



[Alexandria Beautification Commission](#) | P.O. Box 178 | Alexandria, VA 22313
[facebook.com/AlexandriaBeautification](https://www.facebook.com/AlexandriaBeautification) & [instagram.com/beautifulalx](https://www.instagram.com/beautifulalx)

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 11, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m.
Charles Houston Recreation Center | 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), Felicia Hackett, Kenneth Krupa, Alexander Mcelya (last meeting), Monica Murphy, Laura Norfolk, Maralyn O'Brien, Eleanor Quigley, Yanique Revers, Emily Swaim, Daniya Tamendarova (Secretary), Eleanor Trice (Chair); Oscar Mendoza (City Staff)

Present remotely: N/A

Excused absence: Sara E. Rhoades

Unexcused absence: N/A

Kelly Yates resigned from the Commission

The meeting began at 7:31 pm.

1. Motion approval of [March 14 meeting minutes](#)

Steve motioned to approve March 14 meeting minutes; **Oscar** seconded. Approved unanimously.

2. Budget update & elected official liaison for ABC – Eleanor T. – 5 minutes

a. [Letter about the budget](#)

Time set aside to provide feedback about the ABC letter to the City Council about the budget.

Steve suggested to reframe the letter to begin with our appreciation of the City investing in tree plantings but noting that funding for maintenance is an important second step. **Steve will provide Eleanor T. with suggested language.**

Eleanor Q moved to approve the letter (with **Steve's** amendment to framing); **Alex** seconded. Approved unanimously.

b. Sarah Bagley as the City Council liaison to the Alexandria Beautification Commission

Eleanor T – Sara Bagley agreed to be the City Council liaison to our Commission but wanted this to be an official appointment from the mayor. Upon consultation with Oscar, **Eleanor T. will send a letter to Sarah inviting her to join us in an informal capacity (calling her an “advisor” rather than a liaison;** the liaison status apparently requires formal appointment, which we are unable to do). We are asking her to attend quarterly (she is unable to attend in the next two months). Our request is for her to talk about her agenda (she is also a liaison for other Commissions that may be relevant to our work).

Eleanor Q moved to approve Sarah as an “advisor” and send her an invitation; **Monica** seconded. Approved unanimously.

3. **Sub-committee update/discussion/decisions** (sub-committee chairs) – 30 minutes

a. Education, website update in process – Daniya (10 minutes)

Since Sara is away, Daniya provided an update on behalf of the Education Subcommittee.

Zebra Press Articles: Zebra is publishing all our submissions; we got 2 pages this month. The Editor has told Sara that in the future we only will get one page or 750 to 800 words. This translates to 3-4 stories at 150-300 words each.

- We are going to start looking at other media outlets to send stories to when we have more than the 3-4 allotted stories.
- Interested in following up with Eleanor T's contact at the Alexandria Times in April or May.

Eleanor T. will put the Education Subcommittee in touch with her contact.

- Article submissions for this month are full, and they are all from our Commission members – THANK YOU! Final articles are **DUE 4/14.**
 - New Gateway Signs – Ken
 - Awards Nomination – Yanique
 - ABC Tree Giveaway at EcoCity Festival – Eleanor T
 - How and when to cut down your Bradford Pear Tree – Eleanor Q

- **TO DO for all Commission members:** Start thinking about May article submissions for June edition. **Due May 12, 2024.**

Commission Website Revision: We would like to revise our Commission website (<https://www.alexandriava.gov/Beautification>) to a more user-friendly design and update content. We are using the City's Recreation website as an example of what we could do: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Recreation>

- The updated design will make it more visually appealing and easier to find information. Right now our website layout is blog-like and vertical—readers need to scroll down to find anything. An update will move us to a horizontal layout with informational “buckets” (i.e., more horizontal page layout, with “buckets”/pages with key information covering our main areas of work – e.g., Awards, Sustainability, Education, Partnerships, General Information)

- **TO DO for all Commission members:** Please review our [Commission website](#) or at least your Subcommittee's section(s) and provide us with content revisions/ideas by **May 17, 2024.**

Social Media: Commission social media posting is up, and we have increased our followers and views.

- April/May postings will focus on the Award Nominations, Earth Month events, 275th Anniversary Celebrations, Garden Festivals, and Spring Plantings—as well as any public art work!
- We are doing 3 social media posts a week on the Awards until the nominations close
- **TO DO for all Commission members:** Please send us ideas for posts if you come across something that you think would be good for a post or story.
- **TO DO for all Commission members:** Please check @beautifulalx on Instagram and our Facebook page and like our posts and share them with your networks!
- March 2024 social media stats:
 - Increased account reach by +69% - reached ~1400 separate accounts in March
 - Increased account engagement by +58%
 - Increased total followers by +3%, now at 1,411
 - Top 4 trending posts:
 - Interstellar ~500 views
 - Mary Oliver Mural ~430 views
 - Fact Sheet on the worst Tree – the Bradford Pear – 340 views
 - Eleanor Q talking about why the Bradford Pear is invasive – 300 views

b. Awards nomination process, key dates, venue, other updates – Yanique (10 minutes)

Yanique distributed a handout summarizing the Awards Subcommittee progress report.

The Awards Subcommittee **broke down the Awards process into 4 phases:** 1) Awards pre-planning and development (Jan-March); 2) Awards nominations (CURRENT PHASE; April-May); 3) Awards voting, notifications, promotion (June-September); 4) Awards ceremony (October).

During the current Phase 2, the Awards Subcommittee is working through the following areas: 1) assign zones for Commission member canvassing [a list of zone assignments were distributed at the meeting; **Yanique will follow up with an email to Commission members later in April that would reiterate the assignment and provide zone maps**]; 2) promote 2024 Beautification Awards through various media (ABC social media, handouts, events, website and City channels, Zebra Press); 3) review nominations by Awards subcommittee on a weekly basis; and 4) prepare for Commission van tour.

Key dates to keep in mind:

DATE	EVENT
4/5/2024 – 5/24/2024	Awards Nominations submissions window
6/8/2024	Commission van tour
6/13/2024	Commission members review nominees, vote
6/21/2024	Distribute letters to the winners
6/28/2024	Distribute letters to the nominees
10/17/2024	2024 ABC Awards ceremony

Venue for the Awards ceremony: Elizabeth: The Awards Subcommittee is confirming with the City if the Commission is allowed to use The Garden (the space is being donated by owners).

Yanique motioned to approve going with The Garden if we are allowed to use it; **Laura** seconded. Approved unanimously.

Steve: Can we promote the Awards through City Council members, the Mayor, and existing partnerships (e.g., Patricia Washington)?

Eleanor T: Yes, will resend the list of promotional channels we are using or planning to use. Also [available on the Google drive here.](#)

c. Advocacy/sustainability, including City Gateways - Eleanor Q (10 minutes)

Eleanor Q motioned to vote that **Richard Dorrier** is authorized to work with the Sustainability Subcommittee to help with planning plantings for the Gateways project. Richard will work with Monica to design planting layout, including conversations with Oscar about budget. Ready to start on at least 3 plantings.

Eleanor Q. motioned to approve; Ken seconded. Approved unanimously.

Plantings of between 75 and 100 trees are being planned for 3 locations – Ben Brennan Park, Four Mile Run park, and the park between Cameron Run and Eisenhower Ave. The Subcommittee identified **3 Saturdays (Sept. 28, Oct. 19, Nov. 9)**, hoping to engage all Commission members as well as relevant partners like Tree Stewards (e.g., to offer demos on how to plant new trees).

4. **Phil Jubert**, Urban Forestry Manager & **Camille Liebnitzky**, T&ES – collaboration opportunities & discussion – 1 hour

Phil: The last City plans that focused on trees were implemented 15 to 20 years ago. The City has a great foundation but needs to update our data and review and update our data sources. Phil’s current focus this first year is on listening and improving internal processes. His key goals: 1) cultivate **an actively managed urban forest**; 2) focus on planting **the right tree for the right location** (no poisonous plants in public places; long-term longevity and health of plantings); 3) form **public-public partnerships** – i.e., build communications and partnerships with other City departments.

Eleanor T. asked Phil to comment on the City’s original tree canopy goal of 40%. **Phil:** That was a 1998–1999 recommendation by the [American Forest Foundation](#) (AFF). In 2017, AFF put out a press release that this goal is no longer good practice based on the latest data. Instead, they recommended to focus on trends over 5-year periods and set maintenance targets alongside planting targets. Different standards are hitting the market in recent years.

Improper planting practices are a big threat to tree canopy. **Phil** hopes to develop a better relationship with Arlington County and learn from each other (e.g., finding new ways of influencing private residences).

Camille L. from Transportation & Environmental Services – oversees green infrastructure in the City.

The City is planting on the King St median, next to King St and Bradley Shopping Center as one of the Gateway Signs. The City carefully evaluates where to put new trees, so that planned development will not affect them in the next 10 years. Efforts are also made to ensure that plantings are not done just in Old Town and Del Ray. West End will experience more development, so planting there needs to take that into account.

Steve: How much do you both (Phil and Camille) see the private sector—e.g., developers, businesses—helping you achieve your goals as opposed to the City (e.g., for drawing funds for maintenance)?

Camille: Any development needs to meet certain stormwater management and maintenance plans. **Phil:** State of Virginia works with large developments to create plans for tree management—this is a unique and new program to grow. Urban Forestry engages with businesses focused around employee health and tree plantings as group activities.

Phil would like to become more aggressive with getting grants—though many of the available grants are not appropriate for City and are targeted at smaller private areas.

Camille: Trying to engage people around “green programs”.

Ken: Are you updating the map of historic trees?

Phil: Yes, we are planning to update that list **by July 15**. Many of the trees currently on the list are on private property, so need to connect to owners to ensure that trees are there and are well maintained.

Maralyn: Can Commissions endorse/help with grant applications? **Phil:** Yes.

Phil: Another thing to keep on your radar as a Commission: Our only tree ordinance currently in place is safety ordinance. We can use this ordinance to remove English ivy from trees. But **the City needs to come together to decide whether we need new ordinances around trees** (and there is a lot of progress that can be made there), including provisions for maintenance.

Eleanor Q noted that she is seeing big City vehicles damaging big trees. **Phil:** Our City does not have a sufficient tree pruning program. Currently, we are reactive rather than proactive, based on how City budget is designed.

Eleanor Q: Can this Commission be helpful? **Phil:** That’s a multi-year change, but yes. His office is currently designing a proactive pruning plan to present it later in this calendar year. **Oscar:** The Commission could provide feedback on this plan and recommendations to the City Council. **Phil:** Safety of trees is an important consideration that the City is behind on.

Ken: This Commission is concerned with **proliferation of non-native and invasive tree species**. Can the City provide inventory of where such species are and begin planning for long-term removal? **Phil:** Currently, the City removes non-natives when issues arise (e.g., trees break). If a tree is non-native but not noxious, it will be removed when it dies and replaced with a native tree.

Camille: Recent project - [Lucky Run Stream Restoration Project](#) (600+ trees). With Phil’s work, the City was able to save a lot of money on planned plantings.

Eleanor Q.: What trees are being selected for mass plantings?

Phil: In general, we use a few ornamentals (i.e., to plant under power lines) and big shade trees (4-5 types of oaks, maples, sycamores...)

Eleanor T: Phil is helping us with tree saplings for the upcoming EcoCity event. What seedlings are we going with? **Phil:** Dogwood and/or red oak. It is recommended to focus on 1-2 specie and provide an educational flyer about tree care.

Monica motioned to ask for 50/50 white dogwood and red oak for Commission tree distribution activities; seconded by **Elanor**

Q. Approved unanimously.

5. Upcoming events

- **ALX Dog Walk** – Saturday, April 20 from 7-11 am
- **Del Ray Festival (GardenFest)** – Sunday, April 21 from noon - 4 pm
- **May EcoCity Festival** – Saturday, May 11 at NVCC from 10 am - 1 pm. **TO DO for all Commission members: Please let Eleanor T. know if you can volunteer for 1 or more hours at this festival.**

6. Announcements and public comment

Alex noted that, though he plans to attend some upcoming events, this is his last meeting as the Beautification Commission member. Commission members thanked him for his contributions to the group (including as past Secretary) and wished him well as he begins law school.

Eleanor T. noted that the Commission now has 2 openings.

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