

December 4, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

I will be retiring from the City of Alexandria after 27 years of service effective December 29, 2023.

In my capacity as Alexandria's Natural Resource Manager heading the Natural Lands Management office, I have collaborated with a great many natural resource professionals, conservation biologists, and environmental organizations and agencies at the federal, state, and local levels, as well as fellow staff, consultants, volunteers, and residents, to further natural resource and native biodiversity conservation and stewardship in Alexandria and vicinity. All of this work is underpinned by sound science and is closely aligned with Natural Heritage Network conservation methodologies.

Some highlights and accomplishments are: [Natural Resources Management Plan](#), [Native Vascular Flora of the City of Alexandria, Virginia](#), *Geologic Atlas of the City of Alexandria, Virginia and Vicinity* at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/89974>, and numerous technical reports and best practice Standard Operating Procedures.

Unfortunately, much of the above is often seen as an inconvenient truth and liability by senior management and elected officials who, in turn, selectively suppress the information in attempts to keep it from impacting their agendas. Ethical standards and adherence to scientific and professional integrity come into play at this point, compelling public servants to act as whistleblowers as a stop-loss. See https://peer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/PEER_2022_AR_med_nomarks.pdf, page 9.

Between 2016 and the present, in upholding the duties and taxpayer expectations of the Natural Resource Manager position, I have expressed misgivings regarding the City's handling of the Karig Estates development; Strawberry Run, Taylor Run, and Lucky Run stream projects; the Polk Avenue sidewalk project; construction of the Potomac Yard Metro Station Alternative B; and other construction projects affecting Alexandria's natural resources, as well as the needless local extinction of a regionally rare species. These statements were made to City staff and management; individual citizens and citizen groups; local, state, and federal officials; and the media. These were good faith disclosures of violations of law, rule or regulation, and/or gross mismanagement or waste of funds and abuse of authority protected by the City's Whistleblower Protection Policy.

As a result, the City has taken repeated retaliatory actions against me. The City has excluded me from projects, hearings, and meetings directly tied to my job description; marginalized, harassed, and sidelined me; suppressed my environmental review in many cases; disavowed long-held environmental policies and practices associated with my job; prevented me from performing core job duties; and issued two baseless written reprimands within the last 12 months. Since 2019, the City even disallowed my participation as Natural Resource Manager in its 3 stream construction projects, relegating my participation solely as a private citizen, even though my job description expressly includes such matters. See https://peer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PEER_Newsletter_Fall_2023_final.pdf, page 8.

In December 2018, I learned through a concerned resident's FOIA that the City Attorney's Office and its counsel had prepared a legal brief for an upcoming Circuit Court hearing to settle the Karig Estates debacle. Upon reviewing the brief, I was appalled to see a rash of fraudulent statements intended for the court that involved my name and actions falsely attributed to me. These false statements to the court, pursuant to the City's defense against the plaintiffs', were made knowingly by the City Attorney's Office and its counsel.

Although asked at the time by the plaintiffs' to produce my own affidavit, I did not and instead retained the counsel of renowned civil rights and labor attorney, Victor Glasberg, to help prevent this information from influencing the court and its decision. My attorney ultimately prevailed with City's counsel, and the false statements were redacted from the brief. My attorney's later comment was, "unbelievable, in four decades of lawyering, I've never seen anything like it".

Clearing up this mess cost me \$6,000 of my own money (nothing compared to the 20-times-plus as much that was expended by the plaintiffs). Money, though, I was happy to spend because it provided a measure of confirmation of the irregularity of representations made by City officials in a formal legal proceeding, as well as some small measure of support for fair process.

The workplace culture the past two years has been especially intolerable. On top of 7 full years of heavy-handed manipulation and harassment, I've realized that it is futile to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of Natural Resource Manager until there is sincere buy-in and support from elected officials and senior management. It is also overly stressful and unhealthy to remain in such an environment. Hence, my imminent retirement, which is a few years shy of the standard 30 years of service.

The City clearly doesn't want to uphold its own environmental policies, initiatives, and declarations, let alone support and empower its threadbare environmental staff. Yet, unchecked, high-density development continues to spread throughout the City, exacerbating existential climate change impacts, degrading water resources, wetlands, and forested stream valleys, and decimating native wildlife and biodiversity.

The facts speak for themselves and will last, be they science-based, technical material made by experts cautioning against ill-advised projects or repeated violations of the public trust documented in the public record, with consequences yet to be learned. Nevertheless, the facts herein are fair and accurate, which I believe important to know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rod Simmons', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rod Simmons
Natural Resource Manager / Conservation Biologist