



City of Alexandria, Virginia

Alexandria Beautification Commission

P.O. Box 178

Alexandria, Virginia 22313



The Honorable Allison Silberberg, Mayor
and Members of City Council
City of Alexandria
City Hall Room 2300
301 King St.
Alexandria, VA 22314

April 16, 2018

Mayor Silberberg and Members of Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Alexandria Beautification Commission to request your support for the proposed amendment to the requirements for membership on the Beautification Commission (Sec 2-4-190-Creation, composition and organization).

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 Beautification Commission has multiple ongoing projects at all times. It advises the city on improvements to city portals and medians as well as advising the city and community groups on large-scale improvements to vacant lots. The commission educates residents on matters of beautification through a variety of efforts and celebrates beautification efforts in the city through the annual awards ceremony. This year, the commission stood up a new subcommittee dedicated to increasing the tree canopy in the city. Efforts on these projects have made clear that there are certain skill sets that must always be present on the commission in order for it to successfully fulfill its charter.

Of the sixteen seats on the Beautification Commission, the commission requests that three be reserved for citizens who hold those specific qualifications that are essential to the success of the commission. It requests the membership of the Beautification Commission be as follows:

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

The commission must have a member with expertise in architecture or urban planning or that is a historian with architectural knowledge in order to fulfill its function of serving in an advisory capacity to the city council and the citizens of Alexandria on all matters related to the beautification of the city. Without a member with one of these qualifications, the commission will be unable to represent the full scope of beautification. While much of the commission's focus is on landscaping and natural spaces, it is only by considering all visual aspects of the city that

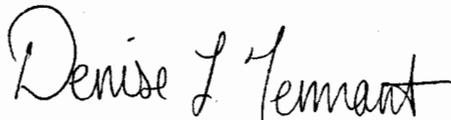
it will be successful. One of Alexandria's greatest assets is its architecture. People from around the world visit Alexandria specifically to view the beautiful historic buildings that the city has taken great pains to preserve. A member with this expertise is able to help the commission recognize and preserve the unique characteristics of each neighborhood in the city. In order to appropriately recognize and advise on this aspect of beauty, the Commission requires someone with the appropriate education and experience which can only be derived from one of the above qualifications. By having a seat designated specifically for a citizen with this expertise, the Commission can fully advise on all aspects of beauty.

The commission must have a member with expertise in landscape architecture or landscape design in order to fulfill the dual functions of 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. There are currently two landscape designers on the commission who are overtaxed with the needs for their expertise. For example, they have advised the city on the test beds at Market Square which will help determine which native plants will thrive in Alexandria's urban environment. This saves the city both time and money that would be otherwise spent on finding outside experts. They are also heavily involved in the commission's long-running effort to improve the portals and medians of the city. Without their presence on the commission, progress on these efforts would halt completely as evidenced by the Commission's recent involvement in vacant lot improvements. As the commission expanded into assisting community groups with improving vacant lots around the city, the commission was forced to put in a great deal of time and effort to find a landscape architect who was willing to volunteer their time to the project, causing a delay of nearly two years. By having a seat designated specifically for a citizen with this expertise, the commission can continue its active involvement in advising on landscaping in the city.

The commission must have a Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, or Tree Steward in order to fulfill its function of advising the citizens of Alexandria on matters of beautification. For the last three years the commission has placed increased focus on educating the citizens on Alexandria on ways to responsibly and sustainably beautify the city. The commission has done this through partnerships with the Virginia Cooperative Extension and Master Gardeners as well as directly with a booth at Earth Day, film screenings, and through social media. The commission has found that its efforts are most effective when taken directly to citizens, but it requires a member with the education, training, and experience in educating others about these matters to be truly successful. These specific certifications ensure that a citizens meets these specific qualifications and has the reach back to community partners to ensure successful collaboration. By having a seat designated specifically for a citizen with one of these certifications, the commission can ensure that education efforts will meet the highest standard.

It is with much thought and consideration that the Beautification Commission asks you to add these requirements to the City Code. The commission recognizes that every citizen-at-large member brings valuable contributions to the commission and that the commission as a whole benefits from the diversity of experience these members bring. However, the commission has determined that the qualifications it is requesting are so crucial to always have represented that the commission would rather the seats stay vacant while it recruits qualified citizens to fill these specific roles than fill them with other citizen-at-large members.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise L. Tennant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Denise L. Tennant
Chair, Beautification Commission