

**Alexandria Beautification Commission
Annual Report
July 2017 – June 2018**

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The mission of the Alexandria Beautification Commission includes serving in an advisory capacity to the city council and the citizens of Alexandria on all matters related to the beautification of the city and serving in an advisory capacity regarding the beautification of portals to the city. Within these guidelines, the Alexandria Beautification Commission membership completed the following activities during its 2016/17 year.

Alexandria Beautification Commission Policy and Membership Accomplishments

Membership increased slightly during the year, beginning the year with fourteen members and ending with a full complement of sixteen members. While a quorum was not able to be obtained in one month during the year, the attendance policy was more strictly enforced to ensure more consistent attendance.

During the annual Awards nomination process, the Commission is able to canvass all areas of the City. This canvass is interactive and, as ambassadors of the City, it is an opportunity to inform and promote City beautification. From this activity, we have drawn many qualified residents who have submitted applications for appointment. In addition, through both Commission volunteer work and private volunteer work of our members, we come in frequent contact with outstanding individuals whom we encourage to apply.

Alexandria Beautification Commission Member Activities

Alexandria Beautification Awards

The Commission sponsors the Alexandria Beautification Awards each year recognizing residents, businesses, and public sector efforts that contribute to the beautification of their neighborhoods and public vistas. Each year the Commission canvases the City in search of properties that have beautified their surroundings through landscape, maintenance, building improvements and other community efforts. The Commission also solicits award nominations from the public.

The Commission recognized six categories of awards: Excellence in Architecture, Excellence in Sustainable Design, Green Practices in Beautification, Residential Beautification, Commercial Beautification, and Community Beautification. Each category recognizes properties and efforts from the East, Central, and West areas of the City, with the exception of the Green Practices award, which is competed City-wide.

The 2017 Beautification Awards ceremony was held on September 27, 2017 at the Lyceum. Twenty-one awards were given by Mayor Silberberg and members of Council during a slide show presentation. Michael Verguson, FASLA, spoke on “Why Beauty?”

From April-May 2018, the Commission solicited and made nominations for the 2018 Awards. Forty-eight nominations were submitted. The 2018 Beautification Award Ceremony is scheduled for October 17, 2018 at the Lyceum.



Gateway and Median Improvements

The Commission continued to work with City staff in Parks and Recreation to plan for revitalizing the landscaping at city gateways. The delays in finalizing a contract for wayfinding gateway signs have caused a significant delay in landscape improvements as specifications for size and placement of the signs must be known before landscape planning can begin.



In the meantime, the Commission has shifted its focus to projects where they can have a more immediate impact. The Commission worked with the City’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities throughout the year to develop a cohesive landscaping plan for the medians which they hope can serve as a model for beautification of medians throughout the City. This project came to fruition in June 2018 with the installation of native and sustainable plant material in three medians at the heavily trafficked

intersection of King Street, Quaker Lane and Braddock Road.

Educational Efforts

The Commission continued its partnership with the Alexandria/Arlington Chapter of the Virginia Cooperative Extension to host free educational seminars on beautification issues. Three seminars were held in the second half of 2017. Topics included season review and winter interest in the garden, tree selection and care, and native plants in the home landscape. Due to a proliferation of similar events in Alexandria, the Commission readjusted its approach for 2018 to focus its efforts on directing residents to existing resources and educational programs.



The Commission participated in Alexandria Earth Day on April 28, 2018. The Commission distributed native plants and flower seeds to the general public and educated over 100 Alexandria residents on planting for pollinators. A QR code was provided that took residents to the Commission's Facebook page for additional information.

The Commission has revitalized its use of social media to reach residents. The Facebook page is updated 2-3 times per week with information on native plants, invasive plants, and available

resources. The Commission also uses it to publicize Commission events and highlight articles of interest on beautification.

Vacant Lot Improvements

The Commission continues to advise the City and community residents on improvements to Simpson Triangle, which was the former construction staging area at Simpson Park.

After comprehensive efforts to obtain community feedback in early 2017, the Commission has been advising a group of Del Ray residents, led by Annie Ebbers, on plans to improve the space. The group applied for Community Matching Funds through RPCA in early 2018 and was approved for matching funds of \$22,500. The design by Landscape Architect Doug Tipword has been finalized and fundraising efforts have begun.



Community Clean-Ups

The Commission's effort to assist in the coordination of clean-ups were made largely redundant with the creation of the City's PARKnership program. The Commission ended this effort in October 2017 and shifted its focus to other areas.

Tree Canopy

A new subcommittee focused on increasing the city's tree canopy was stood up in January 2018. At present, the subcommittee has served as the point of contact for coalescing and communicating the Commission's position on the update to the Alexandria Landscaping Guidelines. Other initiatives include advertising and supporting the City's fall tree sale, providing information to citizens on what city resources are available to them to support the tree canopy, and advising the city on budget for tree plantings.

Program and/or Legislative Accomplishments

In the last few years, the Beautification Commission has taken a more direct approach to fulfilling its dual functions: serving in an advisory capacity to the city council and the citizens of Alexandria on all matters related to the beautification of the city and serving in an advisory capacity regarding the beautification of portals to the city. While active participation in city happenings has made the commission much more effective in fulfilling its functions, it has led to a marked increase in the need for members with specific expertise in fields relating to beautification.

The Commission proposed, and City Council approved, a change to the City Code governing its membership composition. Prior to the change, the Commission's membership consisted of 16 citizen-at-large members. With the amendment, the membership consists of:

- (1) one member with expertise in the field of architecture or urban planning, or be a historian with architectural knowledge;
- (2) one member with expertise in the field of landscape architecture or landscape design;
- (3) one member who is a Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, or Tree Steward; and
- (4) thirteen citizen-at-large members.

Goals for 2017-2018

The Commission will continue to implement the projects outlined above. Additionally, the Commission will continue to conduct outreach to other City commissions to identify and to develop additional partnerships to further achieve beautification goals.

In the near future, the Commission will be evaluating the pilot gardens installed at Market Square in May 2017. These gardens will be refreshed with new and/or different plants as needed, and missing plant markers will be replaced to ensure these gardens continue to be an educational installation. The Commission will also be considering additional portals and medians in the City for improvement.

Leadership

Officers for the upcoming year were elected at the January 2017 meeting: Denise Tennant was elected to serve as Chair, Dana Holmstrand as Vice-Chair, and Joseph Crowell as Secretary.

Oscar Mendoza of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, Park Operations Division acted as the staff liaison to the Alexandria Beautification Commission during the course of the 2017/2018 year.

Term expirations and new members:

- Kathryn Chiasson (Nov 2017)
- Joseph Crowell (Oct 2017)
- Cathleen Curtin (term expired, reappointed Oct 2017)
- Kevin Dunne (Nov 2017)

Mary Ensched (Mar 2018)
Christina Mazurkevich (Sep 2017)
Julie Moore (term expired, reappointed Oct 2017)
Monica Murphy (term expired, reappointed Dec 2017)
Mellenie Runion (Jan 2018)
Erich Veitenheimer, III (term expired, reappointed Jan 2018)

During the course of the year, membership included the following individuals:

Seth Bishop
Kathryn Chiasson
Joseph Crowell
Cathleen Curtin
Kevin Dunne
Mary Ensched
Archer Heinzen
Nicole Hersch
Dana Holmstrand
Carol Maxwell
Christina Mazurkevich
Beth McElwain
Julie Moore
Monica Murphy
Mellenie Runion
Anna Smith Lacey
Renata Stuebner
Denise Tennant
Erich Veitenheimer, III
Benjamin Verdi

Attachment

1. ABC membership amendment letter; Apr 16, 2018