

Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)
Minutes of the November 27, 2023 Meeting

Present: Jackie Cohan (Archivist); Cam Cook; Lynn Jorden; Dennis McDonald

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

Appointment of Secretary: Lynn Jorden was appointed secretary.

Minutes:

Renovations: Renovations are coming along at a steady pace. Doors, hardware, sprinklers, painting have all been worked on, and the next project is HVAC and duct work. The elevator is scheduled to be replaced early in 2024. It's unclear when all renovations will be finished, especially given manufacturing delays, but will likely be sometime in 2024.

Burn Building: Archives met with the Fire Department and General Services to discuss the burn building construction. Jackie had several questions and concerns about the burn building's impact on ARC. The burn building has been designed so that no windows would face the ARC building, and renovations on the ARC building should help mitigate smoke from the burn building.

Jackie noted the hatch that had been found in the ARC building basement, where water has been coming in. The Fire Department felt that this had not been caused by hoses putting out fires, but it's difficult to imagine where else it could have come from. The small amount of flooding is not currently causing problems.

There were some concerns about the higher height of the burn building, but the Fire Department said that should still not affect the condition of collections on higher floors of the ARC building, since those windows are already bricked up.

Jackie anticipated that the ARC building's renovations would be complete before construction of the burn building, but noted that the replacement of the ARC building's fire escape needed to be coordinated and finished before the Fire Department did their demolition.

Digital Records: Jackie has begun to put records into Share Point, including planning commission minutes for most of the 20th century and City Council dockets from 1923-1938, and City Council minutes from 1922-1943. They're currently only going onto the OHA's shared departmental site, but eventually would be shared with relevant City departments.

Jackie solicited ideas on how best to organize the files in Share Point; currently, one can search documents by key word, but can also go directly to folders for certain years if someone is looking for a particular date. Lynn said that made sense to her, and recalled that most other public databases she had encountered were arranged similarly. Dennis said in the future Jackie could create future indexes by topic, but that would be a difficult task, and allowing someone to search by key word would essentially give

people the ability to search by topic. Jackie wondered if there was a way that words would become highlighted when searched, as was the case on Adobe Acrobat, as well as there would be further indexing needed for various records. Lynn said it may be better to wait and see how City employees used it and if they had additional needs, those could be considered at that time.

Open Data: Dennis updated PRAC on the status of the City's Open Data efforts. He reported that Ricardo, chair of the IT Commission, had written a memo on Open Data planning in the City that was being circulated within the IT department and gathering comments. Ricardo was planning to meet with the City Council and the mayor and was hoping to have a proposal to City Council to officially require development of an Open Data policy, which IT, Archives and other departments would then create. Dennis participated in the latest IT Commission discussion on Open Data planning and the need to start with a wider, holistic view of what needed to be included, rather than focusing first on the technology to support it. Dennis is pleased with the IT Commission's progress on this issue and their inclusion of Archives in the process.

Dennis noted that the IT Commission was also discussing AI and its place in Open Data planning, and wrote to the IT Commission suggesting they use AI services to help build those plans, skipping a long study process. He included an example of a prompt he gave to Chat-GPT and how it returned a detailed plan. Lynn asked if the City had an official AI policy; it didn't look as if that were the case.

Office of Performance Analytics: The Office of Performance Analytics visited ARC in June to talk about records management and tour the building. Jackie had a virtual meeting with them recently about what to permanently retain from the City's website Dashboard, which includes various statistics about City management and performance. The challenge with retention of this data is that some of the data was not specific to the City of Alexandria or was captured elsewhere. Cam noted that you could make the argument that direct data was a work product of the City and therefore subject to retention policies. Jackie said that she was going to check the retention periods of that kind of data with the state and see what other jurisdictions were doing with their Dashboards. PRAC discussed that sometimes even if a record is not legally required to be retained, it still may be worth retaining for its historical or cultural value.

Next meeting: The next meeting was rescheduled to January 22 due to Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

New Business: About 10 years ago, Jackie had agreed to temporarily take some Alexandria Historical Society records, since the Society didn't have an adequate place to store them. Jackie has been encouraging the AHS to find a more permanent storage space for these records, and they are now finally working on doing so. AHS had considered the library, but Jackie recommended against this and suggested using Paxton off-site storage.

Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 8:11pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Jorden