

City of Alexandria, Virginia

Alexandria Beautification Commission

P.O. Box 178

Alexandria, Virginia 22313

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 13, 2019

7:30 PM

Durant Arts Center, 1605 Cameron Street

Attendees: Kathryn Chiasson (Chair), Joseph Crowell, Cathleen Curtin, Kevin Dunne, Donald Kent, Christina Mazurkevich, Geoff Montross, Monica Murphy, Eleanor Quigley, Mellenie Runion, Denise Tennant (Vice Chair)

Excused Absence: Mary Ensch

Unexcused Absences: Richard Dorrier

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza, Jack Browand

Community Members: Mike Kenny

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 PM.

- 1. Approval of May 9, 2019, Meeting Minutes** – A motion to approve the minutes was made by Ms. Mazurkevich and seconded by Mr. Montross. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes.
- 2. Membership Updates** – Ms. Chiasson introduced a new member, Emily Freeland, to the Commission. Ms. Freeland is an architect.
- 3. Speaker: Jack Browand (RPCA) on Open Space and FOIA**

Jack Browand began the discussion of open space with the history of the Planning Commission becoming interested in the evaluation of open space in new development. That interest has renewed interest in overall open space. Mr. Browand noted that the Open Space Plan was last updated in 2017. That plan sets the goal of 7.3 acres of open space per one thousand residents. That updated included much discussion of what open space is, where it should be, could it be above or below grade, and did it need to be publicly accessible. The recent Environmental Action Plan urged the reestablishment of the Open Space Steering Committee. That committee existed in the 1990s and worked with a fund that private

developed contributed to. That fund no longer exists and instead contributions are made to the Capital Improvement Plan budget.

On May 20, the Planning Department held a joint work session of the Planning Commission, the Environmental Policy Commission, and the Parks and Recreation Commission to discuss, in part, publicly accessible open space policy plans. The draft plan calls for the Open Space Steering Committee to provide policy guidance on publicly accessible open space. The draft includes participation by the Beautification Commission.

Ms. Runion asked whether, at present, above-grade open space meets the requirements for open space, which Mr. Browand confirmed does. Ms. Quigley raised the concern that above-grade open space may preclude the installation of trees. Mr. Browand noted that the recent Landscape Guidelines update gives only partial credit for above-grade trees as well as spells out the planting requirements for such trees, but he agreed there had been historical issues with tree wells and not “right-sizing” plantings.

Mr. Kenney asked about the rationale for including private open space in the overall allowance for open space, noting that as a citizen he doesn’t have access to other private open space. Mr. Browand noted that the city looks at it as a potential “win-win” when the private open space is complementary to public open space when it provides relief to the use of public facilities. He said that the Planning Commission were faced with answering whether proposed space in new development fit the context and whether it benefits the public. Mr. Kenney then asked whether the discussion of private open space precluded the discussion of public open space. Mr. Crowell responded by noting that the city has two ongoing discussions of open space: one in private development, led by Planning and Zoning, and one for publicly accessible open space, led by Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities. They don’t need to operate in different trajectories, but that is how city staff have decided to pursue the process.

Mr. Kenney asked if the city has sufficient park space right now. Mr. Browand responded by saying that the City has more than the 7.3 acres of open space per thousand residents right now, and if population growth continues as expected, the city won’t hit the 7.3 until 2045. However, if population growth increases and new development is approved meeting the minimum current standards, the 7.3 could be hit in 2025.

Mr. Kenney asked if the city has enough athletic fields at present, with Mr. Browand saying, yes, though they may be sub-optimally used. The Athletic Field Master Plan should address that issue and determine various causes. He noted that even if there are good pieces of open space, perhaps they are not what the community needs. For example, if the above-grade soccer field is only used when soccer is being played, it’s a loss of the open space that can’t be used for other uses because those might damage the artificial turf. Mr. Dunn asked what’s being done now to ensure that the city is developing open spaces optimally if they are not being used efficiently now. Mr. Browand noted that it was unclear, although some fields and parking lots are being reviewed for the potential to convert from one to the other.

In addition to open space, Mr. Browand briefly reviewed the policies broadly labelled “FOIA.” These include providing notice of meetings, holding publicly accessible meetings, and conducting business only in the public space. Mr. Browand met with the Commission last year to perform a thorough review of the policies and remind the group that we are a politically appointed body subject to the requirements of Virginia law. Whenever more than two members meet about commission business, it must be open to the public. To that end, business cannot be conducted over email. For example, Mr. Browand specifically noted that polls cannot be taken online or over email and the decision simply ratified in a meeting. He noted that there are laws allowing members’ email to be searched under FOIA requests to ensure that such is not happening. Unfortunately, he noted, those searches also often reveal personal information that members may not want made public.

On the subject of meetings, Mr. Browand emphasized that meetings must be announced and agendas posted to the public as soon as they are available. Ms. Chiasson asked if she should be coordinating directly with the Clerk and Mr. Browand responded, no, that Mr. Mendoza, as the staff liaison, was the appropriate person to take care of the notices.

Finally, Mr. Browand encouraged members to reach out to him if there are any questions. In particular, he noted a broad interest in electronic participation policies among City commissions and that he would be happy to help the Commission if we desire such a policy.

4. Commission Business

A. Awards

Ms. Murphy reviewed the results of the van tour to present the Awards Subcommittee’s proposed list of winners for the Beautification Awards. After the van tour, all results were tallied and compiled to form the basis for the proposed list. With a slide show of Ms. Runion’s photographs provided by Ms. Chiasson, the Commission reviewed the proposed list. During the review, the Commission was informed of and discussed issues related to the proposed list:

- Because of the number of properties for sale in the Eisenhower Square development, the Subcommittee determined that the property was ineligible for the residential award. Several members noted the potential for awards when sales were completed.
- The issue of classification of high rise residential properties arose with the potential award for Place One Condominiums. Ms. Tennant noted that the Commission has, for all recent memory, included such commercially-run residences in the residential category. However, several members noted that, despite the residential nature of the property, it was commercially managed. For the proposed list of winners for this year, the Place One Condominiums are included as a commercial property and the Commission will review the guidelines for commercially-run residences next year.
- Two Community Awards projects received high overall scores: Founders Park and the King Street Corridor project. The Subcommittee is proposing to award the

Founders Park the East Region award and the King Street Corridor a city-wide award. No members expressed reservations about the inclusion of the additional award.

With the discussion completed, Ms. Quigley made a motion to approve the proposed list of winners and Ms. Murphy seconded. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the list.

B. Commission and Committee Updates

- a. **Commission** – Nothing further.
 - b. **Awards** – Nothing further.
 - c. **Outreach** – None.
 - d. **Sustainable Landscaping** – None.
 - e. **Vacant Lots** – Ms. Runion announced that the fundraising for the planned park at Simpson Triangle had been completed with the receipt of \$3,300 yesterday. The next step will be the City’s Naming Committee which will meet Monday the 17th. The proposed name of the park is Kettle Park, based on historic community cooking events, and is supported by the community survey.
- 5. **New Commission Business** – None.
 - 6. **Staff Report** – The Staff Report was electronically circulated. In the interest of time, Mr. Mendoza did not summarize the report but asked that members reach out to him with any questions or follow up they have.
 - 7. **Agenda Items for July 11, 2019, Meeting** – None.
 - 8. **Public Comment/Discussion** – Nothing further.

Meeting adjourned at 9:04 PM.