

City of Alexandria, Virginia
BUDGET AND FISCAL AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BFAAC)

Monthly Meeting

December 16, 2025

City Hall Sister Cities Conference Room #1101
301 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

Summary Minutes

Committee Members Present: John Ruthinoski (Chair), Randall Williams (Vice Chair), Nancy Drane (Secretary), Sonya Day, Erica Kaster, Lauren O'Brien, Lester Simpson (via Zoom), Mark Tonsetic, Jake Truex

Absent: Mindy Lyle

Staff Present: Morgan Routt, Director of the City of Alexandria Office of Management and Budget; Meghan McGrane, Budget Management Analyst

Guest: Ebony Fleming, Director of the Office of Communications and Community Engagement

1. **Call to Order:** Vice Chair Ruthinoski called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.
2. **Approval of the Minutes of the December 2, 2025 Meeting:** Truex made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 2 meeting, seconded by O'Brien. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote of those present.
3. **Alexandria Budget Communications**
 - a. BFAAC was joined by Ebony Fleming, Director of the Office of Communications and Community Engagement.
 - b. Director Fleming and her team have been focused on strengthening efforts to expand outreach on budget-related communications. Those efforts were recently recognized by the Virginia Municipal League.
 - c. Director Fleming shared that in her view, her office has three goals:
 - i. Promote education and understanding among residents
 - ii. Bridge the gap between government and community
 - iii. Elicit feedback and input on government decision-making so that government serves its residents better.
 - d. In Director Fleming's view, the execution of the City's communication efforts is working well, but they are focused on facilitating greater engagement with communities that are not typically connected with the government.
 - e. They are using a range of metrics to assess the success of their engagement efforts (i.e., social media, in-person events, etc.) including attendance, survey

participation, social media views/hits, and so forth. They've identified some efforts that perform well (e.g., entertainment/social themed posts, posts with the Mayor and other Councilmembers) and some that don't (e.g., Weekly Council Recap). They are also preparing to launch a new system to track engagement called Public Input, <https://publicinput.com>.

- f. Budget-related communications present a significant portion of their work. A budget communications plan has been developed but they also want to be able to be flexible in real time to respond to how the process is evolving. They are particularly interested in trying to do a better job of telling the story in areas and putting the pieces together (e.g., youth/families). This year they are also focused on targeting a list of community/demographic groups for enhanced engagement, asking them how they want to learn about the budget and what topics would be of greatest interest. These include: children, youth, and families; arts and culture; environmental groups; veterans; and elders. They'll be sending a survey soon to these groups. Director Fleming mentioned that she will share the survey with BFAAC so that we can share in our networks as well. All City departments also receive a toolkit to help with outreach and engagement.
- g. BFAAC shared a range of ideas, including tapping into communities that are trusted by community members (e.g., faith, tenant associations), using community members as intermediaries or messaging ambassadors, leveraging Boards and Commissions, connecting with school PTAs and youth groups, and using 'captive audiences,' like individuals at the library, waiting in line at City Hall, etc.
- h. The discussion turned to what topics are most important for the community to receive regarding budget issues – for example, understanding the process versus updates on the budget timeline. The City generally begins with the release of the City Manager's budget proposal and then evolves throughout the budget process.
- i. BFAAC provided a summary of its 'Budget 101' series, and Director Fleming agreed to review what we had developed to see if it could be useful to incorporate into the City's efforts. Director Fleming said that she'd be interested in thinking more about how to leverage BFAAC in her office's continued work.

4. Discussion of FY27 Budget Work Products

- a. **Ruthinoski** summarized the deliverable that BFFAC committed to provide to Council and the group reviewed a draft outline for the memorandum. The general proposal would be to divide the content of the memo into sections and develop committees to develop content in each section.
- b. **Drane** suggested that we ensure that the memorandum includes a discussion and analysis of the Council's role in decision-making under "Current and Prior Tools Utilized by the City" in addition to tools the City Manager and OMB use to

develop the budget (i.e., how do they navigate the add/delete process, Council's recent CIP work session).

- c. **Ruthinoski** suggested that BFAAC's Councilmember representatives reach out to their Councilmember to ask a few questions to ensure BFAAC is on the right track with this memo. The group agreed to pose the following questions to Councilmembers between now and our January 20 BFAAC meeting:

Question 1: What we heard you say during the Council Budget Retreat is that you are asking us for recommendations on identifying the elements of a framework that will first, help you navigate the budget decisions you need to make, and second, will help you communicate to the public how you ultimately came to those final budget decisions. Do you agree?

Note to BFAAC members: Make sure they understand we are not creating an actual tool – but rather a review and analysis of what potential tools might be out there that they could consider.

Question 2: Do you have something specific in mind as to what that framework might include or look like, or how it would be helpful when facing hard budget choices? For example, would it be a checklist with factors to consider; core questions to discuss; a scoring tool, something else?

5. Updates and Reports – Office of Management and Budget

- a. **Director Routt** reported that five of the City's six collective bargaining agreements were completed without an impasse. The sixth, involving the City's police department, did result in an impasse that necessitated a Council hearing. During that impasse hearing, each side had an opportunity to present its position on the three issues that remained in dispute. Ultimately the Council sided with the police on wages and the City on the longevity bonus and pay parity. Council will consider all the agreements on January 13. (Its role is to accept the fiscal impact and commit to funding the agreements.)
- b. Reminder that meetings will move to Lee Center Room #4 beginning in January with a new start time (6:30 p.m.) and end time (8:30 p.m.)

6. **Adjournment:** A motion was made by **Ruthinoski** and seconded by **Simpson** to adjourn the meeting. The motion was carried by unanimous voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 P.M.

BFAAC Regular Meeting	Tuesday, Jan 20, 2026 – 6:30pm	Lee Center, Conference Rm #4	<i>Noticed</i>
BFAAC Regular Meeting	Tuesday, Feb 17, 2026 – 6:30pm	Lee Center, Conference Rm #4	<i>Noticed</i>
BFAAC Regular Meeting	Tuesday, Mar 17, 2026 – 6:30pm	Lee Center, Conference Rm #4	<i>Noticed</i>
BFAAC Regular Meeting	Tuesday, Apr 14, 2026 – 6:30pm	Lee Center, Conference Rm #4	<i>Noticed</i>
BFAAC Regular Meeting	Tuesday, May 19, 2026 – 6:30pm	Lee Center, Conference Rm #4	<i>Noticed</i>

Note: Calendar items in ***bold and italic*** have changed or been added since the previous month's agenda.