

PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Annual Report to the City Council July 2015 – June 2016

The Public Records Advisory Commission provides advice and guidance to the City Records Administrator and Archivist on records management matters and implementation of the archives and records management program in the city. The Commission is authorized to have seven citizen members appointed by the City Council for terms of two years. It is composed of professional archivists, records managers, historians, librarians, research specialists and other citizens. The Commission supports the mission of the Archives and Records Center, which was established by the City Council as follows:

“It is hereby declared to be the policy of the City of Alexandria to provide efficient, economical and effective control over the creation, distribution, organization, maintenance, use and disposition of all records through a comprehensive system of integrated procedures for the management of records from their creation to their ultimate disposition, to achieve complete, effective and economical documentation of the policies and transactions of city offices and departments, to identify and preserve archival records and, in conjunction with archival records, to provide reference services to the public.”

(Ord. No. 3189, 3/21/87, Sec. 2; Ord. No. 3282, 4/16/88, Sec. 2)

The State of Virginia mandates the retention of many paper, microfilm and audiovisual records for varying lengths of time, so the city continues to need a physical facility and adequate staff to handle a collection of records that continues to grow. Digital scanning has slowed the physical growth of such records somewhat, but they also require care from city staff, and ultimately cannot replace all physical records.

During the period of July 2015 through June 2016 the Commission held seven meetings. Each meeting had an agenda and was open to the public.

Summary of Activities

Over the 2016 fiscal year, the Commission addressed several topics pertaining to the city’s archives and records management program and submits the following observations and recommendations:

I. FACILITIES

Highlights:

The City Council’s approval of the FY 2016 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget for \$150,000 facilitated the renovation of the former Print Shop space, creating a large and much needed research and reception area for the public as well as sufficient processing space for the Archives and Records Center staff.

- Major renovations were completed by end of the 2016 fiscal year.

- Staff made arrangements to move into the new office, research and processing space (telephone, computer and furniture).
- Lighting improvements in Room 47 were completed.
- Removal of the incinerator smokestack was completed.
- Surplus equipment stored at the former Print Shop was successfully auctioned.
- Space on the 4th floor not used for records storage was converted to architectural plans storage.

The Commission recommends:

- Knock down the walls to the old office area to create more space for records storage (sufficient funding from the 2016 CIP budget of \$150,000 for the renovations exists).
- Replace fixed, industrial shelving on the ground floor with mobile shelving to increase records storage capacity.

Needs: Immediate

- Install a doorbell/intercom system that uses the facility's telephone system to allow visitors to alert staff to answer the front door (when they are working away from the reception area in other parts of the facility).

Needs: Short-term

- CIP funding is needed to complete the last phase of the overall renovation project: purchasing mobile shelving for the ground floor and Room 7 in the basement to increase records storage capacity and allow staff to remove records from the commercial records storage facility in Springfield. For the last twenty-five years, records for which there is no space have been stored at Paxton at a **cost of over \$100,000 to the city**. In addition, staff must drive to Springfield to retrieve records stored there, taking time and incurring record retrieval costs.

The Commission recommends:

- Approval by City Council for FY 2018 project funding, particularly for the ground-floor area. To cover the cost of the shelving along with increased lighting and sprinkler coverage is estimated at \$250,000.

Needs: Long-term—New Facility

The renovation project is expected to give an additional cost-effective 10-15 years of use to the ageing facility. However, the city sanitation organization (Alexandria Renew) may need to expand in the next 15-20 years. Should that happen, funding for a replacement Archives and Records Center may be needed.

II. PERSONNEL

Highlights:

- A new part-time (20 hours a week) position—FOIA Researcher—was established by City Council to begin with FY 2017.
- A school volunteer program provided 300 hours of student help with shelving and moving boxes of records.
- A volunteer spent 60 hours surveying photographs and assisting with research requests.
- Two Summer Youth program students worked a total of 240 hours.
- The Sheriff's Office provided inmate labor to move large numbers of boxes and equipment as well as to clean areas of the facility not covered by the custodial contract.

Since the loss of the one of two Records Center Clerk positions in 2009, the staff has struggled to get records transferred to the Archives and Records Center efficiently, process an overwhelming number of FOIA, CallClickConnect and city employee research questions quickly and carry out the destruction of legally obsolete records in a timely manner in accordance with Virginia state law. At the beginning of FY 2016, staffing was 2.6 FTEs. At the beginning of FY2017, however, the total number of FTEs will be 3.0, which will greatly aid in all of the problems noted above.

The Commission recommends:

- Work with Human Resources to create a description for the new FOIA Researcher position and hire an employee to fill the position as soon as possible in FY 2017.
- Work with city agencies to streamline FOIA requests.

III. BUDGET

Highlights:

- CIP funding (\$150,000) was used to renovate a portion of the former Print Shop, creating a large and much needed space and reception area for both the public to conduct research and for staff to process records.
- No funding was provided to install mobile shelving on either the ground floor or in Room 7 in the basement, thereby obligating the city to continue to use the offsite storage facility in Springfield.
- The FY 2016 budget allotted \$20,487 in funding for non-personnel expenses, but the FY 2017 only allots \$16,774 for such expenses.

The Commission recommends:

- Fund the last phase of the renovation project. Such funding would cover installing mobile shelving on the ground floor and Room 7 in the basement to allow the Archives and Records to remove all boxes from offsite storage in Springfield.

- Provide greater funding for non-personnel expenses.

Needs: Short-term

- CIP funding is needed to complete the last phase of the overall renovation project: purchasing mobile shelving for the ground floor and Room 7 in the basement to increase records storage capacity and allow staff to remove records from the commercial records storage facility in Springfield. For the last twenty-five years, records for which there is no space have been stored at Paxton at a **cost of over \$100,000 to the city**. In addition, staff must drive to Springfield to retrieve records stored there, taking time and incurring record retrieval costs. The total costs of the shelving, along with the increased sprinkler coverage required and additional lighting, is estimated at \$250,000.

IV. OPERATIONS

No civil lawsuits have been filed against the city because of a failure to destroy legally obsolete records in accordance with Virginia state law.

Highlights:

- Research conducted by staff for various FOIA and CallClickConnect requests covered mid-20th-century housing policy in Alexandria, Planning Commission activities over a wide-ranging period, the second block of South Union Street and finding architectural and site plans for a multitude of residential, commercial and city-owned addresses.
- The renovations to the former Print Shop, adjacent to the original Archives and Records Center space, proceeded with very little disruption to staff.
- Members of the public who visited the Archives and Records Center to conduct research increased from an overall average of 1.5 to 2.0 a week.
- Plans were made to add city employee records management training on the first Tuesday of each month (in addition to the large yearly training session and multiple on-site visits conducted by staff to various city agencies).
- Worked with ITS on a policy for the management of email.
- Held a training session, in conjunction with the City Attorney's Office, for city employees on processing FOIA requests.

The Commission recommends:

- Use the new FOIA Researcher (FY 2017) to fulfill as many FOIA requests as possible and to assist the public with their research when visiting the Archives and Records Center.
- Continue to review operations for opportunities for improvement.
- Provide more frequent records management training to city employees.

- Continue to work with other city agencies to facilitate city processes (e.g. FOIA, etc.).

V. PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION OUTREACH

The Commission engaged in activities to call attention to the work that is done at the Archives and Records Center and the critical needs of the program and facility.

Highlights:

- Chair Ann Parham and chair Lisa Knight emailed City Council members to advocate funding for renovations and a new FOIA researcher position.

The Public Records Advisory Commission Goals for FY 2017

- Continue dialog with City Council and city staff to complete the renovations to the facility: installing mobile shelving to increase storage capacity on the ground floor and in the basement (Room 7).
- Continue to advocate for a strong archives and records management program.

Recruitment and Leadership Plans:

Recruitment will take place through announcements on both records management, archives and library listservs as well as through the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Northern Virginia ARMA Chapter and other suitable venues.

Ensuring Turnover in Leadership:

The Commission will vote to select a chairman every two years following the completion of his or her term. No chairman may serve more than six years consecutively. Ann Parham served as chairman for September through November 2015 and Lisa Knight for January through June 2016.

The following citizens served on the Public Records Advisory Commission during the period covered in this report:

Carol Abrams
LiMin Fields
Barbie Keiser
Lisa Knight
Ann Parham
Diondrea Ricks

Respectfully Submitted,
Jackie Cohan
Records Administrator and Archivist