



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

Thursday, November 14, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Charles Houston Recreation Center | 901 Wythe St

Present in person: Russ Bailey (new member!), Leah Bancheri, Steven Cohen (final meeting), Elizabeth (Liz) Gelfer (Vice Chair), Felicia Hackett, Kenneth Krupa, Laura Norfolk, Maralyn O’Brien, Eleanor Quigley, Sara E. Rhoades, Daniya Tamendarova (Secretary), Eleanor Trice (Chair); Oscar Mendoza (City Staff)

Present remotely: Sandy Friedman (new member!), Emily Swaim

Unexcused absence: N/A

Guests: Sarah Bagley, Alexandria City Council; Samanta Heitsch and Ryan Freed, Alexandria’s Office of Climate Action

1. Welcome Russ Bailey & Sandy Freeman

The Commission welcomed our two new members, who briefly introduced themselves. **Russ** is a tree steward and has participated in ABC activities in the past & will be on the Advocacy/Sustainability Committee. **Sandy** looks forward to starting her term; she will be part of the Education Committee.

2. Office of Climate Action new [Eco-City Homes Recognition program](#)

Samantha Haitsch, Sustainability Coordinator, and Ryan Freed, Climate Action Officer, at the City of Alexandria’s Office of Climate Action talked about the [Eco-City Homes Recognition Program](#) for Alexandrians (homeowners, condo owners, and renters) who introduce eco-friendly features to their homes.

Those wishing to participate can fill out [the short application online](#). Participants who earn recognition receive window clings and yard signs to display their Eco-City Home designation, as

well as resources and guidance from the Eco-City team to help the participants' sustainability journey.

The City is accepting applications on a rolling basis and has opened the program to as many participants as possible—everyone is invited to apply and to encourage friends and neighbors to apply, too! (Link to the application page: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/eco-city-alexandria/eco-city-homes-recognition-program-0>)

3. Follow up from August discussion with Councilmember recognize er Sarah Bagley (1 hour)

a. The Alexandria Gateways Project (Eleanor Q. provided the update)

Six of the gateways were planted (phase 1). ABC's former members **Richard Dorrier & Monica Murphy** were on site to guide Brightview Landscaping. **Eleanor Q.** expressed the hope that the watering program will keep everything alive next year.

- Brightview has committed to watering and maintenance.
- Next plantings - 2 phases - will take place in spring and/or fall 2025. Spring may be a good time to take pictures and promote the initial plantings.
- There is a slower, phased approach to help Richard/Monica/Brightview monitor the plants, see what works/doesn't work and plan for the future.

Steve: We are in a drought situation and will there be additional maintenance planning to account for that? **Eleanor T:** Yes, watering and maintenance are part of the planning. **Oscar:** Proposals for additional funding for drought-time maintenance may also be considered for the next fiscal year (starting in July 2025).

b. Bike gateway signs (Oscar/Eleanor T. update)

The idea is to mark Alexandria (midpoint) on the East Coast Greenway, the 3,000-mile pedestrian and bicycle route between Maine and Florida. The proposal is to create a gateway sign, identifying Alexandria as the "Midpoint of the Gateway." Other bike trails - e.g. 4 Mile Run - will also have the bike gateway signs.

Eleanor T. and **Liz** talked with Visit Alx about how we could celebrate Alexandria's midway status more—possible ideas include: an organized run or biking, waystations, etc. and Visit Alx may pursue these in the future.

c. Poetry in the parks (update from Eleanor T)

ABC discussed the idea of introducing poetry to Alexandria's parks—on some plaques/signs or sculptures to display, for example, the poem about the City by [Alexandria's Poet Laureate](#).

- Eleanor reached out to the Office of the Arts and they will be collaborators with us.

- This will likely be a phased approach, piloting a poem in one park to start.
- We would like to see poems in West End parks (e.g., Ben Brennan); other parks to consider: Potomac Yards, Fort Hunt, there will be new parks around the Landmark Mall area.
- **Sarah Bagley** noted: When the Holmes Run bridge is refurbished in 2025, that may be a good location for 2026 ABC initiatives.
- **Sarah Bagley** also noted: From a budget-saving perspective, instead of signs or permanent structures, perhaps we could install just QR codes taking users to the readings of the poem – as part of forest bathing trails.
- Eventually we could work with Visit Alx on a “poetry trail”--this is a multi-year effort.
- This could be a public-private initiative, so the City need not bear all the costs.
- **Daniya** noted: DC’s Golden Triangle area has an initiative to post haikus (on temporary signs along sidewalk green islands) written by kids in DC. Could we do something similar, perhaps drawing on an outreach initiative that the Poet Laureate may be already doing?

Ken motioned to pursue the idea of introducing poetry to Alexandria’s parks further. **Sara** seconded the motion. Approved unanimously.

Daniya would love to be involved in this with **Eleanor T.**

d. Collaboration with ACPS

Use of City Greenhouse:

Sara Bagley: At a recent climate panel, an ACPS student was talking about a gardening program at his school and expressed an interest in using the greenhouse. Sarah will put ABC in touch with this student to potentially take the conversation forward.

Eleanor T talked with **Melanie Wright**, Alx City Public Schools (ACPS) School Garden Specialist who works part time across ACPS schools on gardening club projects. Julie (a former ABC member; runs Alexandria Dog Walks) was interested in funding a project led by ABC and related to youth engagement and sustainability.

- We could potentially use the greenhouse to propagate native plants that could be planted around local school entrances (many of them have a lot of concrete).
- Also, possibly engage NOVA Master Gardeners, who are currently mostly involved in projects in Arlington. There is a [Junior Master Gardener curriculum](#) that potentially could be adapted and added as a module to ACPS.

Eleanor Q: When we first went to the Tree Stewards’ meeting, one of the things **City Arborist Phil Jubert** spoke about is bridging the gap between the City Arborist Office and ACPS (these have been siloed).

Sarah Bagley: will check on whether City Arborist has responsibility over ACPS tree maintenance. **Oscar:** Phil Jubert would like to provide proactive maintenance help to ACPS locations via Memoranda of Understanding - MOUs (that could be renewed every 3 years).

Eleanor T: The Virginia Department of Forestry can create stewardship & other plans for larger private properties in the City of Alexandria, including schools, at no cost. Schools & others can learn more at: [Community Forest Revitalization Program : Virginia Department of Forestry](#)

Sara motioned to continue exploring these potential education efforts with ACPS. **Eleanor Q.** seconded. Approved unanimously.

e. Tree equity program & parking lot heat island mitigation

Eleanor T: There are fewer trees in the City's lower-income areas. As part of [ABC's budget recommendations](#) to City Council we focused on initiating a tree equity program in budget year 2025-2026 and outlined some ideas for parking lot heat island mitigation. We are waiting for feedback from the Office of Housing that would help us with focusing our efforts in areas with low tree canopy.

Sara Bagley: City Council will be voting on the Alexandria West plan at the next meeting (November 16, 2024). There are 30 acres of parking lots at Southern Towers – that area in particular could be made more hospitable with tree plantings. If the plan is passed, it will inform tree plantings, especially in existing areas like parking lots, for the next 20-30 years.

Eleanor Q: To bring trees to high-rise properties requires residents' or property managers' consent to take responsibility to care/water trees. This is not always feasible. As part of the planning, there should be alternative means to maintain the plantings from the City.

Sara B: Involvement of the Office of Housing is crucial to build long-term planning for any plantings.

- We encourage implementing private sector incentives - e.g. tax breaks, etc.
- Our budget proposal had some ideas from other cities (e.g., expediting permits, tax incentives, etc.) to engage support for green initiatives.

Eleanor T: In terms of mitigating heat islands – the Patrick Henry Rec Center & Minnie Howard HS are particularly lacking tree islands or trees around the perimeter of the parking lot. We also made some suggestions about replacing “pavement in parks” in the City's budget with “permeable and nonpermeable surfaces” – i.e., set a goal to, where feasible, replace asphalt/concrete with (and provide incentives for developers to use) appropriate permeable pavement options and/or native trees.

Sarah Bagley: As a tactical suggestion, ABC should follow up on the materials/ideas the Commission just sent as budget recommendations again in February/March. It is hard to know

which of ABC ideas will fit in the existing budget. The [ABC letter with budget recommendations](#) and examples from other cities was very helpful.

Eleanor Q: Is there any need to affirm ABC's interest in the City continuing their watering efforts of the trees we planted, including extra watering in times of drought? **Oscar:** It's late now for the current budget cycle, but in July (preparing documents in Feb), ABC could submit a request for supplemental funding to provide for extra maintenance/watering during times of drought. **Eleanor T:** The Sustainability Committee, please prepare a proposal we could review in February/March to submit to the City.

Oscar: We do need to allocate additional resources next year for drought conditions, since those events are increasing (and we planted a record number of trees this year).

Steve: Yes, and we should consider the scope of this commitment – e.g., the life of the tree or first 5 years. It'd be good to be specific.

Russ: In terms of tree equity efforts, how does it work with private properties – for example, we are considering a focus on 2 properties in Alexandria's West End. How would the City support this? **Oscar:** The City would provide free trees, and the owner would need to provide care and maintenance.

4. Updates (Eleanor T. & Oscar):

a. Bicentennial tree

Eleanor T: We're trying to celebrate the Bicentennial Tree at Holmes Run, which is over 200 years old (as is a sweet gum in Alx Natl Cemetery). These are "witness trees". Oscar is working on creating a sign with a QR code with the information about the tree. Phil Jubert just measured the tree, so the info on the City website is being updated. Oscar is also working on informational signs along paths up to the Bicentennial Tree.

Also working with the Office of Historic Alx on 250th American Revolution plans for 2025, highlighting the older trees and working with the Office of the Arts to decorate the trees around the Bicentennial Tree with red, white & blue.

b. The Fort Ward arborist memorial

Eleanor T: Oscar has been helpful in coming up with a plaque for the memorial, including names of all arborists to date, with space for future arborists. The plaque production is in process. We will also plant a dogwood (since one of the trees around the memorial died).

Ken: It'd be nice to add a time capsule to memorialize this point in time.

Eleanor T: Are there restrictions on what we could introduce to the park? **Oscar:** There may be technical issues/permits required—will look into it.

Ken: Let's investigate and take it on early in 2025.

Eleanor Q motioned to **explore the idea** of installing a time capsule by the arborist memorial in Fort Ward. **Ken** seconded. Approved.

c. Urban wood staging area

Eleanor T: Phil Jubert had an idea of creating an urban wood staging area - i.e., the City would put wood from tree removal/pruning in a public area where artists and others could pick up. ABC suggested to help with identifying an appropriate place.

Oscar: No update on this yet. A potential staging area was identified, but there is no decision yet (e.g., a criteria of what kind of wood can be taken to such a place).

Sarah Bagley: The Art League's space has a big room near artist studios, currently kept as open space. That may be an option. **Oscar will explore.**

Ken: The Del Ray artisans group may also be interested (about half dozen of the group's artists work with wood). It'd be good if artists would be notified first when new wood is available, before the public. **Eleanor T.** is planning to notify the Office of the Arts and other artists when the space is made available.

d. City Hall renovations

The City Hall is being renovated. **Eleanor T.** requested for someone from the City to talk to ABC about this.

Eleanor Q: Last time around, our Commission contributed to planting around Market Square, but because of lack of maintenance everything died.

Eleanor T: Yes, we must reiterate the emphasis on having a plant maintenance plan. Construction will start in 2026, but **the feedback loop is open now (until November 28):** <https://www.alexandriava.gov/CityHall> and directly [via this survey.](#)

Please watch **the video on the City website** about the plans for renovation and what the Market Square may look like: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/CityHall>

5. 2025 ABC retreat

Eleanor T: We would like to repeat a retreat in February and wondering if Sarah Bagley is interested/available to attend. Also invited Sarah to attend our 2025 meetings on a quarterly basis.

Sarah Bagley: Please send ABC meeting dates. She enjoys the group and our can-do attitude about working through complications.

Eleanor T: We can vote on the retreat date in January. Everyone, please check calendar to see if we can reserve **Saturday, Feb. 15 from about 9 am - 1 pm.**

6. ABC meetings will be at Durant Center starting in January 2025

7. ABC administration updates/decisions:

Daniya noted that, though she would be willing to stay on as secretary, she is open to one of the new members taking on this post. **Sarah Freedman** expressed an interest in serving as secretary.

Eleanor Q moved to have Eleanor Trice (Chair), Elizabeth Gelfer (Vice Chair), and Sarah Freedman (Secretary) as ABC officers in 2025. **Sara** seconded the motion. Approved unanimously.

Sara motioned to not have an ABC meeting in December and have a party instead. **Eleanor Q** seconded. Approved unanimously.

Oscar has made an offer to one person for the Natural Resources Manager position and another position was declined by a candidate, so the next candidate is being notified. ABC will be working with these new hires closely and they will attend a future meeting.

Eleanor T: We will have the party on **December 12** at Liz's house. Information will be provided.

The meeting closed at 9 pm, with the following remaining items for the January 2025 meeting:

- Motion approval of October 2024 meeting minutes
- Vote to keep Sarah Bagley as advisor for December 2024 – November 2025
- [Bylaws updates](#)

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.

“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