

# **ALEXANDRIA HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONFERENCE AND TOWN MEETING, MAY 4 AND 5, 2007**

## **Conference Summary Report**

On May 4 and 5, 2007, the City of Alexandria, in company with the Historic Alexandria Foundation, the Greater Alexandria Preservation Alliance and a group of anonymous benefactors, sponsored a conference and town meeting focusing on the present state and future of historic preservation in the city. The focus of the conference, in the words of the planners, was “balancing historic preservation and growth, preserving... planning... taking action.” The goal of the conference was to make historic preservation the business of the entire city, not simply the existing historic districts. The following report is a summary of the conference, including discussion points. An action plan for the future will be prepared based upon ideas generated at the conference and town meeting. Papers from the conference are available on the City of Alexandria website and the Historic Alexandria Foundation website.

### Background

The conference grew out of discussions by members of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission in the spring and summer of 2005 in the face of concerns regarding the condition of the city’s historic properties and the overall state of historic preservation in the community of Alexandria. Former City Council Member Andrew MacDonald also raised the issue in columns in the Alexandria Gazette and The Washington Post. The first activity generated by the discussions was the production of a video on the state of the city’s historic properties followed by a series of conferences and meetings that made specific recommendations for improving support of the city’s museums.

At the same time, the issue of the current state of historic preservation across the city became the focus of a planning group supported by the City’s Planning Department, led by past Director Eileen Fogarty, and the Office of Historic Alexandria, led by James Mackay. Membership in the planning committee expanded to include representatives of many organizations within the city and representatives of city boards and agencies. The following were represented:

- Department of Planning and Zoning
- Historic Alexandria Foundation
- Old Town Civic Association
- Alexandria Historical Society
- Greater Alexandria Preservation Alliance
- Alexandria Chamber of Commerce

National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
Historic Alexandria Resources Commission  
Planning Commission  
Old and Historic District's Board of Architectural Review  
Alexandria Historic Restoration and Preservation Commission  
Office of Historic Alexandria and Alexandria Archaeology  
Alexandria Black History Museum  
Alexandria Archaeological Commission  
Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association  
Waterfront Committee

The first activity generated by the committee was a public lecture by the Honorable Mayor Joseph Riley of Charleston. Attended by over two hundred members of the public, plus the Mayor and Council, the April 2006 event marked an intensified awareness of the possibilities for expanded public support of historic preservation and set the stage for further activities by the committee. In succeeding months, the committee developed a program for the proposed conference. City Council approved the proposed conference and its dates at its January 9, 2007 meeting. The consulting firm of Kramer and Associates from Annapolis provided critical support in the discussions that shaped the conference.

### The Conference

May 4-5: The conference itself took place over a day and a half, involving a distinguished group of speakers, and attracting 216 participants from across the community. Venues for the conference included Historic St. Paul's Episcopal Church for the Friday evening program, Gadsby's Tavern Museum for the evening reception, and First Baptist Church of Alexandria for all Saturday events.

#### Opening Events:

Remarks by Ellen Stanton, Conference Co-Chair, Chair, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission; the Honorable William D. Euille, Mayor. Brief History of Historic Preservation in Alexandria, Morgan Delaney, M.D, Conference Co-Chair and President, Historic Alexandria Foundation. Keynote Address, William Seale, Ph.D.

Morgan Delaney, M.D.: Review of the accomplishments by the Alexandria community in historic preservation of the past 61 years, beginning with the establishment of the Old and Historic Alexandria District, the third such legally zoned district in the United States in 1946. Since that date, the community has continued to be a model for historic preservation through programs in zoning, archaeology, development of a museum system managed by the Office of Historic Alexandria, and the creation of national register districts.

William Seale, Ph.D.: Keynote Address. Alexandria is intricately tied to the history of the nation in many ways and, not least, in the development of historic preservation. While time certainly never passed it by, Alexandria has somehow avoided the worst results of prosperity's wrecking ball that have devastated so many of America's historic communities.

Preservation's approaches have changed. The driving issue is no longer to stay the wrecking ball, but rather, with buildings generally well protected, to prevent alterations that intrude upon the existing character of Alexandria's neighborhoods and buildings. This challenge, which is nearly universal, might be described as preservation's coming of age.

Reception, Gadsby's Tavern: Provided a useful opportunity for networking at the end of the day.

#### Saturday Events:

The day's activities included a series of concurrent sessions, a plenary speech, a discussion of preservation in Alexandria, and a town meeting.

#### Concurrent Sessions:

Basic Preservation Tools: Patrick H. Butler III, Ph.D., Moderator, Chair, Virginia Board of Historic Resources; Panelists: Kathleen Kilpatrick, Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR); David Edwards, Director, Northern Virginia Regional Preservation Office, DHR; Elizabeth Tune, Manager Preservation Incentives Program, DHR; Marc Wagner, Director of Resource Information Division, DHR.

To make preservation work within a community, preservationists must use and take advantage of various programs existing under state and Federal law to develop protections for historic structures and districts. Programs in Virginia that are most useful for historic preservation are: tax credits, easements, historic districts.

Design Concepts: Joanne Goldfarb, AIA, Moderator, Principal, Goldfarb, Notkins & More, PLLC; Panelists: AL Cox, FAIA, City Architect, Code Enforcement Bureau; Thomas Luebke, AIA, Secretary, U. S. Commission of Fine Arts; Mark Orling, AIA, Principal, Rust, Orling Architecture.

The design issues involving historic preservation are in the phrases "Vitality and Diversity vs. Inbreeding and Stagnation." The panel explored whether or not replication of the past is the right way to account for the passage of time in a living community? The issues included the nature of regional design, the nature of design quality, the character of design in response to the Review Boards, the problem of recognizing true historic features if current construction is reproduction, the importance of materiality and allowing the inherent nature of historic materials to be expressed, the matter of infill and appropriate scale and mass, and the question of potential mediocrity in historic reproduction design.

How Preservation Works in Alexandria: Pamela Cressey, Ph.D., City Archaeologist, Moderator; Panelists: Peter Smith, Ph.D., Boards of Architectural Review; Lee Webb, Boards of Architectural Review; Jim Mackay, Acting Director, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Alexandria does have a substantial governmental structure that cares for and manages the city's historic resources, both public and private. The issue of management of the historic resources is a matter of public policy and programs, as well as private interests.

Broadening the Coalition: Boyd Walker, Moderator, Greater Alexandria Preservation Alliance; Panelists: Michael Leventhal, Historic Preservation Program Coordinator, Arlington; Bill Hendrickson, Resident of Del Ray; William Cromley, Resident and Builder in Parker-Gray; Lillian Patterson, Curator, Alexandria Black History Museum.

The future of historic preservation in Alexandria will involve the entire city, not simply the Old and Historic District. In neighboring Arlington, a program exists to develop 20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhoods as historic resources. The process has begun in Alexandria in Parker-Gray, Rosemont, Potomac, and Parkfairfax, but most of the remainder of the city already potentially qualifies for the State and National Historic Registers.

Plenary Session: Donovan Rypkema, The Economics of Preservation.

Historic preservation has traditionally been advocated for aesthetic, cultural, educational, and environmental reasons. However, over the last two decades, preservation's considerable economic importance has also been identified. Historic preservation has both direct and indirect measurable economic benefits. Among the direct benefits are: jobs and household income created; heritage tourism; impact on property values; the role in downtown revitalization, and small business incubation. Indirect benefits include the use of historic preservation as an anti-sprawl/Smart Growth strategy, affordable housing, global competitiveness, the broader concept of sustainable development, and others.

Preservation in Alexandria--Current Opportunities and Challenges: Jean Federico, Moderator, Former Director, Office of Historic Alexandria; Panelists: The Honorable Marian Van Landingham, Former Member, Virginia House of Delegates; Willem Polack, President, Potomac Riverboat Company; H Stewart Dunn, Jr., Esq., Member Planning Commission, City of Alexandria.

Town Meeting: Robert Kramer, Facilitator, Kramer and Associates.

The two events offered a free form discussion, one by a panel knowledgeable in Alexandria preservation topics, and one from the floor that both expanded on and added new directions to the discussion of the state of and future of preservation in our

community. The mix of comments focused on a series of needs, culminating in a report to be presented to the Mayor and Council that is to be prepared by the group organizing the Conference. At the beginning and end of the discussion is the realization that the entire city of Alexandria is an historic community and must be considered as such in all future development and educational programs.

The major issues, along with some discussion points, are as follows:

1. Education of the Community in the Importance of Historic Preservation:  
This may be the most critical need established throughout the discussions. Much of Alexandria lacks a critical awareness of the value of historic preservation in the future of our community. Among the suggestions for developing a sense of the value of preservation across the city are the following:
  - a. Focus, in so far as possible, on programs for the schools, including the recognition that many schools are history structures themselves.
  - b. Develop television resources aimed at expanding community awareness.
  - c. Expand the neighborhood histories.
  - d. Use the newspapers for stories about preservation issues, and community histories, as well as seeking to take advantage of Comcast opportunities in this area.
  - e. Develop information packets for newcomers, some oriented towards better informing those who move into regulated historic districts, and some oriented to newcomers across the city.
  - f. Remind all Alexandrians that the city has a twentieth century history, including its role in war and peace, its place as a source for popular culture, and the impact of all the neighborhoods as residences for national leaders.
  - g. Seek to develop an expanded set of tours both in the Old and Historic and Parker-Gray Districts and across the city that educate both tourists and residents to Alexandria's preservation values.
  - h. Market the city through historic preservation and green activities.
  - i. Seek to involve all interest groups, including the Chamber, the neighborhood associations, realtors, developers, etc. in historic preservation programs and planning.
2. Expanding the use of existing tools that support preservation and planning.
  - a. Improve the knowledge of the regulated historic districts.
  - b. Expand the role of easements and tax credits both within and beyond the historic districts.
  - c. Develop small area plans with strong historic preservation components. Perhaps considering Arlington's recent work as a model.
  - d. Expand the use of the Virginia and National Registers for districts and individual sites.
  - e. Develop an improved 100 year building list outside the regulated districts.
  - f. Continue to develop historic plaque programs.
  - g. Monitor the use of special use permits and seek to use these to develop protections for historic properties.

- h. Continue to review and develop historic preservation ordinances on both a city and state basis.
  - i. Seek to continue to better support the city staff as it regulates historic districts.
  - j. Continue to develop better signage programs supported by the city.
  - k. Provide careful examination of the procedures that affect open space in the city, including monitoring of special use permits, subdivision proposals, site plans and open space management.
  - l. Most important, focus on identifying and using all the city's resources in historic preservation efforts, including archaeology, planning, parks and recreation, the office of Historic Alexandria, city transportation and roads, the convention and visitors bureau, and coordinate these efforts in a more coherent manner.
3. Develop the Relationship between Environmental and Historic Preservation programs. The two activities are natural allies and should develop in such a way as to support one another on all levels of the community.
- a. In planning activities, including proposed demolitions, examine the economic impact of preservation versus demolition.
  - b. Seek to educate the community about the "green values" to be found in older structures.
  - c. Recognize that destructive change often comes in small increments that appear to be harmless in and of themselves, but as they accumulate, do real destruction to the community.
  - d. Focus on developing an understanding of the relationship between "green values" and historic preservation values throughout the city staff across all departments.
  - e. When examining the economic impact of change, develop the long view relating green and preservation values to the process.

Critical Points from William Seale and Donovan Rypkema. Our keynote speakers provided a variety of insights that affected the afternoon discussions and are listed below.

Seale:

1. The emergency nature of preservation in the past has made preservationists lie in the shade when there are no problems to address. Education on the subject of historic preservation and historic architecture and its place has been profoundly lax.
2. It is far simpler to stop a bulldozer than to curb the insidious alterations that are adding up to demolition by part. This is quite as detrimental.
3. The city-wide survey of buildings needs to be revisited and expanded into a rich body of architectural fact and analysis.
4. From such a written and illustrated study emerges a grading or classification system, wherein the style, materials and state of authenticity is spelled out.
5. Acceptance by the public of a strong system is going to rely on education. It is imperative that the preservation community take its education role seriously.

## Rypkema

1. It is often through the door of economic impact that those decision makers become advocates for historic preservation on the other, more important grounds.
2. The most pressing economic development challenge of 2007 is affordable housing and the most significant economic development variable is quality of life. Historic preservation has a vital role to play in both of these.
3. Quality of life is determined by the five senses: the sense of place, the sense of evolution, the sense of ownership, the sense of identity, and the sense of community itself. Preservation of the historic built environment enhances each of the five senses, and constitutes the physical manifestation of a “community of memory.”
4. Reuse of historic buildings is an integral part of the sustainability movement-historic preservation as smart growth throughout the world.
5. Historic preservation adds significance, adds meaning, and adds value.
6. Heritage visitors stay longer, visit twice as many places, and on a per trip basis spend 2 ½ times as much money as other visitors.

Evaluation: The evaluations by the conference attendees indicate that the event was a marked success. The participants rated the conference as excellent to good, with one exception, who rated it as fair. The details of the evaluation are in an attached appendix. The comments and suggestions for the overall conference, as well as the individual sessions, support the strong approval by the participants. The hope of our participants is that we will continue to develop conferences and related activities focusing on historic preservation in Alexandria in the coming years.

Thanks: A conference with the many elements included in the Alexandria Historic Preservation Conference is based on the contributions of many in the community beyond those who served on the Committee. In addition to financial support provided by the City of Alexandria, a group of private agencies and citizens provided additional funding necessary to carry out the program. The Historic Alexandria Foundation provided lead funding, along with a grant from the Great Alexandria Preservation Alliance and additional support provided by individual citizens who wish to remain anonymous.

Throughout the conference, staff from the Department of Planning and Zoning and from the Office of Historic Alexandria participated in all aspects of the planning for the conference, as well as the implementation of the program. In addition, through a grant provided by the City of Alexandria, Kramer and Associates of Annapolis provided significant leadership and support for both the development and the implementation of the program. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources provided support in planning the program and provided a group of speakers for the conference. The Historic Alexandria Foundation provided logistic support for the conference, as well as program support through Mary Sterling, the Foundation’s coordinator.

Contributors to the conference included the City of Alexandria, the Historic Alexandria Foundation, the Greater Alexandria Preservation Alliance, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Gadsby's Tavern, First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Twig Murray Creative, Maribeth's Bakery, and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The Conference Committee:

Representatives of many public and private organizations participated in developing the program for the conference.

Morgan Delaney, M. D., Co-chair, Historic Preservation Conference Committee; President, Historic Alexandria Foundation.

Ellen Stanton, Co-chair, Historic Preservation Conference Committee; Chair, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission.

Patrick H. Butler III, Ph.D., Chair, Virginia Board of Historic Resources and Historic Alexandria Foundation.

Pamela Cressey, Ph.D., City Archaeologist, Alexandria Archaeology, Office of Historic Alexandria.

H. Stewart Dunn, Jr., Member, Planning Commission and Historic Alexandria Foundation.

Louis Hicks, Director, Alexandria Black History Museum.

Tom Hulfish, Chair, Old and Historic Alexandria District Board of Architectural Review.

John Johansen, Old Town Civic Association. (Michael Hobbs first represented OTCA in the meetings).

Richard Josephson, Deputy Director, Department of Planning and Zoning.

Andrew Macdonald. Vice Mayor, City Council.

Jim Mackay, Acting Director, Office of Historic Alexandria.

Skip Maginniss, Architect, Chamber of Commerce

Janice Magnuson, Alexandria Archaeological Commission.

Stephen Milone, Zoning and Land Use Services Division Chief, Planning and Zoning.

Laura Overstreet, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association.

Susan Pettey, Chair, Waterfront Committee.

John Rust, Architect, Rust Orling Architecture.

Peter Smith, Ph.D., Boards of Architectural Review, Department of Planning and Zoning.

Douglas Thurman, Alexandria Historical Society.

Chuck Trozzo, Chair, Alexandria Historic Restoration and Preservation Commission.

Boyd Walker, Greater Alexandria Preservation Association.

Lee Webber, Boards of Architectural Review, Department of Planning and Zoning.

Rob Nieweg, National Trust for Historic Preservation, provided valuable advice.

Mary Sterling, Historic Alexandria Foundation, assisted immensely with logistics.