

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

MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, January 11, 2018
7:30 p.m.
DURANT ARTS CENTER
1605 Cameron Street

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

Absent: Anna Smith Lacey

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm.

1. **Approval of December 14, 2017 Meeting Minutes** – A motion to approve the minutes was made by Ms. Curtin and seconded by Ms. Heinzen. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes.
2. **Membership Updates** – Ms. Runion was recently appointed to the Commission. There is now one vacancy to be filled in February.
3. **Officer Elections** – Ms. Tennant was nominated to continue her position as Chair of the Commission. Ms. Holmstrand was nominated to the position of Vice Chair and Mr. Crowell was nominated to the position of Secretary. Ms. Mazurkevich made a motion to approve of these nominations, seconded by Ms. Murphy. The nominees were approved unanimously.
4. **Commission Business** – The entirety of the meeting was devoted to discussion of the Commission’s implementation of its strategic plan. Specifically, the Commission wished to review its activities relative to the goals set by “The Commission in 2020” developed at the July 18, 2015, Commission meeting. Further, the Commission wished to determine its priorities for 2018. The Commission established the following rules for the discussion: (i) Avoid sidebar discussions. (ii) All ideas are welcome. (iii) Everyone is equal. (iv) Stay on task.

A. Ideas

The Commission began the discussion by brainstorming considerations relevant to the Commission’s goals. Members offered the following ideas:

- Consider the balance between horticultural and architectural emphasis by the Commission in order to define the Commission’s strengths.

- Consider how the Commission might pursue a cohesive vision of what it wants the city to be
- Consider the adoption of a theme for the year, particularly as it may align decisions for the award ceremony.
- Consider the development of particular pillars to guide Commission actions, such as sustainability, community development, and long-term development.
- Consider expanding the Commission’s advocacy role, with the result of having the Commission’s consensus opinion heard by City Council, the City Manager, and other groups.
- Consider the promotion of public art.
- Consider where beautification is happening in Alexandria and if particular acts of beautification can serve as focal points for messaging.
- Consider further integration into communities in meaningful ways.
- Consider revision or elimination of past goals, such as clean-ups and education, in order to streamline the Commission’s priorities.

B. “The Commission in 2020” and Activities through 2017

The Commission restated the following goals from “The Commission in 2020” to compare its past activities and determine future priorities.

- Complete improvements of five city portals.
- Coordinate fifty community clean-ups.
- Improve three vacant lots.
- Educate five hundred residents on matters of beautification.
- Conduct five revamped awards ceremonies.

The Commission reviewed its activities through 2017 for each of the five goals above, respectively:

- The improvement of roadway portals to the city was indefinitely postponed as the City worked to develop the relevant signage. Any landscaping in such areas would be wasted during sign installation. In the interim, the Commission has turned to the development of other public spaces. First, the Commission completed several container installations in Market Square. In this project, the Commission gained experience working with Department of Parks and Recreation. Two important lessons were the choice of plant sizes, with the need for larger plantings in the future, and the maintenance of plantings, with greater follow-up care needed. Second, the Commission initiated a program for the landscaping of city medians. The pilot median, at the intersection of King Street and Quaker Lane, is in the development stage, with the Commission awaiting site plans from the City.
- In each of 2016 and 2017 the Commission has conducted 1 clean-up program. Since establishment of the clean-ups goal, other public and private groups, including the City’s PARKnerships, have taken the reins on clean-up programs.
- In the nearly two years working on the pilot vacant lots initiative, the Commission has learned a great deal about the process for establishing a vacant lot

improvement project. In particular, the Commission believes obtaining community equity early in project development is essential. The Commission has picked a lot for the pilot program and made great strides in the planning of improvements: learning the relevant City regulations and resources, working closely with the community to meet the needs of the neighborhood, selecting and working with a landscape architect on the design, and beginning work on plant selection.

- The Commission conducted 7 programs in 2017, serving approximately 50 residents (excluding the Commission's Earth Day program). Since establishment of the educational goal two and a half years ago, the Commission has provided 16 beautification programs in total to approximately 230 residents combined. Nevertheless, turnout for Commission programs has diminished, likely due to the enhanced outreach of other groups such as the Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia. The marketing plan created as part of the education outreach will continue to be a Commission resource for future events.
- In the past three years the Commission has conducted 3 revamped award ceremonies. Reviews of the award ceremonies are consistently positive.

After reviewing these activities, the Commission made the following suggestions:

- The Gateways/Medians subcommittee is in need of a name that encompasses the wider variety of projects they are taking on. One suggestion was the Sustainable Landscaping of Public Spaces subcommittee. The subcommittee will evaluate the success of the pilot median project to determine future plans and goals. As the redevelopment of Market Square comes on line, this subcommittee will lead that effort.
- The Commission will leave community clean-up programs to PARKnerships and other public and private groups and instead focus on the residential and public tree canopy to support community development and natural resource maintenance.
- The Education subcommittee should broaden its focus from specific educational programs and explore other ways to educate and serve residents' needs.
- Beyond the award ceremonies, the Commission would like to develop its advocacy role for the beautification of Alexandria.

C. Priorities for 2018

In order to set its priorities for 2018, the Commission conducted brainstorming of ideas for each of the following subcommittees. After completing the brainstorming, the commissioners volunteered for subcommittee participation. Finally, all commissioners were provided twelve adhesive dots to represent support for particular goals of each of the subcommittees. The dots could be allocated to particular ideas in any way, to guide subcommittee members in their planning, if needed. Below, in no particular order, are the results of the brainstorming, volunteering, and dot placement.

a. Sustainable Landscaping of Public Spaces Subcommittee

Ms. Curtin, Ms. Maxwell, Ms. Moore, Ms. Murphy

- Identify sites for landscaping. (1 dot)
- Work with City to create cohesive landscaping plans. (1 dot)
- Create a priority list for Commission work with the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager and staff. (2 dots)
- Spend the money allocated to beautification projects. (8 dots)
- Create connection with Capital Improvement Plan funds via Mr. Bob Williams. (1 dot)
- Refurbish planters at Market Square. (2 dots)
- Assist with Market Square Master Plan. (5 dots)
- See Quaker/King/Braddock project to completion. (6 dots)
- Follow up on ABC landscaping projects. (3 dots)
- Review role for Market Square revitalization. (1 dot)
- Take on primary role for medians. (1 dot)

b. Tree Canopy Subcommittee

Ms. Chiasson, Mr. Crowell, Ms. Heinzen, Ms. Maxwell, Ms. McElwain, Mr. Veitenheimer

- Investigate *in memoriam* tree groves. (9 dots)
- Create educational component. (1 dot)
- Connect residents with resources. (2 dots)
- Help city reach a specific goal. (6 dots)
- Evaluate tree maintenance for city, including regulations and enforcement. (2 dots)
- Identify development goals of city. (3 dots)
- Identify areas for planting. (2 dots)
- Recommend list of native trees. (3 dots)
- Revise list of approved trees in City Code. (5 dots)

c. Vacant Lot Improvement Subcommittee

Ms. Curtin, Ms. McElwain, Ms. Runion, Ms. Tennant, Mr. Veitenheimer

- Identify lots for improvement.
- Continue to develop PARKnerships relationship. (2 dots)
- Develop and document a process for vacant lot development. (3 dots)
- Complete Simpson Triangle Park. (7 dots)
- Focus on community engagement. (3 dots)
- Select next project. (4 dots)
- Identify corporate and community partners. (2 dots)

d. Education Subcommittee

Mr. Dunne, Ms. Holmstrand, Ms. Runion

- Define education for the Committee. (4 dots)
- Be an aggregator of resources. (5 dots)

- Advertise VCE classes.
- Send a newsletter (e.g., for events and native plant sales). (1 dot)
- Bring resources to residents. (1 dot)
- Develop a social media plan, including a posting schedule and plan of topics. (7 dots)
- Provide 2-3 large events per year. (2 dots)
- Continue Earth Day event. (6 dots)
- Coordinate with the Old Town Garden Tour.
- Provide education regarding architectural resources.
- Work with Master Gardeners to go to less advantaged areas. (8 dots)
- Reach out to business associations. (2 dots)
- Find out what other cities are doing in terms of beautification and education. (4 dots)
- Contribute to city mailings. (2 dots)

e. Awards Ceremony Subcommittee

Ms. Chiasson, Ms. Mazurkevich, Ms. Moore, Ms. Murphy, Ms. Smith Lacey

- Look at timing of activities. (1 dot)
- Make process improvements, including fillable forms, going electronic, streamlining paperwork, and finding City staff to assist. (7 dots)
- Expand subcommittee to at least 5 members.
- Ensure safety at the ceremony in terms of sign stakes.
- Identify a theme for the awards. (5 dots)
- Orient presentation to reflect Commission goals.
- Teach about beautification at the awards ceremony. (4 dots)
- Find a relatable speaker.

f. Beautification Advocacy Subcommittee

Mr. Crowell, Mr. Dunne, Ms. Holmstrand, Ms. Runion, Ms. Tennant

- Establish subcommittee priorities. (1 dot)

- 5.** Agenda Items for February 8, 2018 meeting – James Spengler, Director of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities will discuss budget and program updates. Bob Williams, Division Chief of Natural Resources, will present the City’s draft Master Plan for Natural Resources.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:35 pm.