



City of Alexandria, Virginia

[Alexandria Beautification Commission](#) | P.O. Box 178 | Alexandria, VA 22313
[facebook.com/AlexandriaBeautification](https://www.facebook.com/AlexandriaBeautification) & [instagram.com/beautifulalex](https://www.instagram.com/beautifulalex)

January Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 11, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m.
901 Wythe St

Present in person: Leah Bancheri, Steven Cohen, Felicia Hackett, Elizabeth Gelfer (Vice Chair), Kenneth Krupa, Alexander Mcelya, Laura Norfolk, Maralyn O'Brien, Eleanor Quigley, Sara E. Rhoades, Emily Swaim, Daniya Tamendarova (Secretary), Eleanor Trice (Chair); Oscar Mendoza

Present remotely: Yanique Revers

Excused absence: Monica Murphy, Maralyn O'Brien

Unexcused absence: N/A

Meeting called to order at 7:33 pm

1. Motion approval of November 2023 meeting minutes

November 9, 2023, notes motioned for approval by Steve, seconded by Alex; passed unanimously.

2. Speakers – 30 min allotted total

- Kathie Hoekstra, Chair, [Environmental Policy Commission](#) – collaboration opportunities & discussion (allotted 15 min) – **did not attend the ABC meeting without notice**
 - **ABC NEXT STEPS: Eleanor T** to discuss with **Eleanor Q** whether inviting this guest speaker again to ABC is necessary (unlikely).
 - **@SustainAlex** – EPC's Instagram is focused on sustainability, but their emphasis is more on buildings – **SUGGESTION FROM Eleanor T:** EPC may have good recommendations for ABC Awards

- [Jessica Lassetter](#) & [Camille Liebnitzky](#), City Transportation & Environmental Services – update about [stormwater utility fee credit program](#) for residents & [flood mitigation grant](#) program & discussion; @alexandriavates on IG (allotted 15 min)

Presentation by [Camille Liebnitzky](#), Senior Water Resources Engineer, City of Alexandria VA

The City Transportation & Environmental Services gave out over \$170K to Alexandrians through the [stormwater utility fee credit program](#). Storm water fee applies to all properties in the City within the flood zone.

- Property type breakdown: individual property owners, condo association, nonresidential property owners.
- Practices like rain gardens, planting a new native tree (must be planted within the past 1 year) or having a mature tree (trunk 12 inches wide), dry floodproofing (e.g., floodgates, window protection) can get 5-20% credit per practice for protected units (new tree planting – up to 30% one-time credit).
- 295 applications received in 2022 (up from 75 in 2021); under 30 applications so far in 2024. **Application period: Dec. 1-Feb. 15**, annually; **credits are good for 2 years**.
- **Program updates:** This year, simplified application process (e.g., many practices just require a picture), multi-year and increased credits with notification to reapply, added mature tree preservation (vs. just having a newly planted tree), expanded the number of qualifying practices (new dry floodproofing and water quality practices).
- **Qualifying practices:** no-fertilizer pledge, conservation landscaping, new tree planting (of certain size), mature native tree preservation, + **additional stormwater practices** (e.g., rain barrels, cistern, dry well/infiltration, rain garden, vegetated green roof, flow through planter box, permeable pavement), **dry floodproofing practices** (e.g., protective barriers/walls, passive flood gates, basement window protection, passive flood gates, etc.)

Feedback from Eleanor Q: As a certified tree steward, I suggest that when a whip become a young tree of at least 1” caliper, that it will qualify for the program.

Details/application at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Stormwater>

Flood Mitigation Grant Program

The [flood mitigation grant program](#) was launched in 2021, using funds from the stormwater utility fees, and is still evolving. **The City makes changes to the program based on feedback.**

- The program financially reimburses qualifying residents for flood mitigation efforts (up to 50% of total costs of eligible practices, up to \$5,000 for private properties and \$25,000 for common areas for condo and homeowner associations); generated program fee revenues go toward mitigating flooding in the City.
- Open-ended program, **no set deadline**
- **Work must be completed prior to application time.** Eligible practice examples:
 - **Windows and doors:** permanent glass protection, basement window protection, ground floor or basement window wells and drains, etc.

- **Basement/utilities:** sump pump battery backups, drain tiles below basement floors, flood vents, etc.
- **Exterior and topography:** surface grading, flood walls, French drain systems, etc.
- For questions on eligibility, contact: FloodGrant@alexandriava.gov
- **Program improvements for 2023 onwards:**
 - Increased reimbursement amounts (e.g., up to \$25K for mitigation practices on common areas at condo and homeowner associations)
 - Applicants are **no longer required to provide documentation of past flooding** to receive grant funding.

Presentation continued by [Jessica Lassetter](#)

Other City programs:

- The City’s sewer [Backflow Preventer \(BFP\) Assistance Program](#) – up to 50% reimbursement of the cost of installing BFP device by a licensed plumbing contractor, up to \$2,000; open to all City homeowners (of properties with basement, finished or unfinished).
- [Virginia Conservation Assistance Program](#), operated through the [Northern VA Soil and Water Conservation District \(NVSWCD\)](#), provides financial and technical assistance to property owners for installing Best Management Practices (BMPs) in Virginia’s Chesapeake Bay watershed.
 - Eligible BMPs include rain gardens, permeable pavement, conservation landscaping, rainwater harvesting, green roofs, and many others.
 - This is the **only program that needs to be contacted before you implement your practice**. Contact the NVSWCD at 703-324-1460 or conservationdistrict@fairfaxcounty.gov to discuss interest in the program.
- Adopt a block or a stream (block and stream cleanup) – contact [Camille Liebnitzky](#) for details; it’s part of the credit program, but need to identify a non-residential property that the credit will be provided to. The City will provide participants with gloves and trash bags to do the cleanup.

Send questions or suggestions to stormwater@alexandria.gov

ABC NEXT STEPS: Will feature programs on ABC social media; follow and cross-promote posts with @alexandriavates on Instagram.

3. Membership updates – 10 min allotted

- **2024 ABC officers:** Chair – Eleanor Tice, Vice Chair – Elizabeth Gelfer, Secretary – Daniya Tamendarova

- **Recent new members:** Felicia Hackett, Emily Swaim, Daniya Tamendarova: Felicia and Emily introduced themselves.
- 1 citizen vacancy remains: Expert in Landscape Architecture or Landscape Design
 - **Daniya** reached out to owners of Nature by Design – but Randee is not available.
 - **Eleanor T:** How about Greenstreet Garden owners? & will contact Scott Knudsen, native tree plant sale organizer
 - **ABC Instagram/Fb** will post a call for nominations. **Leah offered to lay out the post in Canva for Instagram.**
 - **Eleanor Q** will reach out to Chris Wright from Earth Sangha
- [See updated roster/contact list](#) on ABC Google drive
- Access bylaws, past meeting notes, etc., in ABC Google drive [General folder](#)

4. 2024 planning – 20 min allotted

- ABC's February meeting will be the February 3 retreat to review strategic plan, priority initiatives & partnerships; to be facilitated by Judy Lo, who facilitated the 2022 strategic review. Likely to take place at 9am-2 pm (Judy Lo will confirm the recommended time frame).
 - Agenda will be sent by **Eleanor T** during week of Jan. 15. [Retreat agenda is here.](#)
- Most ABC members are available on February 3. Three (3) members cannot attend. To ensure that all members can contribute, **Eleanor T is coordinating with Judy Lo a Zoom meeting with all subcommittee chairs.** Agenda will be sent in advance, and subcommittees can provide feedback prior to the meeting. (Too many scheduling conflicts; we met with Eleanor Q.)
- **Strategic retreat goals:** Can revisit ABC's established strategic goals and mission, but the idea is not to change them but to build on what's accomplished and focus on major initiatives and strategies to meet existing goals/mission. Some suggestions to consider from **Eleanor T:**
 - Work with City to organize an event with **the new arborist at the First Arborist monument at Fort Ward.** The monument is in disrepair – ABC can help fix it up prior to the event.
 - Establish a **liaison from City Council.** Likely candidate – **Sarah Bagley**, who has environmentalist/sustainability background. Seems a good fit, though she's never engaged with ABC.
 - The liaison and ABC could meet once a year or once a quarter (preferred) and act as ABC champion on the Council.
 - **Ken:** We should stay apolitical – i.e., avoid engaging someone who's currently running for mayor.
 - **Steve:** We should get involved with the City Council before the budget season, so we could have a shot at influencing budget.
 - **Eleanor T:** The ABC Sustainability Subcommittee may send a letter of invitation to Sarah Bagley.

- Draft [2024 calendar](#) – major ABC & City 2024 milestones. Please review & send any comments to Eleanor.

5. Subcommittee discussion/decisions (by Subcommittee chairs)

- **Awards Subcommittee (Yanique):** Subcommittee has not yet met. Will meet shortly to discuss how they'll handle awards.
 - **Ken:** Consider another small-scale award within the next 3 months? **Eleanor T**, on behalf of the Subcommittee: “There is a lot to do with the main awards, but thank you for the suggestion.”
 - **Laura:** Do we want to hold the awards at the Lyceum again (we didn't have to pay for the property because it's a city property)? It may be booked now.
 - **Steve:** One suggestion was to hold the ceremony in another part of the City, not always Old Town.
 - **Ken:** Alexandria Highschool has a nice cafeteria that holds events.
 - **Steve:** Could look for grant options/sponsorships.
 - **Eleanor T:** Maybe even hold it at a park (e.g., Ben Brenman Park)
- **Advocacy/Sustainability Subcommittee (Eleanor Q):** Monica will continue to be our point person on our #1 priority, the gateways to the city of Alexandria. Plans are on schedule and installation of the new gateway signs will begin in March.
 - The Subcommittee plans to meet with each City Council member at least once this year.
 - Perhaps ABC could pursue with City Council to **plant 275 native trees** in honor of Alexandria's 275th birthday. Consider planting at Ben Brenman Park (because West Alexandria is the most tree-deprived) – e.g., planting trees around the basin.
 - **Eleanor Q** drafted an article for *Zebra* with all the members of the Sustainability Subcommittee about the native trees residents could choose to plant this spring as alternatives to invasives—and outline the negatives of Bradford pears.
- **Education Subcommittee (Sara):** We created a [social media and Zebra calendar](#). The document is saved in our Google Drive, **with a tab for suggestions from committee members.**
 - Education Subcommittee will have a mini-strategy session to build off retreat conversations to review/update Subcommittee goals.
 - **Zebra** articles – we are submitting 4-5 articles monthly; our submissions have been featured every month since April 2023. See in *Zebra* p. 37.
 - This is a lot of work for a subcommittee of 4. **Sara** recognized **Eleanor Q** for the Sustainability Commission's contribution this month. **We would like each Subcommittee to provide us with 1 article every month** = treat it as a homework assignment after each ABC meeting.
 - Sara distributed a template for Zebra submissions and Eleanor Q's article as an example:

- Need 4-5 articles per month
- **Article submission components:** Title, by-line (if you wish), and body of 150-300 words, + picture (include photo credit and a caption)
- **Subcommittees should submit their article by each Commission meeting**, so we have leeway before *Zebra* deadline.
- **ABC social media:** We are posting Wednesday, Thursday, Friday – follow us and share our posts (facebook.com/AlexandriaBeautification & instagram.com/beautifulalx). If you have ideas for posts, please let us know or add them to the [social media/Zebra tab for suggestions](#).
- The Subcommittee will review the ABC website and discuss some improvements in March. **Eleanor T:** Note that the website traffic has gone up since our social media became more active.

6. Public comment/discussion

Instead of a regular February meeting, we will have our strategic planning retreat on February 3.

ABC Goals

- 1) Inspire beautification through the awards program.
- 2) Promote environmental sustainability through collaboration and engagement with City Council, City staff, and private organizations.
- 3) Educate local community on beautification and sustainability best practices.