

State of the City Address – “The Time is Now”
Mayor William D. Euille
April 14, 2015

Good evening. I’m Mayor Bill Euille, and I’m here to talk about the State of our City.

You may have read the headlines about stagnant revenues, a slow housing market, a regional slump, and an economy that is in slow recovery.

(By the way—we are not selling City Hall! It is NOT for sale!)

We’ve discussed these issues in the State of the City Address for the last eight years, and we’re all suffering from “fiscal fatigue.”

Tonight, I want to inspire you. I want to focus on all the good news we have to celebrate.

In the face of many challenges, the City of Alexandria remains sound, and continues to move forward. There's an excitement in the air, and anticipation that our future will be prosperous and bright.

The State of our City remains strong. Why?

Because Alexandria is blessed with:

- A thriving, diverse community of informed and engaged residents;
- A City workforce that has tirelessly continued to do more with less, dedicated to promoting a culture of service excellence, creativity and entrepreneurship; and
- A strong financial footing, rooted in time-tested principles of good financial management--blended with new tools, ideas, and strategies--to align our spending with the vision and goals for our city.

Let's look at some of the big things we've accomplished.

- With the approval of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, we've reached a major milestone in our goal of seeing a new Potomac Yard Metrorail Station, open as soon as late 2018. The Draft Statement, approved by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, National Park Service, and the Federal Transit Administration, marks a significant point in this critical project. The Draft Statement is available for public review. After a series of public meetings, City Council is scheduled to act by May 20.

- In addition to providing a critical public transit option along the Route 1 corridor, the station is expected to generate billions of dollars in new private sector investment. The resulting development around the station will support up to 26,000 new jobs within one-quarter mile, and 13,000 new residents within one-half mile. The station will be completely funded without using any current General Fund dollars, which means that the average resident or business in Alexandria will not have to make any direct tax contributions to the station. That's good news.
- And, the City was awarded a \$50 million loan from the Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Bank, which locks in an extremely low interest rate for 30 years, defers initial principal payments, and provides an accelerated repayment option if revenue exceeds expectations. This loan avoids the need to use higher-interest City-issued bonds for a significant portion of the station funding.
- Last August, the City opened the first phase of the Crystal City-Potomac Yard Transitway, the D.C. area's first right-of-way dedicated to premium bus operations. We inaugurated a new bus service, Metroway, on the Route 1 corridor. It's the first of many

planned transit corridors that will provide residents and commuters with the ability to travel easily within the city and the region. Along with Alexandria's current transit options, and future connections to the planned Potomac Yard Metrorail Station, Metroway brings us ever closer to the City's goal of a multi-modal transit system.

- I'm also happy to report that the challenges to implementation of the Waterfront Plan have been resolved.
 - Just weeks ago, the Virginia Supreme Court upheld the Alexandria Circuit Court's dismissal of the last remaining lawsuit challenging the zoning underlying the Waterfront Plan.
 - Last year, the City ended a decades-long dispute with Old Dominion Boat Club regarding property at the foot of King Street. Last month, City Council unanimously approved construction of a new Boat Club building at the old Beachcomber Restaurant site. Now our Waterfront will have its centerpiece—a public park at the foot of King Street—and Boat Club members will have a beautiful new facility in a prime location. It's a testament to what leadership, collaboration, good-faith negotiations and perseverance can do!
- The City moved into the next phase of its civic engagement initiative by adding an online portal, *AlexEngage*, to encourage residents to become

involved in decisions that shape our City. *AlexEngage*, which builds on the “What’s Next, Alexandria” engagement principles adopted by City Council in 2014, allows users to post their opinions and to see what others are saying. The input is read by City officials and incorporated into the decision-making process. *AlexEngage* was used to ask residents about the outcomes they wanted to see in the FY 2016 budget process, and it’s being used for a number of other important City issues.

Alexandria remains one of the best places in the country to live. We’ve made a lot of recent "top 10" lists: one of the top 10 safest places in Virginia, one of the top 10 best downtowns, and one of the top 10 cities on the rise.

Our Eco-City was recognized for the seventh consecutive year by the Virginia Municipal League as a platinum-level “Green Government.” This platinum-level certification is VML’s highest local government certification.

Around town, there’s a new energy in the air. Emerging neighborhoods that were once construction sites are coming alive with residents and retail, and revitalization is coming to other neighborhoods across the city. Small area plans for the Oakville Triangle and Eisenhower West communities are in the works.

The Alexandria of the future is taking shape.

And we aren't just a city of new buildings, streets and neighborhoods. We're a city of ideas.

Creating an environment that fosters innovation is key to keeping Alexandria a viable regional player, and helps facilitate change in all sectors of our community. Innovation has helped city government find ways to improve service delivery, reach out to residents, and help solve problems through services like *Call.Click.Connect* and *AlexEngage*.

We support the industries and businesses, large and small, from which innovative ideas can grow.

- We're a community of national, regional and local businesses, tech startups, trade associations, and nonprofits.
- We've more than 250 "commercial creative" firms working in public relations, graphic and web design, marketing and marketing consulting.
- We're the home of the United States Patent and Trademark Office; and
- The future home of the National Science Foundation, which will firmly establish our city as a hub for discovery, innovation, and creativity.
- We've created a new business development center to help veterans create and cultivate their businesses, known as Capitol Post.

- And we continue to improve our regulatory processes to make establishing and growing a business in the City easier.

Last October, the brightest and best technologists and entrepreneurs in the field of clean technology gathered for the Cleantech Open Northeast Regional Summit. We're proud this organization chose Alexandria as the site for the Summit, which is slated to return. And last weekend, the City hosted the Environmental Protection Agency's eleventh annual People, Prosperity and the Planet, or "P3," Competition and National Sustainable Design Expo. The expo brought 300 university students to compete for the nationally prestigious P3 Award. I participated in the awards program just yesterday afternoon, and was the keynote speaker at that presentation.

And at this year's influential South by Southwest events in Austin, Texas, the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership and Arlington Economic Development co-hosted, for the first time, an event highlighting the contributions of both jurisdictions to the development of the Washington, D.C. metro region as a location for tech startups. About 200 people were there.

Our tech-savvy residents, transit-friendly community, dedication to sustainability, and proximity to the nation's capital make Alexandria the perfect location for such companies, as well as the federal government's

technology and science sectors. The National Science Foundation's new headquarters is under construction and its 2,100 employees are slated to move to Alexandria in 2017.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, which just celebrated the 225th anniversary of the Nation's first Patent Act, continues to expand its employee base and recently welcomed its first female director, Michelle Lee, a former Google executive. I also participated in that event the other day as a keynote speaker behind Congressman Don Beyer, and was able to congratulate the 9 millionth patent award recipient.

We hope organizations and leaders will help create an environment that attracts more innovation that, in the end, will benefit our city, too.

And because Alexandria is a high-tech, knowledge-based community, we recognize it's important to our economy and quality of life that all residents and businesses have reliable and affordable Internet connectivity. We're continuing efforts to ensure that all customers have access to the latest communications technologies.

Change and innovation have affected our budget development process, too.

Acting City Manager Mark Jinks has proposed the Fiscal Year 2016 budget, incorporating strategies used in the FY 2015 budget process, including a new approach that linked spending to long-term outcomes detailed in the City's Strategic Plan. The proposed FY 2016 budget:

- uses analysis from the City's Five-Year Financial Planning process, which was introduced last year;
- reflects the five budget priorities first adopted in the FY 2015 budget process; and
- was guided by extensive input gleaned from the community through civic engagement activities, including *AlexEngage*.

Like last year, the proposed budget is organized around Focus Areas that illustrate the things we all want for our community:

- An Accountable, Effective and Well-Managed Government,
- Healthy and Thriving Residents;
- A Livable, Green and Prospering City; and
- A Safe, Secure and Just Community.

The proposed 2016-2025 Capital Improvement Program includes significant funding for school projects and other vital projects like

- the first phase of the Waterfront Implementation, which includes flood mitigation and core area parks,
- modernized sanitary sewer and stormwater infrastructure,
- increased capital contributions to Metrorail to make it safer and more reliable, including the purchase of new rail cars as needed; and
- street resurfacing and athletic field improvements.

The Acting City Manager's budget proposes strategic, forward-thinking spending that retains core services and invests in our future without increasing property tax rates.

Now, City Council is carefully reviewing the proposals, weighing them against the economic challenges we face. The process, as always, is difficult.

However, with the hard work of City staff and the opinions, concerns and suggestions we've received from our residents, I know we'll come to a consensus that will help us to continue the good work we have begun. And we will adopt a budget on May 7.

What are the things that make Alexandria such a great place?

- Safe streets, beautiful parks, and a great place for youth;
- A place where the arts thrive and history lives.

- A socially and economically diverse, caring community.

It's all about the excellent quality of life we enjoy.

We have something special here: a city of nearly 150,000 people with a small-town feel, and Alexandria's safe streets help contribute to that feeling.

Our city continues to experience a historically low crime rate. And our public safety agencies—Police, Fire and EMS services, the Sheriff's Office, and the Department of Emergency Communications—work together, often putting their lives at risk, to ensure that security. Here are some of their accomplishments:

- First, I must mention the tireless work and perseverance of the Alexandria Police Department in apprehending the suspect in three unsolved murders that rocked our community, and bringing him to justice.
- Our Fire Department gained a new chief in the past year, and adopted a new organizational structure emphasizing professional development, health and safety. The Department also is cross-training medics with firefighting training, with the goal of eventually

achieving a “dual firefighter” workforce. These dual firefighters will maximize incident response, and help us to meet regional standards. Six medics have already received training, and 18 new firefighters have already started recruit school.

- This month Fire Station 210, the first in the Eisenhower Valley, officially opened with a staffed, round-the-clock medic unit. As part of the budget process, City Council is looking at how we can accelerate the establishment of an engine company at that station. Decisions will be made through the ongoing budget discussions.

- In January, Alexandria launched a new, \$18 million state-of-the-art computer aided dispatch system to facilitate incident response and communication to public safety personnel in the field. The new system
 - Enhances emergency response for law enforcement, fire and EMS
 - Provides faster processing of calls
 - Shortens response times; and
 - Provides expanded inter-agency and cross-jurisdictional communications and data sharing.

- Finally, to address a pay gap with our neighboring jurisdictions, the FY 2016 proposed budget includes \$2.1 million for salary

increases for all sworn police positions, and additional firefighter and medic career ladder opportunities.

There are other lifesaving forces at work, too: those that provide services to Alexandria's most vulnerable populations. Although we're known for being an affluent community, there are those who rely on the City's "safety net" programs. Over the last year, that safety net was strengthened through several grants.

Here are two examples:

- The City received nearly \$4 million for programs to ensure Alexandria's children thrive and succeed, through Head Start, youth adult transition programs for young people with special needs, services to families of children with special needs, and similar programs.
- More than \$94,000 has been received to increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Electronic Benefits Transfer usage for food purchases by low-income community members at the Old Town Farmers' Market and support a program that uses bicycles to transport donated produce to area shelters.

Housing is also an important part of the safety net. A range of housing affordability keeps our City strong and diverse; it supports our economic development and keeps us regionally competitive. The last year has been an exciting one in the City's continuing commitment to affordable housing. Here's some highlights:

- The Alexandria Housing Development Corporation completed the substantial renovation of 75 affordable housing units at Arbelo and Longview Terrace Apartments, which were acquired with City assistance.
- This fall, 78 new affordable housing units will be delivered at the corner of East Reed Avenue and Route 1 in the "Jackson's Crossing" development. The City provided a \$2.5 million loan and contributed a parcel of City-owned land to facilitate the project.
- The City has been invited to continue its highly successful Neighborhood Stabilization Program with its partner agency, Rebuilding Together Alexandria. This partnership acquires and rehabilitates foreclosed and short-sale properties, making them available for purchase by income-eligible first-time homebuyers. To date, 17 households have been able to make Alexandria their home.

- And here's big news. The Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority, or ARHA, has initiated a process to redevelop five sites: Andrew Adkins, the ARHA Administrative Building, Samuel Madden, Hopkins-Tancil Courts, and Cameron Valley--into mixed income communities. As they have done so successfully in the past, ARHA will work with development partners. This spring, ARHA and the City are co-sponsoring community meetings to engage neighbors regarding the upcoming redevelopment.

Did you know Alexandria was named the number one greenest mid-size city in the nation? Livability.com conducted a study of 189 cities, which ranked Alexandria in the top 20 of four categories, including the number of public parks.

Our open spaces are a treasure. In 2012, the City began a multi-year process to develop a Citywide Parks Improvement Plan to study, enhance, and preserve Alexandria's six large, multi-use parks. The Plan was formally endorsed by the Parks and Recreation Commission last year, and to date, City staff raised \$218,000 in alternative funding for Park Plan implementation, while also using the plan as a guide to budget the Capital Improvement Program. Ongoing planning continues for the City's existing neighborhood

parks, which will help budgeting and improvement priorities to ensure these parks serve our needs now and into the future.

Speaking of our future, Benjamin Franklin once said, “*An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.*” That’s a wise observation when it comes to our young people and the many ways the City and community invest in their future. It’s not just financial; it’s the time and talent used to build programs that foster the love of learning, and the work of educators in providing a quality education for our children. And, for the Alexandria City Public Schools, those investments are paying off.

- More than 50 percent of the class of 2014 received Advanced Studies diplomas and 87 percent plan to attend college.
- Seventy-three percent of all minority students in the class of 2014 took the SAT, exceeding state and national percentages.
- T.C. Williams High School experienced the highest Advanced Placement course participation and pass rates in the school’s history, earning Honor Roll status by The College Board; and
- Fifteen out of 16 schools have been accredited.

Yet, there have been challenges:

- growing enrollment and aging facilities;

- working to raise achievement for all students, while addressing the needs of underperforming students;
- and planning for elementary redistricting for the 2016-17 school year.

ACPS is creating a five-year strategic plan that will guide the school system in reaching its vision to become a high-performing school division. The plan is being developed through the leadership and guidance of a 25-member committee of representatives from the community, including business leaders, religious organizations, nonprofit organizations, students, teachers, parents, and others.

The plan's goals, closely tied with those of the City's Children and Youth Master Plan, make a clear commitment to early childhood education and recognize the need for creating optimal, equitable learning facilities.

The dollars we invest today in education are indeed an investment in the City's future. Along with our annual budget transfer to ACPS, the Acting City Manager's Proposed Capital Improvement Program proposes \$300 million in school improvements over 10 years.

The State of our City is sound, strong, and solid. We're poised to do great things. But with that said, how do we move forward in tough economic times?

We must seize the moment, seek opportunities, and withstand challenges, while striving for innovation. We cannot let the momentum stop.

We must have a vision for our future.

Because the time is now.

The time is now to celebrate the great things that we have accomplished and to work toward making our city even greater.

The time is now to seize the endless opportunities--and meet the inevitable challenges--that lie before us.

The time is now to continue developing and implementing the ideals set forth in the City's Strategic Plan and to fully realize our vision, hopes and dreams for the city we love.

The time is now to affirm that we need to continue working together—as one--to move Alexandria into the future.

In last year's State of the City Address, I said our best days are yet to come. I still believe it. Because we are united in our love for a great City that endures despite all odds.

To our community members: thank you. Your participation provides us with energy and a call to action. Our strength lies in you, and we are listening. We may not always agree, but hope our heightened engagement initiatives will make it easier for you to reach out to us, and for us to hear your views.

Thank you to my fellow City Council members: Vice Mayor Allison Silberberg and Council members John Chapman; Tim Lovain; Del Pepper; Paul Smedberg; and Justin Wilson, for all you do for our city.

I'd like to thank former City Manager Rashad Young for the innovations and ideas he put into place during his tenure. I'd also like to thank Acting City Manager Mark Jinks, who has hit the ground running and is ably guiding Alexandria through this transition period.

Finally, I would like to thank our City staff, whose hard work results in the high standard of living we all enjoy today. Just recently, two weeks ago, I went out with the pothole crew for two hours fixing potholes, so I know how hard they work!

We should be proud of what we've done, and we must continue to look forward.

Thank you, and may God bless the great city of Alexandria.