

Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC)
Annual Report
September 2015 to June 2016

Introduction

HARC advises the City about the preservation of historic sites and buildings, artifacts, and records from loss or deterioration and promotes citizen and tourist use of historic sites and the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

Officers

During this fiscal year, Bill Hendrickson served as chair, Elliot Bell-Krasner as vice chair, and Linda Lovell as secretary.

HARC vacancies

HARC has a number of vacancies that were not filled this year: Christ Church, Alexandria Public Records Advisory Commission, Alexandria Convention & Visitors Association Board of Governors, and George Washington Masonic Memorial.

Ramsey Homes

HARC focused a great deal of its attention during this fiscal year on a proposal by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) to demolish the Ramsey Homes public housing development and replace the development's four buildings and 15 units of public housing with 52 affordable housing units. HARC representatives attended meetings on this proposal held by ARHA and testified at Planning Commission and City Council public hearings. Citing the substantial evidence about the historical and architectural significance of these buildings, HARC argued that at least one of the four buildings needed to be preserved, restored, and reused. HARC believes that the City Council decision to demolish all four buildings was unfortunate. However, HARC intends to take a constructive role in proposing measures to mitigate the loss of the historic and cultural resources.

Alexandria Waterfront Plan

HARC continues to closely follow the implementation of the waterfront plan. In October 2015, Katherine Milliaris of the city staff

gave a presentation on historic interpretation measures planned for several of the development sites. In January 2016, local historian Ted Pulliam provided an overview of the history section of the waterfront plan.

HARC remains concerned that there is no dedicated funding for implementation of the history plan for the waterfront. However, HARC was encouraged that the city provided funding for first-stage preservation of the remains of an 18th-century ship found at the site of the planned Hotel Indigo. HARC approved a motion to ask the City Council to support appropriate funding for further research and interpretation.

Possible acquisition of 517 Prince Street

HARC discussed a proposal by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority to purchase this historic 18th-century property. Several HARC members questioned whether the park authority could adequately care for the property, given concerns about deferred maintenance at its two other historic properties in Alexandria. Although HARC did not take a public position on the issue, the general consensus among HARC members was that the park authority's proposal to tie the acquisition of 517 Prince St. to an agreement by the city to extend the lease for the water park that the authority runs in the west end of Alexandria was not appropriate.

Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names

HARC voted to ask the City for representation on this committee, and the request was granted. HARC voted for Elizabeth McCall as its representative. HARC did not take a position on the issues considered in this controversial area.

Condition of City-owned historic structures

HARC invited Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager, and Al Coleman, Department of General Services, to speak on a study of the physical integrity of 36 city-owned buildings, 12 of which are historic sites. The study assigned a grade of A to F for the buildings, using an industry standard called the Facility Condition Index. Gadsby's Tavern and City Hall were assigned an F grade, which means that the infrastructure of the building is past its useful life. The grade is not an

indication of safety issues. Baker said the study was done to determine priorities for repair and restoration. HARC members raised various concerns about the study and the state of the historic structures. Baker said a plan would be presented to the City Council for the funding needed to repair and upgrade the buildings over a 10-year period.

Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) Budget

HARC has generally been pleased with the modest increases in this budget in the past few years. HARC was especially pleased that the City Council approved its longstanding request to make the half-time research historian full time.

HARC notes the continuing progress made by OHA in offsetting city funding with increases in volunteer hours, grants, and donations. About 35 percent of OHA's funding came from these sources in fiscal year 2015. This percentage could potentially be increased much more if the City agreed to OHA's request to provide funding for a development consultant for fundraising.

Subcommittee on Historic Preservation Strategies

HARC formed this committee to explore additional tools for preserving historic and/or architecturally significant buildings, as well as historic and cultural resources, that do not currently have legal protection. The committee's work is ongoing.

Ad Hoc Fort Ward Management Plan Implementation Monitoring Group.

HARC continues to follow the work of this group, receiving updates from its representative on the group, McArthur Myers.