

PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Annual Report to the City Council July 2013 – June 2014

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)

The State of Virginia mandates the retention of paper records, for varying lengths of time, so the City continues to need a physical facility and adequate staff to handle a collection of documents that can only continue to grow. Digital records may slow the physical growth somewhat, but they also require personnel time, and ultimately cannot replace all the physical documents.

During the period July 2013-June 2014 the Commission held eight 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:

- A new HVAC unit was installed to facilitate the transfer of permanent records to a larger space, providing a temperature-controlled environment to protect records from premature decay.
- The basement electronic loading dock door was replaced. It was in such poor condition that rodents and snakes got into the building and high winds caused the alarm to go off. An inspection discovered that the decrepit door was directly over an ash pit and retaining wall that had to be stabilized.
- Extensive landscaping to improve property appearance was done.
- A new cleaning service was contracted for a better price and better service.

Needs: Immediate

- Lighting needs to be improved in one of the upstairs records room. A flashlight is required to read the box labels.

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

A budget request by General Services for FY 2015 in the amount of \$680,000 was submitted to address the space and facility issues noted below. The request did not make it into the budget. The issues below are now several years old.

The severe space shortage at the Archives and Records Center has been documented in last two years' annual reports:

- 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, and other unacceptable places.

During 2013 and 2014, 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.
- Replace shelving in basement level with high density shelving to increase capacity without changing the square footage “footprint”.
- Install high density shelving throughout the first floor.
- Convert 4th floor space currently not used for record storage.
- Renovation of the building's electrical, HVAC, plumbing, roof, and fire protection systems (this system does not meet code requirements).

General Services plans to submit a new budget request for FY 2016 to cover the cost of this expansion and renovation project. The total cost of the project (estimated at \$890,000 in 2013) will be funded through the use of the Office of Historic Alexandria's FY2015 and part of FY2016's CFMP funds, some CFMP funds from General Services' budget, and the FY 2016 CIP budget request.

This renovation, if funded, would commence in July, 2015 and provide the Records Center with adequate work and storage space for the next 10-15 years.

The Commission recommends:

- Approval by City Council for FY 2016 CIP project funding.
- Use of 2015 CFMP funds for the fire protection engineering study and repair.
- 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.

Needs: Long-term--New Facility

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

Planning, acquiring land or an existing building, 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. This recommendation was first suggested in 2012.

II. PERSONNEL

Highlights:

- The part-time Records Management Analyst's position was converted to full-time effective FY2015.
- A volunteer worked 140 hours digitizing photographs.
- A student from George Washington University volunteered 67 hours in June.
- A school volunteer program provided 234 hours of student help with moving and shelving boxes.
- The Sheriff's Office provided inmate labor to move large numbers of boxes and perform cleaning services.

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 2.4 FTEs while over 17,000 cubic feet of records have been maintained. Starting with FY15, staffing now stands at 2.6 FTEs. **Five years of inadequate staffing** have created many critical issues including:

- A gap of several months left by the departure of a part-time clerk at the start of FY14 required the Archivist to divert operational funds to pay for 500 hours for two temps until a new clerk was hired.
- 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 third year.
- Response time for records retrieval and search requests for city agencies has increased due to inadequate staffing.
- An increase in Freedom of Information Act requests has put a critical strain on staffing. The City Archivist reported that she spends a significant amount of time responding to requests which leaves inadequate time to attend to her other responsibilities.
- City agencies face delays in pickup of records for storage.

The Commission recommends:

- Increasing the staff by 1 FTE to meet the needs of the department.
- Work with ITS department to coordinate digital records policy and responsibility.

III. BUDGET

Highlights:

- The approved FY 2015 budget of \$265,406 is an increase of \$30,755 over FY 2014.
- This increase will cover the costs of merit raises and the salary increase for a full time Records Management Analyst.

Needs: Increase funding

The FY 2014 budget brought the Records Center budget back to its **2009** funding level. The additional funds for FY 2015 only covers personnel cost increases. The **five** intervening years of inadequate 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 over the years (from \$24,158 for FY 2007 to \$17,569 for FY 2014).
- Cost for management software tech support (\$2,038) could not be paid.
- Maintenance deferred 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 2016 to include funding to meet the needs for staffing, maintenance, operating supplies and materials. Based on our observations, the Commission feels the FY2016 budget needs to be a minimum of **\$325,000.00**, an increase of approximately \$60,000 which would help fund one additional FTE and cover increased operational costs.

IV. OPERATIONS

No civil lawsuits have been filed against the city for the failure to destroy legally obsolete records in accordance with Virginia state law.

Highlights:

- Research projects for city staff included: Robinson Terminal, north and south; Hensley Park; Torpedo Factory (for their 40th birthday); Mount Vernon Street corridor.
- Began a project for scanning an extensive collection of maps and plats of the city's West End. Once scanned, they are accessible through the city's web portal.
- Scanned historic photos with the help of volunteers.
- Catalogued a collection of mid-20th century large aerial photographs of Alexandria.
- Temps were hired to reduce records destruction backlog, help with sorting architectural plans, and for cataloguing records.
- A city-wide records management training session was conducted, as well as smaller agency-requested training sessions.
- An on-site records evaluation was conducted for the Planning and Zoning department and for the Transportation and Environmental Services site plans division.
- Began acquisition of additional archival storage space in room 45 (fourth floor) with the approved removal and relocation of existing exhibits storage to the former Print Shop facility next door.
- 1,656 rolls of architectural plans and 1011 boxes of records were accessioned.
- 1225 boxes of records and 323 non-record items were destroyed per state records retention and destruction regulations.
- The Records Center received 90 business visits from citizens and city agencies.
- 2,308 records boxes were accessed for searches conducted for citizens and city agencies.
- 329 records pickups and deliveries were made to city agencies and 1408 records boxes were delivered.
- 10,362 electronically filed Sheriff's department Laserfishce 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 Information Technology Services 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 met in January, 2013 to update the overdue Administrative Regulation. 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. However, over a year has lapsed since the update, and the Administration Regulation is still waiting approval.

VI. PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION OUTREACH

The Commission engaged in several activities over the past year to bring attention to the work that is done at the Archives and Records Center and the critical needs of the program and facility. These included:

- Commission members met with six of the seven city council members individually over the course of the fall and spring, giving a presentation and answering questions about the records program and needs.
- Vice-chair Laura Vetter spoke at the City Council Budget hearing to advocate for the budget request to renovate the Archives and Records Center.

- The Commission arranged individual site visits of the Archives and Records Center with the city archivist for six of the seven city council members.

The Public Records Advisory Commission goals for FY 2015:

- Continue dialog with city council and city staff to approve the expansion and renovation of the Archives and Records Center.
- Seek support and funding for adequate staffing at the Records Center.
- Begin work on proposal for a new Records Center facility. This has been a commission goal since 2012. The commission will continue to seek support from General Services to initiate the project.
- 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 three years as chairman.

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

Virginia Arnold
Ellen Briscoe
Darah Franklin
Laura Vetter
Jennifer Zakriski
Ann Parham
Lisa Knight

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