

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

Monthly Meeting

February 17, 2026

Nannie J. Lee Memorial Recreation Center, Room #4
1108 Jefferson Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

Summary Minutes

Committee Members Present: John Ruthinoski, Mayor Gaskins Designee (Chair); Randall Williams, Vice Mayor Bagley Designee (Vice Chair); Nancy Drane, School Board Designee (Secretary); Sonya Day, Citizen-at-Large; Erica Kaster, Citizen-at-Large; Lester Simpson, Councilmember Greene Designee; Mark Tonsetic, Citizen-at-Large; Jake Truex, Chamber of Commerce Designee

Absent: Mindy Lyle, Councilmember Elnoubi Designee

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

Guest: None

1. **Call to Order:** Chair **Ruthinoski** called the meeting to order at 6:40 PM.
2. **Approval of the Minutes of the January 20, 2026 Meeting:** **Truex** made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2025 meeting, seconded by **Day**. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote of those present.
3. **January Meeting Follow-Ups: Feedback from Budget Education Series Materials Distributed to Group**

Drane expressed some hesitation about sharing the ACPS summary without some engagement with ACPS budget staff, especially since the presentations are somewhat dated and there may be more up to date materials that would be more relevant or helpful. There is also an open question whether it is appropriate for BFAAC to communicate something schools-related or whether this should be left to ACPS or the BAC. **Ruthinoski** is unsure whether there is much that we can do with the materials that have been circulated (knowing that there are some additional summaries that **Williams** has received from former BFFAC members). **Ruthinoski** will continue to work with **Williams** on determining which materials are actionable and/or worth pursuing with the City Communications staff for review and potential use.

4. Development of Budget Decision Framework Product

Ruthinoski then turned to preparations for our BFAAC memo on the budget development process.

Tonsetic reported on some of his findings related to best practices, captured in a memo that will be shared with BFAAC members. Most of what was found did not appear new or novel. These included concepts like outcome-based decision-making; priority-based budgeting; etc. The City approach, as described by OMB, appears to be in line with the best practices found. (OMB mentioned that the Department of Parks and Recreation used priority-based budgeting to make some targeted decisions and that generally, it could be a nice framework for them to use especially when they are receiving lots of advocacy from certain groups.)

There is a “Rethinking Budgeting” initiative through the Government Finance Officers’ Association (www.gfoa.org) that includes more frequent scoring, especially where context and outcomes are more likely to change. Another alternative (Charlotte, NC; Hillsborough, NC) shifted to a balanced scorecard model where outcome measures were simplified. A third alternative was to apply a scorecard approach focused on areas where there might be the most contention. **Tonsetic** shared that Salt Lake City uses a rubric that could be a promising model, but one drawback is that the scoring still creates a series of similarly situated priorities where leaders are still faced with decision-making. Nevertheless, BFAAC members felt that the tool could tighten the focus of the discussion, even if it cannot answer the ultimate question of what should be higher priority.

Tonsetic reiterated his view that what Council is looking for may have more to do with public communication around budget choices and priorities than tools the Council can use itself. He shared that studies find that most city governments/staff are usually fairly satisfied with their budget process, but the concern is more around public satisfaction with the process. Some jurisdictions have tried things like participatory budgeting to achieve more engagement.

Finally, **Tonsetic** shared some caution on pursuing score-based models. First, these can be quite resource-intensive for staff. One has to ask whether the exercise is worth the time in terms of moving decisions forward. Second, a recognized drawback of the scoring model is that budget activities that interact with the budget most broadly tend to score better (i.e., if they hit all the strategic priorities, they score higher) but they still might not be more worthwhile than a more specific or limited budget priority that has significant community impact.

Kaster shared some observations regarding how AI could be used to facilitate budget decision-making. (A memo was shared with BFAAC members.) AI can be particularly helpful for interrogating/analyzing data (e.g., trends in 311 requests, demographics, housing) or assessing connection to strategic priorities. AI can also be used for gathering data or community feedback on specific issues or budget items (i.e., to pull out language, identify themes, analyze transcripts of public hearings or other community gatherings) to make sense of community feedback. There are also emerging capabilities to use AI for predictive work (i.e., estimating upcoming maintenance needs on equipment, buildings, etc.). The more data inputs, the more well-rounded the feedback being considered might be.

AI can also be utilized to model scenarios or to do visualizations with variables (e.g., tax rate scenarios, etc.) **Day** asked how cities are verifying some of the results being utilized to inform these scenario models. **Kaster** shared that some of this has to do with using AI tools that are specifically designed to do the type of analysis you're asking it to do (versus General AI like ChatGPT).

Truex looked at five jurisdictions both locally (Fairfax County, Annapolis) and beyond the DMV (Tempe, AZ; Pasadena, CA; Gainesville FL). Tempe begins its budget process with a point distribution exercise called START where members have \$100 to apply to various priorities or performance measures. They use this process to identify priorities. They also have a Team Acceleration Program, a different tool to assess priorities that are aimed at big impact – i.e., lowering homelessness). He also has a memo that will be shared with BFAAC members. **Drane** shared that she and Simpson found processes more similar to Alexandria but that they still had some additional research to do.

Ruthinoski then turned to the process of drafting the BFAAC memo. He suggested that each group share a draft by our March 17 meeting so that we review together. We can then use our March 25 meeting with City Council to provide an update on where we are with the problem statement as we see it to ensure we are poised to meet their expectations. The general idea is that we'd provide them with three ways to frame the problem and provide helpful guidance at each step: gaining alignment on priorities; making decisions; and communicating it out. (This report out would supplement our primary objective for the March 25 meeting, which is to comment on the proposed FY27 budget.)

5. Updates and Reports

- a. **McGrane** reported that they are heads down on the budget right now, preparing the budget for the City Manager's presentation to the City Council on February 24, 2026, followed by a community presentation on Thursday, February 26, 2026. These presentations will be followed by a series of work sessions, including a City Council-School Board discussion on March 4, 2026.

- b. **Tonsetic** submitted the oath regarding his appointment to the Stormwater Commission.
 - c. **Williams** reported that the Commission on Information Technology’s next meeting will be later this week on GIS mapping.
6. **Adjournment:** A motion was made by **Ruthinoski** and seconded by **Kaster** to adjourn the meeting. The motion was carried by unanimous voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:16 P.M.

Upcoming Meeting(s) / Important Dates:

<i>Event</i>	<i>Date/Time</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Status</i>
Additional BFAAC Meeting	Tuesday, Mar 10, 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.

