

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

MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, January 14, 2016
7:30 PM, DURANT ARTS CENTER

Attendees: Sharon Bucci, Patrick Deleonibus, Carol Maxwell, Julie Moore, Monica Murphy, Denise Tennant (Chair)

Absent: Cathleen Curtin, Sylvia Winterling, Cynthia Spoehr

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza

1. **Approval of November 12, 2015 Meeting Minutes (Denise):** With majority vote, the Commission approved the minutes of the last meeting.

2. **Commission Business:**

a. **Resignations:** Ruth McKenty and Whitney Stohr have resigned from the Commission. The vacancies will be posted and advertised.

b. **New Members:** Erich Veitenheimer has been appointed to the Commission.

c. **Election of Officers:** Denise Tennant was reelected as Chair, Monica Murphy was elected as Vice-Chair and Julie Moore was elected Secretary for 2016.

d. **Budget Update:** Oscar provided a budget update noting that we have \$290.16 remaining from our FY 2015-16 allocation of \$1,250 through July 1. Oscar noted that if we anticipated expenditures exceeding that amount we should check in with him to see if the dept. could make allowances. Oscar is in the process of having our account transferred to his division. He will be making a request for a larger budget for FY 2016-17. Group discussed that the increase in budget for the Awards Ceremony (additional \$250 for rental of GW Masonic Temple) and other costs impacted the budget this year.

e. **Update on Strategic Plan Implementation**

i. **Vacant Lot Improvement** – Denise and Julie circulated a packet of materials and discussed how they are working with the City to identify areas in need of improvement and also looking at case studies where community groups have already succeeded in improving vacant or underutilized areas of City property. They are also working to develop a list of criteria for selecting sites and improving sites and a more specific timeline for accomplishing goals. The City provided a short list of suggested locations for improvement. Denise and Julie will continue to look into these sites and will consider their suitability for our first project.

ii. **Educational Programs** – Sharon discussed that she and Cynthia are working with Kirstin Buhls, the Extension Agent, to plan and schedule Educational

events for 2016. The next event will be scheduled for late February. Potential topics for 2016 may include – low-maintenance gardening, shade gardens, “Right Plant, Right Spot,” a suggested use for native trees seminar prior to Earth Day or other sales, and another session on holiday container gardening – very popular this year. The group agreed that we should go ahead and present the Smithsonian with the suggested \$100 donation as thanks for their participation in the November holiday gardening. We hope to invite them to participate again next year and a goodwill contribution would go a long way towards securing the speaker again. Also Sharon suggested that it would be beneficial to advertise the educational programming in the City’s quarterly Recreational Programs Catalog. Oscar agreed that it would be a good idea and that he could help facilitate. It was also noted that the City should consider looking into what percentage of Kirstin Buhl’s salary is covered by City funds – a much smaller percentage than Arlington.

iii. Gateways – Carol announced that the RFP for wayfinding signage was finally released today. The proposals are due back on February 14th. TES is looking forward to Commission input on the prioritization of sites for sign installations. As noted previously, the landscape designers on the Commission will work to develop plant palettes and design schemes for the sites. The City will provide matching funds, based on the cost of design fees, for plantings. Oscar noted that getting vendor estimates for maintenance will be quick. Once the sites for signage are selected and designed, we can begin to shop for sponsors.

Once the proposals/estimates come back, TES will know how much the signs cost and how many/which signs they can afford to install in the pilot program.

Oscar noted that there is also money to fund median upgrades. Some of this funding may be used for gateways that coincide with medians. There is an estimated \$15,000 for median beautification. Oscar will also provide us with a list of other potential median projects for our input.

iv. Awards Ceremony – Monica advised that the group working on the Awards Ceremony will meet shortly. Nobody has yet offered to take the lead on the ceremony. They will meet and come up with proposed updates on the criteria for awards, etc. and will report back to the Committee.

v. Community Clean Ups – Patrick is planning to meet with Rod Simmons to zero in on potential sites for clean up. Oscar will help arrange the meeting. Group discussed potential ideas for recruiting volunteers...including Cub Scouts, school PTAs, etc. He will report back to the group with potential sites.

vi. Recruitment – Denise and Monica agreed to focus on recruitment ideas. There are currently 3 vacancies currently advertised.

4. New Commission Business:

i. Other Activities – Denise asked the Commission about activities that it might want to be involved in again this year, specifically Earth Day and Spring for Alexandria. The Educational Programs sub-committee will look into Earth Day, but they requested assistance in manning the booth. Patrick will explore the possibility of using Spring for Alexandria as one of the Commission’s community clean-up

projects. Patrick also agreed to take over responsibility for the Commission's Facebook page.

ii. Environmental Policy Commission – The Environmental Policy Commission would like to meet with us to talk about their plans to step up and implement key components of the Urban Forestry Master Plan and the Environmental Action Plan, specifically goals relating to tree canopy and plant selection. We will invite them to our next meeting to present their plans. Plant recommendations could be helpful for the Gateways and Vacant Lots projects. If we want to use any plants that are not on the recommended list, we should consult with Rod Simmons first.

5. Staff Report

i. Tree Installation Funding – Oscar noted that the City has tree installation funding --\$56k for Spring 2016 and \$55k for Fall 2016. We should plan to meet with John Noelle to advocate to make sure that trees are located within our areas of work – i.e. Gateways, vacant lots or clean up areas

ii. City Budget – City Council will meet the last week of January to discuss budget reductions. The Commission decided to invite Jim Spengler to the March meeting to discuss the impact of these reductions on the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities.

6. Agenda Items for February 11, 2016 Meeting

- i. Presentation from Environmental Policy Commission