

MINUTES

PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

MONDAY, June 21, 2021, 7:30 PM

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present: Jackie Cohan (Archivist), Cam Cook, Sean Ferguson, Monica St. Dennis, Lynn Jordan

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

Appointment of Secretary: Sean Ferguson was appointed Secretary.

Approval of the draft minutes of the May 17, 2021 meeting: Minutes from May 17, 2021 were approved.

Selection of new chairperson

- Jackie invited meeting participants to consider stepping forward to be the new chairperson. Lynn asked what duties are involved, and Jackie explained that the primary responsibilities include tracking attendance and writing the annual report and mentioned that it might be a few months before a new chairperson is selected.

Facility Renovations and Box Storage Update

- The purchasing process for the project has been slow. The project has not been put out for bid at the time of the meeting.
- All of the cleanup that archeology and the museums were doing has been completed. Not everything could be thrown away. Departments are required to surplus some things, and that process has completed.
- The Project Coordinator wanted an estimate on putting both shelving and boxes off site during the project and the total price came to almost \$200,000, which was very high. Jackie proposed separating the shelving storage from the box storage. That way, Paxton could be used to store the boxes, which cost about \$16,000 for 13,000 boxes. It would not be paid by the Archive Center. It would be paid for by general services. Some boxes could be stored on pallets and some boxes could be stored on shelves, allowing access to the shelved boxes for FOIA requests.
- The Project Coordinator is also expecting that prices from the bids are going to be fairly high, meaning some components of the project might need to be cut. The Project Coordinator is considering removing the window coverings, which help to seal the building.
- This is not ideal because sealing the building is an important part of the project, but fixing the HVAC and sprinkler system is still more important.

Research Projects Update

- The research project that Dr. Moon was doing on housing covenants is being finished up. She gave her talk about a month ago.
- We are going to return the boxes we pulled out of Paxton.
- The whole process has gone very well.

Internships and volunteers

- The Intern from University of Maryland arrived 2 weeks ago. She is working on scanning more city council records, including dockets and minutes, as well as transcripts if present. Transcripts can be found in later dates.
- She also works on processing planning records. We don't know what is in those records, but they are supposed to support the Planning Commission Minutes. The collection begins with 1948. Having a better handle on this collection is a goal Jackie has before retirement. Similarly, Jackie would also like to finish the City Council records.
- Jackie would love to see the city's permit collection scanned. It goes back to late 1929. It is a huge collection. Lynn asked if this collection include all permits for the City or just a particular kind of permit. Jackie answered that the code enforcement department issued permits for new construction, repairs and alterations, and then later for permits for demolition and signs. Permits for installations also came later, such as for pools and gas tanks. Some of it has been scanned by the City in its internal database. It got scanned during a project 15 years ago and it was done from the Center's microfilm collection. Jackie realized that the only microfilm the City had was the repair permits and not the new construction. The goal for Jackie's project would be to make the content available not only to the City employees but the public as well.
- Jackie is also concerned with how FOIA requests will be handled in the future after she retires. She knows she will have to train someone, but having the employee handle it rather than have a researcher come in to do research has been a big burden.
- Another intern will be coming in the Fall – also from the University of Maryland. There is a great deal of requests to volunteer. 2 more volunteers may join. Because we are limited in terms of number of scanners, they make work on processing the planning commission records.

Training presentations for City boards and commissions and their staff members

- On the 29th, Jackie will join one of the Assistant and the City Clerk. The meeting is a presentation for members of the city's boards and commissions as well as staff liaisons, focusing on compliance with city rules, FOIA, and COIA (Conflict of Interest Act). The goal is to have presentations on these topics recorded and made available to staff either as an introduction or a refresher, but the videos will not replace live presentations in the future.
- Jackie asked if the Committee had seen any of these live presentations, and the answer was no.
- As the email Jackie read that was inviting her to the meeting explained, from time-to-time staff ask what records are required to be retained and for how long.
- Jackie added that typically if a body has regulatory powers, its records are kept for longer compared to an advisory body like PRAC.
- This is an exciting opportunity for the Center, because the pandemic caused the Center to halt its plans for employee and department head trainings.

- Jackie hopes to resume city-wide trainings in the Fall. Even though no city-wide trainings have occurred in a long time, Jackie has still been able to meet with divisions, one-on-one. A recent training occurred with Court Services Unit.

City COVID-19 operations update

- Commission meetings will be resuming next month in July. Presumably this means that PRAC will meet again in September at the Center.

HARC Update

- 2 meetings since last meeting.
- Letter sent to city council specifying we are not opposed to affordable housing.
- 506 North Overlook will be subdivided, which is a threat to the historic building.
- HARC does not have bi laws and the City Council wants them to have bi-laws, so a bi-law writing committee will be established.
- 100-year-old buildings list rules are revised. Individuals not just city staff can nominate their own homes to be included. This is a way to recognize historic homes that are not in the historic district.
- In-person meetings will resume in July.
- Virginia State Supreme Court ruled on the Justice Black House, ruling that Historic Alexandria did not have standing to prevent that house from being renovated.
- Alexandria area 501 C3 org. called Living Legends donated 120 portraits to the City. They have requested that 42 of the 120 be returned. OHA wants to return all 120 instead of breaking up the collection. They want to be ensured that they will get a digital copy of each portrait. The Founder of Living Legends came to the meeting to speak in opposition to OHA giving them back. Living Legends only wants 42, not 120. Historic Alexandria Resources Commission has oversight over deaccession so they have to vote on whether the portraits should be given back.
- HARC members will do more research and vote in July.
- Rotten fence outside the Elks Lodge on Queen Street has been removed.
- The Power Plant is going to exceed the open space requirements in the historic district.
- The Advocacy Subcommittee has moved its meeting to Tuesday at 10:00am from Wednesday at 3:00pm. This was in an effort to avoid conflicting with people's day jobs, but Tuesday at 10:00am is during people's day jobs.
- HARC chair, vice chair, and secretary elections are happening.
- OHA got 1 IMLS and 2 Historic Alexandria Foundation awards.

New Business

- There are three vacancies on the commission.
- Next Meeting: 20 September @ 7:30 PM via Zoom

Adjournment: PRAC adjourned at 8:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

– Sean Ferguson