

ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2025

7:00 P.M., City Hall
301 King Street, Room 2000
Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Kristen Creighton
Caitlin Fitzsimmons
Huayra Forster
Jacob Griffin
Lawrence Lewis
Megan Prince, Vice Chair
Deanne McNulty
Alex Radt
Alex Sprague
Howard Weiss

City Staff Present

Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. support

Members Excused

Rachel Dixon
Tom Valluzzi

Members Absent

Bob Ludke
Robbi Woodson

1. **Call to Order/Introductions by Vice Chair Prince**

Vice Chair Prince called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. Introductions were made.

2. **Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was approved on a motion by Commissioner Radt, seconded by Commissioner Lewis. All Commissioners present voted aye.

3. **Approval of Minutes of the November Minutes Meeting**

The November minutes were approved with changes upon a motion by Commissioner Creighton, seconded by Commissioner McNulty. All Commissioners present voted aye.

4. **Public Comment**

Sarah Radt stated that they raised the design guidelines about eight months ago, and the Board of Architectural Review is reviewing the 149-page document that covers different things; there is a section about accessibility that was written in 1990, and they are updating the language, which is borderline offensive for people with disabilities, and they need input for updating the language. They spent much time last year dealing with the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) about different things, and they frequently get proposals from homeowners saying what they want to do, and they are the ones who decide whether or not they get to do it, such as adding ramps, adding rails, which are good things but if they do not meet their aesthetic guideline they will reject the plan. They will benefit from having members from the Commission keep an eye on them occasionally and encourage them to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

5. **Chair's Report** – No Report

6. Guest speakers

Ramiro H. Gálvez, Deputy Chief Emergency Medical Services, Alexandria Fire Department.

Mr. Gálvez stated that he oversees emergency medical services and training. Mr. Galvez talked about how the Department handles people with Disabilities. He started by saying that the city has ten fire stations that respond to different areas. He said that all ten have at least one fire engine, and out of the ten stations, six have transport units, and those transport units have one paramedic. He added that they have one paramedic on the medical unit and one on the engine and explained why they put one paramedic on each.

He also explained that they get support from the other jurisdictions because they have a mutual agreement that when they are saturated in the city they come over and help. He also stated that they have two EMS supervisors in the City. He explained that most of them sign out as a firefighter but elect to go to paramedic school; sometimes, people wait a few years before deciding to go to paramedic school; currently, the paramedic is about six months. He said that during those classes, there is a lot that goes into working with some other groups, and those groups include people with disabilities. He said that they do not call them people with disabilities; they call them different groups. He stated that they spend much time practicing how to approach those groups best; they learn to communicate with the non-verbal community, learn to work with blind people, they learn to work with people with physical disabilities, and with people who have emotional emergencies; they also learn how to communicate with people who are non-English speaking.

Mr. Gálvez stated that they have a protocol that gives them indications on how to treat people based on their symptoms, regardless of their abilities. Protocols are designed depending on the medical emergency that is needed by the person. He added that they spend much time trying to learn about people with different disabilities so that they can better serve that community and try to keep up with the times.

The presentation was followed by questions from the Commission, such as raising awareness about sensory-friendly fire alarms and how wheelchair users get out of a building when elevators cannot be used during a fire emergency. Additionally, the Commission shared ideas about having more sensory-friendly rooms and offered them a watch that would vibrate if there was a fire within a certain number of feet.

Mr. Gálvez stated that he doesn't think a watch like that exists yet, but if it does, he would like to hear about it. He informed me that there are special smoke alarms for deaf people. Mr. Gálvez explained that when there is a wheelchair user, and the fire is on the opposite side of the building, they will protect in place, but they will often carry people out.

The Commission also inquired about how many calls the fire department receives and how many are and what percentage of those calls are for medical emergencies or psychiatric emergencies. Mr. Gálvez stated that he did not know the number of calls, but 78% were medical emergencies. They do not run numbers on psychiatric calls, so he did not have those

numbers. Commissioner Lewis mentioned a chair called the Stryker Evacuation Chair, which helps people down the stairs. Mr. Gálvez stated that the Fire Department purchased 10 or 12 chairs.

The Commission also brought to Mr. Gálvez's attention that the Alexandria City Public Schools staff is not trained to evacuate people who are wheelchair users and asked if the Fire Department has considered doing training for ACPS on what to do in case of a fire emergency. There was also a question about whether firefighters and EMTs are Crisis intervention trained; Mr. Gálvez said that not all of them are crisis intervention trained, but they are trying to get more people to take the Crisis Intervention Training, and this is something that goes along with the Police and Sheriff; they would do it as public safety and said that the training is two or three times a year. He also stated that they continuously train in many disabilities, and he added that monthly, they get together with the Medical Director and the EMS supervisors, and they look at the trends; they talk about the number of calls that they run for the month and what types of calls they received.

The Commission also asked if the Fire Department is conducting any advocacy with any large employer, such as nursing homes and schools, regarding the shelter-in-place and best practices and planning for them. Mr. Gálvez stated that they work very closely with them, and they also have a community outreach program and a retired paramedic who works with community centers. There was a comment about medical ID bracelets, and they are starting to come out with the Code readers so that in an emergency, they can take a picture, find out that person's information, and ask if the Fire Department has access to that. Mr. Gálvez stated they do not have access to it because it is a service, and it is costly, so not all the municipalities can afford it. He also talked about the refrigerator magnet called "File of Life," which they give to people. It has all the information about the person, their medical condition, and allergies, so they know to always look at the fridge.

Commissioners suggested doing outreach and doing something like Fairfax County handing out the "In case of Emergency refrigerator Magnet." Mr. Gálvez stated that the budget is tight, especially this year, but they may apply for grants. He added that he would push to do something like that. He explained that their community paramedicine program is in its infancy, and we are one of the few municipalities with it right now. The state is thinking about giving all municipalities some money so they can start doing it.

Chair Prince thanked Deputy Chief of Emergency Medical Services Ramiro Gálvez for his presentation.

7. **Committee Reports**

- **Executive Committee:** Vice Chair Prince stated that the former Chair Pool did not renew his membership with the Commission and decided to step down as Chair. She stated that she is the Chair right now. However, she wanted to open the floor for discussion about that because as much as she does not mind being Chair, she believes that there should be a chance for other people to run for the position, and she asked if anyone is interested in being the Chair and read the responsibilities of the Chair. Commissioner

Creighton stated that she is confused about the Commission's structure and what they are supposed to be doing; there isn't any orientation, documentation, or strategic plan. If they are in a place where they need a new Chair, this may be the time to put information together for new members joining the Commission or have some onboarding so that they are productive. Commissioner Radt suggested holding official elections at the next meeting because several members were absent and also suggested putting it on the agenda. Commissioner Creighton indicated that the person in charge of the Commission gives a presentation for them or has somebody from another Commission who is a functional or organized Chair. Commissioner Weiss stated that the Chair does that, so he does not think they need to have someone from another commission come. Chair Prince said that she would contact Commissioner Palmer Johnson, an Executive member of the Commission for Women, and they are the most accomplished Commission in the city.

Commissioner Griffin wanted to add two agenda points: 1) To establish a committee known as the Mental Illness Advisory Committee and 2) a new member orientation committee. Vice Chair Prince said she would contact the CSB to see if they would liaise with ACPD. Vice Chair Prince said that she would like to form an Executive Committee with the Chair, Vice Chair, and third Executive member that the Chair appoints.

- **Legislative Committee:** Commissioner Sprague stated that he hopes to report next month the adoption of Bill 1800, which will give people with disabilities more access to playgrounds, House Bill 2104, which is a seizure medication issue, and House Bill 2116, which is a DMV related issues.
- **Housing Committee:** Commissioner Creighton plans to attend the March meeting about the Housing 2024 Master Plan.
- **Housing Affordability Committee:** None
- **Accessibility-Friendly Businesses Committee:** Commissioner McNulty reported that she had met with the Chamber and VisitAlex, and they are both trying to work on accessibility and working with people with disabilities. She explained that their focus is on mobile disabilities, and they also talked about sensory disabilities.
- **Architectural Review**—Vice Chair Prince asked for a volunteer to serve on this committee. Commissioner Fitzsimmons, Commissioner Radt, and Commissioner Griffin volunteered.

8. **Liaison Reports**

Human Rights Commission: Chair Prince reported that the Alexandria Human Rights Commission met at the Black History Museum in February and voted on a divestment letter sent to the City Council regarding divesting from communities that are committing genocide to other communities after a substantial request from the public. She also reported that some people came two months ago and last month to discuss possible human rights violations that could be coming in the next couple of years. The ACLU came in and discussed their strategies and what the Human Rights Commission's strategies can be in protecting free speech and protecting trans teenagers in schools.

- **AHAAC:** No Report

- **ACPS 2020 Strategic Planning Committee** – No report

9. **Action Items**

Vice Chair Prince stated that the Commission needs to form an Ad Hoc committee to review the application for the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and the ACPA Awards.

Commissioner Griffin and Commissioner Radt volunteered to serve on the Committee.

10. **Member Report**

- Commissioner Forester – None.
- Commissioner Prince – None.
- Commissioner Sprague – Attended a meeting at Potomac Yard for a new housing proposal and they spoke about wheelchair accessibility and sensory-friendly alarms.
- Commissioner Radt – Stated that it is time to start working on forming the Pride Disability Committee for Pride Month in July and said that they can take the lead on it. Commissioner Creighton and Commissioner Forster volunteered to serve on this committee.
- Commissioner Dixon – None.
- Commissioner Fitzsimmons – None.
- Commissioner Ludke – None.
- Commissioner Lewis- None.
- Commissioner Creighton – None.
- Commissioner Weiss – None.

Action Item

Chair Prince requested that pronouns be put on the tent cards. Commissioner Griffin will pass a sheet around at the next meeting for Commissioners to write their names and pronouns. Miladis will work on that.

11. **Adjournment**

Commissioner Griffin motioned to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Weiss. All Commissioners present voted aye. The meeting adjourned at 9:01 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for April 9, 2025, and it will be held at Sister Cities Conference Room 1101.