

Grassroots Alexandria - Fall/October 2017 Newsletter

Janet Murphy, Editor

Steering Committee – by Zeina Azzam, Jonathan Krall and Kate Watters

As we approach the end of our first year, Grassroots Alexandria is facing a need for expanded leadership. We are growing and changing in exciting ways, and this is reflected in our leadership needs. This month, Sarah Stott is stepping down from the Healthcare Team as a result of an impending move out of the area. And, in order to reduce his workload, Jonathan Krall will be stepping down from leadership of the Anti-Fascism Team at the end of December.

Words cannot adequately express our appreciation for the leadership that Sarah has exhibited as a colleague and to all of us as a team leader. Her many years of work and her positive reputation in the Alexandria political sphere opened doors for Grassroots Alexandria.

So how do we continue? We would like to open the leadership discussion. For our first few general meetings of 2018, we would like to have a conversation about how Grassroots Alexandria works and where we are going with our various efforts.

We may want to spread out the workload by encouraging each team to have more than one leader. In this, we would be following the example of our LGBTQ team co-leaders, Danny Clark and Megan Chaplin. The challenge of team leadership is to keep track of the various team projects and to also organize and conduct team meetings. Co-leaders can share the workload.

How has the steering committee worked so far? The original steering committee consisted of a core group of leaders, most of whom were also team leaders. Over time, the committee has shrunk to Zeina Azzam, Kate Watters and Jonathan Krall. The work of the steering committee has included organizing monthly meetings, reviewing statements posted to our web site, approving new teams and team leaders, and discussing the overall work and direction of GA. We have not formalized roles in the steering committee, in part, because we are all too busy with our teams. For this reason we never established a treasury. Perhaps it is time to seek out steering committee members who are not also team leaders.

We look forward to discussing this issue with each of you in the coming months and hearing your opinions moving forward. As always, feel free to reach out to any one of us if you have suggestions and concerns.

Healthcare Team – by Sarah Stott

The Healthcare Team had a big win late summer. On September 12, the Alexandria City Council unanimously passed our resolution entitled, “Regarding Affordable and

Attainable Health Care in the City of Alexandria: A resolution to protect and expand access to quality, affordable health care services for all Alexandrians.”

The resolution assures Alexandria residents that the Mayor and City Council consider access to healthcare a high priority. The resolution states that the City supports the Affordable Care Act (with improvements) and expanding Medicaid in Virginia; the City opposes repeal of the ACA and cuts to Medicaid and Medicare and requests that the City’s Public Health Advisory Commission keep the City informed of changes in State and Federal programs.

Our healthcare team had been working on this resolution since April and for five months discussed it with many Alexandria residents and local health organizations including the City’s Public Health Advisory Commission. The Healthcare for all Virginians (HAV) Coalition as agreed to publicize the resolution around the Commonwealth and the Country encouraging other cities and counties to draft their own resolutions using ours as a model.

Upcoming: The team will work with the City to publicize the ACA enrollment period. We will also push for Medicaid expansion in the Commonwealth.

.Vulnerable Communities Team – by Zeina Azzam

The Vulnerable Communities team has been tracking media coverage of events in the wake of the Charlottesville protests. Several team members are engaging in the semi-monthly rallies outside Richard Spencer’s offices, which are organized by the Anti-Fascism team. We have decided to read ON TYRANNY (by Timothy Snyder) and discuss it at our next meeting, after one member gave an overview of the book and its relevance for our work. We have also been engaging further with Tenants and Workers United and NAACP-Alexandria regarding the police data transparency initiative—to push for passing an ordinance in City Council to require the collection and sharing of police data with the community. Members of the team plan on visiting City Council members, one-on-one, to make the case. The team also invited Christopher Harris, president of NAACP-Alexandria, to speak at the next Grassroots Alexandria meeting.

LGBTQ Team – Danny Clark

In August, the LGBTQ Team followed up on our previous canvassing. We presented formal letters to businesses in Shirlington that have single-user gendered bathrooms to request they change their signage to be gender neutral. We also attended a superintendent search forum to encourage the school board to consider a superintendent who has experience with implementing SOGI non-discrimination policies. We then submitted public comments via a web survey and distributed it to the wider GRA listserv. The LGBTQ Team is currently looking into tabling at the Del Ray farmer’s market to raise awareness for LGBTQ issues. We also attended the Restorative Justice Community forum Wednesday 10/25 in support of the Vulnerable Communities Team.

Environmental Stewardship Team – by Kate Watters

1. Unfortunately, we learned that we were not selected to participate in the ad hoc sewage working group for Alexandria (we nominated Kate Watters) to participate. We will continue to follow the issue, but it seems to be very slow in getting off the ground.
2. Grassroots Alexandria sent a representative to the Alexandria Earth Day planning session in early October, and we have been participating in the selection of a theme for the event. The theme is likely to be something related to climate change, but we won't know for certain until after the next meeting of the planning group, scheduled for November 2nd. We will be working with the planning committee to help to put on this year's Earth Day, which will be either on April 22 or April 28, 2018. Mark your calendars now.
3. Ellen Eggerton, the new sustainability coordinator for the city of Alexandria, will be our guest speaker at the November 15 meeting of Grassroots Alexandria. Please plan to attend the meeting to hear her talk about what the mayor's commitment to the Paris Accord means for the city and how we can help to meet those goals as individual citizens.
4. Volunteer opportunity: We are still looking for someone who can represent Grassroots Alexandria at the meetings of the Environmental Policy Commission. The meetings are monthly on Monday evenings at 7pm.

Upcoming: The team is looking for a volunteer (or volunteers) to represent Grassroots Alexandria at the environmental policy commission meetings, which should start up again in September. Those interested should contact Kate (katewattersga@gmail.com).

Communications Team – by Jonathan Krall

The communications team has continued to do its work. We keep the web site updated, answer email sent to the group address, keep our email lists and Facebook group going, and keep the pictures going out on Instagram. Lately we've worked to feature more of our volunteers on the grassrootsalexandria.org website. In September and October, we published 5 articles from 4 authors on our blog. Please have a look at the website to see our commentaries and updates. Simply visit the home page and scroll down.

Anti Fascist Team - by Jonathan Krall

Our anti-Richard Spencer protest series continues, with protests on the second and fourth Sundays each month, from 1230-130pm. Each protest has a theme, usually tied to current events or Grassroots Alexandria projects. Recent themes included the DACA

immigration program (we support it), the phenomenon of “taking a knee” at sporting events (we support that too), and the upcoming election. We typically have fliers related to the theme, to educate the public on the issue of the day. At our most recent protest, we supported the Vulnerable Communities team by handing out 50 fliers and discussing Restorative Justice with city residents.

In all cases, we share information on Fascism and White Supremacy, the twin threats posed by the White Nationalist ideology of Richard Spencer. Our aim, as always, is to visibly oppose white nationalism, to do so in a way that is effective, and to do so in a way that Richard Spencer cannot help but notice. He must continue to receive the message that his presence in Alexandria is not advancing his mission.

More recently, we have been protesting our local Jim Crow era statue, known as Appomattox. This is one of many monuments erected, following Reconstruction, for the purpose of reminding black Americans of their status as second-class citizens. We contend that the statue is still working as intended and that it will continue to do so until removed or somehow altered to neuter its toxic message.

Statements concerning the statue and #takeaknee4justice can be found on the Grassroots Alexandria web site:

<http://grassrootsalexandria.org/2017/09/19/the-appomattox-statue-isnt-history/>
<http://grassrootsalexandria.org/2017/10/05/takeaknee4justice/>

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