

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Alexandria Beautification Commission
P.O. Box 178
Alexandria, Virginia 22313

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 14, 2019
7:30 PM
Charles Houston Recreation Center
901 Wythe Street

Attendees: Kathryn Chiasson (Chair), Emily Freeland, Mary Enschede, Mellenie Runion, Denise Tennant (Vice Chair), Geoff Montross, Christina Mazurkevich, Kevin Dunne, Don Kent, Chris Peterson, Monica Murphy

Excused Absences: Eleanor Quigley, Richard Dorrier

Unexcused Absences:

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza

The meeting was called to order at 7:36pm.

- 1. Approval of Oct. 2019 Meeting Minutes:** A motion to approve the updated minutes was made by Ms. Enschede and seconded by Ms. Mazurkevich. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes.
- 2. Membership Updates:** Chris Peterson introduced himself to the Commission. Kevin Dunne will not be extending his term. Christina Kang expressed interest in the Commission but is undecided.
- 3. Guest Speaker: John Marlin (Alexandria City Arborist) and Bob Williams (Division Chief – Natural Resources)**
 - Mr. Williams shared that they are trying to be proactive on tree canopy and updating the Alexandria Urban Forestry Master Plan. Mr. Williams will send a copy sometime this winter for feedback. The overarching goal of the Alexandria Urban Forestry Master Plan is to increase the tree canopy throughout the City by better maintaining existing trees and adding a significant number of new trees.
 - Recently finished a 5-year tree inventory program – GIS 30,000 + trees. This doesn't include private areas. How does it compare in the past? Before about ~18k Now more data exist, and they can see what species dominant and what areas are to focus on. Accurate pictures are updated constantly year-round.

- Alexandria has a big problem with ivy. Questions arise such as, “At what point do we give up on a tree?” Public safety is the primary concern and it depends on the desirability and safety of the tree. Trees go into a mortality spiral. If there is a limited City budget is it worth trimming the tree? Answer: depends on the cost benefit of the tree.
- We have an entire section on natural lands management that addresses ivy and invasive species. It teaches them how to remove English ivy and address these types of issues that are attacking trees and/or reducing the tree canopy. We have spent a lot of time on invasive species. Anywhere construction is going on, there are invasive species.
- The Commission asked if Mr. Williams and Mr. Marlin manages construction in terms of tree protection. In addition, “who manages and inspects trees on construction sights.” Answer: In private development Mr. Williams and Mr. Marlin are not involved unless it’s public. They have great standards in place, however, street trees can propose a lot of problems because they are constricted. There are new standards for tree wells and there is a need for more sustainability. The idea is not to have to replace a tree every few years and address stormwater at the same time.
- Mr. Marlin advocates for max diversity. No species should be more than 10 % canopy. It’s also advised to not put two of the same trees in a row, clearly there is sometimes an aesthetic push from landscape projects and construction projects. Promoting diversity at all scales is important. The Alexandria Inventory Program has helped us identify which pests or species are prone to certain issues. Red maple is more than 10% -- about 26-30% in the City of Alexandria.
- You can tell the color of the leaves from satellite imagery. Drones are not allowed by the FAA. The City would have to have a contract with the State.
- “How does Alexandria compare to other urban environments and bringing expertise from Boulder? Arlington and Fairfax County have a program. Arlington took some missteps and had a large error and didn’t share with the public. Fairfax doesn’t have jurisdiction for a lot of trees in the county. City vs. county makes a difference. The City has a good inhouse expertise and political support.
- The Commission can help more by doing the following:
 - Continue to work with medians
 - Push for green infrastructure and push for diversity
 - Changing the idea of what is beautiful and include diversity heterogenous landscape urban forest
 - Advertise beautiful ornamental trees
 - Incorporate more native trees
- Major goal: reach tree canopy and get more private owners involved. The City needs to look for partners. There are some legal ramifications to work in Arlington. The City will set funding aside and get city money to support private land. A partner like, “Tree Stewards” could help.
- Irrigated medians and the issue of water use is something to also look into.
- Landscape Guidelines – thought natives were exceptions. When did it take effect? The guidelines were adopted by City Council this past march. We are trying to plant more natives.

- The City will continue to plant until the ground freezes. They hope to plant for a couple of more weeks. What matters is establishing the tree. Process improvements are essential. For example, “How do you make sure we get water to the trees?”
- Alexandria has great in-house talent and resources we must expand on that; use tablets for example.
- Ultimately the top priorities are as follows: Hire another arborist, process improvements, and start to measure important key indicators of the forest and manage the data.

4. Commission Business:

- a. Elections** - The positions for Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary are open. Jan 1, 2020 will be the official start date.
 - i) **Chair:** Kathryn Chiasson
 - ii) **Vice Chair:** Chris Peterson
 - iii) **Secretary:** Emily Freeland

A motion to approve the new officers was made by Ms. Tennant and second by Ms. Murphy. The Commission unanimously approved the new officers.

b. Awards Debrief

- i. The awards went well. The speaker was good. Now the subcommittee is going to revise and talk about best practices. For example, we have already gone from paper to electric voting. There have been some glitches but it's easier to have electronic. Everyone gets to go out and everyone gets to vote and participate. There are roles for everyone. Great job on the PR this year.

c. Subcommittee Updates, As Needed

i. Awards:

(a) Ms. Murphy presented the subcommittee. When looking for potential awardees the subcommittee looks for exceptional efforts contributing to the beautification of Alexandria through architecture, landscaping and sustainable practices. Awards are presented in six categories: Excellence in Architecture, Excellence in Sustainable Design, Green Practices in Beautification, Community Beautification, Residential Beautification, and Commercial Beautification. The Mayor and members of the City Council present the winners with their award certificates.

(b) Prior to the event, the subcommittee begins the full Commission's involvement in awards season by distributing nomination assignments to each of the Commissioners, along with maps and criteria for nomination (e.g. plant material sustainable practices, neighborhood context, and overall maintenance). The subcommittee also asks City residents to send in their nominations and descriptions. After the nominations are in, some of Commissioners attend a van voting tour. Each year the ceremony takes place at the Lyceum Museum around the end of September/ early October. Be on the lookout for what's going on in the

city for beautification and look for nominations for both public and private, ex. Community base groups, individual. The awards ceremony has a keynote speaker who is interested in beatification, a slideshow of all the awardees, and they get a sign to put in their yard.

(c) The subcommittee asked the Commission if spot awards for other times of the year should be given.

Action item: Send a thank you note to the piano player. Awards didn't meet this month, but they will discuss next week.

ii. **Outreach:**

(a) Ms. Tennant shared that the subcommittee is working on a one-page letter to discuss priorities and goals. Ms. Tennant will send it out to the subcommittee to provide further feedback. The document will explain the Commission's goals, background, and objectives. It's for commission members so there is in consistency -- basically an elaborated mission statement.

(b) Ms. Enschede suggested adding a diagram showing how the Beautification Commission fits within the various City Commissions and include that along with the mission statement in a packet to be given to new members or interested parties.

iii. **Sustainable Landscaping:**

(a) The subcommittee has been working on installing native and sustainable plant material in three medians at the heavily trafficked intersection of King St., Quaker Ln and Braddock Rd. The Commission initiated the pilot median improvement project in Oct of 2017 to make the City's medians both more attractive and more sustainable. The subcommittee took interest with each of the gateways of the city to make them look better, however, decided to switch gears and work on areas that get a lot of traffic. The trees have died and would be replaced. The subcommittee has been working with the City to get this fixed and hope to identify future projects. The subcommittee finds the area where the City has the resources and the power to install trees. It's all the city's resource – the subcommittee is helping them identify areas.

(b) Warwick village – the subcommittee selected that median to be the demonstration and provided the design, but the city does the work with the contract. We plan to do more in that area as well. The City doesn't ever push back from subcommittee's design.

iv. **Vacant Lots:**

(a) The subcommittee has been working with the City on areas that are empty. We selected Simpson Triangle, which was part of Simpson park, part of Route 1. It is now officially called Kettle Park. The subcommittee solicited names from the community and partnered with Del Ray community. It was narrowed down to a few names then pushed it back out to the community for a vote. Got it approved by the city council 6 weeks ago. Del Ray Citizen Association applied for matching funds. Phase A is complete as of last week. The boulders are in. Everything is mostly dormant now but in the spring it will come alive. Part II will be a grove of trees. The City didn't have funds this spring so it will be planted later.

- (b) The subcommittee will have a special meeting this Monday at Charles Houston at 7pm to talk about this last contract. The subcommittee has decided to get input on the big neglected area that needs beautification near the west end. The subcommittee is rescheduling the meeting for Monday, November the 18th at 7pm and external guests will be invited (i.e. Arts Commission, Parks Department Urban Planner, and Sheriff Dana Lawhorne). Hope to get new ideas of last project.

5. New Commission Business: None

- 6. Staff Report:** There is a possibility of having someone come to the next meeting to talk about the budget.

7. Holiday Party - Mr. Dorrier will host. Dec 12th

8. Public Comment/ Discussion

Bill Gillespie, Rita Leffers, and Susan Berry attended the Commission meeting to discuss the following:

- i)* Susan Berry shared that the Fairlington Presbyterian Church adopted the stormwater project. Also interested in possibly joining the commission. Lives in Alexandria.
- ii)* The three were interested to know what's going to happen around Quaker Ln
 - i.* Update: It's a monoculture of trees but there was a halt put on the project because of stormwater management. Green infrastructure is under transportation and environmental services. There was an issue, so we contacted the stormwater folks in transportation. We had more meetings with them, apparently there is a huge process to improve their storm water MS4 permit and cleaning up stormwater. No beautification will be done in this area because it's potentiation.

Action item: Get behind a case like this and bring it to the appropriate person within the city.

Action item: Mr. Mendoza will follow up with Jesse Maines, Division Chief at City of Alexandria, Virginia, Transportation and Environmental Services, Stormwater Management and Yon Lambert Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services at the City of Alexandria.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.