


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 5, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: RECEIPT OF THE 2005-2006 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA RESOURCES COMMISSION

ISSUE: Receipt of the annual report (2005-2006) from the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission.

RECOMMENDATION: That Council receive the report of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission and thank the Commission for their efforts on behalf of the City.

DISCUSSION: The Historic Alexandria Resources Commission has prepared a report detailing the activities of the Commission from July 2005 through June 2006. During this period, the Commission held 10 meetings that focused on different aspects of history and preservation in Alexandria and worked with City agencies and private historic organizations on three major, successful projects. Additionally, the Commission continued its regular responsibilities as the forum for history institutions in the City.

- 1. Maintenance of Museums and Historic Sites:** The Commission recommended increasing efforts to preserve the City's historic buildings. In the summer of 2005, the Commission produced a video documenting the deterioration of historic structures and the limited resources available to support historic preservation in recent years. In October, a conference was held to discuss additional funding for historic preservation, identifying the needs for the care of historic structures, and increasing public awareness as well as the best way to approach these problems. A follow-up meeting was held in November. The Mayor, City Council, and members of historical organizations participated. The Historic Alexandria Foundation provided additional support.
- 2. The Role of Historic Preservation in Alexandria:** The Commission recommended efforts to stimulate greater interest in historic preservation in Alexandria with regard to the entire City and not simply existing historic districts. In April, Mayor Riley of Charleston, South Carolina, spoke to the Mayor, Council and over 200 residents regarding Charleston's successful 30-year preservation program. A conference on the needs and resources for preservation in Alexandria is

planned for the fall of 2006. The City's Planning and Zoning Department, Old Town Civic Association, and the Historic Alexandria Foundation became involved, as well as the Office of Historic Alexandria.

3. **400th Anniversary of Jamestown (Jamestown 2007 Celebration)**: The Commission, one of the sponsors, continued to assist in coordinating events, lectures, and activities as well as programs and exhibits. The Commission also helped in the coordination of the May-June 2006 visit of the *Godspeed* to Alexandria, the site of the first stop on its tour and a replica of the middle of the original three ships that carried settlers to Jamestown in 1607. The Alexandria stop of the *Godspeed* was the most heavily attended stop of all the *Godspeed*'s visits to other cities on the east coast.

ATTACHMENT: Historic Alexandria Resources Commission Annual Report, June 2006

STAFF: Jim Mackay, Acting Director, Office of Historic Alexandria

HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA RESOURCES COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT

JUNE 2006

In its 2005-2006 year, the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC) played a leadership role in three major successful projects focusing on different aspects of history and preservation in Alexandria in addition to continuing its regular responsibilities as the forum for history institutions in the City. At the same time, HARC saw a change in its leadership with the retirement of Ms. Jean Federico, Director of Office of Historic Alexandria, who had for many years served as the City's liaison with HARC and had played a significant role in the development of Alexandria's historic programs and historic preservation. While HARC continued to serve as the forum for the discussion of issues of concern to Alexandria's history community, it focused its efforts on three major activities, working with other City departments and private historic organizations to carry out these activities. Two focused on conferences and meetings that led to discussions and activities designed to improve historic preservation within the community. The third marked Alexandria's activities focusing on the celebration of the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown.

Beginning late in the 2005 year, work began to develop a program that would bring to the attention to the community the problems facing our city in terms of historic preservation. Although Alexandria has long been a model for historic preservation with the second historic district in the United States, the Old and Historic District, and early efforts at preservation that date to the 1920's and 1930's with the preservation of

Gadsby's Tavern and other significant structures, resources available to support historic preservation in the city have been more limited in recent years. During the summer, the efforts to spark a renewed interest in preservation took two directions. First, a group within HARC produced a video documenting the problems facing various historic properties owned by the City. This was followed by a plan to hold a conference to discuss the needs of historic properties owned both by the City and by other public and private non-profits. HARC held the first conference on October 1, a Saturday, which over 80 individuals including Council members attended. The issues of the meeting focused on the need for additional funding -- both public and private, on identifying the needs for the care of structures, on making the public aware of the situation, and on directions to be taken to deal with the problems. Later, in early November, HARC held a follow-up session that involved the Mayor and most of Council, as well as many of the participants from the first session. In the following months, the City and the community have worked to make the vision come to pass, although the issue will remain a significant matter facing HARC and the community in future years. Members of most of the historical organizations in the community participated in these discussion, and the Historic Alexandria Foundation provided additional support.

The second project, an effort to develop an awareness of the role and place of historic preservation in Alexandria, grew to involve the City's Planning Department, as well as the Office of Historic Alexandria -- and included the City's Archaeology Program, the Board of Architectural Review, the Old Town Civic Association, and the Historic Alexandria Foundation. The first phase of this project took the form of a public lecture by Mayor Riley of Charleston, held in April. Mayor Riley spoke to the Mayor, the

Council, and over 200 citizens in a meeting held at the Masonic Temple. His important and inspiring discussion of how Charleston has developed a successful program in preservation over the past 30 years served to stimulate interest in the needs to improve the situation in Alexandria. Follow-up to Mayor Riley's discussion will be a conference on the needs and resources for preservation in Alexandria to be held in the fall of 2006. Again, as in the case of the first conference series, this is to be the start of a long-term and continuing program designed to encourage an understanding of historic preservation as it serves the entire city, not simply the existing historic districts.

The third project is Alexandria's involvement in the celebration of the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown. In the current year, this project has followed two courses. The first, a continuation of activities begun several years ago, is the creation of a program of events, lectures, and activities marking the celebration over the coming year and a half. This includes programs and exhibits developed through the City's museums, as well as private agencies. These will be publicized through the Jamestown website and local programs. In May-June of 2006, Alexandria also served as the site of the first stop on the cruise of the *Godspeed*, a replica of the middle of the three ships that carried the settlers to Jamestown in 1607. Supported by the Department of Recreation and Parks, with participation by HARC, the event was a major success for the community. Held over a week in late May and early June, the ship drew tens of thousands of visitors to the city, increasing interest in the city and an awareness of the its historic programs, as well as its role in the early settlement of Virginia.

Taken together, the three projects represent a substantial effort by a citizen body working with representatives from the entire history and preservation community within

the City of Alexandria. Although the antecedents of all three projects predate the current year, and the results and follow-up will continue through the coming years, the current year's production is a success for the Commission, and does set the stage for future accomplishments. In a sense, we are only continuing work based on precedent and are setting the stage for the future.