



[Alexandria Beautification Commission](#) | P.O. Box 178 | Alexandria, VA 22313  
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### **MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, March 14, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m.  
901 Wythe St

**ABC MISSION:** The Alexandria Beautification Commission was established by the City to advise City Council and citizens on all matters related to City beautification.

**Present in person:** Leah Bancheri, Steven Cohen, Elizabeth Gelfer (Vice Chair), Kenneth Krupa, Maralyn O'Brien, Eleanor Quigley, Sara E. Rhoades, Daniya Tamendarova (Secretary), Eleanor Trice (Chair), Kelly Yates (new member); Oscar Mendoza

**Present remotely:** N/A

**Excused absence:** Felicia Hackett, Alexander Mcelya, Laura Norfolk, Emily Swaim, Yanique Revers, Monica Murphy

**Unexcused absence:** N/A

Meeting started 7:33 pm.

1. Motion approval of [January 2024 meeting minutes](#) & [February 2024 retreat minutes](#) - including [sustainability subcommittee work plan](#), [awards subcommittee work plan](#) & [education subcommittee work plan](#)
  - **Sara** motioned that we approve Jan and Feb minutes. Ken seconded. Approved unanimously.
  
2. Speaker: Kathie Hoekstra, Chair, [Environmental Policy Commission](#) (EPC) – collaboration opportunities & discussion – 20 min total
  - Kathie provided the following materials for reference after the meeting: [Info for Conversation](#); [Sample Metrix Chart](#); [Eco City Awards Pilot](#) (proposal)

How to link sustainability dimension of ABC Awards to available info the City/EPC gather?

- The EPC came up with new metrics: 1) reduce fossil fuel gasses (through renewable energy refocus and energy efficiency; by 2030, reach 50% in fossil fuel gasses reduction; the goal is to have 53K out of 76K housing units electrified and made high-performance—e.g., through efficient heating and cooling, insulation;; buildings are the highest fossil fuel gas producers in the City because of our high housing density. 2) 95% of newly built homes to be energy-efficient; 3) transportation – reduce the number of gas/diesel cars and improving public transportation; 4) increase number of protected bike lanes – see details in [Sample Metrix Chart](#).

Sustainability metrics we could add to evaluate ABC Award nominees?

You could base it on energy efficiency and/or electric vs. gas and/or net zero or how much of a carbon footprint the building/residents generate. In other words, does the property have solar and perhaps backup battery? What level of air-sealing/insulation does the property have? What level of EE are its windows and doors? Adding an Energy Audit before and after work done on any of nominated properties would help dramatically because it's an independent source of info and with a blower door test will tell us how efficient the building is.

- **Steve:** If the City wants people to adopt solar panels, they should remove inhibitors – e.g., explicitly allowing installation of solar panels in Old Town.
- 

Who tracks translation of solar and heat pump switch (from gas)?

Who tracks installations of solar and heat pumps in the City?

Solar tracked by Dominion and also registered with PJM (regional electric grid operator). Heat pumps are not tracked by anyone because generally no permit is required to replace gas with electric, only heat pump. Someone should provide incentive for homeowners to register heat pumps with the City so we know OR do a door-to-door survey. Washington Gas could tell ABC if nominated properties switch out gas for electric, but it's harder to assess if property has dual fuel gas and heat pump.

**Eleanor Tice:** Does the EPC have or plans to have awards?

The inflation reduction act had 2 pots of money: tax credits (benefitting more affluent households); point-of-sale rebates (to benefit poorer households). In the end, EPC did not agree on priorities/criteria. **If ABC wants to add explicit Sustainability Awards, contact the Office of Climate Action to do something jointly.**

**Kathy H.:** Should our two Commissions have a joint meeting? Or Commissions could have regular space in each other's agendas to discuss items of common interest. [ABC members were generally open to the idea]

**Sara K.:** Do you deal with solid waste? **Kathy H.:** A little, but because it's only 2% of the pollution and the contract with waste management vendor does not run out for a while, the focus is on reducing pollution from building. **Sara:** May be of interest to us in terms of composting/educating the public about composting.

### 3. Budget update & elected official liaison for ABC – Eleanor T./Oscar/all - 15 minutes

- Comments on the [invitation letter to Sarah Bagley](#)

**Eleanor T.** distributed draft letter. She reviewed all Council member bios. Sarah Bagley's was the only one mentioning sustainability, though she hasn't been engaged with ABC (and it appears she is already engaging with other Commissions).

**Oscar:** What is the main ask? **Eleanor T:** Ask to attend ABC meetings 2-3 times a year. **Steve:** Perhaps ask for quarterly attendance.

**Oscar:** If the Council member accepts the invitation, for the first meeting to have a meeting devoted just to the Council member and how we could work together.

**Eleanor T:** Noting that the City Arborist and someone from Transportation will come to the next ABC meeting (April).

**Steve:** What are the benefits for a Council member to become our liaison? **Eleanor T:** Speak at the Awards event, get to know and help shape our priorities.

**Eleanor T.:** If we agree on Sarah Bagley, we can tweak the letter in the next week and send an invitation.

**Steve:** What's the ideal timeline? **Eleanor T:** April, ideally, to involve her in some Earth Day events (many Council members will be there anyway).

**Oscar:** If she does accept, may want to send an invitation later on to all Council members to join events/initiatives.

**Steve:** Plan B, if she is unable or unwilling to join us?

**Elizabeth:** We would ask her for a recommendation.

**Eleanor T:** Motion to send the letter, **Steve** – second it. Approved unanimously.

- Tweaks to the letter: Ask in the letter to recommend someone from the Council if she is unable to join. The letter will be circulated for input following March meeting.

#### **Recap about the budget:**

**Oscar:** Sometimes City Manager proposes reduction in one area without discontinuing the program—e.g., delaying it into next year but allowing use of originally allotted surplus money for something else. This year, such surplus money is to be devoted for tree planting, connected to the City Anniversary celebrations. **Will soon have 156K\$ for tree planting.**

- **Eleanor T:** Plan to do seedlings giveaway. Can ABC committee be involved with tree planting? **Oscar:** A big part of that money will be dedicated to citizen requests for planting (there is already big backlog). Some are for Arborist discretion and existing tree maintenance, as well as invasives removals.
- **Steve:** Are some of the funds linked to maintenance of newly planted/distributed trees? i.e., not just tree planting, but allowing funds for maintenance or care information (e.g., a follow-up, a pamphlet on how to care for the newly planted tree).
- **Oscar:** At April meeting, City Arborist could present the details of this program and its components.

- **Eleanor Q: Maralyn** noted lots of new plantings along Eisenhower Ave last year, but it looks like there was a very low survival rate this spring; consider planting fewer but larger trees and include budget for hot-weather watering. Maintenance/watering needs to be included.
- **Oscar:** Watering may cost 2-3 times more than the tree (200-300K\$ to water trees). Sometimes it's more cost-effective to replace the tree than include 2-3 watering sessions. City is considering handling this itself and not rely on vendors.
- **Eleanor Q:** It makes no sense, budget-wise, to plant a young tree and then not water them. Survival is unlikely and very discouraging.
- **Oscar:** Ask these excellent questions when Phil (City Arborist) comes to the ABC April meeting.
- **Eleanor Q:** We considered sending a letter to City Manager and Council outlining considerations for this and next year, letting them know our concerns
  - o **Steve:** Can students/schools go out and water trees? Maybe it's not the City but incorporate this into a curriculum.
  - o **Sara:** Another idea for budget consideration: thinking about invasive trees – is there a focus on removing them?
- **Ken:** Some federal money may have been available, but did City apply? **Oscar:** Yes, urban forestry and a couple other dept. applied for 2 grants.

#### 4. Updates – Eleanor T./all ABC members – 25 minutes

- **Earth Day events & 275 celebrations**
  - o Stream Cleanup - April 6 from 9 am - 11 am @ Windmill Hill Park
  - o Alexandria 275<sup>th</sup> Kick Off Event - Saturday, April 6 from 12 – 4 pm at Waterfront Park
  - o River Farm Spring Market – April 12-13 from 9 am – 3 pm
  - o **ALX Dog Walk** – Saturday, April 20 from 7-11 am
  - o DelRay Festival (**Gardenfest**) – Sunday, April 21 from noon - 4 pm
  - o [Community Cookouts](#) – from April 25 – May 25 (Tuesdays/Thursdays)
  - o **May EcoCity Festival** – Saturday, May 11 at NVCC from 10 am - 1 pm  
Tree seedling giveaway
  - o [alexandria.gov/ALX275](http://alexandria.gov/ALX275) (link will be set up by March 12?)
    - Portside in Old Town Summer Festival – June 21, 22
    - Alexandria City Birthday – July 13
  - o Tree planting at Ft Ward, Ben Brenman, Cameron Run & 4 Mile Run?

**Eleanor T.:** Events above are events that are already scheduled. We can have a booth at ALX Dog Walk, DelRay Gardenfest, and May EcoCity Festival. The Awards subcommittee was considering to distribute a flyer about awards (with sustainability facts on the reverse side).

- **Steve:** What is our goal? – **Eleanor T:** Educating the public about ABC Awards and how City residents can implement sustainable practices.
- **Sara:** What about April 6 event (Alexandria 275<sup>th</sup> kickoff event at Waterfront park)? **Eleanor T:** We are just invited to distribute flyers and attend, not a booth presence.
- **Steve:** I don't recall participating in events like this as a Commission. We can think about focusing on one event (where we think there is the closest affinity), use it as a learning experience, and then apply our learnings to next year. **Eleanor Q:** Agreed. The sustainability sub-committee is concerned about bandwidth.
  - o **Eleanor T:** May EcoCity Festival organizers said it's the largest and will have space for us to do seedling giveaway, if we wanted to, so that would be her selection. DelRay Gardenfest is small. ALX Dog Walk is focused on dogs but does have a sustainability theme.
  - o **Eleanor T:** Can go to the ALX Dog Walk herself, and then do ABC group participation for the May EcoCity.
  - o **Eleanor Q:** If we are involved in passing out seedlings, how do we ensure that it's sustainable? **Eleanor T:** The goal is to build awareness, engaging the public, but, if we chose, we could have **Tree Stewards** come as well with handouts about taking care of seedlings. If we have leftovers, we could distribute them at Farmers Market right afterwards.
  - o **Eleanor Q:** Do a demonstration planting with Tree Stewards as an engagement?
  - o **Steve:** Considering many people live in apartments, encourage people to plant the seedling in a pot? Provide info about that?
  - o **Ken:** If we have a booth at EcoCity, should we expand our offerings? **Eleanor T:** We will have educational handouts.
  - o **Daniya:** Which trees are being distributed? **Eleanor T:** Dogwoods and oaks – it was recommended to have 2 native options.
  - o **Steve:** Motion to focus on one event. **Sara:** We can focus on one event, but then make use of those events where members will be informally present. **Daniya:** Motion to focus on one event formally with a booth; if members are present at other events informally, can give out flyers (Sara: especially since the smaller events are in April and that would give more visibility in time for nominations).
    - **Sara seconded. Motion approved unanimously to focus on one event formally with a booth and have members be present informally at other events to distribute flyers.**

- - **Eleanor T. reminder:** Awards event date: October 17. By May 24, nominations have to be submitted – looking at 8 zones.
- **Laws/rules** re: FOIA, etc.
  - **Please note that Eleanor T. is using [alxbeautification@gmail.com](mailto:alxbeautification@gmail.com)** for ABC communications.
  - Ensure Oscar has access to Google drive & social media accounts.
- **Donations & [Community Matching Fund](#)**
  - **Eleanor T:** Other possibilities depend on funding and may better wait until we meet with City Arborist in April.
  - **Oscar:** The idea is if a Commission raises an x amount, the City matches that amount. This year, given the 156K\$ availability, funds are available. May wish to wait until next fiscal year (July onward). **Eleanor T:** Consider an additional tree planting for the fall then.
  - **Eleanor T:** with Elizabeth, met with **Office of the Arts** and the **Board of Architectural Review**; both organizations will help promote ABC Awards.
  - **Elizabeth G.** looked for an alternative Awards location: 1) Alexandria City High School (only downside – can't apply until June); 2) Del Pepper Community Building – a new venue, so may not have all tech hooked up by Oct, but would be great for a future event. 3) Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School (one of the ABC past architectural awards winners; would be free because it's City-owned) – first-floor cafeteria (can sign up right now—excellent option); 4) The Garden – beautiful inside (not that much from outside, but professional and great setting—another great option) – looks like the owner would donate the space to us.
    - **Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School (award winner, city-owned) and the Garden (supporting local business) would both be appropriate.**
    - Can decide by the end of April, to be decided at the next meeting.

#### 5. **Sub-committee discussion/decisions** (sub-committee chairs) – 30 minutes

**Sustainability Committee: Eleanor Q** – (1) Gateways Project - no activity detected around the Gateway project. It appears to be behind schedule. Monica will be involved in planting decisions once the project is back on track. (2) considering where a planting could take place – trees are especially needed in Northern part of Alexandria and far Southwest of the City. **Some potential places:**

Ben Brenman Park, Cameron Run Park. (3) If we are thinking of a fall event, don't want to conflict with the Awards. Can happen any time between late Sept. to mid-Nov.

Ran out of time (9pm). The following Committee reports were not presented:

- Awards key dates, venue, other updates – Yanique,
  - Education/communications - Sara
- 

## **ABC GOALS**

1. Inspire beautification through the awards program.
2. Promote environmental sustainability through collaboration and engagement with City Council, City staff, and private organizations.
3. Educate local community on beautification and sustainability best practices.

## **RESOURCES on the ABC Google drive**

- [See updated roster/contact list](#) on ABC Google drive (most recent posted Jan 11, 2024)
- Bylaws, meeting notes, etc. in [General folder](#)
- Draft [2024 planning calendar](#) with key dates
- ABC [partners & collaborators](#)

“Though the word beautification makes the concept sound merely cosmetic, it involves much more: clean water, clean air, clean roadsides, safe waste disposal and preservation of valued old landmarks as well as great parks and wilderness areas. To me ... beautification means our total concern for the physical and human quality we pass on to our children and the future.”

Lady Bird Johnson



