



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

Thursday, June 13, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 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: Steven Cohen, Elizabeth (Liz) Gelfer (Vice Chair; acting as Chair), Felicia Hackett, Kenneth Krupa, Laura Norfolk, Eleanor Quigley, Yanique Revers, Sara E. Rhoades, Emily Swaim, Daniya Tamendarova (Secretary), Oscar Mendoza (City Staff)

Present remotely: N/A

Excused absence: Leah Bancheri, Monica Murphy, Maralyn O'Brien; Eleanor Trice (Chair)

Unexcused absence: N/A

The meeting began at 7:32 p.m.

1. Motion approval of [May 9 meeting minutes](#)

Ken motioned to approve May 9 meeting minutes, **Eleanor Q** seconded. Approved unanimously.

2. Vote for top 2-3 high-level priorities (1 short-term & 1 long-term) to discuss with Sarah Bagley at Aug 8 meeting – Liz lead discussion (15 minutes)

Liz noted that Eleanor T. and she would like to select one short-term priority and one long-term priority to bring up at the August 8 meeting with Sarah Bagley (our new City Council advisor). One of the highest first short-term priorities at last meeting was Bradford pear tree removal program similar to Charlottesville.

Other examples for potential short- and long-term priorities include:

- Supporting a specific sustainable practice(s) like rain barrels, other – what would the strategy be? (short-term?)
- Ft Ward arboretum – park opened publicly in 1964 (long-term)
- Awaiting results from fall 2024 parks & rec needs assessment & support an effort like nature trail (long-term)
- Potomac Yard space recommendation (long-term)
- Social services for distressed/unkept properties? (long-term)

Steve: Whatever we come up with should be achievable and measurable. Is there something we could tie to 275th Anniversary, especially sustainability-focused?

Eleanor Q: Increasing permeable pavers, rain barrels, planting natives are good examples and already part of City programs that we could help promote.

Steve: Can we connect this to tax breaks already approved by the Council?

Eleanor Q: Yes, exactly, there are tax breaks for installing permeable pavers, rain barrels, and planting native trees – and a goal like this would be measurable because of existing City records requirements.

Liz: One long-term goal was to make Fort Ward an arboretum.

Eleanor Q: Read up on the definitions of an arboretum – there may be a component of ongoing research (not sure if that's something that could be implemented for Fort Ward)

Ken: Enthusiastic about this goal because Fort Ward is a site with great potential for multiple uses beyond just being a Civil War-related site. This could provide the ABC with a substantial long-term legacy in addition to the 275 trees planted this year and new Gateway signs. In terms of requirements, Russ Bailey, the Tree Steward who participated in our ABC van tour, said that the key basic requirement was to have at least 25 different tree varieties to qualify a site to the most basic arboretum status.

Eleanor Q: Withdraw my reservation if the definition of an arboretum does not necessitate ongoing research on the site.

Liz: Other potential long-term priorities were developing a sustainability-centered solution for the Potomac Yard space and promoting social services for the distressed and unkempt properties (**Eleanor Q** underlined how the latter came to mind and she and Yanique were looking at homes in their Beautification Awards zone).

Yanique: The latter really stands out as key for our growing City – making services available to people who need help.

Laura: It may be that services and resources are in place but the City is not responding.

Eleanor Q: What City office would be a good alignment for a project like that? I think we need to do additional research to develop this as an idea.

Laura: Perhaps our focus should be on economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to provide public spaces—somewhere for families to take their children to play and relax.

Ken: The social service-type project would require resources – it’s unclear where such resources could come from. Do such programs already exist and may just not be well promoted?

Steve: It’s not necessarily a City problem to solve alone, but something for a City/private business collaboration.

Eleanor Q: The long-term project on Potomac Yard space, we could focus on recommending formation of a park at least for part of the property. **Sara:** Like the park spaces in Amazon Headquarters in Arlington – they are beautiful and full of native plants!

Yanique: It’s important not to lose sight of the need for t the ABC to align on equity issues in our City. We could be doing more in educating the public and connecting them to available resources.

Steve: We could discuss with Sarah Bagley what’s already on the books that could be allocated to address this kind of challenge.

Eleanor Q. motioned that, in our August conversation with Sarah Bagley, we focus on projects under the umbrella of sustainability and in that sustainability package could be encouragement of removing Bradford pear trees, installation of permeable pavers and water barrels, etc. **Steve** seconded. **Nay:** Laura; all others in favor. Motion passed.

Eleanor Q. motioned that we support creating an arboretum at Fort Ward Park; **Ken** seconded. **Abstain:** Yanique and Laura; all others (8) in favor. Motion passed.

Eleanor Q. motioned that we support a sustainability-focused use for the Potomac Yard site (e.g., a park on at least part of the property). **Steve** seconded. **Abstain:** Laura, Yanique, Emily, Felicia; all others (6) in favor. Motion passed.

Eleanor Q. motioned to appoint a task force among us to explore how to address distressed properties in socially equitable way. **Yanique** seconded. **Abstain:** Laura (too vague), Ken (it's out of our league); all others (8) in favor. Motion passed.

3. Award winner voting – Yanique (15 minutes)

Yanique provided an update. We did not receive enough highly-ranked properties to qualify as winners for Residential award (there were only 2 properties nominated from East Alexandria, and they were low-rated). **Liz, Yanique,** and **Eleanor Q** will be scouting in the next 5-6 days and will send around pictures to the group, possibly will hold a meeting on Zoom to present photos and vote. **Sara** and **Steve** will also walk around and try to provide some recommendations.

Yanique read out the winners in all categories and highlighted key dates.

Architectural	Potomac Yard, 3001 Potomac Ave. (Central)
	Douglas MacArthur Elementary, 1101 Janney's Lane (West)
	US Patent & Trademark Office, 600 Dulany St. (East)
Commercial	Port City Brewing Company, 3950 Wheeler Ave. (Central)
	Mural at Bradlee, 3660 King St. (West)
	750 Port St. (East)
Community	Simpson Demo Gardens Park, 426 East Monroe Ave. (Central)
	The Winkler Preserve, 5400 Roanoke Ave (West)
	44 Canal Center Plaza (East)
Residential (3 for each area)	205 Laverne Ave (Central)
	118 E Raymond Ave (Central)
	721 N Overlook Dr (Central)
	500 Virginia Ave (West)
	4619 Strathblane Pl. (West)
	503 Fontaine (West)
	TBD (East)
	TBD (East)
	TBD (East)

Upcoming key dates:

- June 13: ABC meeting, vote on the results of the van tour
- June 21: Notify winners via mail
- June 28: Notify and thank non-winning nominees via mail
- July-September: Communicate about winners via media outlets, confirm attendees of the Awards Ceremony, and prepare for the Award Ceremony itself
 - July: Promote winners in the Architecture category
 - August: Promote winners in the Community category
 - September: Promote winners in the Commercial category
 - October: Promote winners in the Residential category
- October 17: Awards Ceremony

Steve: Did anyone nominate balcony?

Yanique: There were no balcony nominations.

Steve: We should be ready to speak to this since we've mentioned this as a new category in promotions. (All in agreement: We'd need to have self-nominations in this category; we should think how best to promote this next year).

Yanique showed images of the winning residential properties to remind people which properties these were.

Laura left the meeting at 8:15, but we retained quorum.

Ken motioned to approve these nominations. **Steve** seconded. Approved unanimously.

4. Vote on City Arborist Phil Jubert as Awards Ceremony speaker & vote on poet laureate speaking – Liz

Ken: As an alternative, we could ask Maralyn to invite someone with the White House gardens connection – e.g., the White House Groundskeeper or even the First Lady; maybe someone from the National Parks Service?

Steve: Going back to **Yanique's** and **Elanor's** point, perhaps there is someone from the City who can talk about available services that can help.

Eleanor Q.: Another suggestion: One of our previous speakers, **Kathie Hoekstra**, Commission Chair, Field of Environmental Science EAP. Her view of sustainability was very informative. Even if not for this year, perhaps for future years.

Ken: Why don't we have a tiered approach? A national speaker, drawing on Maralyn, two City speakers, and a poet laureate. Or at least invite our candidates to reflect this approach and see who is available.

Steve motioned to vote for inviting the following speakers, to be voted on individually, **Ken** seconded:

- City Arborist Phil Jubert – approved unanimously.
- Kathy Hoekstra – not approved.
- A non-political White House or National Parks Service speaker – approved unanimously.
- Alexandria poet laureate – approved unanimously.

5. Vote to skip July ABC meeting – Liz

Sara motioned to skip the July ABC meeting, as usual, and meet on August 8 next. Steve seconded. Approved unanimously.

Daniya: As Secretary, will not be able to attend on August 8 (work conference). Are there any volunteers to take August 8 minutes?
Yanique volunteered.

6. General updates from Liz (10 minutes)

Liz, Sara, and Eleanor T. engaged a speaker from American University to present an online seminar at the Barrett Public Library branch on native and sustainable gardening practices on Sat, July 27, to be followed up on August 8. The Zoom portion of this seminar will be recorded.

The donated space for the Awards Ceremony will be reviewed and up for approval by City Council later this month.

7. Sub-committee update/discussion/decisions (45 minutes)

- AWARDS – **Yanique** (10 minutes)

As discussed, we have a plan to figure out residential nominations for East Alexandria. Still plan to stick to key dates (listed above).

Steve: Will need to coordinate website updates too, not just social media announcements. **Yanique:** Good point. Noted.

Ken: Has been in touch with Del Ray Artisans, who are enthusiastic about our work (and did a yarn bomb dedicated to the 275th Birthday). Would it be appropriate to display works by Del Ray Artisans at the Awards Ceremony venue?

Liz: The venue may not be able to accommodate displaying artworks.

Emily: Could put them up on easels instead of hanging.

Ken: Yanique is a talented floral designer. Maybe she could bring some examples to display at the ceremony? **Yanique:** Agreed.

Liz: All good ideas that we will discuss in more detail at the next meeting.

- EDUCATION/communications – **Sara** (10 minutes)

The subcommittee members are working on Voices of Alexandria videos featuring last years' award winners.

Zebra Press: We are grateful for enthusiastic participation from ABC members and subcommittees. This month, we have a feature about the 275th Anniversary banner by Del Ray Artisans (by Ken); Laura wrote about nontoxic weed killer; and Liz wrote about the upcoming seminar at the library. We can do the no-maw article by Eleanor Q. next time—it was too long to include this time.

All website changes were submitted to Katy Bishop but haven't heard back about the timeline for the updates. **Oscar** will follow up with her.

On the ABC website, there is a section featuring Citizens' Perspectives – for almost a year, we have the outgoing mayor listed there. We need more contributions to replace these. We have a piece by the City Arborist, but waiting for his approval. Will ask last-year's winners to contribute—this idea was well received by ABC members.

Steve: Ryan Freed who spoke at a previous meeting may be a good candidate.

Ken: Alexandria Tree Stewarts – Russ Bailey, Bonny

Sara noted these suggestions.

- SUSTAINABILITY/advocacy - Eleanor Q (15 minutes)

Let's note that our Awards nomination timeline may be beginning too early to see pollinator blooms (everything is blooming now, in June, but was not at its best when we were gathering nominations or reviewing the properties).

Fall 2024 Tree Planting: Liz, Russ Bailey from Tree Stewards, Eleanor T. by phone, and Eleanor Q. met with City Arborist Phil Jubert on Tuesday and agreed to a partnership of City staff, Tree Stewards, Master Gardeners, and the Commission to plant 75 – 100 trees in 2 city parks (Mt Jefferson Park and Greenway and Four Mile Run Park) and in the area between Eisenhower and Cameron Run. All involved organizations will sign a Memo of Understanding with the city about our respective responsibilities.

Responsibilities:

- Phil will purchase the trees, stakes, and straps to stabilize trees and provide water and mulch on planting days;
- Tree Stewards will provide tools;
- members of the new Tree Steward Fall class and neighborhood volunteers will plant the trees after brief training by city tree experts and experienced Tree Stewards.
- The experts will be available throughout to give guidance and answer questions. All involved non-City employees will be asked to sign waivers before working.

Planting dates are **September 28** in Mt. Jefferson, **October 19** in Four Mile Run, and **November 9** along Eisenhower Avenue. All ABC members are encouraged to participate. If you prefer not to do the planting but can be there, we'll need waterers and mulchers after the tree goes in the ground.

Phil was able to cut the price of trees in half, each tree will come in half-gallon size.

Sara: This would be a great article for Zebra. Please consider writing something, **Eleanor Q.**

Steve: Will the locations be reviewed for underground utilities?

Eleanor Q: Once locations are fully confirmed by the end of June, Phil will contact relevant City employees about review of the sites (including of underground utilities). About \$200 was saved per tree.

Ken: If we need additional labor, can ask East and West business associations to volunteer. There was general encouragement that he do so. There is also an organization called Alexandria Volunteers.

Sara: We can create a volunteer event and get many volunteers that way. There was general agreement that this would be a promising approach and something to promote on the ABC social media.

Gateways Project: Monica is traveling. She and Richard Dorrier reported that all signs are installed.

Richard has done preliminary designs on all gateways, and he and Monica will present them at the ABC August meeting. We hope the City will prepare the beds (remove grass, add topsoil and amendments) in September, and that the plants will be purchased by RPCA and installed by the contractor in October or November.

Important to note the gateways will include 13 new sites with beds that will need watering and maintenance. **A question for Oscar:** It is our understanding that we are awaiting information about the new budget that begins July 1. Please keep us informed about the budget situation. Do you have questions or comments now about the planned activities or the schedule?

Oscar: Once the design is approved and contractors are identified (Aug/Sept), it'd be helpful if ABC produced a maintenance plan that will be needed. **Eleanor Q.:** Noted. Monica may be able to provide Spanish translation as well.

8. Public comment/discussion

Ken: Congrats to the Awards Committee and Yanique as its Chair for leading a smooth and streamlined nominations process! There was general agreement with this sentiment among ABC members.

The meeting concluded at 9:03 p.m. EDT.

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