

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Alexandria Beautification Commission
P.O. Box 178
Alexandria, Va. 22313

MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, February 8, 2018
7:30 p.m.
DURANT ARTS CENTER
1605 Cameron Street

Attendees: Kathryn Chiasson, Joseph Crowell, Dana Holmstrand (Vice Chair), Carol Maxwell, Beth McElwain, Julie Moore, Mellenie Runion, Anna Smith Lacey, Denise Tennant (Chair), Erich Veitenheimer

Absent (excused): Cathleen Curtin, Kevin Dunne, Christina Mazurkevich

Absent (unexcused): Archer Heinzen, Monica Murphy

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza, James Spengler, Bob Williams

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm.

1. **Approval of January 11, 2018 Meeting Minutes** – A motion to approve the minutes was made by Ms. Maxwell and seconded by Ms. Holmstrand. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes.
2. **Membership Updates** – There is still one vacancy to be filled in March.
3. **Commission Business**

A. Mr. Bob Williams, Division Chief, Natural Resources, DPRCA, Presents the Draft of the Natural Resources Master Plan

Mr. Williams provided copies of the draft Natural Resources Master Plan and presented an overview of the NRMP to the Commission. The NRMP is tied to the City's Open Space Plan and should act as a guide on implementing the Open Space Plan's goals for natural resource management. The goals of the NRMP are thus preservation and stewardship of the City's natural resources, the use of science-based management practices, public education, and citizen involvement. The elements of the NRMP will consist of an inventory of the city's resources, recommendations for achieving the NRMP's goals, and several GIS datasets.

The recommendations within the NRMP are organized by categories (i) general strategies, (ii) resource protection and stewardship, (iii) vegetation, (iv) water resources, and (v) collaboration and community involvement. Mr. Williams reviewed specific goals

within each of these categories and answered questions from commissioners, relaying the following information:

- Mosquitos should not be as hazardous to human health within natural areas as within built areas because natural mosquito predators should exist in higher concentration in the natural areas. Nevertheless, the City Health Department maintains control over mosquito programs.
- Although the presentation summarized the draft report to say that a goal of vegetation was “no planting of non-native species,” Mr. Williams clarified that goal relates only to natural areas and not the built environment such as tree wells within the urban forest.
- Any efforts to restore streams that have been buried are under T&ES jurisdiction as they are responsible for storm water.
- There are several DPRCA projects relating to invasive plant monitoring and removal, and this is an active area for volunteering in the city.
- The NRMP is not a master plan by the City, so its recommendations are limited to the DPRCA. Further, the state-owned land within the City remains under state control and the federally-owned land under Federal control.
- The Natural Resources Division manages the urban canopy and is in the process of updating the Urban Forestry Master Plan. As the City completes the fourth year of the five year tree census, the division is looking to engage private land owners and civic groups to encourage and facilitate the purchasing and planting of trees on private land. In fact, the master plan will include community involvement for the first time in the coming update. At present, contractors provide an analysis of the total canopy coverage every three years. The city arborist, under Mr. Williams’s purview, received approximately 2000 trees-related requests through Call.Click.Connect last year.

In closing, Mr. Williams reminded the Commission that the NRMP is open for comment, invited commissioners to send him any comments or suggestions, and shared the timeline wherein he hopes to have the draft finalized and provided to City Council in spring of this year.

B. Mr. James Spengler, Director, DPRCA, Discusses the DPRCA Budget and Beautification Commission-related Issues

Mr. Spengler relayed to the Commission that preparation of the FY 2019, which begins July 1, 2018, has been completed and that City Manager Mark Jinks would be presenting the budget to City Council on February 20. Meetings related to the budget would continue as the Council reviews until the finalized budget is adopted in May.

In FY 2019, the DPRCA plans to resume some services that have been terminated as a result of budget cuts over the past 10 years. Mr. Spengler looked to master plans developed within the past 9 years, such as the Open Space Plan, as important commitments that should be reflected in the budget. In the development of the FY 2019 budget, the starting point was a two percent decrease, which was smaller than many

recent years. Mr. Spengler credited the easing of the fiscal belt to improvements including the national economy, especially as those improvements took longer to reach the City; property values rebounding; and the FY 2018 property tax rate increase. In the interim, decreases in DPRCA spending have been achieved through measures which both cut City expenses and increased service. Mr. Spengler gave as an example the contracting of tree-maintenance services (after the City arborist has made an evaluation) which is now done more efficiently and at decreased cost. Mr. Spengler expects the budget to include continued increase in the community partnership matching funds and encourages the Commission to reach out to any organizations that might be interested as there is a March deadline for applications.

Mr. Spengler noted two DPRCA projects that may be of particular interest to the Beautification Commission. First, the DPRCA is completing its census of pocket parks: small, City-maintained land that often act as important touchstones for citizens. The DPRCA already completed its survey of large parks (those over 20 acres) and medium parks, and expects to complete the survey of the more than one hundred pocket parks in the next twelve to sixteen months. Second, the DPRCA is beginning the process of updating the City Landscaping Guidelines and the Urban Forestry Master Plan. Mr. Spengler suggested the the Commission may have particular interest in the Landscaping Guidelines, first developed in 1997 and last updated in 2007, because those guidelines affect landscaping actions beyond just the DPRCA. Public schools and certain developments are required to landscape in accordance with the guidelines. In contrast, the NRMP exists only to guide DPRCA actions. Further, Mr. Spengler emphasized that City and residents' priorities and preferences for naturalized areas over mown areas have changed since 2007 and the Commission has particular knowledge of those changes. The goal is to have the first draft of the Landscaping Guidelines before council in late 2018.

For the Landscaping Guidelines, Urban Forestry Master Plan, and other issues, such as city portals, that the Commission prioritizes, the Commission is encouraged to advocate for such issues. In conclusion, Mr. Spengler reminded the Commission that Capital Improvement Plan funds remain for the improvement of the Commission's pilot median to reduce mowing, improve usefulness, and serve as an example of how future medians may be renovated.

4. New Business – New business for the commission consisted of suggestions for actions by the Advocacy Subcommittee. The Commission received the following suggestions:

- Work with newspaper delivery to prevent accumulation of degrading newspapers.
- Advocate for the transfer of the landscape maintenance of the King Street exit of I-395 to be transferred from VDOT to DPRCA.

Before the next Commission meeting, all subcommittees should meet to determine goals for 2018 and brainstorm potential goals for 2023.

5. Staff Report – Mr. Mendoza provided the attached “Beautification Commission Meeting Report” dated February 8, 2018.

6. Agenda Items for March 8, 2018 Meeting – Finalize planning for one-year and five-year goals.

Meeting adjourned at 8:51 PM.