

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*  
*Alexandria Beautification Commission (ABC)*  
*P.O. Box 178*  
*Alexandria, Virginia 22313*

**Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, April 14, 2022  
7:30 PM

Virtual Meeting

**Present:** Michael Budinski, Steve Cohen (Chair), Julie Chapman (Secretary), Kathryn Chiasson (Vice Chair), Casey Clark, Chirag Mapara, Thomas McChesney, Laura Norfolk, Denise Tennant.

**Excused Absences:** Richard Dorrier, Monica Murphy, Eleanor Quigley, Kathryn Hartka

**Unexcused Absences:** None

**City Staff:** Oscar Mendoza

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 PM.

1. **No Virtual Meeting Legal Requirements Read Any Longer!**
2. **Approval of the April 14, 2022 Meeting Minutes**
  - a. Thomas motioned to approve the minutes, Charig seconded, unanimous approval.
3. **Membership Updates**
  - a. There was an introduction of two new ABC members, Casey Clark and Laura Norfolk. Casey works for the City in the elections office; Laura operates an event planning company — welcome!
  - b. Three open positions remain on the ABC, and no further Membership updates.
4. **Commission Business**
  - a. Guest Speaker: John Marlin, Urban Forest Manager (City Arborist)
    - i. Overview:
      1. Key City Goals: Cool temperature of the city and intercept storm water.
        - a. Manages 30,000 trees on public property, not trees in natural areas (park or forest settings).
        - b. Deliver and maintain canopy resiliency through tree diversity.
        - c. Transition from a reactive to a proactive canopy approach by utilizing data.
        - d. Maximize a contractor driven model with only two field staff.
      2. How ABC Can Collaborate with the Urban Forest Program

- a. Choose projects that reduce staff time. For ex: donating a lump sum \$s that can be given to staff to generate plantings.
  - b. Keep the Program's priorities in mind when choosing tree plantings for beautification efforts.
3. Department's Priority Considerations
  - a. Safety: pruning for safety
  - b. Function: pruning/planting for function.
  - c. Any objective beyond what is highlighted isn't possible until more staffing exists.
4. Primary Focus of Tree Plantings
  - a. Diversity of tree plantings to mitigate risk of large numbers of trees killed by the introduction of new insect or diseases: One insect type can do catastrophic damage to a single type of tree; need forest resiliency.
  - b. Larger shade trees: The larger trees provide exponentially more benefits than small shade trees. It's better to plant a smaller tree (1.5") at the beginning because they grow larger as they're able to absorb the shock of temperature, etc. They are cheaper and easier to plant as well.
5. Disease
  - a. Elms have been bred to be more resistant.
  - b. Critical to have diversity in tree population.
  - c. Destructive pests can show up at any time.
6. Tree Inventory
  - a. The City manages about 30,000 trees in its inventory and strives to evaluate and maintain diverse species and balance.
  - b. The City looks at size and species and strives to be more strategic to optimize the canopy.
  - c. Residents tend to request the trees they want versus what is the most appropriate tree plantings.
7. Ongoing Maintenance in Existing Inventory
  - a. Power companies have carte blanche on tree management decisions; improperly planted trees create danger for power company professionals. The City plants smaller flowering trees under power lines.
  - b. The Forest Program wants to transition to a more strategic approach that uses data to manage trees and undertake appropriate pruning.
8. Budget
  - a. Currently, the Forest Program is only reactive; they receive 2,000 tree problem requests annually, and with two staff people, there's no time for proactive planning.

- b. The Program recently requested more money (\$500,000) to afford a 10-year rotation of tree pruning and management; waiting for approval.
- c. The Program needs to hire another staff person to collect data and manage data. If proper software was in place, much more data could be collected to create a more modern program; the expertise exists.

9. How Does the Program Define Success

- a. Canopy percentage: The Program recently completed a canopy analysis, and the results will be released soon.
- b. Inventory: Basic forest metrics such as mix of tree species, age of trees. The inventory is way off balance.
- c. Risk: How many limb failures happen in a year (damage to property and people).
- d. Clearances: How many trees impact sidewalks, homes, etc.

10. How Can ABC Help Promote Information Via Social Channels

- a. Informational resources exist already at other organizations, and John will provide a list to share with the community.
  - i. Below are some mostly local resources on plants and pests for reference. Plant Nova Natives and Virginia Native Plant Society have good information on native plant selection. University of Virginia and University of Maryland have great public information on plants and pests. 'American Forests' is pioneering the measurement of canopy equity in Cities.
    1. <https://www.plantnovanatives.org/>
    2. <https://vnps.org/virginia-native-plant-guides/>
    3. <https://ext.vt.edu/>
    4. <https://dof.virginia.gov/>
    5. <https://extension.umd.edu/>
    6. <https://www.americanforests.org/>
- b. Pest information would be valuable to promote.
- c. Beautification equity would be a valuable dimension to consider when siting projects.

b. Subcommittee Updates

i. Awards and Outreach

1. Awards

a. Discussion

- i. This year we're undertaking quarterly Awards (not 6 Awards as in the previous year) with Architecture Awards in the winter and Residential Awards in the spring. Community Awards will be in the fall.

- ii. Opening nominations for Residential Awards (4/21) which will remain open for 3 weeks (5/12).
- iii. Following nominations, a three week voting period opens to submit votes (5/15 - 6/5).
- iv. The Committee proposes to divide commission into six groups with two in each group and each group responsible for one City zone.
- v. After this meeting, committee members will be connected with a partner and a zone.
- vi. Targeting 4 nominations per zone (excludes past five years of winners and a list will be provided).
- vii. Criteria for nominations will be sent out soon.
- viii. Residential nominations will represent all types of landscape architecture in areas throughout the City.
- ix. There are people who do not want to be nominated, and all nominated residences will be contacted and permission requested for featuring their property in City resources.
- x. General guidance: look for native plantings, smaller lawns, sustainable green practices, etc.

ii. Sustainable Landscaping

1. Discussion by Mike

- a. Committee still preparing educational materials about how to plant and manage plant materials.
- b. Exploring how to make inroads in increasing native plant material and determine a broad strategy with the City.
- c. Oscar says Ellen Eggerton is meeting with the Environmental Policy Commission about ways to integrate ABC efforts to expand native plantings with the Eco-City efforts. Oscar to keep us posted on this progress.
  - i. Meeting has been set for May 13. Items to be discussed:
    - 1. RPCA- Park Services is responsible for right-of-way and median mowing but the Beautification commission is interested in a Citywide conversion to native plants under Eco City framework.
    - 2. Open an interdepartmental conversation and budgetary strategy discussion. What are the current mowing costs?

3. Elevate “native plant” programs to higher level (strategic level)
  4. How could a citywide program for native plants in public property could be incorporated in the Eco City framework and support the EAP 2040.
  5. Native plants are part of the EAP 2040 strategic plan in chapter 4 in several actions. RPCA is the lead on these actions with PZ and TES as supporting departments. How to integrate the EAP actions into RPCA priorities.
  6. Who control plant selection? Are medians part of development or City responsibility?
  7. Stormwater and Heat Island benefits
  8. Where to start pilot and equity issues?
- d. Steve shared that an E-News blast appeared on the City’s website about gateway cleaning, dates, etc. The Sustainable Landscaping Committee wasn’t made aware of the City’s efforts, and there needs to be collaboration between the City and the ABC. Oscar said he’ll invite the person responsible for the gateways to attend our meeting.
  - e. Oscar said that Ellen is asking the Policy Commission if the native plants will be a standard line-item in the Eco-city budgets. Oscar said he will ask if a member of the ABC can also attend the May meeting.
  - f. Michael said the content as it exists could be pushed out into the ABC and other social media channels.
  - g. Katie has created an ABC social media plan, and as the manager of the plan, she will present it at our May meeting.

### iii. Vacant Lots

#### 1. Discussion

- a. The current vacant project - Flagpole Park – will be mirrored after the renovation process for Kettle Park
- b. A meeting with the neighborhood association will happen soon.
- c. The Committee will provide a broader update at the May meeting.

## 5. **New Commission Business**

- a. Denise put forth we need to undertake a vote to approve the revised Awards approach of consolidating from six Award categories (Excellence in Architecture, Excellence in Sustainable Design, Green Practices in Beautification, Community

Beautification, Residential Beautification, Commercial Beautification) to four Award categories (Excellence in Architecture, Community Beautification, Residential Beautification, Commercial Beautification) where sustainable design and green practices will be evaluated across all 4 award categories. We will vote on the revised plan during the May ABC meeting.

- b. Steve reviewed the feedback received regarding updates to the ABC mission statement. Denise proposed further refinement to the Beautification Section. With the addition of the proposed refinement, the changes were approved by the commission.
  - c. Oscar will invite Camila Olivares from the City's communication department to attend a future meeting regarding collaborating on social media.
- 6. Agenda Items for the Thursday, May 12, 2022 Meeting, 7:30 PM**
- a. Thomas re-confirmed that Katie will present the ABC social media plan at the May meeting.
- 7. Public Comment/Discussion**
- 8. The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 9:00 PM.**