiterated given the number of departments and different department cultures. Jackie believes that making these records public and accessible will cut down on the number of FOIA requests. She also said she would edit her document to note what was already digitized, and think of what else needed to be added.

PRAC talked about retention of records, especially those which are retained digitally. Jackie noted that the format doesn't matter, it's the information the record contains that drives the retention period. Dennis said that Jackie may want to advise the IT Commission about records retention and destruction (which has historically been a controversial subject among City departments).

Jackie noted that it was clear the public was demanding accessible public records, and that the City Council should be responsive to the public.

Dennis brought the discussion back around to the overall strategic vision for ARC, and how the department would continue to plan and evolve.

**Digitization of Records:** The City Manager's office had recently told Jackie that they were no longer producing paper records; they will be going completely digital—a trend that ARC thinks will persist, particularly after current staff has left. But Jackie wanted to make sure that the City Manager's office record would be saved permanently in electronic form. Although it was clear digitization was the future, Jackie lamented the loss of paper records, and hoped they would still be available in case of emergency.

Lynn noted that in her experience in recent years requesting records from other entities, digitized copies of records seemed to be the default. She noted that the ability to make records searchable was a huge asset to researchers. Allan and Jackie agreed that making records searchable would be ideal.

Dennis noted the importance of individual departments having records management systems in place. Jackie explained the role of records management officers in departments and described her efforts to train staff on records management.

**HARC Report:** Sean was absent from this meeting, but had sent notes on the most recent HARC meeting to Jackie. Topics included renaming of streets, a day-long strategic planning retreat, and changes to HARC's composition.

**Next meeting:** Our next meeting will be on May 15, 2023, in person. Gretchen Bulova plans to attend and PRAC discussed what questions and materials would be necessary for that meeting.

**Adjourn:** Lynn made a motion to adjourn at 8:37 PM; Cam seconded.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Jorden