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AGENDA

Thursday, June 12, 2025 @ 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Durant Center, 1605 Cameron St

1. APPROVAL OF MAY MEETING MINUTES

May Minutes approved by Commission.

Attendees in person: Liz Gelfer, Eleanor Trice, Alisa Wong, Eleanor Quigley, Russ Baily, Kevin Fisher, Emily Swaim, Sarah Hill, Sara Rhoades, Dereth Bush

Attendees on phone: Laura Norfolk & Ken Krupa

Unexcused absence: Felicia Hackett

Other attendees: Maralyn O'Brien, Oscar Mendoza

2. WELCOME & DISCUSSION WITH NEW NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS – KATRINA NAPORA & RAYCHEL FRYE – ~30-40 min

Raychel Frye's Background and Goals for Alexandria's Wildlife Management

Raychel, a New Jersey native, holds a master's degree in Recreation Management and Wildlife Management. She recently joined the City of Alexandria with a mission to establish a comprehensive wildlife management program focused on enhancing biodiversity and ecological health in city parks.

Her initiatives include planting native vegetation, reducing pesticide use, and incorporating sustainable water sources within park landscapes. She is also exploring certification opportunities to have Alexandria's parks designated as certified wildlife habitats through organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation.

A key component of Raychel's work involves leading a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI). This effort will identify existing habitats, locate potential habitat corridors, and assess the presence of threatened and endangered (T&E) species. She is currently considering issuing a Request for Information (RFI) to engage contractors for the inventory process. The initial assessment phase will be critical in guiding future actions.

In addition to her wildlife work, Raychel manages the City's community gardens and actively engages with local residents to foster community involvement in environmental stewardship.

Raychel plans to prioritize Alexandria's more intact natural areas for the early phases of the NRI. These areas, though relatively undisturbed, often contain some invasive species. The City aims to remove these invasives and restore the native plant communities. In heavily infested zones, invasive species will be systematically removed and replaced with native plantings.

Volunteer involvement will be a cornerstone of these efforts. Raychel emphasized that community volunteers are one of the most valuable resources in invasive species management. Pre- and post-treatment vegetation surveys will be conducted to monitor restoration success. Special attention will be given to removing the invasive Tree of Heaven, a known host for the destructive spotted lanternfly.

Looking ahead, Raychel is also interested in initiating a native seed collection and curation project. This long-term effort would support the development of plant ecotypes specifically adapted to Alexandria's local environment.

Katrina Napora – Natural Resource Management Initiatives

Katrina is a Virginia native who grew up near James Madison University, holds a master's degree in Environmental Science and Public Policy from George Mason University. She brings a strong background in stream and wetland evaluation and is deeply committed to the Alexandria community and its parks.

Currently, Katrina is developing a comprehensive five-year invasive plant management workplan. This plan will include expanding volunteer programs for invasive plant removal, overseeing the development of an herbarium for the City, and coordinating other related natural resource initiatives. She is currently focused on establishing a citywide invasive plant management contract, which is a high priority for Alexandria.

As part of her outreach and education efforts, Katrina plans to update the City's Natural Resources website. The updates will include information on local wildlife, invasive plant control, and ongoing natural resource surveys. In addition to the invasive species contract, a separate contract is being planned for native plant installations, with the potential to prioritize locally adapted native ecotypes.

Katrina is also exploring the creation of a native plant seed library in partnership with the Alexandria public library system. This would support native plant propagation and community

engagement. She is currently learning to balance these initiatives with the City's broader environmental priorities.

Alongside colleague Raychel, Katrina will help manage the City's RPCA Adopt-a-Park program, further engaging the community in park stewardship and conservation.

Comments from the Commissioners

Alisa W., an ABC Commissioner and certified Master Naturalist, expressed interest in connecting with Katrina and Raychel to discuss conservation initiatives and potential wildlife corridors within the City of Alexandria. She recently organized a planting event at Four Mile Run and is eager to learn more about the City's current environmental priorities to identify areas where the Commission can provide support.

Alisa noted that some designated "No Mow" areas—specifically at Four Mile Run at Commonwealth and the Four Mile Run Boat Dock—were inadvertently mowed. She offered to provide a site tour to review these areas, which she believes hold potential for formal park designation. Additionally, she highlighted the successful planting of approximately 100 trees at Mt. Jefferson Park.

Russ B. recommended Monticello Park as a key area for City review and is planning to lead a walk there with the natural resource managers and interested Commissioners. Known for its rich bird habitat, the park could benefit from invasive species removal, native plant restoration, and ongoing monitoring to ensure successful regeneration. The Commission is interested in partnering with the City to support these efforts.

Eleanor T. provided an update on the Fort Ward Park Arborist Memorial. The Commission continues to serve as a steward of the site and is currently awaiting installation of the commemorative plaque.

3. UPDATES – 15 min (Eleanor/Oscar)

Discussion: Spring Outreach and Tabling Events

Eleanor T. invited feedback on the community tabling events held in April and May:

- **Del Ray GardenFest:** The Del Ray event effectively engaged residents on the topic of native plants. It was suggested that future events include giveaways such as native plant seeds or small native plants to enhance community engagement.
- **Alexandria Dog Walk:** Eleanor T. noted that many attendees at the Alexandria Dog Walk appeared to be from outside the City, which may affect outreach effectiveness.

- **EcoFest Observations:** Eleanor shared that some residents, particularly those living in condominiums and townhomes, told her they felt the trees offered at EcoFest were too large for their available space.
 - Sara R. and Eleanor Q., who staffed the ABC booth at EcoFest, reported enthusiastic responses from many residents. These Commissioners distributed trees to all who expressed interest, with several individuals taking multiple trees – including smaller dogwoods, redbuds, etc.
 - A significant number of trees remained at the end of the event. Some were provided to Master Gardeners for planting in demonstration gardens, while the City retained the rest for future use.

City Landscaping Guidelines

Eleanor T. stated that the guidelines won't be updated until 2029.

RPCA Needs Assessment

The Alexandria RPCA completes a needs assessment biannually. Results will be available in the Fall of this year. Division Chief for Park Planning Beth Znidersic will attend a future meeting to review report.

SharePoint Transition for Commission Document Management

The Commission is transitioning away from Google Drive, as the City has established a dedicated SharePoint site for Commission use. To support this transition, Eleanor requested volunteers to help design and organize the site's structure. Alisa W. and Kevin F. expressed interest in contributing to the development of the new SharePoint platform.

Bicentennial Tree

The Bicentennial Tree at Holmes Run has been outfitted with a new interpretive sign, and directional signage has been installed to guide visitors to the site.

4. Art walk (Dereth & Eleanor Q) – 5 min

Discussion: Arts and Culture in Old Town North

Eleanor Q. circulated a document containing comments from Eleanor T. regarding arts initiatives in Old Town North (OTN). There was a recommendation to invite Sarah Alney, Executive Director of the Old Town North Alliance, to speak with the Commission about how it can support the advancement of arts and culture in the area.

Key points of discussion included:

- **Lack of City Coordination:** While the arts project in OTN is progressing, the Alliance noted a lack of a designated point of contact within the City to coordinate efforts among various stakeholders. The Alliance emphasized the need for the City to appoint a liaison to streamline collaboration.

- **Limited City Involvement:** The Alliance expressed concern that much of the responsibility for arts development is falling on private developers, and called for greater engagement and support from the City.
- **Permit Delays:** Concerns were also raised about slow permit processing, which reportedly contributed to a major music school choosing to locate elsewhere.

Public Art Task Force Participation – The Commission has been invited to participate in the City’s Public Art Task Force. Members Sara, Emily, Dereth, Liz and Daniya expressed interest in joining. The Waterfront Commission is also involved in public art efforts and has proposed installing a piece of art within the water.

VA Tech memorial for shooting victims is near the community gardens by Alexandria City High School, in the big circle near the tennis courts. Oscar will work with the contact at RHI to investigate adding a sign for this memorial.

5. Subcommittee updates (Subcommittee chairs – 10 min each)

ADVOCACY COMMITTEE UPDATES

Stakeholder Engagement - Eleanor T. and Liz G. met with Hashim Taylor, the new Director of RPCA. Hashim expressed strong alignment with the Commission’s priorities and showed particular interest in the Tree Equity program, citing relevant experience from his previous role. He will attend the August Commission meeting.

Over the past month, Commissioner Maralyn O. has arranged several meetings with City Council members and select ABC Commissioners to establish strong working relationships and promote collaboration. Councilmember John Chapman expressed interest in engaging with the Commission. These meetings have included:

- Councilwoman Green
- Mayor Gaskins, who demonstrated a strong interest in environmental equity and asked thoughtful follow-up questions.
- Abdel Elnoubi - expressed interest in attending an ABC meeting
- Council member McPike is next Friday, 6/20/2025

Interagency Collaboration – Mayor Gaskins suggested ABC meet with the:

- Alexandria Health Department and the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA). Both organizations expressed interest in collaborating on equity and access initiatives.
- ABC can also work with the City for improved strategies for stormwater management and expanding public awareness of stormwater credit programs.
- ABC may also work with [Cornerstone Craftsman](#) on future initiatives.

School Tree Preservation - Russ B. reported that the George Mason Elementary School plans to redo a walkway, which may result in removal of several mature trees. In response, RPCA's director is convening a meeting to address the issue. Attendees will include Tree Stewards, the City Arborist, Eleanor T., Russ B., and other stakeholders.

Tree Equity and Urban Greening Initiatives - Liz G. and Russ B. also provided an update on the Tree Equity Plan targeting the West End near Beauregard Street. The plan includes planting trees this fall in collaboration with the Office of Housing and developers, with the goal of securing long-term maintenance commitments.

Innovative Urban Forestry: Tree Nucleation - Katrina N. introduced the concept of tree nucleation or the Miyawaki method—a technique focused on planting dense clusters of trees to mimic natural forest ecosystems. This method encourages the development of a full tree canopy and understory, supporting urban biodiversity and resilience.

Fall Tree Plantings - Russ B. proposed Linear Park, which connects to Ben Brenman Park, as a site for a volunteer-led fall tree planting. While the best planting window is September through October, Eleanor T. noted that this would result in three separate plantings over three months, with priority given to the Tree Equity project.

Commission Action - Eleanor Q. introduced a motion for the Commission to explore the possibility of organizing three separate fall tree plantings, including one at Linear Park. The motion was seconded and approved by the Commission.

AWARDS COMMITTEE UPDATES

Sara R. provided the updates for Kelsey P., who could not attend the meeting.

- 28 nominations have been submitted so far. Commissioners must submit all their nominations by June 24, 2025.
- So far, we have 16 residential street, 33% community, and 50% residential nominations.
- As a reminder, the van tour will take place on July 12, 2025. Kelsey will send out a final poll confirming participation early next week.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATES

Emily S. provided updates as Daniya T. was not at the meeting.

- Increased followers by 18% and 30 new followers
- 9,000 views in the past month
- Great Zebra article this month with articles submitted by all committees.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT/DISCUSSION

- No public comments.
- Eleanor Q. made a motion to not have a Commission meeting in July. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

