

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

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 13, 2022
7:30 PM

Present: Michael Budinski, Steve Cohen (Chair), Kathryn Chiasson (Vice Chair), Alexander Mcelya, Laura Norfolk, Denise Tennant

Excused Absences: Julie Chapman, Monica Murphy, Eleanor Quigley, Richard Dorrier

Unexcused Absences: NA

City Staff: Oscar Mendoza

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

1. **Approval of the September 8, 2022 Meeting Minutes**
 - a. Alex motioned to approve the minutes, Mike seconded, unanimous approval.
2. **Membership Updates**
 - a. 2 new Commission members; Eleanor Trice and Yanique Revers
 - b. 12 members, to date, 4 vacancies
 - c. We are looking for new Commission members.
3. **Commission Business**
 - a. Officers / Next Year / Elections
 - i. All roles are up next year
 - b. Three New Priority Goals Approved at the ABC August 2022 Retreat
 - i. Inspire beautification through the Awards Program.
 - ii. Promote environmental sustainability through collaboration and engagement with City Council, City staff, and private organizations.
 - iii. Educate local community on beautification and sustainability best practices.
 - c. **Objectives reviewed to support the modified ABC 3 goals were discussed**
 - i. **Goal: Inspire beautification through the Awards Program**
 - a. Objectives
 - i. Current plan of record
 - a. Conduct 3 categories of awards per year.
 - b. Publicize winners broadly (with ABC name attached).

- ii. Need to come back to commission with proposed go forward options for next year; Determine best way to conduct awards (annually, quarterly, ceremony, etc.)
 - a. Re-evaluate award categories and approach on an annual basis to increase participation and support ABC goals.
- iii. Provide feedback to nominees for awards who are cultivating ecologically undesirable trees and plants
- iv. Promote Award messaging through the ‘Educate’ goal.

b. Action items, Feedback and Misc items

- i. Determine as a subcommittee/commission what cadence we want to do in 2023.
- ii. Do we want to do three different categories per year and separate them? Or are we going to do them all at once? Plus an event?
- iii. Give out awards annually
- iv. Publicize award winners with an educational approach.
- v. Alex suggests that we let people know they were nominated + tell them the criteria

ii. Goal: Promote environmental sustainability through collaboration and engagement with City Council, City staff, and private organizations

a. Objectives 1

- i. Coordinate with City staff (T&ES) on installation of the new gateway signs (Phase IV of the City’s Wayfinding Program) and landscape plans for each gateway site to upgraded in 2023 (number to be determined). Help with site verification of sign locations, suggestions on landscaping & plant material including native plants if possible, and installation of the landscaping by the City contractor (BrightView). Also work with the City staff to develop a maintenance program for all landscaping installed at the gateways to ensure continuity of this investment for the future.

b. Objective 2

- i. By June 2023, collaborate with the City staff (Park Planning) and the HUME Springs Civic Association to develop an improvement plan for Flagpole Park, to include Surveying neighborhood residents in English and Spanish on desired uses and improvements for the space and working with a landscape designer to develop a landscape plan. Work with City Staff to ensure a plan iOS in place for these

improvements to be implemented upon completion of the planned T&ES storm water improvement project.

c. Objective 3

i. Meet with two members of the Alexandria-Arlington Tree Stewards, of the Arlington Chapter Master Naturalists, and of the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia and invite them to join with the Beautification Commission to:

- a. Identify 2 or 3 ways to collaborate to increase sustainable and beautiful plantings in the city of Alexandria
- b. Choose a park or vacant space in the city that would benefit for sustainable planting and trees
- c. Propose a conceptual development plan for consideration by the city, the city's arborists, and BrightView, the city's contractor for green spaces. Ensure that any new planting area(s) could be added to the BrightView's contract.
- d. Plan for supervision, number of volunteers and both city and BrightView staff needed for effective maintenance once the agreed-upon CDP is installed
- e. Ensure inclusion of expenses for the project are included in BrightView's contract
- f. Secure volunteers to assist BrightView with plant and tree installations
- g. Collaborate with BrightView to train volunteers and contract staff in:
 - a. Proper maintenance of chosen native plants and trees
 - b. ID of weeds typically found in the area and their effective removal
 - c. The ideal outcome is that maintenance could be handled by a volunteer group drawn from the Tree Stewards, Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners and the Beautification Commission.
- h. Complete a pilot/demonstration project by Fall 2024

d. **Action items, Feedback and Misc items**

- a. Discussion on Objective 1:
 - a. The City is planning to redo all gateway signs in 2023. This was new information to the group, ambitious timeline.
 - b. Subcommittee proposes doing a template for the landscaping, and the City implement it.

Denise believes the biggest concern is maintenance.

- c. Oscar flagged that budget conversations for maintenance need to happen ASAP based on the City's budget calendar. Could be an estimate.

b. Discussion on Objective 3:

- a. Kathryn expressed concern that this is too ambitious a slate of tasks. We should have one to three sentences describing it. Oscar flagged that we are getting a new city arborist, they'll need time to get up to speed. Laura suggested that we work with private groups on this.

iii. Goal: Educate local community on beautification and sustainability best practices

a. Vision

- i. Educate and motivate Alexandria residents, public officials and staff, contractors and landscapers on the ways to make the city more beautiful.
- ii. Educate local community on beautification and sustainability best practices using the following outlets
 - a. ABC web page
 - b. Social media via Instagram and Facebook
 - c. Local news publications

b. Strategy

- i. Populate the ABC web page with applicable and useful information
 - a. Award program and past winners
 - b. Other content — to be identified and developed
 - c. Measure traffic to the web page
- ii. Use social media and other avenues to broadcast the ABC webpage content and other information to Alexandria residents, public officials and staff, and contractors providing services to the residents and the city.
 - a. Develop a communication calendar to guide social media postings on a regular basis
 - a. ABC Awards
 - b. Using a network of local influencers, repost content that exemplifies specific beautification topics

- c. Regular topics such as “did you know” postings
 - d. Public events like the ALX Earth Day, native plant sales, other events(TBD)
 - b. Collaborate with local newspapers and publications to highlight ABC events and programs via press releases
 - c. Track progress and efficacy by measuring likes, followers, number of accounts reached , etc.
 - iii. Standing agenda topic item for monthly Commission meetings, solicit and discuss topics/items to be posted via social media channels or web page.
- c. **Action items, Feedback and Misc items**
- i. Oscar will coordinate a meeting for the subcommittee and the RPCA communications staff
 - ii. Michael would like to connect with social media people from Visit Alexandria
 - iii. Kathryn expressed concern that the goals are too big and hard to define if we succeeded
 - iv. Laura suggested a social media calendar
 - v. Alex suggested setting specific and low goals that can be achieved
 - vi. Denise suggested once a week
 - vii. Denise suggested adding a goal that we ensure citizens are engaging on beautification when they ask for feedback
 - viii. Denise suggested asking the community for suggestions/feedback on what we should do
 - ix. Alex suggested considering seasonality (holidays, seasons)
 - x. Laura suggested posting pictures of people’s homes as inspiration