



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

Wednesday, August 14, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Durant Center | 1605 Cameron St - multipurpose room near front desk

Present in person: Leah Bancheri, Elizabeth (Liz) Gelfer (Vice Chair), Kenneth Krupa, Yanique Revers (arrived 7:43; quorum achieved), Maralyn O'Brien (arrived at 7:48), Sara E. Rhoades, Emily Swaim, Daniya Tamendarova (Secretary), Eleanor Trice (Chair); Oscar Mendoza (City Staff)

Present remotely: N/A

Excused absence: Steven Cohen, Felicia Hackett, Monica Murphy, Laura Norfolk, Eleanor Quigley

Unexcused absence: N/A

Meeting began at 7:33. We did not have quorum, but, as we expected Maralyn O'Brien and Yanique Revers to join, we began with the non-decision items.

Councilmember Sarah Bagley introduction & discussion about her priorities & related projects:

Eleanor T introduced Sarah Bagley.

Sarah serves on several other boards and commissions (the City Naming Committee; Eco-City Alexandria Environmental Action Plan Steering Committee; Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy, Child, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission; Waterfront Commission; Council of Governments: Climate, Energy and Environmental Policy Committee; Northern Virginia Transportation Commission; and Virginia Railway Express (VRE) Board of Directors).

Sarah tries to be focused on climate and transportation, in particular—two interrelated issues of relevance to ABC work. She lives in Old Town North and works in an affordable housing nonprofit around the country.

Sarah underlined an opportunity for collaboration with ABC around the new high school. **ABC members were invited to join a tour of the school on Friday, 8/16, at 1 pm (Elizabeth, Eleanor T, and Sara will represent ABC).** The building is special because it is so environmentally sound.

Eleanor T: Sara Rhoades proposed that we **meet with representatives of local schools, perhaps to introduce a sustainability module** (in partnership with Master Gardeners or another group) and potentially to develop an award for students and their families in the long run for implementing what they learned.

Sarah: Perhaps an Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) representative can come and present to ABC. There is a great opportunity for educating the youth.

Another idea: The **50th Anniversary of the Torpedo Factory is Sept. 15, 2024**, with many activities planned. **Sarah will forward an invite to ABC for various celebrations.**

Eleanor T: Douglass Elementary won an ABC award, so that's another school we could partner with. Eleanor T will go to Douglass Elementary to present the award in September; **Sara** expressed an interest in possibly coming with Eleanor T to record it for ABC social media.

Sarah: The City Council is also evaluating the [Green Building Policy](#) with a possibility to set new standards on solar panels, use of space outside of buildings, etc. Energy Use Intensity (EUI) is more affordable and attainable now than it was at previous policy development time (2019). The Council is considering to move to more of an outcomes approach.

On the Alexandria City Gateways project: Bike trails have no visual gateways or signs – Sarah would like to lift up this project and propose it to the Council, so this may be a good area to collaborate with ABC on beautification matters.

- **Eleanor T: Ricard Dorrier** is currently working on the Gateways with **Monica**, and, once that project is complete, they could contribute to the bike trails Gateways.

275th Anniversary of Alexandria City: [Alexandria's Poet Laureate, Zeina Azzam](#), crafted a poem on the City's history and present. Sarah would like for ABC to brainstorm how we might memorialize the poem in some permanent way in the City—ideas on a place or how to physically display the poem are welcome.

The level of donations to ABC was impressive, and it prompted a new City Council policy to simplify approvals for donations to City Commissions and Boards. (The Garden is donating their space as the location of the party; Bittersweet is donating 150 mini muffins, Green Street is donating 18 plants for awards, etc.).

Eco-City Academy: Sarah and the City Council put in a grant to restart the Eco-City Academy program (designed to inform residents about programming in the City to support sustainability efforts). **If the grant is received and the Eco-City Academy program comes back online, this would be an ideal project to partner on with ABC.**

Eleanor T: How can we help support low-income areas/residents, including support for distressed properties? Oscar suggested that we may get a demographics map of the City to identify an appropriate area to focus on (**Eleanor T.** attended a webinar on how other cities handle this: e.g., triangulating income info with tree canopy info and health markers to inform decisions like where to plant new trees).

Sarah: The [Alexandria Energy & Climate Change Action Plan](#) has some great charts that can help with demographics and identifying heat islands (e.g., Figure 25 “Relative summer land surface temperatures in Alexandria” on p. 93 and Figure 26 “Heat vulnerability indices for separate vulnerable population groups” on p. 95).

[Alexandria West Plan](#) is also about to be presented (see [AIXWest site](#) for updates) – the area is dominated by parking lots, which could be developed/enhanced with tree canopy. ABC is invited to look at the Plan and especially the green space recommendations for input from ABC members.

The Transportation Project near Bradely is about to come before the Council (redesigning the bus stops to make them more accessible) – another possibility for input.

Going back to the idea of supporting lower-income areas – perhaps invite a speaker from the Office of Housing to identify 1-2 specific communities. Sarah has done small-scale beautification projects – some to bring in natural design features to address stormwater, to address heat islands with plantings, do elevated garden boxes (e.g., for senior properties). Rather than creating a new process, identify existing programs to build a representative example/organic partnership on the ground as an example of a program that could be scaled up (get residents’ buy-in). In short, Sarah recommends ABC to review the Alexandria Energy & Climate Action Plan for ideas of City areas (in terms of demographics and heat islands) and then consult with the Housing Office on specific communities to focus on for a small-scale engagement project.

Yanique agreed that it’s a great starting point.

Sarah: Another area to address, in the long run, could be around vacant properties near Seminary Road and Beauregard. When developers apply for permits, they have to get approvals from various bodies like the Waterfront Commission, etc. ABC is not yet part of this review process – not to add another review loop, but it’d be reasonable for ABC to be informed and plugged into the conversations.

Recommendation from Sarah: Make sure ABC membership is aware when development/planning/affordable housing projects are being discussed – e.g., have a liaison with [Housing Affordability Advisory Committee](#), [Waterfront Commission](#).

Virginia General Assembly has not specifically allocated many regulatory powers to Alexandria City Council – so Council has to use incentives instead of requirements.

Maralyn: How can we better incentivize developers and households to act in sustainability-minded ways and to follow the existing rules?

Sarah: Apart from Alexandria West, the [City Housing Master Plan](#) is up for review – an opportunity for introducing incentives for sustainability-minded development practices that go above and beyond current basic requirements (tax breaks, incentives).

Since ABC already liaises with the [Environmental Policy Commission](#), it'd be great for ABC to also comment on the Green Building Policy (e.g., the Brandford Tree program).

The next budget will be presented to City Council in the end of February 2025. That's a great vehicle for Council members to put forward new ideas and initiatives: e.g., between August and February, ABC could identify some examples from other cities or counties of effective grant programs that Sarah could recommend in the area of beautification and sustainability – e.g., permeable pavers, Charlottesville's Bradford tree program, etc.

In addition, there is a new CEO for Visit Alexandria ([Todd O'Leary](#) from Sonoma County) – having him on ABC agenda could provide some good ideas on highlighting past award winners, etc.

Another interesting space for ABC to get an update on and review is the new Potomac Yard park, closed for now but likely to be opened to the public in spring.

Creating an area like Crystal City Amazon HQ area in Alexandria would be great – e.g., there is no splash pad in West End.

NOVA parks is operating a **water park in Cameron Run Park**; the lease is up in 2028. Alexandria as a City and the new Council will ultimately be making a decision on continuation (or not) of that lease in the near future. That could be another long-term opportunity for ABC to provide ideas/feedback on what that space could be.

Sarah: Do you have a youth member position? **Eleanor T:** We are thinking about this, especially as we are developing the idea for working with Alexandria public schools.

Sarah: Council added a childcare budget line – there is some **money in the budget to provide childcare to Board/Commission members during meetings** (to make being on Commissions more accessible); there is also **money available to compensate youth for participation in City activities and governance bodies.**

Ken: Since Alexandria is midway on the Greenway biking trail, could we consider developing something like a youth hostel?

Sarah: The City Council is currently debating about Airbnb and the tension with traditional hotel model in the City – there will be an updated short-term rental property policy. **Maralyn:** DC just updated theirs. **Sarah:** Yes, and that pushed the Airbnb model out of DC and into Arlington and Alexandria, which is why the Council is now looking at it in our City.

There is opportunity not just for hostels but developing relief stations, bathrooms, inviting biking trail users to visit local businesses.

Ken had some ideas on engaging bikers, particularly around City areas with fewer trails.

Sarah: Keep an eye out for biking tour of libraries around Alexandria (was in October in 2023: [Le Tour d'Alexandria Library Bike Ride](#)).

To recap: Sarah will follow up on inviting ABC to existing development presentations; tour of the new High School; will keep ABC posted on Eco-City Academy; as we head into the budget season – if there are good ideas, especially on planning and zoning process, that may be outside of ABC’s immediate remit but that we’d like to propose to the City, send them to Sarah.

Motion approval of [June 13 meeting minutes](#)

Ken motioned to approve June 13 meeting minutes, **Maralyn** seconded. Approved unanimously.

Eleanor T: ABC has to provide our annual report to City Council in September. All Subcommittees, please provide a short report of accomplishments by the end of August.

Kathy Hoekstra noted that we should discuss budget ideas for Council in September, so Subcommittees should discuss ideas.

We also need to update ABC Bylaws to add guidelines on how to use donations and term for a City Council representative.

Sara – motioned to update Bylaws, **Yanique** seconds. Approved unanimously.

At the next meeting, will discuss moving our meetings to Durant Center from Houston. (everyone was opened, Daniya Tamendarova and Emily Swaim had no preference).

September meeting topics will be focused on:

- **Awards** planning & responsibilities
 - City Council passed donation threshold resolution
 - Vote to update bylaws re: donation guidance & 1 yr-term for City Council advisor
- **Budget recommendations** so we can provide to City Manager in October
- **Need each subcommittee’s report** of activities from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024 by August 31.

The meeting concluded at 8:56 pm.

Commented [DT1]: I have this recorded, but did we decide to review this again in September?

Commented [DT2R1]: And a follow up question to Oscar - do I need to propose language for Bylaws update?

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

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