


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 4, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

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 July 2007 through June 2008. During this period, the Commission held 9 regularly scheduled meetings to discuss archives and records management issues. The Commission worked on the following projects during this 12-month period:

1. Acquisition of the Print Shop Space: *The Commission supports giving the space left by the Print Shop at 801 South Payne Street to the Archives & Records Center as well as to the Office of Historic Alexandria.*

The Commission, along with the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission and Alexandria Archaeology Commission, sent a joint request asking that the former Print Shop space at 801 South Payne Street be given to the Archives & Records Center, as well as to the Office of Historic Alexandria to resolve the lack of adequate storage, working, and research space. Initially, the Print Shop was to be part of the facilities and property study being conducted as part of the follow up on the Economic Sustainability Implementation Report. It was determined later that the building was needed for city offices and in the future might be needed for the expansion of the Alexandria Sanitation Authority facilities.

In response to the Commissions' request staff from the Office of Historic Alexandria, the General Services Department and the City Manager's Office have formed a team to address current and future records storage needs. The team has met twice and has developed a plan for using budgeted Records Center CIP monies in FY 2009 to make more efficient use of the current records storage facility. With some reconfiguration of space use the current Records Center should accommodate City records storage needs until 2012. The group has identified a portion

of the old Print Shop that would be suitable for future records storage. The team is developing plans for this space for future records storage and research use.

Other space in the old Print Shop is planned for use as office facilities for the 30 staff members in the old Health Department if the City Council determines that facility should be sold. We will be discussing the study results with Council during our FY 2010 budget deliberations.

2. City E-Mail Policy: *The Commission recommends that the City adopt a comprehensive, written e-mail policy.*

Continuing to monitor and review the formulation of the City's e-mail policy, Tom Trobridge, the Deputy Director of ITS, was invited by the Commission to attend a meeting in February 2008 to explain the City's e-mail system's planned changes. While the City's policy and practice is to follow State laws on records retention including for emails, a specific written policy on email retention is under consideration.

3. Records Digitization: *The Commission urges City staff and elected officials to ensure that digitized historic records are not destroyed.*

In keeping with State law on permanent records, the Commission worked to alert all those who create public records for the City that any designated historic records, although digitized, must be maintained in either paper or microfilm format as well.

4. Archives & Records Center Facility: *The Commission recommends that repairs and other maintenance issues at the Archives & Records Center be completed in a timely fashion, particularly with regard to the deteriorated fire escape, which is too dangerous to use in the event of a fire. The Commission also recommends that the Fire Department's adjacent Burn Training Facility be moved to another location at the earliest feasible opportunity, as it constitutes an unacceptable hazard to the preservation and safety of the City's records.*

During the past winter or spring, a section of the iron and cement fire escape collapsed. General Services staff have repaired a damaged fire escape and will ensure that the facility is maintained at the proper level.

The Commission also discussed the risks of having fire training next to the City's Records Center. The Burn Training Facility, under the direct supervision of the Fire Department, has operated without incident at the Payne Street site since approximately 1983. The City does not have another site to relocate either the Records Center or the Burn Training Facility.

ATTACHMENT: Annual Report of the Public Records Advisory Commission.

STAFF:

J. Lance Mallamo, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria

Jackie Cohan, Records Administrator & Archivist

Rose Williams Boyd, Executive Secretary, Boards and Commissions

PUBLIC RECORDS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Annual Report to the City Council July 2007 – June 2008

The Public Records Advisory Commission (PRAC) provides advice and guidance to the City Records Administrator and Archivist on records management matters and implementation of the records program in the City. The PRAC is authorized to have seven citizen members appointed by the City Council for terms of two years. It is composed of professional archivists, records managers, historians, research specialists, and citizens.

During the period July 2007 – June 2008 the PRAC held nine meetings. Each meeting had an agenda and was open to the public.

Acquisition of Print Shop Space by Office of Historic Alexandria/Archives & Records Center

Again this year, the major issue addressed by the PRAC during the period under review has been the acquisition of the vacated Print Shop space at 801 South Payne Street by the Office of Historic Alexandria/Archives & Records Center. The PRAC continues to strongly support this measure. Acquiring the additional space would resolve storage problems for many years to come, and provide much-needed improved working and processing space for staff, as well as an expanded area for public researchers. Expansion into the Print Shop space is also cost-effective, since an adjacent space would be used and little moving would be required.

In June 2008 the PRAC, the Alexandria Archaeology Commission, and the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission sent a joint report to the Mayor and City Council detailing the reasons for their support of the addition of the vacated Print Shop space to that of the Archives & Records Center.

City E-Mail Policy

The PRAC has continued to monitor and review the formulation and implementation of an e-mail policy for the City government. The February 2008 meeting of the PRAC was attended by Mr. Tom Trobridge, Deputy Director of ITS, and a useful exchange of ideas ensued.

Records Digitization

The PRAC has also continued to monitor and review the formulation and implementation of records digitization projects in the City government.

Archives & Records Center Facility

The PRAC noted that in the past year there have been delays in the maintenance of the Archives & Records Center facility. Most notably, the outside staircase is in a seriously deteriorated condition and is a significant safety hazard. There has also been slow mail delivery and pickup.

While acknowledging the professionalism and dedication of the City Fire Department, the Chairman particularly wishes to emphasize that the presence and continued use of the Fire Department's Burn Training Facility directly adjacent the Archives & Records Center facility constitutes an unacceptable hazard to the safety and preservation of the records stored therein. The PRAC strongly urges the removal of the Burn Training Facility to a more appropriate location at the earliest feasible opportunity.

Ongoing Issues

The PRAC will continue to monitor, review, and make recommendations on the following matters:

-Development of a comprehensive, City-wide e-mail policy that incorporates employee training and ensures that Virginia's public e-mail records are managed and preserved in accordance with applicable laws as well as Library of Virginia standards and guidelines.

-The records digitization projects in the City government. The PRAC urges that elected officials and City staff take particular care that permanent, historic records of the Mayor's office, the City Council, boards and commissions, and City agencies are never destroyed. This is a particular temptation and danger following records digitization projects. However, the Library of Virginia requires that all records deemed permanent be retained in either paper or microfilm format in addition to any scanned copies.

-Administration regulations for the Archives. The current regulations were approved in July 1983 and are in need of significant revision, to reflect the many changes since then in information and communications technology.

Commission Membership

The following citizens served on the PRAC during the period covered in this report:

Ginger Chamberlain
Sammye Collins
Alice Fierstein
Louis Gioia
Clarence Henley
Jeannine Jeffrey
Nils Kandelin
David Kois
Charles Ziegler

Respectfully submitted:

Charles Ziegler, Chairman

Ginger Chamberlain

Sammye Collins

Alice Fierstein

Jeannine Jeffrey

Clarence Henley

Nils Kandelin