

ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025

7:00 P.M., City Hall  
301 King Street, Room 1900

**Members Present**

Kristen Creighton  
Caitlin Fitzsimmons participated by phone  
Rachel Dixon  
Jacob Griffin  
Lawrence Lewis  
Shannon Loelius  
Megan Prince, Chair  
Deanne McNulty  
Alex Radt  
Alex Sprague, Vice Chair  
Howard Weiss  
Tom Valluzzi participated by phone

**City Staff Present**

Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

**Members Excused**

Robert Ludke  
Robbi Woodson  
Huayra Forster

**Members Unexcused**

**1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Prince**

Chair Prince called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m., and Introductions were made. New Commissioner Shannon Loelius introduced herself and said that she had recently joined the Commission.

**2. Approval of Agenda**

Upon the motion by Commissioner Griffin, seconded by Vice Chair Sprague, the agenda was approved. All Commissioners present voted aye.

**3. Approval of Minutes of the April Meeting**

Upon a motion by Vice Chair Sprague, seconded by Commissioner Loelius, the April minutes were approved as amended. All Commissioners present voted aye.

**4. Public Comment**

Sarah Radt- stated that she is legally blind and, about six months ago, became one of the representatives on the WMATA (Metro) Accessibility Advisory Committee. She noted that about twenty of them from around the region are trying to represent D.C., Maryland, and Virginia for people with disabilities. She said that their job is to give feedback to WMATA on how to serve people with disabilities on buses, metro rails, and metro access. She said she is here to represent the Commission if they have questions or problems when riding the metro rail, metro bus, or metro access. She also announced that as of June 29, Metro is instituting a better bus network, and there has been some advertising about it. All local jurisdictions are reworking their metro bus routes; every bus route will change. There is a new application on WMATA's website that will help people figure out what has changed. This is the most significant change they have made to the bus system since 1979. The new names for the Metro buses are the following: All of the ones that start with A-Alexandria or Arlington; F-

Fairfax, Falls Church, Fairfax City; D-heading downtown; C-Crossing; M- M-Montgomery County, and P-Prince George's County.

**5. Chair's Report**

No Report

**6. Guest speakers Marc Barbieri, City Emergency Management Coordinator, Office of Emergency Management (OEM).**

Mr. Barbieri stated that he oversees the City's emergency preparedness activities, ensuring they are ready for disasters and other emergencies. He added that he spends much time talking to folks about preparedness in the community. He gave an overview of what the office does and said that he reports to Fire Chief Hernandez, who reports to the City Manager.

Mr. Barbieri said that he works closely with the City Manager, advises him on emergency preparedness activities, and helps them make policy decisions. He added that they have a volunteer program, the community emergency response team, and they also work closely with volunteer Alexandria. They help recruit volunteers during major emergencies. They also coordinate resource support and collaborate with internal and external partners.

Mr. Barbieri stated that they do a lot of planning, training, and exercises to prepare for all sorts of threats. In two weeks, they will be doing a series of exercises about hurricanes to prepare for hurricane season, which starts on June 1. They run the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, where they train volunteers to serve the community. Fifty-two volunteers recently graduated from the program. They participate in the Citizen Corps Council and Local Emergency Planning Committee. These groups advise the City on disaster and emergency activities and maintain and share situational awareness with the community. During emergencies, they communicate and send out emergency notifications (internal staff and the public) and activate the Emergency Operations Center.

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) aims to coordinate, provide strategic guidance, and support incident response. He also gave emergency kit tips and suggested having them in several places, such as home, car, and work. He also suggested replenishing the kits twice a year. He talked about the five "Easy" Steps to being prepared: Know Your Risks, Have A Plan, Build A Kit, and Stay Informed and Involved. Questions from the Commission followed the presentation. Chair Prince thanked Mr. Barbieri for his presentation.

**Leslie Palucho is a firefighter, paramedic, and outreach coordinator with the Alexandria Fire Department (AFD).**

Firefighter Palucho stated that she goes around conducting fire safety presentations and arranging tours of the Fire station. She said the Volunteer Fire Department was established in 1774 and became a paid department in 1866. She reported that right now, the department is composed of 300 employees, and they have three shifts, A, B, and C, so they provide 24/7 services. They do EMS and operations and have 10 stations throughout Alexandria. There is an engine or engine and a truck in the stations.

Firefighter Palucho talked about smoke alarms and reported that 200,00 people have died in the US from home fires and not having a smoke alarm. She said the Red Cross recommends having a fire alarm on every property level if they live in multiple-level houses. She stated that special smoke alarms exist for hearing and vision-impaired people. She suggested testing smoke alarms once a month and placing them 10 feet away from the kitchen. She talked about electrical safety and said not to overload electrical outlets, because they can cause fires. She spoke of knowing two ways out of the home when escaping from a fire and letting the family know where they are meeting in case of a fire. She talked about what to do in a fire: stop, drop, and roll. Chair Prince thanked Firefighter Palucho for her presentation.

### **Olavinka “Yinka” Olarinde, DCHS – Police/CIT**

Mr. Olarinde stated he is with the Alexandria City Crisis Intervention Team, part of the Department of Community and Human Services. He worked as the coordinator for about a year; before that, he did mental health, substance abuse, and ID outreach for 23 years. In 1988, a young man was killed during a mental health crisis emergency, which led the Police in Memphis to partner with NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) to create a curriculum for addressing the issue; it is where we can have people talk with one another, have police use de-escalation techniques to address people in mental health crisis.

CIT is a community partnership between law enforcement, mental health professionals, and individuals with mental illnesses (as well as family and other advocates). Crisis Intervention was created in Memphis, Tennessee, and has spread internationally. Alexandria City adopted the CIT program in 2010; the first graduating class had 18 students. Graduates represent Police, Code Administration, Fire, Sheriff, Mental Health, EMS, Emergency Dispatch, Juvenile Detention, and Probation. The CIT training involves a 40-hour training course for responders to become certified. The training course teaches them how to de-escalate and talk to people. There are three training courses annually, and they usually have between 18 and 22 students. Chair Prince thanked Mr. Olarinde for his presentation.

### **Owen Albrecht, T&ES**

Owen started the presentation by saying that he is the Paratransit program manager. He gave an overview of the program and talked about the newest changes since last year. The City started the paratransit program in 1984, and it was modified when the ADA came out in 1993 to meet ADA requirements and expand the service to Washington, D.C., in 2022. He said that the City directly operates it, so he is a City employee.

The paratransit program complements DASH or fixed route services, so the DASH's service area designates their service area, and their fare-free area is mandatory. They offer curb-to-curb services with door-to-door services upon request; all trips must be scheduled at least the day in advance. They serve all the city residents and visitors and anyone within the eligibility zone whose disabilities prevent them from riding a fixed-route public transit system. The service area includes Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, Falls Church, Arlington County, and the District of Columbia. The fare structure: they have a fare-free zone, a federally designated mandatory zone; outside Alexandria, they have 5-mile ratios by driving, which is their \$5 zone, and any outside that and the District of Columbia is their \$6 zone.

Owen reported that they have two main contractors supporting their operation: Alexandria – Call Center and Reservation Support and WeDriveU/Diamond transportation services. They brought UZURV as a transportation subcontractor, similar to Uber or Lyft. Still, the staff meets the full-time requirements for public transit, including drug testing, and they have additional training for serving people with disabilities. The service hours are 5:00 am-1:00 am Monday – Saturday and 7 am-1:00 am on Sunday, and the call Center is open 7 days a week.

Owen talked about the recent program improvements, which are the following: shifted application processing to the contractor, hired a Paratransit Program Manager, updated the application process, created a recertification process, updated policies and procedures, created feedback management process through 311, expanded fare-free zone and implemented new app., and a web-based interface to improve one of the biggest complaints of fare data and the requested fare was not getting to the user and sub-contractor. Owen said that they brought a new vendor, that data flows seamlessly back and forth, and that the riders can now track all their trips; it doesn't matter which vendor they are being served by.

The following are things that they are working on coordination with City Departments on Human Services Transportation, DCHS, Park and Recreation, and RPCA to see what vehicles they have in their fleet and where they are taking customers. They are implementing a computerized telephone system to serve customers better, conducting outreach to boards and commissions, and developing community engagement strategies. Owen reported that they implanted two postcards with the switchover to the new; they sent out over 1,200 postcards to their previous riders and active and current users to inform them of the changeover and how to upload the new app.

Owen said that the City Manager's Office has tasked them to find deficiencies and reduce costs. Owen explained that they would like to apply for a grant from the Metropolitan Area Council Governments. They are asking for a total investment of up to 1 million dollars to procure paratransit vehicles. They expect to purchase between six and seven cars with those funds; it will be 80% of the grant, and the City would have to match 20%. Four vehicles will stay in the town, with two or three going to the paratransit vendor; the four cars in the City will go to Parks and Recreation and DCHS. Parks and Recreation needs wheelchair-accessible vehicles for their Therapeutic Recreation programs. Owen asked the Commission to support the City's application for the Federal Transit Administration's Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities discretionary grant program. Chair Prince thanked Owen Albrecht for his presentation.

**Iram Sikander, Vice President, Financial Inclusion Leader II with TRUIST BANK**

Ms. Sikander started by saying that she had been banking for 20 years and had been a manager for 8 years with Truist. Then, she transitioned to financial inclusion so that she could help educate communities on the importance of understanding banking, budgeting, and avoiding predatory practices. She reported that they customized their presentations to educate people with disabilities and have partners who will offer free consultations. Chair Prince thanked Iram Sikander for her presentation.

- **Committee Reports**

**Executive Committee:** Chair Prince reported that they had their first Executive Committee meeting today and that they will have the Executive Committee Meetings 30 minutes before their regular meeting.

Chair Prince reported that they prepared to develop a strategic plan during the Executive Committee Meeting. The strategic plan has two sections: the previous section, which includes things that they are already working on, and the future section, which includes things that they are starting to work on now or could work on in the future. They have a list of exciting initiatives, including accessibility-friendly businesses, architectural review, disability pride month, ACPD awards, legislative Committee, and Housing Affordability Committee.

Chair Prince reported that what they discussed during the executive meeting was what the Commission wants to do moving forward. First, City Council engagement; they will start writing a memo to the City Council summarizing any information that the Commission learns from guests. Second, having a commission member partner up with a member of the City Council every couple of months, a member can meet to have coffee with the council member to build a relationship with the city council. The Commission must develop at least three initiatives and a strategic plan.

Initiative #1- Accessibility Walkway; Initiative #2- Accessible Transit; Initiative #3- Community Engagement, community events, creating more relationships through events; creating literature to bring to the events.

Commissioner McNulty followed up on what has happened with budgeting through the State, what is being cut, and how that affects people with disabilities. She mentioned that Fairfax County put out a big thing in it, and Arlington County will do more work on it. What she saw was that it seemed like a much bigger deal because they made a public statement, trying to track what the City Council is going to be cutting for budgetary reasons.

Commissioner Creighton thanked the Executive Committee for putting the strategic plan together and suggested how to improve the initiatives. Chair Prince will re-tool the strategic plan and represent it in July or send an email, and they have a tentative strategic plan for the following year.

Chair Prince reminded the Commission that they have two meetings in June. Technically, they have a meeting to vote virtually through Zoom to conduct elections and meetings during the ACPD dinner. She encouraged all commissioners to attend the ACPD awards event.

- **Legislative Committee:** None
- **Housing Committee:** None
- **Housing Affordability Committee:** None
- **Accessibility-Friendly Businesses Committee:** None
- **Board of Architectural Review-** Commissioner Griffin stated that they have not responded, and he sent David a note to send them a message stating that if they do not answer, Commissioner Griffin will send a message to City Council members.
- **Disability Pride Month** – Commissioner Radt sent the proclamation to the mayor’s assistant, and they said that it would be presented at the June 24 meeting. Commissioner Radt encouraged commissioners to attend the City Council meeting to receive the proclamation. Commissioner Radt also talked about flying disability pride month flags at City Hall and said that they found some paperwork to be completed for general services, and when they reached out last year, they were asked if they had acquired the flags. Commissioner Griffin requested the link to the flag and said he has a donor who can procure that and plans to have them flown by the manager's office.
- **ACPD Awards Committee** – update will be done when doing elections.

## 7. **Liaison Reports**

- **Human Rights Commission:** Chair Prince reported that the Human Rights Commission had a conversation with the Mayor about Human Rights-related stuff.
- **HAAC:** No Report

## 8. **Action Items: Election Committee**

Commissioner Creighton presented the following slate: Chair Prince for Chair and Vice Chair Sprague for Vice Chair. Commissioner Creighton asked if there were any nominations from the floor; Chair Prince nominated Commissioner Radt for Vice Chair. Upon a motion by Commissioner Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Weiss, the slate was accepted as presented. All Commissioners present voted aye.

- **ACPD Awards Committee.**

Commissioner Radt shared that the Commission received two nominations for the John Duty Collins Award and two nominations for the Gerry Bertier Scholarship. Commissioner Radt read out their accomplishments and credentials. With five votes in favor, three against, and two abstentions, the winner was **Diane Monnig** from the Arc of Northern Virginia. Commissioner Radt reported they received two applications for the Gerry Bertier Award, and with eight votes in favor, the winner was **Evan Ameer Khanna**.

## 9. **Member Report**

- Commissioner Forester – None.
- Commissioner Prince – None
- Vice Chair Sprague – Thanked everyone who joined them at the morning coffee with the Sheriff’s Office on April 23 at the Dunkin Potomac Yard to highlight autism acceptance month.

- Commissioner Radt –None
- Commissioner Dixon - None
- Commissioner Fitzsimmons – None
- Commissioner Ludke - None
- Commissioner Lewis- None
- Commissioner Creighton—The Alexandria Chamber of Commerce recognized Commissioner Dixon – Shared that she was named one of the 40 over 40.
- Commissioner Weiss – None

**10. Adjournment**

Upon a motion by Commissioner Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Sprague. All Commissioners present voted aye. The meeting adjourned at 9:26 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for June 11, 2025, and it will be held at 7:00 p.m., virtually.