

Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC)
Minutes of the March 20, 2017 Meeting
Alexandria City Hall, Room 1102A

Present: Jackie Cohan (Archivist), LiMin Fields, Barbie Keiser, John Hocker, Monica St. Dennis, Jen Walsh, Emily Traeger

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

Appointment of Secretary: Barbie Keiser was appointed Secretary

Minutes: Minutes of the November 21, 2016 meeting will be reviewed/approved at the April 17, 2017 meeting of the advisory commission

Introductions

For the first time in months, the Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC) has its full complement of members. The meeting began with members introducing themselves. All received a copy of the FY2016 PRAC *Annual Report*. Jackie Cohan, Alexandria City Records Administrator and Archivist, reviewed accomplishments of the past year, as well as longer-term goals, including:

- Renovations and the move to the new office completed in 2016
- Archives and Records Center allotted \$100,000 for update of TRIM records management software
- Additional movable shelving would ultimately save the city money as it would mean all records stored off-site could be moved to the Archives & Records Center. Given that funds were just given to the Center for the records management software, it's unlikely the request will be granted before the FY2019 budget.
- If voting machines are moved out of the facility, that room could be used for city records, but some construction and air conditioning would be necessary, adding to the cost.
- The food bank installed on the other side of the building attracts pests—not ideal for archival preservation—but regular visits by pest control keeps the problem in check.
- Burn training using the records center's fire escape created significant rusting—so much so that the fire escape needed to be replaced.
- Jackie worked with the city's IT department to develop an email policy that she believes is included in new city staff orientation.

Type of research conducted at the Center

The number of FOIA requests processed by staff has quintupled over the past few years. Jackie reviewed with Commission members the type of records included in the permanent collection, many of which must be kept in paper (state law requirement). Examples of records include the following:

- Auditors' books 1876-1923 (some gaps)

- City Council minutes 1922-1985
- Photo maps
- City budget 1930-
- Planning Commission minutes 1939-1998
- City managers' records (permanent – controlled viewing)
- Mayors' records (permanent)

Approximately 100 boxes of records are already available online. Digitization of additional records might make them easier to access, but the costs associated with that digitization (and the fact that some of those records fall under state destruction requirements) means that more thought needs to be given to the subject.

With the City's Call/Click/Connect system, individuals can submit research requests online, but the records office still sees 1-2 persons per week seeking to conduct research on-site. Most of these requests involve property research. Copies of materials are provided free of charge. Enhancing the catalog records in a searchable database is only possible with the assistance of staff (permanent, temporary, voluntary).

Staffing issues

Jackie provided new committee members with a short history of records management office staffing: In addition to the Alexandria City Records Administrator and Archivist, the office has one additional full-time worker. Prior to the recession, there were two 25 hour/week support staff to assist with non-permanent records. Part-time support staff hours had to be reduced and now the office is down to a single records clerk working 25 hours/week.

There was discussion throughout FY2016 for the need to reinstate that lost records center clerk position (25 hours/week), but new part-time positions are limited to 10 hours per week. Feeling that the reduced hours would not attract the right sort of individual, the new strategy is to add 10 hours to the existing records clerk position, bringing support staff to 30 hours/week.

The Human Resources Department has shifted many of the responsibilities during the hiring process to the departments seeking personnel. One successful strategy for the Records Center may be the use of temporary personnel (to see if they will work out) before offering a permanent position as it's difficult to dismiss an employee who's not succeeding in his/her position.

In addition to paid staff, the Archives & Records Center has a volunteer program. (For example, one volunteer has catalogued photos.) There is also a summer high school intern program run by the city. Jackie has agreed to explore how the more formal, year-round, intern process has changed so that commission members can brainstorm ways of getting interns with a diverse set of skills: Library cataloguing; records management; history; archival preservation; etc.

Opportunities for the Advisory Committee

With all positions of the Advisory Committee filled, members agreed that we should think about ways in which we could help the Center in coming months, including the following:

1. What message is needed in 2017 to convey to City Council members and how best to contact them, e.g., email?
2. How to promote volunteering at the Center
3. Reach out to various communities—records managers, librarians, archivists, historians—to get interns for Center projects requiring expertise beyond that which volunteers could provide
4. Consider an open house – the last was held in 2006
5. Explore holding a fundraiser event for the shelving that is needed
6. Determine what collections might be of interest to publishers (and others) willing to digitize materials for the Center. (Publishers might be willing to digitize select collections records if the records could be included in one of their (larger) collections.

The group agreed to think about these outreach efforts and brainstorm during the next meeting, April 17.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:23PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbie Keiser, Secretary