

City of Alexandria, Virginia

Alexandria Beautification Commission

P.O. Box 178

Alexandria, Virginia 22313

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 13, 2018

7:30 PM

Durant Arts Center, 1605 Cameron Street

Attendees: Kathryn Chiasson, Joseph Crowell, Cathleen Curtin, Kevin Dunne, Archer Heinzen, Dana Holmstrand (Vice Chair), Christina Mazurkevich, Beth McElwain, Monica Murphy, Mellenie Runion, Denise Tennant (Chair), Erich Veitenheimer

Excused Absences: Mary Enschede, Anna Smith Lacey, Carol Maxwell

Unexcused Absences: Julie Moore

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 PM.

1. **Approval of July 12, 2018, Meeting Minutes** – A motion to approve the minutes was made by Ms. Holmstrand and seconded by Ms. Curtin. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes.
2. **Commission Business**

A. Commission Workload and Mid-Year Review

In response to the concern of members about the Commission's overall workload and effectiveness, The Chair asked at the July 12, 2018, meeting that each subcommittee meet and discuss how busy every group was and whether the goals from the beginning of the year were still applicable. Ms. Tennant asked each subcommittee to report the outcomes of those discussions, with each subcommittee reporting as follows:

- **Education:** The subcommittee believes it is making adequate progress on the goals determined earlier this year and will continue working to meet those goals. The subcommittee will consider how it measures the number of residents it connects with as, for example, the group spoke to a lot of people at the Earth Day celebration. The subcommittee believes it has the right number of people for their goals.

- **Sustainable Landscaping:** The subcommittee is happy to report that their major goal of completing the King Street and Quaker Street medians are fully installed. The subcommittee did not meet to discuss the Chair's question, but reports that their goals would be harder to achieve with fewer members who are landscape architects or designers. However, the subcommittee will explore what time is the appropriate one to hand off physical projects to city staff for care and completion.
- **Tree Canopy:** As a new subcommittee, members reported that they are happy with their progress thus far, even if some goals need to be refined in light of new information. The determination of scope has been a productive endeavor, with all members contributing fully. The subcommittee believes it has the right number of people for its goals.
- **Vacant Lots:** The subcommittee reported that some residents of Del Ray have stepped up to assist with fundraising for the Simpson Park. Again, the members are considering when the appropriate time to hand off aspects of the project to the community and city staff would be. They believe they are using the number of members on the subcommittee wisely.
- **Outreach:** Again, as a new subcommittee, the members reported needing to refine their early goals, learning, for example, that a number of outreach letters are not the best way to measure success. Instead, the subcommittee may count "issues addressed" as the appropriate measure. If the subcommittee lost a member, they expect their progress would slow down but the progress would still continue.

As a result of the discussion, the general consensus among members is that goals are on track and that membership among the subcommittees is adequate.

B. Commission Bylaws Discussion

In response to members' interest in adopting policies relevant to the operation of the Commission, the Chair asked members to provide their thoughts and level of interest in participating in a subcommittee to Ms. Chiasson. Ms. Chiasson reported that she received feedback from a number of people. Because of conflicting input from members, Ms. Chiasson suggested establishing a subcommittee to work through those issues. To that end, Ms. Chiasson made a motion to create a subcommittee to discuss operational policies. Ms. Holmstrand seconded and the Commission voted unanimously to create the subcommittee. In addition to Ms. Chiasson, Mr. Crowell, Ms. Curtin, and Mr. Dunne indicated their interest in serving on the subcommittee. Ms. Chiasson will arrange the meeting.

C. Commission and Subcommittee Updates

a. Commission

Because none of the current officers expect to serve as an officer for next year, the Chair proposed holding elections for the 2019 officers in November; the term of the new officers would still be the 2019 calendar year. However, the two months

between elections and service would provide the opportunity for new officers to work with the outgoing officers on responsibilities. City code requires electing a chair, vice chair, and secretary. The members agreed that such an opportunity would be a good one.

b. Awards

Ms. Murphy reports that preparations for the awards ceremony are very much in order. “Green spaces” is developing as the theme, particularly with the health benefits of green spaces repeated throughout. Ms. Moore is working on the script. Ms. Smith Lacey is working on the slide show. Members provided suggestions to coordinate the members of City Council during the presentation, and to keep the presentation uninterrupted by preventing awardees from accessing the microphone and making speeches. For the speaker, Mr. Veitenheimer can coordinate with the speaker to give a sense of time and coordinate audiovisual needs. He reports that the Mayor will want to speak. The Awards Subcommittee requests that everyone RSVP to get an accurate head count. Catering should focus on sweets rather than savory items. Ms. Mazurkevich is reviewing the RSVPs to elicit responses if they seem slow in coming. Ms. Curtin will hold the certificates. She notes that the signs have been approved and will be ordered and ready by the end of the month. Sign stakes will be available after the ceremony. Ms. Mazurkevich will reach out to local newspapers with invitations and certainly afterward we will reach out with a follow up article. The subcommittee will be there early that day for set up and hopes that a local pianist will be available for pre-ceremony music. All members are asked to bring a mum (of any color) to the ceremony. Mr. Mendoza will handle the transport of borrowed plant material from Greenstreet Gardens. Ms. Murphy is working on the draft of the program. Ms. Curtin reminded all that if any material has the city logo on it the material needs to go through Jack Browand for approval. Mr. Mendoza will coordinate the signage for the evening. Ms. Chiasson will make a sign-up sheet and members will act as greeters, pamphlet distributors, and mind the refreshments.

- c. Vacant Lots** – None.
- d. Education** – None.
- e. Tree Canopy** – None.
- f. Sustainable Landscaping** – None.
- g. Outreach** – None.

3. New Commission Business

A. New Logo

Ms. Curtin, with Ms. Tennant's support, has reviewed the implementation of the new logo on various items, including letterhead, yard signs, hats, and car magnets. Mr. Crowell asked the purpose of the car magnets, which Ms. Tennant gave as alerting the community to the Commission's work when on the awards van tour and photo tour.

B. Considerations for Awards

Following up on her concern about the fairness of comparisons made in the awards process when comparing properties of different values, Ms. Heinzen presented average assessment across the city and suggested pairing those areas most similar in terms of average assessed value as the award regions. This would serve to ensure that areas with lower property values would be guaranteed an award and thus spread the awards more evenly across the city. The members greatly appreciated Ms. Heinzen's work on the subject and suggested she map previous years' winners into her map zones to determine how the distribution would have looked in previous years. Ms. Chiasson suggested that the Commission consider simply awarding the highest scoring property in each zone rather than regions, which would also more equally distribute winners across the city. Mr. Crowell suggested that, if Ms. Heinzen is interested in comparing the most-similar properties, one method might be categorizing winners by property size according to the new Stormwater Fee categories: apartment/condo, townhouse, typical single family home, and large single family home. These categories are available on the city's assessment webpage. Ms. Heinzen appreciated the input and will continue to develop her idea.

- 4. Staff Report** – Mr. Mendoza provided a written staff report. He noted that the department is getting ready for fall and winter. He explained that the Commission will soon receive a request for priority-based budgeting advice that could be used to address several of the Commission's goals. Mr. Crowell ask about the status of the landscaping guidelines and Mr. Mendoza said he would follow up.
- 5. Agenda Items for October 11, 2018, Meeting** – RPCA Strategic Plan 2018-2023. Budgeting strategies for Council.
- 6. Public Comment/Discussion** – None.

Meeting adjourned at 8:52 PM.