

**Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)**  
**Minutes of the February 28, 2018 Meeting**  
**Alexandria City Hall, 301 King Street, Room 1102A**

**Present:** Jackie Cohan (Archivist), John Hocker, Rich Brune, Barbie Keiser, Monica St. Dennis

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:26 PM

**Appointment of Secretary:** Barbie Keiser was appointed Secretary

**Minutes:** Minutes of the January 22, 2018 Meeting were reviewed, amended, and approved (as amended)

**FOIA requests and public access:** The issue under consideration is whether all requests for review of documents should be considered FOIA requests. The purpose of this change of policy *appears* to be to assure that there is internal review of all records prior to public access, affording staff the opportunity to assure that the documents contain no sensitive information.

Such a change may require a revision of the Archives and Records Center website <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Archives> that currently includes “public access”: *“The mission of the Archives & Records Center is to identify, preserve, and make available to the public records of the City of Alexandria government that have been appraised and selected for historic value.”* Is this a violation of administrative regulations? This change may also require a review of language used in the City Code regarding access to records and accessibility addressed in the charter.

This changes what the Records Center does, how staff performs its duties, and public access to records. It will certainly bring in more revenue for staff conduct of research and photocopying fees, but the Records Center is understaffed and may not be able to satisfy the current high level of research requests (averaging five per month from city staff plus five requests per month concerning code/code enforcement) within FOIA response time requirements. One possibility is to have departments send staff to help out when they need records from the Records Center. Also, departments need to be reminded to review records for sensitive information prior to sending them to the Center.

We need to understand why this change in policy is being implemented. Jackie Cohan, Archivist, will check with Gretchen Bulova, Director of Office of Historic Alexandria, and Adrienne Sakyi, City’s FOIA Officer, to understand what is behind this change in policy. Ms. Cohan will also survey several records centers in Virginia municipalities to ascertain best practices and whether this is a trend elsewhere.

Staff should not be taking time to conduct research for others who could be doing their own research as they are needed to catalog records. This way, the city can make the most of its catalog and recently upgraded records management software’s five read-only license.

**New business:** HPE records management software has been installed and most glitches resolved. Training has been provided. The upgraded software can allow individuals to check out files, maintaining usage records for Record Center staff to use for follow-up reminders. Future plans include the use of bar codes for maintaining accurate check-in and check-out status of inventory.

There will be no budget cuts to the Records Center budget.

Wi-fi has been installed, but the hardware (7 units) needs to be configured so laptops can be used throughout the Center. Wi-fi gives staff the ability to work where the documents are located, not necessitating that boxes be carried back-and-forth to the office.

Monica St. Dennis, new HARC representative, reported on the first meeting she attended. HARC discussions included:

1. Virginia artifacts competition – Alexandria came in second
2. Combined sewer outflow project
3. Freedom House museum
4. Ramsey homes
5. Easement issue

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8:06 PM.