

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 14, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *ps*

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

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**ISSUE:** Receipt of the Annual Report from the Public Records Advisory Commission.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That Council receive the report of the Public Records Advisory Commission and thank the Commission for their efforts on behalf of the City.

**DISCUSSION:** The Public Records Advisory Commission has prepared a report detailing the activities of the Commission from July 2002 through June 2003. During this period, the Commission held 5 regularly scheduled meetings to discuss records management issues. The Commission worked on several significant projects during this 12-month period:

1. Public Records Management Program. The Commission supports facilitating public access to permanent records that are not restricted by state or local governing law. Restrictions proposed by City agencies should be subject to outside review by the Records Administrator and Archivist with legal guidance as needed for conformity with those established exclusions. The Commission also recommends the adoption of the September 2002 draft of Administrative Regulation 1-9 (Public Records Management Program). A staff committee has been reviewing the City's Administrative Regulations. The draft of this A.R. will be forwarded to Department Heads for Review.
2. Micrographics. The need for efficient storage and public access to construction and other material continues to be an area of concern to the Commission. Due to contractor quality problems the City suspended microfilming of these materials in the early 1990's. Currently Code Enforcement is participating in a pilot imaging program to digitally store and index by address and subject matter, all current and past records and blueprints. If it is found to be successful, it is likely that staff will be discussing this with the Commission in the future. The Records Administrator & Archivist is a member of the City's Imaging Committee which oversees

imaging projects throughout the City. This provides an opportunity for significant input about records and archiving issues for these types of projects. The Commission will continue to monitor this situation and offer advice and suggestions.

3. E-mail. The Commission encourages the City to consider other methods for distinguishing emails of record. The City, like most governments, will continue to rely on printing and filing paper copies of record material. In October 2003 the City issued a new set of draft guidelines on the use of email which will implement a process which will allow individual email users to be able to store older appropriate e-mail more efficiently and will provide a mechanism to distinguish record from non-record material. ITS is in the process of implementing the services to support these new guidelines and is expected to begin placing them in-service during summer of this year. Members will continue to provide comments and suggestions regarding the City's email policy.

4. Resources. The lack of additional and better storage as well as additional staff to process archival materials and create finding aids for researchers limits efforts to facilitate public access to the City's historical public records and increase awareness and use of existing material. The Records Administrator & Archivist has been identifying and processing researchable archival collections and produced both textual and on-line finding aids with the help of graduate students from George Mason University. The City Manager's proposed FY 2005 capital plan includes \$25,000 for a shelving/storage study to identify ways to increase shelving and storage area capacity, including the possibility of high-density shelving. The Commission encourages increased cooperation and partnerships with other record holders, particularly Special Collections in the Alexandria Library, as a means of leveraging available resources.

5. Activity of PRAC Members on Additional Commissions and Committees. Mr. Clarence Henley continued to serve on the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission with the full support of PRAC. Membership with HARC provides an opportunity for cooperation among organizations dedicated to preserving and improving public access to historical documents and other records.

6. Commission Membership. Four members left the Commission and one new member was appointed by City Council.

**ATTACHMENT:** Report of the Public Records Advisory Commission.

**STAFF:**

Jean Taylor Federico, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria

Jackie Cohan, Records Administrator and Archivist

Rose Williams Boyd, FOIA Officer

## **Public Records Advisory Commission**

### **Annual Report to the City Council July 2002 – June 2003**

The purpose of the Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC) is to provide advice and guidance on records management activities, including appropriate public access, and on the implementation of the records management program in the city. The Commission consists of seven citizen members appointed by the city council, each with a term of two years. Membership is composed, to the extent possible, of professional archivists, records managers, historians and research specialists. The Commission held five regularly scheduled meetings at City Hall and the Archives & Records Center during the period covered by this report. Each meeting had an agenda and was open to the public.

#### **Public Records Management Program**

During this period PRAC continued to deal with several issues that have been pending for some time. Some of these issues have been summarized in a review of draft Administrative Regulations covering this area at an October 18, 2001 meeting as follows:

1. The purpose of the public records management program should include facilitating appropriate access by both City staff and the public as this is an essential objective of good records management. This corresponds with the underlying law that includes under the purpose of Records Management the provision of reference services to the public.
2. Records should only be restricted in accordance with the provisions of governing law and procedures. Restrictions proposed by originating offices should be subject to outside review for conformity with those established exclusions. The Records Administrator & Archivist is the appropriate City official to conduct such reviews with legal guidance as needed.
3. Unrestricted records that are stored at the Archives & Records Center should be made available to the public there on the same basis they would be made available if those records were still in the originating office.

The recommendations were part of the Recodification of City Code project that was initiated in May 1999. At its September 2002 meeting, PRAC further reviewed changes to the pending draft Administrative Regulation 1-9 (Public Records Management Program). PRAC recommended minor changes and unanimously supported its adoption as amended.

#### **Micrographics**

This remains an area of concern to PRAC. There is an ongoing need to more effectively store and access drawings and other material. Microfilming of this material generated by Code Enforcement was stopped in the early 1990's due to resolution problems. A consistent approach to scanning, indexing and accessing public records is important in meeting the objectives of the records management program.

## **E-mail**

Further work needs to be done in this area. Like most governments, the city is still relying on printing record material and adding it to files. No good operating means exist to distinguish record from non-record material or to ensure that record material will be appropriately available years hence.

## **Resources**

Available resources remain a limiting factor in improving access to archives and increasing public awareness and use of existing material. Additional and better storage is needed to handle city records. Additional staff is needed to complete the accession of archival material and to provide appropriate finding aids and to facilitate use of both archival and record material. PRAC has been encouraging increasing cooperation and partnerships with other records holders, particularly the Alexandria Library as a means of leveraging available resources.

## **Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC)**

Mr. Clarence Henley continued to serve as PRAC's representative on this body. The Commission members are keenly interested in the activities of HARC because it provides an important opportunity for cooperation and mutual support among organizations interested in preserving historic documents and improving public access to information in those documents and other records.

## **Commission Membership**

There were several changes in the membership of the commission during this reporting period. Richard Peuser resigned because he was moving out of the city and Robert Smith completed his third term and did not reapply. A new member, Charles Ziegler was appointed by city council in June. During this year, the following citizens served:

Robert Smith (chair)  
Clarence Henley  
Martha Crawley (elected chair on October 16, 2003)  
Michael Strutzel  
Paul Pattak  
Alice Fierstein  
Richard Peuser  
Charles Ziegler

Respectfully submitted:



Martha Crawley, Chair  
Alice Fierstein  
Clarence Henley  
Mark St. Mary  
Charles Ziegler