**Minutes of the**

**Seminary Hill Association, Inc.**

## 2012 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

### Thursday, November 8, 2012

The Annual Membership Meeting of the Seminary Hill Association, Inc., (SHA) was called to order at 7:30 PM in the auditorium of the Virginia Theological Seminary by President Nancy Jennings. She thanked VTS for their hospitality in allowing us to use their auditorium. She also said we were looking forward to the construction of the new chapel as well as the contemplation garden on the site of the historic chapel that burned down. Current plans are for construction to begin next year with completion the following year. She then introduced the current officers and board members.

President Jennings then recognized and thanked newly elected City Council member John Chapman for attending the meeting.

The agenda for the meeting was approved, as were the 2011 minutes.

Treasurer Jack Sullivan reported that SHA has a total of $27,460.17 available resources. He also noted that SHA expended $5,560.75 for 2 Freedom of Information Act request to Alexandria City Government and the Alexandria City Public School (ACPS), expenses associated with the co-sponsorship of the City Council Candidates Forum, costs associated with the SHA Web Site, and a small donation to Emanuel Church on the Hill for allowing us to use their spaces for regular SHA Board meetings.

Deputy Police Chief Hassan Aden was present for his last SHA meeting as he will retire this month and become the Chief of Police in Greenville, North Carolina. Chief Hassan has served Alexandria for 25 years and helped bring crime rates in our City to a 43-year low. For the past 8 years, he has been SHA’s police liaison and we will miss him and his excellent work. Chief Hassan reported that there were no real increases in crimes in the SHA area. He also said that there were 4 armed commercial robberies recently in the West End of Alexandria and that the Alexandria Police Department was closely monitoring the Holmes Run Park area where there were 2 sexual assaults recently. He then thanked all the SHA members for their cooperation and once again reminded all of us to lock our cars and report solicitors.

President Jennings reported on the major activities of SHA during the past year. In particular, she reported (1) SHA, along with 4 other civic groups, co-sponsored a forum with all 12 candidates running for City Council, and (2) the City approved 3 major urbanization projects that will affect our area; namely, the BRAC at Mark Center, the ramp from I-395 to Seminary Road, and the Beauregard Corridor Plan. **(NOTE: All of these issues can be found on the SHA Web Site)**. President Jennings also commented on the funding of the City’s transportation initiatives such as the Metro Station at Potomac Yard and the new traffic lanes in the middle of Van Dorn and Beauregard Streets. She said these projects will probably be delayed by the state of the economy and the lack of funding. She also commented on the cancellation of the Fort Williams annual park clean-up. She said SHA will work with Mr. John Smucker again next spring to do the annual clean-up. President Jennings then reported on the “good news”. She reported on (1) SHA’s monitoring of new construction in our neighborhoods, (2) the hopefully ‘saving’ of our small Seminary Post Office, (3) the final report of the Braddock-Quaker-King Study, which may be in the process of being implemented, (4) the bigger and better Safeway grocery store at the Bradlee Shopping Center was approved but the project appears to be delayed, (5) SHA’s continuing to work with Inova Alexandria Hospital administrators as they do improvements to their facilities and correct the landscaping errors made by one of their contractors, (6) T.C. Williams school administrators continue to communicate with SHA residents about their plans – most recently for the new tennis courts that the students and Chinquapin Park badly need, (7) Fort Ward Park continues to be good news in that the first stage of research on historical excavations is finished and the City will implement storm-water management next. Also, a new walkway for people with disabilities will be added to allow them to go from the museum and gate to the northwest bastion, (8) SHA supported the acquisition of a vacant property at 5325 Polk that would preserve some of the tree canopy on Seminary Hill and take advantage of the $1.5 million the Army has proffered as part of the BRAC negotiations, and finally, the best news of all, (9) the Hammond Athletic Field artificial turf surface replacement project will not include putting lights on the field. A special thanks to Area 8 representative Frank Putzu and his neighbors for getting Alexandria City Public Schools administrators to withdraw that proposal. President Jennings closed by reminding everyone that information on all of these issues is posted on the SHA Web Site and she invited everyone to subscribe to the SHA e-news, attend some of the monthly SHA Board meetings, and become involved in civic issues that interest and affect you.

A slate of SHA officers for 2012 – 2013 was proposed and approved including Nancy Jennings as President, Carter Flemming as Vice President, Dick Hayes as Secretary, Jack Sullivan as Treasurer, and Area Representatives. President Jennings thanked Pat Lidy, Area 7 Representative and Vice President Bruce McCarthy for their many years of service on the SHA Board of Directors.

There were no “Old Business” or “New Business” items on the agenda.

President Jennings next introduced the new Alexandria Deputy City Manager, Mr. Tom Gates, who spoke on the topic of a new City of Alexandria initiative called “What’s Next, Alexandria?” City staff are asking for feedback from residents about how they and City Government can improve processes for making decisions. When he used the pronoun “we,” Mr. Gates was usually referring to City staff. City Government appeared to include staff as well as the Mayor and City Council.

Mr. Gates addressed and discussed six significant “issues or happenings” associated with the new initiative. He said (1) people need to be more involved in City issues. The City has monthly meetings that many Alexandria residents attend but staff knows that the City Government can do a better job in communicating with the residents, (2) residents are upset with the “process” used by the City Government concerning West End projects, (3) how can City Government interact better between the City and community? He noted that City Government doesn’t always take the first recommendations from City staff, (4) City Government has taken an “informal” poll to see what concerns citizens, (5) Ms. Carolyn Lukensmyer will facilitate meetings with City staff on “Community Engagement” – he also noted that there was only one citizen represented on the study group, and (6) he again repeated that there needs to be more citizen involvement – particularly at the next meeting scheduled for 15 November. He then took questions from the audience.

**Question:** (or statement) – “there is never any feedback from the City Government to the citizens – this is particularly glaring in the Planning Department”.

**Answer:** We understand the problem and will work to rectify it.

**Question:** “We have trouble getting information from the City Web Site. The County of Arlington has an excellent reference system at their main library”.

**Answer:** We are planning to re-design the Alexandria City Web Site.

**Question:** (or statement) – “Congratulations to the City Government for the improvements in Fort Ward Park. Also, what are the long term plans for the expected ‘population explosion’ in the City such as schools and transportation?”.

**Answer:** We are working on these issues.

**Question:** “How does City staff feed plans to the City Council? We think that many times City staff doesn’t get the right (or correct) information to City Council”.

**Answer:** City staff has a fine line – they don’t make policy – they implement decisions – but they do need to distill the information to City Council to help them make the correct decisions.

**Question:** “There are too many City Council meetings held as ‘secret meetings’ with no citizen involvement”.

**Answer:** The City Attorney tells City Council about the requirements in order to hold a “legal” closed or, as you call it, a “secret” meeting.

**Question:** “Why is there only one citizen on the forward Alexandria study group – the rest are City staff? Also, there is an issue of trust with the City Planning Department.”

**Answer:** Mr. Allen Lomax is the citizen representative to the study group, and he is very knowledgeable about City issues. We recognize that it is not the responsibility for City staff to “manage an issue” because that’s what leads to the “trust” issue.

**Question:** “How is this ‘What’s Next, Alexandria?’ project going to be disseminated to the citizens of Alexandria?”

**Answer:** Many projects, unfortunately, get “put on the shelf”, but hopefully this one will result in a new and improved “process”.

**Question:** “With respect to FOIA requests, we forwarded SHA’s FOIA requests and City staff appeared to try every ‘trick in the book’ to get around responding to it. This is a ‘cultural’ issue, particularly in the Planning Department.”

**Answer:** I understand your concerns and I will definitely bring them up with the City Manager and Council.

Dick Hayes, SHA Secretary, had the last comment to Mr. Gates – “Cultural Issues goes straight back to Trust Issues.”

President Jennings then adjourned the SHA Annual Meeting at 9:57 PM.