The Alexandria Archeological Commission

T he Alexandria City Council approved the creation of the Alexandria Archeological Commission (AAC) in 1975. It was the first group of its kind in the United States. The AAC is a volunteer citizen advisory board to Alexandria’s Mayor and City Council on matters dealing with archaeological and historical resources located in the City of Alexandria. It is charged with advising on, and setting policy and direction for, archaeology and historical resources. As a result of the AAC’s involvement, artifacts have been preserved, prehistoric and historical sites recovered, and parks and public memorials created.

Commission Accomplishments

T he Alexandria Archeological Commission serves as a conceptualizer, catalyst, advocate, partner, and leader when working with the City, private interests, and citizens concerning Alexandria’s archeological resources. As a result of the AAC’s involvement, artifacts have been preserved, prehistoric and historical sites recovered, and parks and public memorials created.

Some of the AAC’s accomplishments, made working in collaboration with many others, include:

- **The Alexandria Canal Tide Lock Park**
  - (1985)
  - The creation of this Potomac waterfront park not only preserves the original tide lock but serves as reminder of the City’s long waterfront history through interpretive signs and a replica of the tide lock. It was built above the original lock, which is protected below ground. The project was a catalyst in the redevelopment of the city’s waterfront, with public access to the riverfront open space and trail.

- **Alexandria’s Archeological Resource Protection Code**
  - (1989)
  - This Code was the first of its kind enacted in Virginia and one of the few in the United States. It serves as a model for other cities in the country.

- **The African-American Heritage Park**
  - (1995)
  - This memorial park lies on the location of the oldest known independent African-American burial ground in the City and contains the graves of at least 21 persons and commemorates the contributions of black Alexandrians.

- **The Alexandria Heritage Trail**
  - (1990s and on-going)
  - The AAC developed the idea of a recreational trail which would highlight the archaeological and historical heritage of the City. Today, the Heritage Trail is a 23-mile hiking and biking trail with more than 56 archaeological and historic stops and 100 sites. The Heritage Trail connects to the Mount Vernon Trail and has been designated a part of the Potomac River Heritage National Scenic Trail. The AAC and the City are working with private interests to erect interpretive signs along the Trail.

- **Alexandria Freedmen’s Cemetery Memorial Park**
  - (planned 2008)
  - The Freedmen’s Cemetery (1863-1869) contains the remains of about 1,200-1,800 African-American men, women, and children who were interred during and after the Civil War. The site will be preserved as a memorial park to commemorate refugees from slavery buried here.

Archaeological Resource Protection Code

T he City Council enacted Alexandria’s Archaeological Resource Protection Code in November 1989. The Code establishes Archaeology Resource Areas for the City, overlay zones similar to historic districts, and requires assessment of any development projects in protected zones for which site plans must be filed. Alexandria Archeology reviews proposed development projects to determine possible impact on archaeological resources and whether preservation actions are needed prior to site construction. Site developers can be required under the Code to undertake research, and, in some cases, archaeological excavation, which must be conducted by a qualified archaeological consultant with oversight by City archaeologists. When excavations are performed, the developer must also provide a site report and a public, non-technical document, and donate the collections to a repository for preservation. Property owners may be asked to allow City archaeologists and volunteers to excavate prior to construction or to monitor the site during construction for those projects which do not require a site plan. The goal of the Code is to share responsibility between the City and developers to preserve archaeological heritage and enhance public appreciation of the City’s past.

Since the adoption of the Archaeological Resource Protection Code, archaeological investigations have been undertaken at many sites within the City, about 40 of which are significant. Summaries of some of these sites can be found at http://oha.ci.alexandria.va.us/archaeology. The code has saved sites and thousands of artifacts representing more than 8,000 years of human presence in Alexandria, such as:

- Four approximately 5,000-year-old Archaic period tool-making campsites
- Cameron Mill and mill race, and the Roberts family homesteaded
- West family burial vault (one of the founding families of Alexandria)
- Ford’s Landing project which contained 18th and 19th century wharves and nine vessel hulls as well as a 19th century railway
- Quaker Burying Ground (late 18th and early 19th centuries)
- The Alfred Street Baptist Church (founded 1816)
- Civil War encampments, hospitals, and privies
- 19th-century Bush Hill estate/plantation houses, a tenant farmer’s house, businesses, and cemeteries
- Oldest lager brewery and brewery vault in Virginia
- 19th-century African-American burial grounds

Commission Membership

The AAC consists of 14 public-spirited citizen volunteers from throughout the City who are appointed by the City Council to a four-year term. In addition to one resident from each of the City’s three Planning Districts and five At-Large resident seats, the AAC’s representatives include one member from:

- Alexandria Association
- Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
- Alexandria Historical Society
- Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage
- Friends of Alexandria Archaeology
- Historic Alexandria Foundation

Together with Alexandria Archaeology and the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology (FOAA), the AAC practices “Community Archaeology,” a concept pioneered in Alexandria which is now recognized world-wide as a model approach. Community archaeology is a cooperative effort involving local citizens as well as City offices, private organizations, and public groups and individuals.
All are welcome to attend the AAC’s regular public meetings, held the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, Studio 327 in the Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union Street, or in other locations throughout the City. City of Alexandria residents interested in serving on the AAC can learn more about possible vacancies by contacting the City of Alexandria Office of Citizen’s Assistance, phone 703-838-4691, website http://alexandriava.gov.

For more information on the Alexandria Archaeological Commission, contact Alexandria Archaeology.

Alexandria Archaeology

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www.AlexandriaArchaeology.org

Alexandria Archaeology is a division of the City’s Office of Historic Archaeology.

Support Alexandria Archaeology!