

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 5, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *ps*

SUBJECT: REPORT ON THE 2004 FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE 2005 FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

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**ISSUE:** Report on the 2004 Festival of the Arts and recommendations concerning the 2005 Festival of the Arts.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

- (1) Receive the Report of the 2004 Festival of the Arts (Attachment);
- (2) For future years, set the second weekend in September as the annual weekend for the Festival of the Arts and endorse the concept of a month-long series of arts activities occurring annually in Alexandria in conjunction with the Festival of the Arts and Art on the Avenue;
- (3) Acknowledge that the Festival of the Arts Executive Committee will serve as the management team for the 2005 event; and
- (4) Direct the Festival of the Arts Executive Committee to further develop and enhance the Festival based on the experience and evaluation of the 2004 Festival.

**DISCUSSION:** In March 2004, when Council approved the Festival of the Arts as an annual City event, it requested that an evaluation of the 2004 Arts Festival be undertaken and docketed for review. As indicated in the attached evaluation report, the 2004 Festival of the Arts was widely considered a great success. In only its second year, the Festival attendance was estimated at 65,000 to 75,000, with nearly all of the logistics working very smoothly and without incident.

As a result, the Festival of the Arts Executive Committee has recommended, and I concur, that the event be held each year on the second weekend of September, and that it become a major part of a month-long celebration of Arts in Alexandria. The Arts Festival in Old Town would be near the beginning of the month-long City arts celebration, with Art on the Avenue (in Del Ray) being near the end of the celebration. In the intervening weeks, a wide range of shows and events would take place, all planned and coordinated as a part of the month-long celebration. This annual celebration of the arts in Alexandria would benefit City residents, the City business community, as well as the arts community. It also would reinforce the City's image in the region as an arts

destination and creative community. Further, it would directly support the Council's adopted Strategic Plan Vision of Alexandria being a "Vibrant, Diverse, Historic and Beautiful City."

The 2005 Festival of the Arts will be held on Saturday, September 10, and Sunday, September 11. In selecting a date for the Arts Festival, September appears to be the best time of year because of existing established signature events, holidays and generally good weather. Assuming Council acknowledges that the management of the 2005 Festival will again be by the Festival of the Arts Executive Committee (which is comprised of the Arts Commission Chair, the City Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities senior staff, the ACVA Executive Director, and a member of the Arts Commission representing the Arts Community), the Committee will begin immediately to plan not only for the Fall Festival on September 10 and 11, but also for other activities and events involving the visual and performing arts, as well as educational components that can be offered during the month in addition to the Fall Festival and Art on the Avenue.

The Committee will also begin the process of hiring an arts promoter for the 2006 Fall Festival and beyond. For the 2005 Festival, the Committee has decided to work with Howard Alan Events, LTD, to negotiate a contract containing a variety of elements of benefit to Alexandria. Howard Alan is familiar with the City requirements, and the Committee is confident that he will produce a successful show. The Committee Chair's intent is to have a contract finalized and executed no later than December 31, if not earlier. This will allow the Committee to focus on activities for the fall other than the Festival and on hiring the best arts show producer for future years.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** City out-of-pocket costs associated with the 2004 Howard Alan Events, LTD, event totaled \$18,287, with the City being totally reimbursed by the promoter for this amount. Costs associated with the local component totaled approximately \$12,000, and included honoraria for entertainers, jurors, artist fees, and promotional materials. The economic benefits to the City are positive from the Arts Festival, but are difficult to measure. If each of the 65,000 to 75,000 attendees spent an average of \$20, then some \$1.3 million to \$1.5 million would have been spent. Clearly many of the attendees did not spend anything, but many attendees purchased art which cost anywhere from ten dollars to thousands of dollars. Primary City tax revenues from the Arts Festival derived from sales taxes as well as restaurant meals taxes. Some restaurants reported that, with the permitted outdoor sidewalk dining, they had their best sales weekend ever.

In addition, the Arts Festival and Art on the Avenue both serve to highlight Alexandria within the region, and to expose the many visitors to the wide range of shopping and dining opportunities within the City. As a result, it is likely that many attending the Arts Festival will return at a later date to shop, dine or purchase art, thereby creating additional economic and tax benefits to the City.

**ATTACHMENT:** Report on the 2004 Festival of the Arts

**STAFF:**

Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager

Kirk Kincannon, Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Janet Barnett, Deputy Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

## REPORT ON THE 2004 FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

The City's second Festival of the Arts (the Festival) was held on Saturday, September 11 from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and on Sunday, September 12, 2004 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on King Street from the Unit Block of King and Union Street to Washington Street. Seven blocks of King Street and the 100 blocks North and South Union, Lee, Fairfax, Royal, Pitt, and St. Asaph Streets were closed during the Festival hours to accommodate the art exhibits that were placed along King Street. This was an expanded footprint compared to the 2003 Festival. It was also a warm and sunny weekend.

Approximately 200 artists from throughout the nation, including local artists, displayed and sold art, which included paintings, sculpture, prints, photography and jewelry. An additional 22 local artists participated in the local component of the Festival, which was juried by local jurors. The footprint of the Festival was extended by two blocks so that more local artists could be accommodated.

City staff and the Alexandria Convention and Visitors' Association staff roughly estimate that approximately 65,000 to 75,000 people attended the two-day Festival. Attendees included City residents, Washington metropolitan area residents and many individuals traveling to the City specifically to attend the Festival. They dined and shopped and some stayed in City hotels. The City contracted with Howard Alan Events, Ltd. to produce the show, and volunteers from the arts community produced the local component of the Festival, which also included juried performing artists at the City marina. Over 140 volunteers assisted with traffic and parking, provided information to Festival attendees, and served as greeters to the Festival.

One of the highlights of the Festival was the opportunity for Festival attendees to dine outdoors in expanded dining areas on City sidewalks. Many of the restaurants offered outdoor dining during the two-day Festival. Staff received many favorable comments from both patrons and the restaurant management about this pilot opportunity. In addition, many of the retail shops and galleries provided outdoor displays and sales. For many, this was successful in terms of sales, and for the Festival attendees, this was another opportunity to learn more about the City's varied retail opportunities.

The 2004 Festival was managed by a Festival Executive Committee which included Leon Scioscia, chair of the Arts Commission, who served as its chair, and three vice-chairs: Janet Barnett of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, Jo Anne Mitchell of the Alexandria Convention and Visitors' Association and Pat Miller, a member of the Arts Commission. These co-chairs represented the three key areas of the Festival, which include logistics, marketing, promotion and the arts.

With regard to the general impression of the 2004 Festival, it appears that it was well-received by the visitors, residents, businesses, and artist exhibitors. Formal evaluation discussions were held with the City's Special Events Committee, the Old Town Business Association, the president of the Old Town Civic Association, the Alexandria Commission for the Arts, the Local Component

Committee, the event producer Howard Alan, Ltd., the Arts Forum, and the 2005 Festival Committee.

Each of these groups agree that the Festival was successful. Major evaluation comments include:

- The Festival brought people to the City, who may return again;
- The art was of a higher quality than in 2003;
- Howard Alan Events, Ltd. included a local juror selected by the Festival committee to serve on his jury;
- Howard Alan Events, Ltd. was accommodating and responded to all City requirements;
- Permitting outdoor dining was a major plus, and added vitality to the City;
- Keeping the Festival open until 7:00 p.m. on Saturday was a good enhancement;
- Exhibiting artists were pleased with the Festival crowd and sales;
- In planning the 2005 Festival of the Arts, consider a month-long celebration which would include the "Festival of the Arts" in Old Town and "Art on the Avenue" as "bookends" with art focused activities scheduled in the middle weeks to include new events, along with activities scheduled by local art organizations, schools and galleries; and
- In planning the 2005 event, initiate a poster contest so that the winning design can be used to promote the Festival.

Major concerns regarding the Festival include:

- Traffic congestion that occurred in some areas due to street closures (such as South Washington Street traffic);
- There is a need for additional security to assist the volunteers with traffic control;
- Entertainment at the City Marina needed to be better promoted (some did not know it was there);
- A central location for Festival information needs to be established;
- Farmers Market was somewhat negatively impacted and plans should be developed to improve the situation;

- Local Artist component needs expansion and presentation needs improvement;
- Children's component was lacking throughout the footprint of the Festival;
- The Market Square footprint was under-utilized during the Festival;
- There is a need for additional signage highlighting the footprint of the Festival and additional informational tables; and
- Improve visibility of the businesses along the side streets of the Festival footprint.

These evaluation comments will be considered as planning begins for the 2005 event.