

# ***PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION***

## ***Annual Report to the City Council July 2012 – June 2013***

The Public Records Advisory Commission (the Commission) provides advice and guidance to the City Records Administrator and Archivist on records management matters and implementation of the records 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, 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)

During the period July 2012-June 2013 the Commission held nine meetings. Each meeting had an agenda and was open to the public.

### **Summary of Activities**

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

#### **I. FACILITIES**

##### **Highlights:**

- Jackie Cohan, the City Records Administrator and Archivist, worked with architectural firm Neale Architects on a design plan to increase and update the Archives and Records Center space—see details below under “**needs-short term**” p. 2.
- Light tubes were replaced throughout the building with longer-lasting, stronger ones.
- Lights were added to parking lot for safety and security.
- Dense foliage around building was cut back to increase security.

**Needs: Immediate**

- Although light tubes were replaced, several rooms are very dark and in need of additional lighting.
- The basement loading dock door needs replacing. It is in such poor condition that rodents and snakes get into the building and high winds cause the alarm to go off. An inspection discovered that the decrepit door is directly over an ash pit and retaining wall that must be stabilized.
- The current cleaning service is overpriced and inadequate—the contract is in the process of being rebid.

**Needs: Short-term—Additional Space TOP PRIORITY**

The severe space shortage at the Archives and Records Center was documented in last year's annual report:

- The small climate-controlled Permanent Archives room is out of space.
- Records are being stored off-site (costly to retrieve and store).
- Document transfer from city agencies is often delayed for lack of storage space.
- Much of the space in the building is being used by other agencies.
- There is inadequate office space for records processing or researchers.
- Records are stacked in hallways and stairwells, etc.

Over the course of the past year, the Commission has had several meetings with General Services, OHA director Lance Mallamo, and Neale Architects who were contracted to develop a design plan for the expansion and renovation of the Records Center. Highlights of the plan are:

- Creation of a new office, records processing and research space—from space currently being used by another agency.
- Conversion of a larger room on the first floor to house Permanent Archives with temperature and humidity control.
- Replace shelving in basement level with high density shelving.
- Install high density shelving throughout the first floor.
- Acquire 4<sup>th</sup> floor space currently not used for record storage.
- Renovation of the building's electrical, HVAC, plumbing, roof, and fire protection systems.

General Services plans to cover the cost of this expansion and renovation project through the use of the Office of Historic Alexandria's 2014 and part of 2015's CFMP funds, some CFMP funds from their budget, and request CIP funding for the project in the 2015 budget.

This renovation would commence in July, 2014 and provide the Records Center with good work and storage space for the next 10-15 years.

**The Commission recommends:**

- Approval by City Council for FY 2015 CIP project funding.
- Use of 2014 CFMP funds for the fire protection engineering study, architect's production of construction documents, and conversion of larger space for the Permanent Archives, which would alleviate the most critical space problem until the renovation begins.
- Immediate repair of loading dock door and contracting new cleaning service.

- Relocation of the fire department burn training tower, which sits adjacent to the Records Center, to ensure the safety of the facility and city records.
- That City Council plans a site visit to the Archives and Records Center for a tour conducted by Jackie Cohan, the City Records Administrator and Archivist.

**Needs: Long-term--New Facility**

The renovation project will give an additional cost-effective 10-15 years of use to the aging facility. However, the city sanitation department has reported that they will need to expand within the next 10-15 years and to do this, they will need to acquire the land that the Records Center facility currently occupies.

Planning, acquiring land, and funding for a replacement Archives and Records Center will take years and should begin immediately to ensure that a new Records Center will be completed in a 10-15 year time-frame.

**The Commission recommends:**

- The immediate formation of a work group composed of staff from the Office of Historic Alexandria, General Services, and the Commission to develop a plan to replace the current Records Center facility.

**II. PERSONNEL**

**Highlights:**

- An unpaid intern from GMU performed 165 hours of work.
- Volunteers from Citizen/JobLink performed approximately 255 hours of work.
- A school volunteer program provided 216 hours of student help with moving and shelving boxes.
- The Sheriff’s Office provided inmate labor to move large numbers of boxes.

**Needs: Increased staffing CRITICAL**

The Archives and Records Center was established in 1983 with 1.5 FTEs and stored a few hundred cubic feet of records. From a high of 3 FTEs in 2009, the staff was cut in 2010 to the current 2.4 FTEs while over 17,000 cubic feet of records are maintained. With the retirement of the Records Center Clerk in June, 2013(leaving a several month’s long gap until his position is filled), staffing has been reduced to less than 2 FTEs. **Three years of inadequate staffing** have created many critical issues including:

- The time for processing, evaluating, and disposition of records has increased due to shortage of staff.
- City agency records survey updates have been put on hold for a second year.
- Response time for records retrieval and search requests for city agencies has increased due to inadequate staffing.

- A record number of FOIA requests has put a critical strain on staffing. The City Archivist reported that she spent one entire month in early 2013 responding to requests which left inadequate time to attend to her other responsibilities.
- City agencies face delays in pickup of records for storage.

**The Commission recommends:**

- Full support of OHA director Lance Mallamo’s request to restore the .6 FTE lost in 2010- this was requested in the 2014 budget and was denied. To meet the increased needs of the Records Center, we recommend increasing the staff by 1 FTE as adding only a .6 FTE will not meet the needs of the department.
- Work with ITS department to coordinate digital records policy and responsibility.

**III. BUDGET**

**Highlights:**

- The approved FY 2014 budget of \$232,923 is an increase of 2% over FY 2013.

**Needs: Increase funding**

The FY 2014 budget brings the Records Center budget back to its **2009** funding level. The **five** intervening years of reduced funding have created critical budget issues:

- Reduction in operating supplies and materials. For example, the cost of records boxes has increased from \$1/box to \$3/box while the budget for operations has been reduced by over \$8,000 since 1998.
- Cost for collection management software tech support (\$2,038) could not be paid.
- Deferred maintenance (lighting not replaced, loading dock door, etc.) and aging office equipment not replaced.
- Lack of personnel to process city records in a timely fashion.

**The Commission recommends:**

- Increasing the budget in FY 2015 to include funding to meet the needs for staffing, maintenance, operating supplies and materials. Based on our observations, the Commission feels the FY budget needs to be a minimum of **\$275,000.00**.

**IV. OPERATIONS**

**Highlights:**

- A project to catalog photos of historic properties (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century this year) with help from Citizen/JobLink volunteers is near completion.

- Seventeen cubic feet of Planning and Zoning project files, historic and permanent records created during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, were processed and cataloged by GMU volunteer. This will allow for quick research and access.
- A project to catalog Board of Architectural Review case files down to the file level was completed. This will allow for research by address or case number and reduce research and access time by 50%.
- A city-wide records management training session was conducted, as well as smaller agency-requested training sessions.
- 1,691 rolls of architectural plans and 1007 boxes of records were accessioned.
- 629 rolls of architectural plans, 837 boxes of records and 299 non-record items were destroyed per state records retention and destruction regulations.
- The Records Center received 75 business visits from citizens and city agencies.
- 1,736 records boxes were accessed for searches conducted for citizens and city agencies.
- 336 records pickups and deliveries were made to city agencies and 1197 records boxes were delivered.
- Over 20,000 electronically filed Sheriff's department laserfiche files were individually destroyed.

**Needs: Explore operational options**

As the scope and size of operations has increased, there is a need to explore operational options to keep up with the demands placed on the small staff.

**The Commission recommends:**

- Continue to review Records Center operations for opportunities for improvement.
- Increase use of electronic methods to improve operations.
- Work with ITS to review electronic records policy for opportunities to improve operations.
- Continue providing training to city employees to facilitate more efficient records transfer, research requests, and records destruction.

**V. ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION UPDATE**

**Archives and Records Management Program Administrative Regulation:**

It has been 30 years since the Administrative Regulation for the Archives and Records Management Program has been updated. Outdated regulations have created concerns over liability issues as well as adherence to records retention and destruction schedules by city agencies. To address these concerns, the city attorney's office, the ITS director, and the City Records Administrator and Archivist have completed the well-overdue update of the AR. This

update defines the purpose of the program and responsibilities of the Records Administrator and agency Department Heads. It also ties “the appropriate implementation and supervision of Record retention and destruction for the department or office” (AR Part IV. Policy) to each Department Head’s performance reviews. The AR is awaiting approval.

The Commission applauds the effort by all involved in updating this important document.

**The Public Records Advisory Commission goals for FY 2014:**

- Presentation to City Council of records management issues affecting the City of Alexandria. This has been postponed from last year due to the need for a request for FY 15 CIP funding.
- Seek support and funding for adequate staffing at the Records Center.
- Continue meeting with General Services to finalize the short-term facility solution.
- Begin work on proposal for a new Records Center facility. This did not get initiated last year.
- Continue to advocate for a strong records management program.

**Recruitment and Leadership Plans:**

Recruitment will take place through announcements on both records management and archives 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. Virginia Arnold has served two years as chairman.

The following citizens served on the PRAC during the period covered in this report:

- Virginia Arnold
- Ellen Briscoe
- Darah Franklin
- Anthony Jones
- Nils Kandelin
- William Toye
- Laura Vetter
- Jennifer Zakriski
- Charles Ziegler

Respectfully Submitted,  
Virginia Arnold, Chair  
Laura Vetter, Vice-Chair