

PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Annual Report to the City Council July 2010 – June 2011

The Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC) provides advice and guidance to the City Records Administrator and Archivist on records management matters and implementation of the records program in the City. The PRAC is authorized to have seven citizen members appointed by the City Council for terms of two years. It is composed of professional archivists, records managers, historians, research specialists, and other citizens. The PRAC supports the mission of the Archives and Records Center, which was established by the City Council as follows:

“It is hereby declared to be the policy of the City of Alexandria to provide efficient, economical and effective control over the creation, distribution, organization, maintenance, use and disposition of all records through a comprehensive system of integrated procedures for the management of records from their creation to their ultimate disposition, to achieve complete, effective and economical documentation of the policies and transactions of city offices and departments, to identify and preserve archival records and, in conjunction with archival records, to provide reference services to the public.”

(Ord. No. 3189, 3/21/87, Sec.2; Ord. No. 3282, 4/16/88, Sec. 2)

Summary of Activities for the Past Year

During the period July 2010 – June 2011 the PRAC held nine meetings. Each meeting had an agenda and was open to the public. The Commission addressed these issues:

Davis and Ruffner Title Company Land Records

A significant portion of the PRAC's time was spent discussing the appropriate disposition of the private business records of the Davis and Ruffner Title Company, which were donated by the Bernard Corbett and Associates law firm in 2000. They consist of approximately 18,000 case files containing some valuable historical documents about the city of Alexandria, Del Ray, Ft. Ward, and other neighborhoods from the 1930s – 1960s. These private records supplement the city land records. In the fall of 2009 the City of Alexandria received full legal custody of the records.

These records, while having significant historical value, have presented the staff of the Archives and Records Center with a number of challenges. There is insufficient space in the Archives and Records Center to house the collection, and so they must be stored off site. This has cost the City more than \$30,000 to date. Due to their remote storage location, these records are not readily accessible to the public; retrieval is time-consuming and expensive. The Davis and Ruffner records are also those of a private entity, and thus fall outside the mandate of the

Archives and Records Center. Finally, no additional funds were appropriated for the storage and maintenance of these records; thus public funds are being expended to preserve private records, a situation to which the PRAC strongly objects.

The PRAC recognizes the historical value of this body of records, and as of the date of this report, studies are underway of the feasibility of scanning the records and, upon completion of the scanning process, destroying the original files. Resources to do so will be sought through grants, and the use of interns from colleges and universities. However, as these records fall outside of the mandate of the Archives and Records Center, and as no additional funds were appropriated for their maintenance, thus diverting funds authorized for the care of records of the City government, ***the PRAC urges that no further records outside of the mandate of the Archives and Records Center be accessioned by it.***

Archives and Records Center Facility

The PRAC notes that there is still a pressing need for further storage space and additional shelving in the Archives and Records Center, not only for City records but for items stored by the Alexandria Archaeology Museum. The PRAC recommends that additional appropriate shelving be obtained at the earliest possible time.

The PRAC notes with considerable dismay the fact that a new boiler was not installed in the Archives and Records Center until March 1 of this year, thus forcing staff to work in the many thus-unheated areas of the building throughout the winter.

The PRAC also notes that the presence of the Fire Department's Burn Training Facility directly adjacent the Archives and Records Center facility constitutes a hazard to the safety and preservation of the records stored therein, and is contrary to the best practices for records storage. We urge that serious consideration be given to moving the Archives and Records Center to a purpose-built facility within the next decade, and that planning for the facility, and budgeting for it, begin in the very near future.

Budgetary Issues

While mindful of the constrained resource environment in which the City of Alexandria currently must operate, the PRAC strongly urges that no further reductions be made in the budget of the Archives and Records Center. It is our belief that any further cuts would seriously impair the ability of the current small staff to discharge their responsibilities.

Other Issues

The PRAC noted the following key trends, challenges and issues facing the archives and records management program:

-Ensuring that professional standards for records collection storage, preservation, retrieval, and destruction are maintained. The Archives and Records Center now ensures that all records accessioned are given a records series name that corresponds with that of the Library of Virginia, and that permanent collections have been processed and preservation measures undertaken.

-Keeping costs within the approved budget.

-Tracking and fulfilling retrieval and research requests in a reasonable amount of time.

-Ensuring the accurate and efficient transfer of inactive records.

-Destruction of records eligible under approved records retention and disposition schedules in a timely manner.

-Staying informed of records management projects throughout the city.

The PRAC notes with approval the following highlights of the year's activities of the Archives and Records Center:

-The staff cataloged 1,535 individual Board of Architectural Review files by site and address in order to facilitate access to both the public and city staff.

-The Archives and Records Center staff implemented an electronic process to expedite the legal destruction of records, whereby lists of records to be destroyed are e-mailed to the appropriate officials and all proper signatures are obtained electronically. (Note that a paper copy will be printed out to back up these records.)

-The staff scanned and saved into AlexNet thousands of records transfer lists going back to 1982 (many of the records transferred are actually much older). These lists were saved under department files, allowing for more efficient access to records and the ability to fulfill records requests much faster.

-Two staff members played an integral role in hosting the spring conference of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (which took place in Alexandria), helping to make it the best attended conference in the organization's history. Among the activities were tours of Gadsby's Tavern Museum, the Apothecary Museum, The Lyceum, the Alexandria Black History Museum and the National Masonic Memorial.

The PRAC also notes for information the time percentages spent by Archives and Records Center staff on City records activities (accession, destruction, visits, records searches and pickups/deliveries (preliminary figures for FY11):

Code Enforcement 25%

Police Department 15%

Mental Health 15%

Finance 12%

Sheriff 10%

Planning & Zoning 5%

Public Defender 5%

Other* 13%

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Total 100%

*Animal Shelter, ASAP, members of the public, City Attorney, City Clerk, City Manager's Office, Commonwealth's Attorney, Court Services, DASH, Fire Department, General Services, Office of Historic Alexandria, Housing, Human Relations, Community and Human Services, Internal Audit, ITS, OMB, Office of Women, Human Resources, Real Estate, Recreation, Transportation and Environmental Services, Library, Health Department, Risk Management, Pension Administration

Goals for the Coming Year

The PRAC will continue to monitor, review, and make recommendations on the following matters:

-The new City-wide electronic communications records policy. The PRAC strongly recommends that the policy incorporates employee training, and ensures that the City's public electronic communications records—whether preserved or destroyed—are managed in accordance with applicable laws, as well as Library of Virginia standards and guidelines.

-The records digitization projects in the City government. The PRAC urges that elected officials and City staff take particular care that permanent, historic records of the Mayor's office, the City Council, boards and commissions, and City agencies are never destroyed. This is a particular temptation and danger following records digitization projects. However, the Library of Virginia requires that all records deemed permanent be retained in either paper or microfilm format in addition to any scanned copies. The PRAC will continue to provide advice concerning the formulation and implementation of records digitization projects in the City.

-Administrative Regulation for Archives and Records Management. The current regulation is in need of significant revision, to reflect the many changes in information and communications technology since their last formulation. The PRAC urges that the updating take place in a thorough and timely manner, and sees one of its goals the assisting in the completion of the draft of a new Administrative Regulation for archives and records management.

-Advocacy for Archives. The PRAC will continue to offer constructive advice to the City government concerning records management and archives matters, and to advocate for greater

resource allocations to records management and archives functions, noting that a soundly-conceived and executed records management and archives program is an essential component of open, transparent, and honest government.

-Archives and Records Center Work Program Formulation. The PRAC will assist, as requested by the City Archivist and Records Manager, in the formulation of work program of the Archives and Records Center.

-Davis and Ruffner Title Company Land Records. The PRAC intends to assist in finding an appropriate disposition for these records.

Recruitment and Leadership Plans:

Recruitment will take place through announcements on both records management and archives listservs as well as through the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Northern Virginia ARMA Chapter and other suitable venues.

Ensuring Turnover in Leadership:

The Commission will vote to select a chairman every two years following the completion of his or her term. No chairman may serve more than six years consecutively. Virginia Arnold succeeded Charles Ziegler as Chair of the Public Records Advisory Commission.

Commission Membership

The following citizens served on the PRAC during the period covered in this report:

Virginia Arnold
Ellen Briscoe
Ginger Burton-Chamberlain
Sammye Collins
J. Glenn Eugster
Jeannine Jeffrey
Anthony Jones
Nils Kandelin
Jean Lavery
Laura Vetter
Charles Ziegler

Respectfully submitted:

Virginia Arnold, Chairman
Nils Kandelin, Vice-Chairman

J. Glenn Eugster
Jeannine Jeffrey
Anthony Jones
Laura Vetter
Charles Ziegler