

MAYOR'S STATE OF THE CITY 2011

Hello. I'm Bill Euille. [title: William D. Euille, Mayor, City of Alexandria, Virginia] [location: City Hall, Council Chamber]

During the past year, my experiences confirmed something I've long believed.

We need each other, and our connections make us better. We have witnessed many challenges; however, many opportunities are on the horizon.

The last time I delivered the State of the City address, I spoke to you about the challenges and changes the City faced as a result of the national economic recession.

As a result of the downturn, City Council was forced to make difficult decisions: we cut some City services, reduced the City's workforce, and raised property taxes.

The City also made operational and budget changes that helped Alexandria cope with the extreme fiscal challenges that began in early Fiscal Year 2009. And City staff quickly adapted, maintaining a high level of service and improving efficiency, while making do with less.

By the end of Fiscal Year 2010, the City ended with a small budget surplus: a bright spot in what has been a very slow economic recovery.

How did we get to this place? With a tremendous amount of reflection, sacrifice, sharing and hard work by everyone.

I'd like to thank my colleagues on City Council: Vice Mayor Kerry Donley, Councilman Frank Fannon, Councilwoman Alicia Hughes, Councilman Rob Krupicka, Councilwoman Redella Pepper, and Councilman Paul Smedberg for their dedication and teamwork in seeing Alexandria through the economic crisis.

I must also thank the City's employees for their work and commitment. We couldn't have done it without you.

And of course, I must thank you, the Alexandria community, for your support and sacrifice during these difficult and challenging times.

And now, I want to focus on a few key components that are reflective of our Strategic Plan.

BUDGET & ECONOMY

“Creating a financially sustainable government, and supporting the local economy.”

In February, City Manager Jim Hartman proposed a \$553.4 million Fiscal Year 2012 General Fund Operating Budget, a budget that included no tax rate increases, no fee increases, and no new cuts to City services.

The release of the City Manager's proposed budget is followed by a series of work sessions, public hearings, and discussions.

City leaders, with your input, will continue to make careful decisions that will maintain Alexandria's financial sustainability in the long term.

City Council is scheduled to adopt the budget on May 2, and there will be opportunity for public input through public hearings, online comments, or email. To learn how you can get involved, please visit the City's Budget website. [URL: alexandriava.gov/Budget]

With this good news about the budget, there is also evidence that the tide is turning slowly in our favor:

As of January 31 2011, our General Fund revenues totaled \$280.4 million, which is 2.2 percent higher than FY 2010 revenues for the same period last year.

The national unemployment rate decreased to 9 percent in December, and Alexandria's unemployment rate as of January 2011 was 4.4 percent, down from 4.6 percent in November 2010.

Local sales and meals tax revenues improved over last year; hotel room rental occupancy decreased slightly, but room rates increased.

Although national and local commercial construction spending remains sluggish, the number of residential construction projects in Alexandria has returned to FY 2009 levels.

By the end of this year, it is anticipated that the value of new multi-family construction will exceed 2010 levels.

Despite economic challenges, the City has remained committed to implementing recommendations made a few years ago by the Economic Sustainability Work Group, evident in the development, transit, and waterfront plans you'll hear about later.

And more cause for hope: the designation of Alexandria as a “Distinctive Destination” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the City's commemoration of the Civil War Sesquicentennial, offers the potential to attract more visitors and spotlight our City as a sought-after place to live, to do business in, and to visit.

The City will continue to work with our partners, the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, and the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, to realize those goals.

No shortfall and a surplus... it is a cause for hope, a charge, and a vision to continue moving forward.

Now that we see the light at the end of the tunnel, we cannot rest. We must keep working together, as one Alexandria, to fulfill our goals and ensure a successful present, and future, for our City.

- A present and future built on strong financial management and plans for a sustainable economy and a vibrant city...
- A quality of life that is unparalleled...
- A safe, healthy, diverse and inclusive population...
- Housing choices for all income levels...
- A reliable transportation system with multiple options...
- Job training, workforce development, and support for the human assets we possess...
- Business diversity...
- Collaborative support for our young people, and their education...
- Support for our seniors, and strategies for the challenges they face...
- Support and investment in the human assets...
- And preservation of our historic and environmental treasures.

These goals mirror that of the City's Strategic Plan, finalized and approved by City Council last year. Shaped by extensive discussion and community input, the Plan forms the vision for our City and its future direction.

Let me tell you about the State of the City, and what we are doing to fulfill that vision.

QUALITY OF LIFE

“Providing safety, security, and efficient services for our residents”

When people think about quality of life, one of the first things they may ask is, “Is our City safe?” [location: Department of Emergency Communications] I'm happy to report that the crime rate in Alexandria remains at a 41-year low. This is remarkable, given that it has been an extremely busy period for our Police officers, Firefighters and Sheriff deputies, as they worked to keep our City safe and orderly following the “Snowmageddon of 2010” and the August 5 wind storm; fought multiple-alarm fires, and provided community education and outreach activities. The commitment of our public safety officers and their commitment to the community is just one example of how the City maintains the safe, excellent standard of living we all enjoy.

This year, our Fire Department received two new, state-of-the-art medic units that will be used for the City's Peak Time Medic Unit Program, designed to provide additional Advanced Life Support transport capabilities in and around the City when Emergency Medical Service calls are at their highest. This will help reduce emergency response times and lessen the City's reliance on neighboring jurisdictions. New EMS medics, who graduated in January, will help staff the Peak Time Medic Units and other medic vacancies.

I'm here at the newly created Department of Emergency Communications, which unifies the former Police and Fire emergency communications into a single separate department, which will be more effective in providing emergency communication services to the public.

For some Alexandrians, quality of life begins with the basics. Within the City, other departmental operations have been streamlined and strengthened as well. The Departments of Human Services; Mental Health, Intellectual Disabilities and Substance Abuse; and the Office on Women were merged to form the Department of Community and Human Services. The goal of the merger is to provide services with “no wrong door” by combining all levels of expertise with a single point of contact for essential services that can measurably improve or maintain the quality of life for Alexandrians in need of the Department's services.

The City also merged its Office of Communications and Office of Citizen Assistance into the Office of Communications and Public Information. The new Office provides news and information about the City and its services to the public and the media.

It also communicates through a variety of platforms: City websites, social media, email, and telephone, so that the public can effectively express their problems, comments and concerns-and have their issues resolved as quickly as possible by City departments.

By combining expertise in communications and media relations with veteran staff experienced in working with the public, the Office of Communications & Public Information will provide a higher level of customer service.

OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITY

“Valuing our diversity, and preserving our rich history and culture.”

One of the many great things about our City is its diverse neighborhoods. From the colonial homes of Old Town to the pleasant landscapes of Cameron Station and Lincolnia Hills and the high-rise and multi-family structures of the City’s West End, there is something here for everyone. However, housing, (in particular, affordable housing) has been a key concern in our City. [location: Mount Vernon Avenue, Del Ray Community]

The City has heard those concerns. The mixed income redevelopment of the Glebe Park Apartments as Alexandria Crossing now includes market rate homes, workforce affordable homeownership units and a resident police officer unit. In addition, the ongoing redevelopment of the James Bland Homes as Old Town Commons continues the modernization of the City’s aging public housing stock.

Last year, the City initiated a community process to develop a citywide Housing Master Plan to guide future development with the goals of preserving and enhancing affordable housing opportunities, various levels of housing choices for all, community diversity, and economic sustainability. I urge you to visit the City’s website to learn more and to follow this process. [URL: alexandriava.gov/HousingPlan]

There's another way you can be involved in improving the city’s quality of life. ACTion Alexandria, a project co-sponsored by the City, the community foundation ACT for Alexandria, the Knight Foundation, and the Bruhn-Morris Foundation, is a community network and website that brings residents and local nonprofit organizations together to identify and prioritize community needs and challenges-and to work together to help solve them.

ACTion Alexandria recently collaborated with the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria to host town hall meetings and online voting designed to ask Alexandrians about “quality of life” indicators-like education, food, safety, and housing-that mattered most in their lives. By gathering this information, the Partnership hopes to begin conversations, forge partnerships, and strengthen collaborations to create a better Alexandria for everyone. [URL: www.ACTionAlexandria.org]

Access to the arts and recreation is another measurement of quality of life and in this, Alexandria is unmatched. There’s something for everyone! In the spring, stroll in one of the City’s many parks. Spend time with friends and family at one of our free summertime concerts at Market Square or in Fort Ward Park, and celebrate the City’s Birthday at the annual celebration at Oronoco Bay Park.

The turning of autumn signals the annual Alexandria Festival of the Arts and the Alexandria Film Festival. And in the winter, you can enjoy wintertime candlelight tours of historic sites and holiday concerts. And our three annual parades bring thousands of visitors into the city. As a lifelong resident of the City of Alexandria, I’ve always been impressed with our City’s recreation facilities, parks and trails. The City also provides more than 100 classes for Alexandrians of all ages and 40 camps and out of school time programs for youth.

I also encourage you to take advantage of the more than 20 miles of biking and walking trails, and more than 950 acres of park land, and tennis and basketball courts throughout this City.

[URL: alexandriava.gov/Recreation]

Finally, this year marks the beginning of the 150th anniversary commemoration of the Civil War, which will feature special events, exhibitions, and lectures. Become part of this special commemoration by attending some of these events and learning more about the City's Civil War heritage as an occupied city in wartime. [URL: www.HistoricAlexandria.org]

DEVELOPMENT & REDEVELOPMENT

“Promoting quality development and supporting local business”

In 2010, City Council approved the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan, and planning for a much-needed new Metrorail station for the area is underway [location: Fire Station 209, Overlooking Potomac Yard Development]. The proposed Metrorail station would be the cornerstone of the Plan, which provides the framework for creating a vibrant, mixed-use urban setting in north Potomac Yard, where a big-box shopping center is now located.

The Plan also calls for pedestrian-friendly streets, with local and regional connections for multiple transportation modes; a series of open spaces; residential areas; affordable housing; and retail and office space. This new development truly brings the Potomac Yard site full circle. The new Metrorail station will serve as the hub of a new, transit-oriented community in an area that once served as a railroad yard. The City also received federal Recovery Act funding to build an exclusive transitway in the median of Route 1 (between Monroe Avenue and East Glebe Road), which will provide additional transportation capacity for the area.

The Potomac Yard Plan is just one of several revitalization plans centered on transit initiatives coming to the City's gateways, including the West End.

TRANSPORTATION & TRANSIT

“Developing a multi-modal system that connects with the region”

The Fort Ward Historic Site and Museum, on the City’s West End, is one of Alexandria’s historic treasures. Built as a Union Army installation defending the Nation’s Capital, Fort Ward is the best preserved Civil War fort in the Washington, D.C. area.

Once again, Alexandria has been chosen to aid in the defense of our nation [location: Ceremonial Gate, Fort Ward Museum & Historic Site]. As you may know, Mark Center will soon be the new location of the Washington Headquarters Service, and a number of other Department of Defense agencies, at one of the largest and most visible building sites in the City. Known as the Base Realignment and Closure Act, or the BRAC-133 project, this development will bring more than 6,400 employees to the area. And with it, increased traffic on our already crowded roadways.

We recognize the complex transportation challenges BRAC-133 will bring to residents, businesses, and commuters in the area. We’ve listened to your voices, and have made our needs known. So far, the Department of Defense has made substantial improvements in building architecture, and City Council has endorsed a recent proposal by the Virginia Department of Transportation for a direct HOV/transit ramp from I-395 into the BRAC-133 area. Governor McDonnell has pledged \$80 million for this project.

The City and the BRAC-133 Advisory Group will continue to work with our state and federal partners in seeing that traffic, safety, and emergency services concerns are addressed, and we will remain vigilant in voicing your concerns.

But transportation is more than just roads and cars. It's also public transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians. It's about continuing our commitment to preserve Alexandria's reputation as a pedestrian and bike-friendly City, and provide diverse options for safe and efficient travel throughout the City and the region.

The City is currently studying the feasibility of developing three high-capacity transitways in Alexandria. One being considered is in the Beauregard/Van Dorn Corridor, and will be part of the overall Beauregard Area plan, which aims to revitalize the West End gateway to the City by:

- Increasing the number of travel options to and from the City...
- Preserving community treasures such as the Winkler Preserve, while adding open and recreational space, increasing access for bicyclists and pedestrians, and increasing connectivity...
- Addressing housing choice issues for every income level and household type, in conjunction with the City's Master Housing Plan...
- And promoting economic sustainability by attracting new retail and office development.

By offering various transportation options that link our diverse neighborhoods to the rest of the region, and promoting quality development throughout the City, we ensure that we keep Alexandria moving forward into the future.

ALEXANDRIA IS AN ECO-CITY

“Protecting the environment and the health of our residents”

One of the resources that make Alexandria such a distinctive place is the City’s waterfront [location: Founder’s Park, Alexandria Waterfront]. Efforts are underway to revitalize and transform the waterfront into a gateway to Alexandria that echoes its heritage as a bustling seaport, a unique place that will enhance the beauty of our shoreline, offer diverse activities, and include public art and historical displays.

The City recently released a Draft Waterfront Small Area Plan, and is seeking public review and feedback. Over an 18 month period, the City hosted a variety of public meetings, tours, and discussions that promoted interest in the development of the Plan. The result of their work is available on the City's website and I invite you to review the Plan, learn about the process, and get involved in the future of our Waterfront! [URL: alexandriava.gov/Waterfront]

Alexandria is an award-winning Eco-City that takes pride in, and responsibility for, our natural resources. From adopting the nation's second “green foods” resolution, to platinum certification in the Virginia Municipal League's Green Government Challenge, we are committed to preserving our environmental resources for ages to come. That commitment extends to our residents as well. Following the debut of the City’s new recycling program last fall, residents recycled an additional 40 tons of material in the first month of operation.

In Alexandria City Public Schools, where “green-ovation” and environmental stewardship is now part of the educational culture, recycling rates have also doubled. The City also launched the Green Building Resource Center, a new Eco-City Alexandria initiative offering green building information and resources for homeowners, renters and businesses, designed to help reduce their environmental impact and operating costs. [URL: alexandriava.gov/GBRC]

And now, let’s talk about another one of Alexandria’s most precious resources--our youth.

EDUCATION AND OUR YOUTH

“Fostering the success and well-being of our children and families”

Last year, I called on the Alexandria community to work with our schools, educators, and students in changing T.C. Williams' classification as a “persistently lowest-achieving school” by the Virginia Department of Education [location: School Library, T.C. Williams High School]. The community responded. Here at T.C. Williams High School, the transformation is working and the school is moving from “good” to “great.” Since the Transformation began, the school has reduced its dropout rates and increased the number of graduates going to college.

The T.C. Williams Vision and Action Committee, composed of students, staff members, parents and community members, helped to guide the Transformation. Now, the ongoing Transformation efforts are spreading division-wide, with focus on high academic achievement for all students, commitment to professional accountability for the success of each student, and forming partnerships with parents and the community as an essential element of individual and overall success for students.

The success of this effort shows that it truly does take a village to raise our children. But we cannot rest on these preliminary achievements—for this effort to be successful, we must continue to support our young people.

Data from the 2010 Census shows that young people under the age of 18 make up 17% of our City's population, an increase from 11.3% in 2000. That's nearly 24,000 residents—and future leaders--of our City.

From infancy to adulthood, these young people need our encouragement and support throughout their lives. The City sponsors and supports many programs and initiatives for youth, from early childhood initiatives to mentoring programs, and your help is needed. Be a champion for Alexandria's children. Learn more about how you can get involved by visiting the City's Volunteer website. [URL: alexandriava.gov/Volunteer]

ALEXANDRIA: MOVING FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE

I'd like to say a word about City Manager Jim Hartmann, who has resigned and is leaving the City to find new opportunities and challenges.

During his six years here, he worked closely with Council and City staff to build an outstanding management team.

His legacy to the people of Alexandria is a strong government, focused on a future that is more accountable, effective, and responsive.

He has guided the City through a myriad of crises, and has positioned Alexandria as an active participant in the region.

On behalf of City Council and the community, we wish him well.

We indeed have cause for hope in Alexandria. The State of our City is strong. Our goals are ambitious, but the commitment, energy, and perseverance of our residents which have sustained the City since its founding days, will carry us through.

We've seen what can happen when communities come together to make change happen. It's in the untold stories that I see in my job as Mayor that make that clear.

Stories like the community's concerned response to a donation drive for 14 families displaced by a 4-alarm fire on Edsall Road on February 15.

And the "can-do" spirit of residents who, following the August 5 storm, helped friends and neighbors who had lost power, and assisted City crews in cleaning up after the storm.

It's not surprising that for the third straight year, Alexandria residents have been recognized for their generosity, in the volume of donations they make to charitable organizations online.

It's this spirit that gives us cause for hope, for now and for our future.

So I say, "thank you." Thank you for your caring, your involvement, and your commitment to Alexandria.

You are the mentors, volunteers, commissioners, environmental stewards, friends, neighbors, families and good citizens who help make our city great.

Together, we can continue to succeed in maintaining Alexandria as a safe, vibrant, healthy, diverse and caring community, where every resident can have a voice in moving our City forward.

God bless you, and God bless the great City of Alexandria.

MAYOR'S STATE OF THE CITY 2011

For more information about the State of the City, the Strategic Plan, or City government, visit www.alexandriava.gov

State of the City 2011 was produced by the City of Alexandria's Office of Communications & Public Information