

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

MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, March 10, 2016, 7:30 p.m.
DURANT ARTS CENTER

Attendees: Cathleen Curtin, Sharon Bucci, Patrick Deleonibus, Carol Maxwell, Julie Moore, Monica Murphy (Vice Chair), Cynthia Spoehr, Renata Stuebner, Denise Tennant (Chair), Erich Veitenheimer, Sylvia Winterling

Absent: Nicole Hirsch (newly appointed member)

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza

Public: Chris Von Schoening (Commission alumna)

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm. Ms. Curtin, Ms. Moore, and Ms. Maxwell arrived late.

1. Approval of February 11, 2016 Meeting Minutes – Ms. Bucci offered a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting with one spelling correction. Ms. Murphy seconded the motion and the minutes were approved by Ms. Bucci, Mr. Deleonibus, Ms. Murphy, Ms. Spoehr, Ms. Stuebner, Ms. Tennant, Mr. Veitenheimer, and Ms. Winterling.

2. Introduction of New Member(s)

Renata Stuebener was introduced. There is currently one vacancy being advertised.

3. Commission Business

A. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requirements

The Chair and Vice Chair were recently trained by the City regarding compliance with FOIA requirements. There are a number of Commission procedures that will need to be updated to insure compliance:

Changes to Minutes: In the minutes, the secretary needs to record votes, motions, names of people making and seconding motions, vote counts, and the names of people voting for and against the motions. Starting time and ending time of meeting must also be recorded.

Public Notification of Meetings: The biggest change we need to make is that any time three or more commissioners are meeting to discuss commission business, we need to advise Mr. Mendoza three working days in advance so it may be published on the City website so the public can attend. We also need to create and publish agendas for all meetings, including working meetings. Agendas must state the purpose of the meeting and topics of discussion. City officials do not count toward the “member count”, only commission members. If you need to schedule a last minute meeting, only two members may attend.

Ms. Curtin made a motion to post Commission meeting minutes on the Commission’s website. The motion was seconded by Mr. Deleonibus and approved unanimously.

Emails: Some group emails can also count as meetings. To avoid being in violation of the requirement that all meetings be open to the public, do not reply all to emails. Instead, reply only to the sender. This is required even for emails to schedule future meetings.

Everything you send to Mr. Mendoza is saved on the City server in case of future FOIA requests. All emails on commission business must either cc Mr. Mendoza if the information is relevant to him, or cc the commission email address – alexandriabeautification@gmail.com.

All commission members are encouraged to open a separate email account for ONLY commission business. Mr. Deleonibus will look into options for creating email addresses for Commission members.

Procedure for meetings: All members received a google invitation giving them access to the Commission's google calendar, and giving them permission to add calendar items. Mr. Mendoza will be notified of additions and will post to the City calendar. When you put a meeting on the calendar, place the agenda in the details section of the appointment. Every meeting is required to keep minutes (informal okay for working meetings), keep track of attendees, and record any votes.

We have also been encouraged to use Roberts Rules of order at meetings and keep conflicts of interest at top of mind.

B. Consideration of Letter to City Council

The members considered the letter to City Council regarding creation of Working Group to regarding implementation of the Environmental Action Plan and the Urban Forestry Plan. The group will look at issues including tree canopy, use of native plants, and use of vegetation to improve our environment. Mr. Veitenheimer offered to serve as our representative, Ms. Moore volunteered to serve as alternate. On page 2, Mr. Veitenheimer suggested striking the word "far" with regard to 34% tree canopy coverage being "far" less than 40%. Ms. Murphy agreed that without quantification of what 40% actually means, it seemed difficult to support the use of "far." Ms. Murphy motioned to support the letter to City Council as written, but with the request that Ms. Tennant suggest the edit to the author of the letter. Ms. Maxwell seconded. The motion passed unanimously. In addition, Ms. Curtin motioned that Mr. Veitenheimer be the Commission's representative to the working group and Ms. Moore be the alternate. Ms. Murphy seconded the motion, and the Commission approved the motion unanimously.

C. Strategic Plan Implementation Updates

i. Educational Programs: The first educational seminar of the year is Monday March 14th 7:00-8:30 pm. The program will include an Extension Service presentation on Low Maintenance Landscaping. Group discussed that registration was not set up for this session. It will possibly be set up for future sessions. The Commission also circulated a list of list serves to use for promotion.

LIST SERV COVERAGE:

Clover College Park – Ms. Murphy
Seminary Ridge – Ms. Moore

Founder's Park Comm. Assoc – Ms. Curtin
Founder's Dog Park Community – Ms. Curtin
Del Ray – Ms. Tennant

NEED: Old Town List Serv, Beverly Hills List Serv

ii. Earth Day: The working group met and is planning a table that will include two giveaways – a seedling in a recycled can and a craft for children involving turning old water bottles into bird feeders. The working title for the table is Choose to Reuse: Reuse to Beautify Alexandria.” They are also working on getting Greenstreet Gardens to lend us a rain barrel for display purposes. Handouts are also planned. Mr. Deleonibus is working on getting donation or discount on seedlings. Commission members are encouraged to bring empty water bottles and cans to the next meeting for use planting seedlings and making bird feeders. Ms. Von Schoening offered to give us seeds to hand out. The working group is checking with the Extension Service on seeds as well.

iii. Gateways: The working group held a meeting with Mr. Mendoza and Matt from T&ES. The Commission suggested N. Washington Street and the intersection of King and Beauregard would be the best projects for the pilot program. Beth Znidarsic clarified that the City wanted the Telegraph Rd. site because the sign is missing, but it was determined the City could relocate a sign from a redone site to Telegraph Rd. However, N. Washington St. is no longer being considered for an initial site because it is on federal parkland and will likely take an inordinate amount of time to gain approvals. Additionally, the intersection at King and Beauregard is off the table because that area is slated for redevelopment. The group is now pursuing the intersection of Quaker and Preston and also Rte. 1 at Four Mile Run as the best options. The signs may not be ready until summer, with landscaping potentially installed in the fall.

iv. Award Ceremony. (*See attachments*) The working group has suggested that we change the criteria and the name of the awards so the awards are no longer simply beautification awards. They are also proposing to slightly reduce the total number of awards and place greater emphasis on sustainability. If we give out all of the awards, it would be 22 awards total. Group reviewed criteria and ratings sheet. Ms. Curtin applauded the new scoring sheet and stated that it made voting less subjective than in the past. The question was raised as to whether or not we should be considering parts of properties that are not visible. It was also suggested that rain barrels may be in backyards and unseen. It was affirmed that our focus needs to remain on parts of property that are visible from the street. The working group will consider other criteria for sustainability that may be more visible than rain barrels. Ms. Bucci will email suggestions for things to consider to the working group.

Nomination Form – This form will be handed out and given to public to make nominations. There working group will consider whether or not the call for nominations should be placed in the newspaper. There have traditionally been very few public nominations. The bulk of nominations come from commission members. The working group would like to encourage greater public participation in the nominating process. Next month we divvy up the maps to look for properties to nominate.

Important Dates: Nominations due: **May 27th**, Van tour: **June 4th**, Photo Tour: **June 5th**, Meeting to discuss nominees on **June 9th**. (Back up date is potentially June 16th.)

D. Proposed City Budget – Jim Spengler was unexpectedly detained at a prior presentation and was unable to attend. The Commission will reschedule this agenda item for next month.

4. New Commission Business: Mr. Deleonibus stated that the Clean-Up subcommittee is planning a clean-up at Wilkes Cemetery, continuing to work with Rod Simmons on selecting site. Once site is identified, he will work with neighbors to get input and advise them on details of the event.

5. Staff Report – *(See attached)* Department has switched over to spring prep – sports fields prep, mulch, clean ups, irrigation de-winterization, replacing trashcans and grills. Equipment is being prepared for mowing season. The spring plantings in hanging baskets around city hall are in the works. The City is considering expanding the hanging baskets for two blocks around City Hall; Jim Spengler is an advocate of expansion.

6. Agenda Items for April 14, 2016 meeting – The Commission agreed that each subcommittee would provide very short updates of their activities in order to provide sufficient time to discuss the award nomination responsibilities.

7. Public comment/discussion

Ms. Von Schoening announced that she has found a sponsor for the Sanitary Workers' Breakfast. The donor will match TES funding so the breakfast can continue. The breakfast traditionally held on the last day of Spring Clean-Up, which this year coincides with Earth Day. The donor wishes to remain anonymous.

Ms. Von Schoening also brought up a missing tree on Royal Street near Gadsby's. The tree is missing and looks awful; the well is empty and full of weeds. Mr. Mendoza and Ms. Von Schoening will work with Bob Taylor and John Noelle to identify and replace.

Ms. Stuebner inquired about whether or not there are requirements for businesses not replacing dead material in planters. There is not one that we are aware of. The Commission concurred that the quick transition to spring probably caught the business owners off guard and that they will likely replace them soon. Ms. Stuebner inquired whether the Commission had ever given awards for window displays. While the Commission was not aware of this having been done in the past, it agreed to consider it for future awards ceremonies. Ms. Von Schoening noted that there was historically an ABC recognition program for window displays that happened at Christmas, but that program has since fallen by the wayside.

* 9:01pm Ms. Murphy motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Moore seconded the motion and the group agreed unanimously to adjourn.