

HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA RESOURCES COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

for

FISCAL YEAR 2018: JULY 2017 – JUNE 2018

I. SUMMARY

In FY 2017-18, the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission made several changes in operating processes and in the focus of its activities. Because of the plethora of issues that should be addressed by the Commission, the membership elected to hold monthly meetings throughout the year as do other commissions, rather than suspend meetings during the summer. Also, to accommodate better the commissioners' schedules and other obligations, meetings are now convened earlier in the evening and aggressive efforts are made to conclude business within two hours. To aid in efficient and effective attention to the issues addressed by the Commission, several new committees were established.

Changes have also been made to the content and focus of the meetings. More time is devoted to discussion of issues relevant to HARC goals rather than to courtesy briefings and information presentations. Also, deliberations now consistently address whether HARC positions should be communicated to other organizations relevant to historic preservation and other areas of concern or other actions should be taken.

II. OPERATING PROCESSES

Meetings now convene at 7:00 pm on the third Tuesday of every month. Election of officers for FY 2018 resulted in a modification of usual prior practices. The two candidates nominated to chair HARC proposed that they jointly lead the Commission. The membership voted to accept that approach, and the two nominees were elected as co-chairs and shared leadership of HARC. The Co-Chairs alternated presiding at the meetings and conducted the business of HARC in full, continual and open consultation. Martha Harris was elected to the position of Vice Chair. The meeting agendas prepared by the Co-Chairs were designed to promote efficient and effective deliberation, and meetings are managed to conclude deliberations, if possible, by 9:00 pm.

III. COMMITTEES

During FY 2017, two committees were established by HARC – the Finance Committee and the Nominating Committee. Those committees were continued in FY 2018. The Nominating Committee, Chaired by Commissioner Linda Lovell, prepared the slate of nominees presented to HARC for the election. The Committee obtained general information on the qualifications of the

candidates and requested that candidates provide responses to a standard questionnaire. That information was provided to the Commissioners to provide a sound basis for the election of officers.

The focus of the Finance Committee, Chaired by Danny Smith, was on gathering information on sources of funding that would be useful to those responsible for preservation of historic properties. It is not the goal of the Finance Committee to obtain the funding, but rather to provide information that responsible parties can use for important fund-raising campaigns.

In addition to the committees described above three other Committees were established during FY 2018: Office of Historic Alexandria and Planning Support Committee, Advocacy Committee, and the Educational Outreach Committee, The full suite of committees is as follows:

A. Office of Historic Alexandria and Planning Support Committee

Linda Lovell, Chair
Stephen Stuart
Laura Lieberman

B. Advocacy Committee

Martha Harris, Chair
McArthur Myers (term expired during FY 2018)
Tobin Tracy
Gail Rothrock
Bill Hendrickson

C. Educational Outreach Committee

John Dumsick, Chair
Jolande Goldberg
Keith Lawson Moore

D. Finance Committee

Danny Smith, Chair
Martha Harris
Keith Lawson Moore
Linda Lovell

E. Nominating Committee

Linda Lovell, Chair
Laura Lieberman

HARC members joined existing Waterfront History related committees established by the Alexandria Archaeological Commission, in particular the African-American Heritage Trail Committee which includes three current HARC commissioners and one former member. In

addition, HARC members have participated in the AAC's Waterfront History Plan Implementation Committee, weighing in on history content for King Street Interim Park.

IV. HARC ACTIVITIES

In the past year, HARC reduced the number and duration of briefings and presentations, which in the past consumed valuable meeting time and reduced the time available for commission business. This refocusing allowed more time for identifying current and anticipated issues relevant to historic preservation and other HARC priorities, discussing those issues as needed, and developing any appropriate actions. Following are descriptions of the more significant issues addressed by HARC during FY 2018.

- A. **Painting of Masonry Surfaces** – An issue that came before the Old and Historic Alexandria District Board of Architectural Review (OHAD BAR) involved the painting of the historically significant masonry façade of a residence at 402 South Pitt Street. Although the owners initiated the painting without the necessary approvals and were told to stop the project when city staff became aware of it, the painting was completed. The BAR reviewed the situation and ordered that the paint be removed. The BAR decision was appealed to the City Council and HARC adopted a motion authorizing the Co-Chairs to provide a statement to the City Council supporting the BAR decision. The BAR decision was unanimously upheld by the City Council.
- B. **Violation of Historic Preservation Requirements** – The BAR determined that a resident at 420 South Lee Street had not complied with the provisions of a permit granted in 2012 to remove a portion of the brick foundation of an iron fence at the front of the house and adjacent to the public sidewalk. The applicant subsequently proposed a wicket style Victorian period fence but asked to eliminate the pedestrian gate on the north side of the property and to install an eight foot wide pair of gates on the south side of the property where it would be aligned with an existing driveway curb cut. The owner's auto had been seen on multiple occasions parked in the front yard in violation of city ordinance. The BAR ordered that the proposed "pedestrian" gate be no more than 6 feet wide. That decision was appealed by the applicant to the City Council. HARC adopted a motion authorizing the Co-Chairs to provide a statement to the BAR and subsequently to the City Council supporting the BAR decision. The BAR decision was unanimously upheld by the City Council.
- C. **Freedom House Museum** – During FY 2017, HARC was informed that operations of the Freedom House Museum located in the building on Duke Street housing the Northern Virginia Urban League might be in jeopardy. The Urban League was experiencing some financial challenges and was not able to keep the museum open, and there was some concern that the condition of the historic building was declining. Furthermore, there was some concern that the Urban League might decide to sell the building, which might affect or even close the museum. HARC discussed the issue and adopted a motion to

underscore to Council the importance of the museum and site for Alexandria and the nation, and to urge that the city provide assistance to the Urban League to provide for orderly resolution of maintenance and finance issues to preserve the museum. The concerns of HARC were immediately communicated informally to the Mayor, Council members, and city staff. While a draft letter from HARC to the City Manager was in preparation, further discussion with the City Manager revealed that the city had taken steps to assist the Urban League. The Office of Historic Alexandria now operates the museum and negotiations are underway for a permanent arrangement that will protect and preserve the museum. The Office of Historic Alexandria submitted a grant application to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and received a grant of \$50,000.

- D. Combined Sewer Outfalls – By action of the Virginia General Assembly, Alexandria has been ordered to correct the discharge of raw sewage into the Potomac River when the Combined Sewer System is overwhelmed by rain and the treatment facility cannot handle the flow. HARC has monitored the issue carefully because of the potential that this major construction activity in and near the Old and Historic Alexandria District could cause damage to historic structures. Alexandria RENEW is responsible for the project. A conceptual design has been selected and approved by the state, and more detailed design based on geologic investigations is underway. HARC has established contact points within RENEW to promote full awareness of ongoing and proposed activities and expedient communication regarding actual and potential historic preservation risks.
- E. Combined BARs – City Council has directed that staff explore combining the Boards of Architectural Review for the two historic districts in Alexandria – the OHAD and the Parker-Gray District. Many other cities with multiple historic districts have a single BAR that is charged with implementation of distinct architectural requirements that are tailored to each district. Staff of the Historic Preservation Division of Planning and Zoning are developing background on the proposal and public meetings are being held to obtain input from interested parties. HARC has been provided information from the Historic Preservation Division, has discussed the issue, and several commissioners are attending the public meetings. HARC has not yet established a position on the issue.
- F. Equal Justice/ Freedom Initiative – Alexandria has been identified by the Equal Justice Initiative as the site of two lynchings of African Americans. In conjunction with acknowledgement of that project, students from the District of Columbia Duke Ellington School traveled to Alabama to participate in the dedication of the memorial to African American victims of such lynchings to represent our area. HARC elected to communicate support for that effort to city staff.
- G. Ramsey Homes – The effort to preserve one of the buildings was unsuccessful, but the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority agreed to allocate \$50,000 of the remediation funding to interpretation of the architectural and historical significance of the buildings. Prior to initiation of demolition, John Dumsick from HARC and Al Cox,

Director of the city Historic Preservation Division, provided excellent tours of a unit where partial removal of superficial features allowed observation of structural features. As demolition began in earnest, key components of the novel prefabricated structures were salvaged and placed in protected storage with the expectation that they will ultimately be displayed to illustrate the groundbreaking prefabrication and construction techniques used in the Ramsey Homes.

- H. Waterfront History Plan Implementation and African-American Heritage Trail – Activity on the Waterfront is accelerating with completion of the Indigo Hotel, beginning of construction at the Robinson Terminal South and discovery of the remains of three ships, completion of the relocated Old Dominion Boat Club building, and construction of the interim park at the foot of King Street. The design of the interim park involves input from multiple organizations and HARC is monitoring activities by the Arts Commission, the Archaeological Commission, Visit Alexandria, the Office of Historic Alexandria, and Department of Project Implementation. HARC is urging some limited acknowledgement at the interim park of the maritime history of Alexandria, but recognizes that the interim nature of the park precludes implementation of the permanent elements of the Waterfront History Plan. Related to that plan, HARC is also participating in the design and implementation of the first history trails which form a key component of the Waterfront History Plan and are also anchored to the Interim Park area. These first trails will focus on African-American History, but the templates and technologies developed will be used for a wide range of similar trails with other themes.
- I. Alfred Street Baptist Church – The Alfred Street Baptist Church has proposed a major enlargement of their facility bounded by Alfred, Duke, Patrick, and Wolfe Streets. HARC received input from neighbors in the vicinity of the church and the church was scheduled to do so also. However, technical issues have delayed the church’s plans, so they have postponed providing input to the HARC.
- J. Vice Chair Martha Harris arranged a meeting with selected members of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that was held at Lloyd House. Key topics included sustainability of historic property museums and enforcement of historic easements. Gretchen Bulova serves as the point of contact with NTHP.
- K. To collect background and ideas for the revised Office of Historic Alexandria strategic plan, Gretchen Bulova sponsored a gathering at the Lyceum. Break-out groups were tasked with identifying and developing input for various critical issues facing HARC. A spokesperson for each group then presented consensus answers.

V. GOALS FOR FY2019

- A. HARC has been monitoring applications docketed for presentation to the BARs and providing input as appropriate. That activity will continue in FY 2019.
- B. HARC will also continue to monitor appeals of BAR decisions to the City Council and provide input to those deliberations as appropriate.
- C. HARC will continue to monitor proposed changes to the building code by the State of Virginia that could impact historic preservation efforts and provide relevant input to the process.
- D. With the unusually high turn-over in elected city officials that appears likely based on the results of the June primaries, HARC will undertake various outreach efforts to apprise newly elected officials of the HARC mission and established positions on current resource, education, and preservation issues as well as to offer assistance on new and emerging historic resource issues.
- E. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has announced that the Yellow and Blue Metro lines providing service to Alexandria will be closed for three months during the summer of 2019. HARC will continue to monitor this coming disruption and the potential impacts on historic tourism and explore actions to mitigate those impacts.
- F. Plans for expansion of the Alfred Street Baptist Church will be monitored as progress is made by the church. Input from the church will be encouraged as their plans are better defined.
- G. As the Combined Sewer Outfall Project evolves, HARC will monitor the plans and implementation to identify threats to preservation and will seek changes that eliminate the threats or mitigating actions to reduce the impacts.
- H. Enforcement of easements protection historic properties has recently precipitated some issues. HARC will continue to monitor developments and will seek to identify effective processes for enforcement of historic easements.
- I. The Torpedo Factory is one of the premier resident artist facilities in the nation. HARC will monitor developments at this historic facility related to the artists' association and city functions with the goal of enhancing its long term viability as a key historic attraction in Alexandria.
- J. Promoting appreciation of the historic heritage of Alexandria among the younger generation of Alexandria residents will be pursued through outreach to the Alexandria City Public Schools.

VI. COMMISSION OFFICERS, MEMBERS AND AFFILIATIONS

A. Officers

Co-Chairs: Elizabeth (Indy) McCall
 Danny Smith
Vice Chair: Martha Harris
Secretary: Stephen Stuart

B. Members and Affiliations

Melinda Barnes – Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission
Elliot Bell-Krasner – Member-at-Large
John Dumsick – Carlyle House
Shawn Eyer – George Washington Masonic Memorial
Jolande Goldberg – Torpedo Factory Artists Association
Martha Harris – Volunteer (Historic Alexandria Docents)
Bill Hendrickson – Planning District II
Laura Lieberman – Lee-Fendall House
Linda Lovell – Mortar and Pestle Society (Alexandria Historic Landmark Society)
Elizabeth McCall – Alexandria Archaeological Commission
Maddy McCoy – Planning District II
Krystyn Moon – Alexandria Historical Society
Keith Moore – Christ Church
Severiano Ortiz – Planning District I
Gail Rothrock – Historic Alexandria Foundation
Monica St. Dennis – Public Records Advisory Commission
Danny Smith – Business Representative
Kelly Spradley-Kurowski – Civic Association At-Large
Stephen Stuart – Planning District III
Nancy Tingen – Alexandria Association
Tobin Tracy – Old Presbyterian Meeting House

C. Vacancies:

Visit Alexandria (Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association Board of Governors)
Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage
Northern Virginia Fine Arts Association
Business Representative (Chamber of Commerce)
Planning District I (1 member)
Planning District III (1 member)