

Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)
Minutes of the September 18, 2023 Meeting

Present: Jackie Cohan (Archivist); Lynn Jorden (Chair); Cam Cook; Sean Ferguson; Dennis McDonald; Allan Krinsman (Guest)

Call to Order, Appointment of Secretary & Minutes : The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM. Allan joined the PRAC as a guest, as his term had expired without his knowledge. Cam Cook was appointed secretary. The minutes of July 2023 meeting were approved unanimously with no corrections or additions.

Facility Improvement Update: Jackie reported that progress is slow moving; mostly due to contractor error. As the City takes the lowest responsible bidder, the contracting relationship is unlikely to be severed. Most of the sprinkler heads have been replaced. The contractor has painted windows and will soon replace some doors.

Digitization completed over the summer: Certificates of Occupancy continue to be digitized, which greatly reduces FOIA-related search burdens. Archives has begun digitizing new construction permits and supporting documentation (though not the construction plans themselves). The Commission briefly discussed document scanning resolution, file formats, and optical character recognition (OCR).

Visit from the Veterans Curation Program: A group from the Veterans Curation Program visited the Archives. The program is a five-month course in four flagship lab locations, including Alexandria, that provides employment, vocational training, and technology skills to veterans seeking to improve their access to the mainstream job market. Jackie discussed the possibility for volunteer opportunities for these veterans.

Firm up plan for getting (already/future) digitized records to the public online: As the retirement of key Archives staff approaches, the Commission discussed accelerating digitization of key records previously that it has previously identified. Discussion topics included:

- the upcoming replacement of the City's intranet; and follow-up with Jimmy Bryant
- the IT Commission's proposals for an open data policy
- potential confidentiality concerns that the City Attorney may have
- publicly accessible indices of resources already provided by OHA's web pages.

Records Management department visits to OPA and Recreation: There were department visits to OPA and Recreation to evaluate records that could be transferred. An additional visit to the Buddie Ford Nature Center is upcoming.

HARC Report:

- Awaiting City Council approval on composition changes
- A strategic plan, drafted during their last retreat, is coming up for a vote.

HARC Letter for PRAC Approval: HARC drafted a letter of support, which advocated for improved records storage through a National Endowment for the Humanities grant.

Below is the text of the letter, as first presented to PRAC.

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council,

On behalf of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC), the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC), and the Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC), we are advising that the City and elected officials prioritize the critical storage needs and goals for the Alexandria's important historical documents, artifacts, and objects in FY24. These resources are irreplaceable and unique. They provide powerful, tangible evidence of the lives of those who lived and labored in Alexandria in the past and they are in danger due to insufficient storage CONDITIONS AND space .

The Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) is currently applying for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to conduct a study of the storage needs for their collections. HARC, AAC, and PRAC are closely following the success of the grant and will prioritize advocacy for OHA collections storage and associated budget requests in FY24. Even if this grant is awarded, there will remain fiscal impacts and require considerable planning by multiple city departments and resources as this may be an infrastructure project.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue for the City's cultural heritage.

Ivy, Sean and Shawn

The Commission discussed a possible textual ambiguity regarding the storage media type; whether that be physical or digital. After discussion, the Commission agreed to sign on to the letter of support with the following addenda put forward to those submitting the letter:

1. Replace the PRAC signatory to Lynn (as she is the Chair)
2. Suggest the storage media be clarified to disambiguate its type

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be on October 16 2023.

Adjourn: PRAC adjourned at 8:30 PM. Respectfully submitted by Cam Cook