ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION ON EMPLOYMENT
October 13, 2026 Minutes
Attendance

Lenwood Roberts	Present
Patrick Edwards	Present
Betel Aklilu	Virtual
Sonja Allen	Present
Kathleen Sindell	Present
Tricia Allen	Virtual
Mackenzie Betrone-Harpst	Virtual
Paloma Martinez	Present
Shawn Gregoire	Virtual

Youth Members
None present

DCHS and WDC Staff

Lesa Gilbert	Present
Katrina Ashmore	Present
Rayna Yu	Present

Meeting Overview

The Commission discussed current workforce challenges, childcare affordability, standing committee performance measures, City Council outreach, document management, bylaws revisions, budget priorities, attendance requirements, and Workforce Development Center (WDC) program updates.

The meeting began with introductions and a discussion of what employers should better understand about today's job seekers. Members emphasized childcare access, flexibility, timely communication throughout the hiring process, and removal of outdated job postings. Members noted that applicants often submit numerous applications in a competitive labor market and benefit from clear hiring decisions and updates.

The Commission received an update on a legislative proposal advocating for increased state funding for childcare assistance. Childcare affordability was identified as a significant employment barrier, particularly for lower-wage workers. The proposal supported fully funding a cost-sharing model involving parents, employers, and the state.

Members agreed to postpone approval of both September and October meeting minutes until November.

The Commission discussed progress on standing committee performance measures and strategic plan implementation. Members considered whether standing committees should develop their own measures or use a common framework. For the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), suggested measures included the number and diversity of employer hosts, industry representation, and nonprofit versus private-sector placements. The matrix will be shared for review with existing City economic-opportunity metrics.

The Commission reviewed City Council outreach assignments and discussed improving communication with Council representatives. Commissioners were encouraged to provide brief monthly updates on ACE activities and workforce priorities. A contact list and outreach template had been circulated. Members discussed a shared post-meeting summary, including WDC presentation materials, that each commissioner could tailor to their Council contact. Assignments will be reviewed for newer commissioners.

WDC staff reported that ACE is transitioning from SharePoint to a Google Drive folder for minutes, agendas, presentations, templates, and other resources. Members asked about meeting recordings and noted that current minutes and bylaws should be available on the City's ACE webpage. Staff will work to organize materials and address outdated website documents. Members discussed editorial revisions to the ACE bylaws to clarify terminology and address inconsistent or contradictory language. Kathleen Sindell will share the edits with Sonja Allen for review. The revised bylaws will be presented at the next meeting for consideration and a possible vote.

The Commission discussed the City Manager's request for input on budget priorities by November 20. Members initially considered reviewing WDC spending by committee but acknowledged that program funding combines City, state, federal, and grant sources and does not align neatly with ACE committees. Staff recommended emphasizing community needs, program demand, outcomes, and opportunities for improvement rather than detailed budget allocations. Potential priorities included youth employment, childcare, job-seeker support, and assistance for residents affected by SNAP and Medicaid work requirements. WDC will provide available program information. Committees will submit recommendations by November 10 for consolidation before the City Manager deadline.

The Commission reviewed attendance expectations. Attendance records should distinguish in-person participation, virtual participation, and absences for quorum documentation and annual reporting. Commission leadership will follow up with members who miss two or more meetings. Members also discussed advance planning for virtual meetings and weather-related limitations.

WDC announced approximately $500,000 in Virginia Department of Social Services funding through the Office of New Americans for a Refugee Support Services employment initiative expected to launch in November. The program aims to serve approximately 150 eligible Alexandria residents through employment preparation, English-language support, benefits counseling, and individualized employment planning. It anticipates 37 paid, 12-week work-based learning placements at $20 per hour, with a goal of 100 job placements. Commissioners were asked to identify potential employer hosts. Outreach materials are being developed.

WDC discussed possible changes to the SYEP application process because applications exceed funded placements. Staff are exploring alternatives to first-come, first-served selection, including simple, balanced, and weighted lotteries. Factors under consideration include benefits eligibility, neighborhood, school, grade, and applicant circumstances. Staff reported that approximately 193 youth were served in 2026 against an original funded capacity of 170. A detailed analysis will be presented in November before the next application cycle.

WDC reported that the 2026 Career Expo at Northern Virginia Community College drew approximately 493 attendees and more than 40 employers with active vacancies. More than 100 participants attended resume and artificial intelligence workshops. Staff are following up with employers regarding hiring outcomes.

WDC provided an update on Pitch ALX, an entrepreneurship program with the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership and Georgetown University Professor Jim Lindsay. The fall cohort began in September with approximately 10 participants and covers business planning, market research, financial management, and marketing. A December pitch event is planned. Members discussed potential partnerships and future cohorts.

WDC announced a new Salesforce-based data management system replacing its prior platform, with improved reporting and tracking capabilities. Fiscal year 2026 highlights included 301 workshops and events, 521 job placements, and more than 10,000 in-person WDC visits. September activities included six hiring events, 16 individual coaching sessions, and 20 workshops. WDC highlighted its hiring partnership with Piedmont Airlines and interest in similar employer partnerships. Members thanked staff for their work and accomplishments.

Next Steps

- Consider approval of the September and October 2026 minutes at the November meeting.
- Distribute the proposed strategic plan performance matrix for commissioner review; continue developing committee objectives, measures, and data collection methods.
- Recirculate City Council outreach assignments and template; confirm contacts for new commissioners.

- Continue developing the ACE Google Drive and follow up on posting current minutes and bylaws on the City website.
- Kathleen Sindell and Sonja Allen will review the proposed bylaws edits for consideration in November.

5:40 A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting adjourned.