

Alexandria Archaeological Commission Meeting [Draft]
Minutes of September 15, 2021 Draft

Public Registration URL: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Pm_iOnQfTZm9e6Jwrkhu7w
Meeting/Webinar ID: 917 7575 2548
Meeting/Webinar Passcode: 805428
Dial-in Number: 301 715 8592

Members Present:

Ivy Whitlatch, Planning District I (Chair)
Esther White, Planning District II (Vice Chair)
Jacob (Jake) Hoogland, Member at Large
(Dick) Owens, Friends of Alexandria
Archaeology (FOAA) Representative
Edward (Ted) Pulliam,
Alexandria Association Representative
Ralph Rosenbaum, Member at Large
Seth Tinkham,
Historic Alexandria Foundation Rep.
Elizabeth Vehmeyer, Member at Large
Dylan Colligan, Business Community Rep.
Rebecca Doser, Visit Alexandria Representative

Members Absent:

Christopher (Chris) Warren,
Historical Society Representative

City Staff:

Eleanor Breen, City Archaeologist
Garrett Fessler, Archaeologist
Emma Richardson, Museum Educator
Judy Lo, Dept. Parks, Recreation &
Cultural Activities

Members of the Public:

Frances Terrell
Glenn Eugster :
April Belk
Toniette Henry
Latosha Jackson
Tammie Gillums

Call to Order:

Ivy Whitlatch, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Reading of Virtual Meeting Notice for the City of Alexandria by Eleanor Breen and meeting recorded by Eleanor Breen:

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic emergency, the September 15, 2021, meeting of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission is being held electronically pursuant to Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.2(A)(3), the Continuity of Government ordinance adopted by the City Council on June 20, 2020, or Section 4-0.01(g) in HB29 and HB30, enacted by the 2020 Virginia General Assembly (Virginia Acts of Assembly Ch. 1283 and 1289), to undertake essential business. All of the members of the Board and staff are participating from remote locations through Zoom. This meeting is being held electronically, unless a determination is made that it is safe enough to be held in person at the Lloyd House at 220 N. Washington, Alexandria, VA. Electronic access will be provided in either event. The meeting can be accessed by the public through the link or phone number posted on the City calendar. Public comment will be received at the meeting by stating name and comment. Questions can be submitted to the committee through the Q&A feature on Zoom. This meeting will be recorded and posted on the alexandriava.gov/historic webpage. Zoom is compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers and keyboard shortcuts.

Seth Tinkham later inquired whether future Commission meetings also would be virtual. Eleanor responded that the City had not yet provided written guidance on the issue.

Review and Approval of Minutes:

The June 16 and July 21 Minutes were reviewed. Ralph Rosenbaum made a motion to approve the June 16 minutes, as amended, and Esther White seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. Ralph made a motion to approve the July 21 minutes, and Esther seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Chair Report:

The Commission's annual report was submitted, and the deadline met. Gretchen Bulova, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria, requested chairs of commissions under OHA to submit to her by the beginning of November a letter that addresses the coming budget request. Eleanor Breen and Ivy agreed to work on such a letter and present it to the next Commission meeting. Ivy asked that any Commission member with suggestions for items to include in the letter to pass them on to her or Eleanor. Dylan Colligan mentioned to Ivy that on Wednesday, September 22, there is to be a general meeting with the new City Manager. Ivy will draft a letter on behalf of the Commission to be sent to the meeting that will address matters the Commission interest, particularly including adding Archaeology as a stakeholder and participant in discussions regarding the Torpedo Factory.

Nominations Committee:

Ted Pulliam, chair of the Nominations Committee, nominated Ivy to serve another term as Chair, Esther White to serve another term as Vice Chair, and Liz Vehmeyer to serve as Secretary. Seth seconded the nominations, and they were adopted unanimously.

Fort Ward Update:

Eleanor updated the status of the Fort Ward project after thanking the Fort Ward descendants for their contributions to the project. Progress has been made in interpreting the complete story of the Fort and the Fort Community both inside and outside the museum. The city is working to establish two new orientation stations in Fort Ward Park, one in the west part of the park and one in the east. Work also is being done to determine how to memorialize and protect the Community burial grounds in the Park. In accordance with the Fort Ward Management Plan, the city is planning to move the children's playground from left side of the Park to an area on the right side where no evidence of graves has been found. Construction of a playground in the new location will not involve ground disturbance, except where deep footers are necessary, and the footers will be placed only after careful archaeological study.

Garrett Fesler described searching old deeds and death certificates for indication of burials in the new playground area and finding no indication of them. He also described digging sixteen or so test holes in scattered places on the property, which also found no indication of burials.

The floor was then opened for comments and questions from members of the public. In response to questions from Aprile Belk and Toniette Henry, Judy Lo said that the playground was to be moved because the current playground is located at the bottom of a steep hill, making its accessibility difficult for some children. In addition, there were drainage issues, and the new location would be much closer to restrooms. She was unaware whether any other location had been considered.

Members of the public expressed concern that the investigation of the new playground had not been sufficiently thorough and graves might still be there. They were concerned with the prospect of children running across a sacred place. They wanted archaeology to indicate positively that there were no graves in the area. Glenn Eugster commented that city had not talked with the Fort Ward descendants to learn more about the possible location of graves in the Fort. Several wanted to know what the next steps were in the process of deciding about the playground, who would make the decision, and who were the people they should talk with further about their concerns.

Eleanor responded that a next step was for Archaeology to employ experts who to use ground-penetrating radar on the site (Alexandria Archaeology itself did not possess the right technology). The public would be invited to observe its use and would receive the results. Judy said she had heard their concerns and did not want to build the playground on the site until it was clear that there were no graves there. Eleanor also said she would welcome talking with descendant families about the Fort Ward community and possible grave sites.

Latosha Jackson, a descendant of the Jackson family whose graveyard is at the Fort, wanted her uncle to be able to see a stone erected at the graveyard containing the names of those buried there. He is the last surviving member of the generation who lived at Fort Ward. Eleanor suggested she continue emailing Gretchen Bulova and others about her proposal. She also suggested that Latosha check with family members to determine whose names and what other information should be on the stone. The public session then ended, and the members of the public departed.

Later in the meeting Liz, joined by Dylan, suggested that the Commission take a bigger role in supporting the proposal for a stone commemorating the Jackson family at the cemetery. Particularly, the Commission should put erecting such a stone in its letter Gretchen requested concerning the upcoming budget request. A discussion among Commission members ensued that resulted in Archaeology staff becoming advocates for the erection of the stone. Ivy is to write a letter to City Council concerning the stone and include the stone in the budget request letter to Gretchen. Staff also was to obtain information from the Jackson family concerning proposed language on the stone.

Ben Brenman Award:

The Commission had decided earlier to give an award to the African American Trail Committee and to Griffin Binot, who led the Eagle Scout project at Douglass Cemetery. The details about presenting the award have not been completed because of covid uncertainty. For the same reason, it was decided not to hold a reception after the presentation and plans for a Del Pepper award this year were postponed. Liz and Ivy will decide on a time for assembling the awards.

Draft Bylaws:

Dick Owen, with assistance from Ted, Eleanor, and Ivy, has drafted bylaws for the Commission that will be circulated to Commission members tomorrow with comments due October 4. The draft with comments will be discussed at the October meeting.

Membership Update:

Tammie Gillums, a member of the public who attended tonight's meeting, is planning to apply to be a Commission member at large. A discussion was held concerning asking City Council to amend the Commission ordinance position reserved for a member of the Society for the Preservation of Black History because the Society is no longer active. As a result, Eleanor is to approach the City Attorney's office to determine whether a change suggested by Jake Hoogland that reserves the position for "one member from the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black History or its equivalent" would preserve the position for the Society should it again become active and provide sufficient flexibility for choosing from another organization within the Alexandria Black community when the Society is inactive. Also, Esther said she would consider filling the Commission's vacant position on the Waterfront Commission.

Planning Updates and Reports:

- **African American Heritage Trail Committee – Eleanor**
The Committee hopes to finish the entire Trail by the end of October. The end of August, Rebecca Doser mentioned the Trail when interviewed by Channel 5 as part of the Channel's five hour program on Alexandria.
- **Torpedo Factory Vibrancy Plan – Ivy/Ted/Ralph**
Ivy was concerned that signs about the Torpedo Factory she saw recently made no mention of Archaeology and that there has been no contact between the current Torpedo Factory consultant and Archaeology. She proposed to write about her concern in the letter to the new City Manager.

Social Media:

Seth asked whether Archaeology was engaging with both Facebook and Instagram, and if both, which was getting more response. Emma Richardson responded that Archaeology was posting the same information on both platforms, and the response from Facebook had been down lately and Instagram up.

Code and Archaeology Activity Updates:

Eleanor presented the code update for the latest quarter. Under the City's Code, Archaeology reviewed 173 projects in the three different areas of the city. Sixteen had required hiring an archaeologist, others required little archaeology oversight, and 81 required no archaeological oversight at all. In addition, two interpretive signs have been erected at the former Ramsay Homes sites. Planning for placing ships in ponds and putting returning preserved timbers from the Carlyle Warehouse into storage is proceeding.

An event in August to celebrate including the Contraband and Freedmen's Cemetery on the Civil Rights Network was successful, and a report on the event is on the Archaeology website. Eleanor recently addressed the American Cultural Resources Association, composed of people across the country, on the Alexandria Archaeology Ordinance

Alexandria Archaeology has been involved in a number of public outreach events including Parking Day and the upcoming Art Safari.

Adjournment:

The Commission meeting adjourned at 9:23 p.m.