

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*18
1-9-01

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 4, 2001

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER^{PS}

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

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 January 1999 through June 2000. During this period, the Commission held 12 regularly scheduled meetings to discuss records management issues. The Commission worked on several significant projects during this 18 month period:

1. Public Access to Records. The Commission supports the access of public records in an efficient and appropriate manner. Staff is working with the City's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer, Rose Williams Boyd, and with the City Attorney, Ignacio Pessoa, to determine which documents can be made available to the public without going through the formal FOIA process.
2. Archiving E-mail. The Commission reviewed and discussed the City's proposed plans and draft guidelines for archiving E-mail with Ignacio Pessoa, City Attorney, and Bill Cole, Director, ITS. Members of the Commission have extensive experience at the National Archives and other Federal agencies. There are significant issues concerning the proper identification of record versus non-record material and in maintaining an efficient storage and retrieval system. Members will continue to provide additional comments and suggestions on revised guidelines. In the meantime, the City has recently prepared and distributed draft guidelines on the use of E-mail, including the need to make paper copies of necessary documents for archival purposes.
3. Microfilming of Code Enforcement and Other Records. The Commission recommended that when microfilming records, an original and two working copies be prepared. In that manner, the original will be archived and the working copies will be accessible in the originating office and at the Archives & Records Center. Maintenance of an archival film is necessary to allow the destruction of copied documents. This process has been instituted by the Records Center.

In addition, the Commission has been particularly interested in the archival maintenance of Code Enforcement documents because these records provide excellent historical documentation of the City's housing and building stock. These records are particularly of interest to future historical researchers in areas such as the City's Old and Historic Districts. As a result, the Commission has been interested in the methods that the City uses to retain Code Enforcement records, which have included retention of paper records, microfilming of some records, and consideration of the use of new scanning technologies. While the City has currently suspended microfilming of new records while plans are underway to implement scanning technologies, the Commission has expressed concern about the multiple record retention methodologies in use for Code Enforcement records over various periods of time. Staff from the Records Center and Code Enforcement are now working to evaluate the methods used to retain documents so the historical information can be preserved in a more systematic manner. The Commission will continue to monitor this situation and offer advice and suggestions.

4. Activities of PRAC members on additional commissions and committees. Mr. Clarence Henley and Mrs. Ruth Lincoln Kaye served on the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission and the City of Alexandria 250th Anniversary Commission respectively. Both members participated in a full range of activities during the past year and a half. Mr. Henley has suggested that it would be helpful to have a guide to holdings in the City's archives as an aid to anyone interested in city history. Mr. Robert Smith represented the Commission on the Historic Alexandria Planning Committee and participated in the development of a long range plan.

5. Draft to Amend the City of Alexandria Code. At the City's request, the Commission reviewed portions of the City Code. The Commission believes the suggested changes emphasize that public access is part of the records management program and make adjustments in language to account for new technology. The amended section of the Alexandria Code has been forwarded to the City Attorney's Office after a unanimous vote by the Commission endorsing the changes.

6. Accession of Historic Public Records. The Commission reviewed a planned donation of 18,000 files concerning Alexandria land records.

7. Archives & Records Center Renovation Project. This extensive renovation project was completed in 1999 during which time the staff was able to maintain essentially uninterrupted access to the records during the entire process.

FISCAL IMPACT: None

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 January 1999 – June 2000

Previously the Public Records Advisory Commission has submitted annual reports on a calendar year basis. This report covers the 18 months ending June 30, 2000 and will align the Commission's reporting with the city's fiscal year.

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 program in the city. The Commission consists of seven citizen members appointed by the city council for a term of two years with membership composed, to the extent possible, of professional archivists, records managers, historians and research specialists. In meeting this purpose, the Commission held 12 regularly scheduled meetings at City Hall during the period covered by this report. Each meeting had a specific agenda distributed to the membership in advance of the meeting and each meeting was open to the public.

There were several changes in the membership of the commission during this reporting period. Katherine Swiencki's position was vacated, Larry Hesterberg resigned, and Arnold Miller's term expired during 1999. Two new members, Martha Crawley and Kyle Chadwick were appointed during that year. A third new member, Raymond Santora, was appointed at the beginning of 2000.

The members began to expand the scope of the Commission's activities during this reporting period. Increasingly they are considering the city's full records management program, including public access and the records that remain under the control of operating divisions, as well as those that have been transferred to the Archives & Records Center. Issues such as public access and E-mail record retention are now prominent. The purpose is to support a program to provide efficient, economical and effective control over the creation, distribution, organization, maintenance, use and disposition of all City records.

Participation by city staff has been particularly helpful to the Commission in this expanded role. Mr. Ignacio Pessoa has met with the Commission on both public access to records and on archiving E-mail. Mr. Bill Cole has presented information on a draft E-mail archival policy. Mr. Arthur Dahlberg discussed Code Enforcement's plans to automate some of their records.

The Commission's principal activities were:

Public Access to Records

The Commission continued to review procedures for accessing public records, especially those that are unrestricted (e.g., building permits). The objective is make access as efficient as practical and to ensure that any necessary procedures are fairly applied. In particular, the commission continues to question whether public access to any unrestricted public records should require submission of a FOIA request.

Similarly, the commission supported more open access to those unrestricted records that have been transferred to the Archives & Records Center. This position was unanimously supported by the commission as stated in a March 19, 1999 memo from the Records Administrator & Archivist to the City Attorney's office:

“... propose that once records are accessioned by the Archives & Records Center from the various City departments as permanent material, they should be made available to the public without the FOIA request process as long as they are not subject to the restrictions mandated by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act or City of Alexandria Administrative Regulations, and if the City departments which have transferred the records do not indicate any restrictions.”

Ms. Cohan subsequently reported that this position was supported by the Director of Citizens Assistance at the September meeting of City Department Heads eliminating the need for any specific action.

Archiving E-mail

The Commission reviewed and discussed the City's plans and draft guidelines for archiving E-mail with Mr Pessoa and Mr. Cole. Comments were provided based on members' extensive experience with the issue at National Archives and in various Federal agencies. There are significant issues concerning the proper identification of record versus non-record material and in maintaining an efficient storage and retrieval system. The members look forward to providing comments and suggestions on a subsequent revised version of the guidelines.

Microfilming of Code Enforcement and Other Records

In order to ensure that there is a protected archival record of microfilmed (or similarly copied) records, the Commission has recommended that in each case an original and two working copies be prepared. The original will be archived and the working copies will be accessible in the originating office and at the Archives & Records Center. Maintenance of an archival film is necessary to allow the destruction of copied documents.

Code Enforcement is initiating a scanning project that will help to automate their review and approval process. At this time they still plan to require paper copies, one of which will become the record copy maintained at the Archives & Records Center. The continuing suspension of microfilming these records leaves unresolved the accumulation

of paper records. For public access it leaves a complicated mixture of microfilm, paper and computer records covering various periods.

Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC)

Mr. Clarence Henley was reappointed and has 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 amongst organizations interested in preserving historic documents and improving public access to information in those documents and other records. In turn, Mr. Henley has suggested that it would be helpful to have a guide to holdings in the city's archives as an aid not only to HARC members but also to anyone interested in city history.

City of Alexandria 250th Anniversary Commission

The commission continued to support the celebration of Alexandria's 250th year primarily through the active participation of Mrs. Ruth Kaye as PRAC's representative on the Anniversary Commission. She consistently kept this commission well informed and encouraged our active support of projects undertaken by the Anniversary Commission.

Draft to Amend the City of Alexandria Code

The Commission is in the process of reviewing the changes suggested by the Records Administrator and Archivist and is preparing changes to reflect an expanded role for PRAC as discussed at the head of this report. Most changes emphasize that public access is part of the records management program and make adjustments in language to account for new technology.

Accession of Historic Public Records

The Records Administrator and Archivist Jackie Cohan reported on her visit with the City Historian Michael Miller to assess Bernard Corbett's planned donation of about 18,000 files concerning Alexandria land records which originated with the Davis & Ruffner Title Company. Based on their positive evaluation of the historic value of the records the Commission unanimously supported obtaining, microfilming and archiving this material.

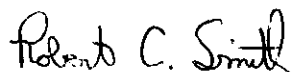
Archives & Records Center Renovation Project

This extensive renovation project was completed in 1999. The Archives & Records Center was able to maintain essentially uninterrupted access to the records maintained there during the entire process.

Historic Alexandria Planning Committee

Mr. Smith has represented PRAC on this ad-hoc group that was initiated in January 2000 by the Office of Historic Alexandria to develop a long range plan with broad support from the historic community. This project is scheduled to be completed in September.

Respectfully submitted:



Robert C. Smith, Chair

Kyle Chadwick

Martha Crawley

Clarence Henley

Ruth Kaye

Maida Loescher

Raymond Santora