

Public Records Advisory commission (PRAC)
DRAFT Minutes of the February 22, 2021 Meeting
Via Zoom

Present: Jackie Cohan (Archivist); Annette Morris (Records Manager); Rich Brune; Cam Cook; Lynn Jorden; Sean Ferguson

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM.

Appointment of Secretary: Sean Ferguson was appointed secretary.

Minutes: Minutes of the January 25, 2021 meeting were approved.

Internships Update: The Archives had to turn down a third internship request, a person from the University of Maryland's graduate MLIS program. A decision will not be made for when to accept interns until June. The tentative plan is to resume internship opportunities in the fall. The prospective intern contacted Jackie Cohan through Alex311, and there is nothing on that site that says the Archives is not accepting interns at this time.

A summary of previous internship projects was given by Jackie Cohan. The last three interns worked on getting city council records scanned, including minutes, dockets and transcripts, which was extremely helpful because it made keyword search of these materials possible. The project started with records of 1922 and has been scanned up to the 1950s.

Future projects for interns include continuing to scan the city council minutes, dockets and transcripts up through the middle of May 1990, the most recent city council meetings in the Archives and Records Center has in its collection.

Records Center Activities: Annette Morris gave an update on Records Center Activities. The Records Center is also in the process of a large records destruction project – 503 cubic feet of Treasury Department records which are past their retention period. By the end of March, the Records Center plans to have destroyed all materials that are a year past their retention period.

There have been many FOIA requests coming to the Records Center lately. Two have been internal city requests. The Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria had requested any permits and plans for the Freedom House. Someone in Planning wanted more recent plans for The Lyceum. Microfilm copies had been consulted for this request.

Lynn Jorden asked why more FOIA requests had been made recently. Jackie Cohan explained that FOIA requests have steadily grown since 2010. Prior to 2010, the Center used to receive about 2 requests a month. Jackie Cohan also explained that at least 95% of FOIA requests have to do with property.

Facility renovation update: The renovation is expected to take place this Summer. Lynn Jorden asked how long the renovation is expected to take. Jackie Cohan explained that it might take 4-6 months and that the building will remain in use during the time of the renovation.

Another walkthrough on the renovations was completed on February 22. A goal of the walkthrough was to determine how many materials would need to be moved off site. One section has already been cleared of records.

For the records that need to stay accessible during the renovation, it has been suggested that a warehouse could be rented for temporary storage. This would be inconvenient for completing FOIA requests because it would necessitate driving to the warehouse to retrieve materials. Apart from this inconvenience, the Center believes the warehouse is a good solution.

The Department of Community Services previously expressed interest in temporarily using the loading dock for projects. However, the renovation might complicate this arrangement, and the Department of Community Services may ultimately choose not to use the space for this reason.

Microfilm Scanning: Jackie Cohan gave an update on the use of the microfilm scanner. She has used the scanner to complete FOIA requests, like those for The Lyceum and Freedom House projects. The scanner has proved to be extremely helpful for the Center. Training on the use of the scanner will eventually be scheduled, and Jackie Cohan hopes that this will help the Center to make even better use of the valuable machine.

Lynn Jordan asked if the goal is to scan all of the microfilm in the collection, and Jackie Cohan answered that it would be a good project for an intern although the collection is extensive.

Sean Ferguson inquired about the conditions of the microfilm. Jackie explained that the silver halide microfilm is in excellent condition. Some materials smelled of vinegar and the Center chooses not to handle or file these materials due to the risks. Overall, the vault in which most of the materials are stored is temperature controlled.

New Business:

Vacancies: There are still 2 vacancies which are regularly advertised. No one has applied yet. It is hoped that people might apply again after the pandemic.

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be held on March 15, 2021 via Zoom.

Adjourn: Rich Brune made a motion to adjourn at 8:05 PM; Cam Cook seconded.