

***Position Paper from the Alexandria Commission for the Arts to City Council
Re: Strategic Planning --- November 23, 2009***

The Alexandria Commission for the Arts is empowered to:

- Support the development and expansion of the arts and the expansion of public access to and participation in the arts in Alexandria;
- Serve as an advisory body for the arts in Alexandria;
- Advise City Council concerning appropriate policies to strengthen the arts and further public access to the arts in Alexandria;
- Serve as the single funding source for all activities concerning the arts that are not conducted as part of regularly scheduled City programs;
- Seek national, state, and private support on behalf of the arts in Alexandria, and
- Prepare and submit to City Council a cultural plan for the City of Alexandria and revisions thereto.

Given the role that Council has established for the Arts Commission, we welcome this opportunity to participate in the City's strategic planning process. The Commission is celebrating its 25th anniversary, and, over that period, the arts in Alexandria have increased in scope and recognition - making our City a unique and vibrant arts destination of national note. This, in turn, has enhanced the quality of life for Alexandria residents, visitors, and workers and added to the City's economic vitality.

The challenge in this current strategic planning process is to ensure that the arts are not segmented into just one area of city planning, but instead are seen as contributing across the range of all proposed City strategic goals. Because the arts are infused into the everyday life of our community, they therefore intersect with all of the City's seven goals.

Initiatives for the Arts in Alexandria

The Arts Commission seeks to achieve the following initiatives within the next five years:

- Integrate the arts into public and private development and redevelopment projects throughout the City by implementation of a funding policy by City Council. [Goals 1, 5]
- Ensure appropriate placement of public art and related programming at key gateways, vistas, and gathering spaces throughout the City, to be identified in the Public Art Master Plan. [Goals 1, 2, 7]
- Complete a City-owned performing and visual arts center. [Goals 1, 3, 5, 7]
- Foster regular participation in the arts by Alexandria youth through programs at schools, recreation centers, and community arts venues. [Goals 4, 7]
- Promote thriving local arts organizations with increased attendance and private-sector support to match governmental funding. [Goals 1, 4, 7]
- Ensure equitable access for all citizens to arts, history, and cultural programs, products, and services. [Goals 4, 6, 7]
- Create a task force to recommend to Council possible mechanisms for an arts and cultural district in Alexandria. [Goal 1]
- Offer vacant spaces rent-free to artists and arts organizations. [Goals 1, 5, 7]
- Establish interactive programs using public art to showcase and teach Alexandria's history. [Goals 4, 7]
- Make the arts a cornerstone of the City's identity and one of the main engines of Alexandria's economic revitalization. [Goal 1]
- Launch a collaborative marketing campaign with arts organizations, schools, museums, libraries, and recreation centers that promotes arts programs and scholarship opportunities for youth. [Goals 4, 7]

The Strategic Planning Process Can Contribute to the Implementation of these Initiatives

The Arts Commission believes that the following must be reflected in the City's Strategic Plan if we are to achieve the vision and specific initiatives that will enhance Alexandria as a community over the next five years. We urge that the actions described below be undertaken by Council in implementing the Strategic Plan.

Public Art Funding Policy

Implementing the Public Art Funding Policy is the first phase in establishing a Public Art Master Plan for the City of Alexandria. With funds from public and private development and redevelopment, as well as private contributions, Alexandria will enjoy a strong public art presence similar to that now enjoyed by our neighboring jurisdictions. The Policy and related guidelines will define a consistent, simplified procedure for the inclusion of public artworks in eligible Capital Improvement Program projects and private development projects; provide guidance regarding proposed plans for artworks or cultural space; provide a means to maintain and conserve the City's art collection; and define an optimal process for selecting artists and/or artwork for public and private development.

Public Art Master Plan

Establishing a Public Art Master Plan will be a comprehensive, community-based effort to outline the goals and objectives for public art in Alexandria. The Plan will set priorities for the location and funding of projects; provide a framework for the shared financial and professional resources needed; and define the procedures for the oversight needed for public art projects to be successful. A Public Art Master Plan will reflect Alexandria's unique history, people, cultural identity, and the future aspirations of the entire community through the appropriate placement of relevant and meaningful public artworks.

Grants Program

Great cities have thriving grants programs that provide a strong infrastructure for their arts organizations, while also encouraging crucial matching support from the private sector. A thriving grants program would enable Alexandria arts organizations to increase their current offerings of free and affordable programs to schools, recreation centers, senior centers, and social service agencies and to increase participation in their fee-based programs through scholarship opportunities. By fostering a strong arts community, we continue to serve the needs of our residents and contribute to Alexandria's identity as an important arts destination for visitors. Those visitors help generate much-needed revenues for our local economy.

Marketing and Outreach

A collaborative marketing campaign can do much to build a strong image of the arts in Alexandria and to use marketing resources wisely and effectively. In partnership with other community organizations and agencies, such as the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, the Alexandria Arts Forum, the Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, and local arts organizations, the Arts Commission can develop a cohesive marketing campaign to increase cultural tourism, generate revenue, promote the diverse geographic areas of our City, and inform City residents, workers and visitors of Alexandria's many opportunities for experiencing and engaging in the creative arts.

In addition to this collaborative marketing campaign, the Arts Commission will expand its current outreach efforts to arts organizations, public and private organizations in the City (or with interests in the City), schools, the business community, city neighborhoods, and other local

constituencies. For example, the Commission has linked ACPS with several of the City's music organizations to the mutual benefit of Alexandria students, teachers, and local artists. Similarly, we have joined forces with the Alexandria Rotary Club by presenting the Commission's annual Alex Arts Awards at Rotary's annual "Taste for Giving" fund-raiser. We are exploring future outreach activities such as the Art Walk, an arts ambassador program, interactive temporary art installations, youth art exhibits, an Arts Bus, mentor programs and master classes.

Performing and Visual Arts Center

A permanent performing and visual arts center that is attractive, functional, affordable, and accessible will help generate new businesses, new jobs, and ancillary spending. Besides contributing to the cultural enrichment of our community, an arts center will provide a multifunctional space for the creative industry and other businesses.

These initiatives are achievable in accordance with the timeline for the strategic plan, and their results can be measured. These initiatives will enhance the quality of life for our fellow residents, provide greater opportunity for our youth, contribute to our local economy, and meet the needs of visitors to our great city. We look forward to participating in implementing them. We thank Council for its consideration and look forward to seeing these initiatives included in the final version of Alexandria's new Strategic Plan.

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