

Potential objectives and initiatives for Goal 1: There is quality development and redevelopment, support for local business and a strong, diverse and growing local economy.

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Vision for Goal 1 Objectives: Pursue objectives to sharpen Alexandria’s competitive advantage and profile within the region through discerning development, operational excellence and community investment through incentives.

Themes: Because of current market conditions, the supply of increasing amounts of office and retail space in the region (e.g. Crystal City, Arlington, National Harbor) creates more options for businesses considering relocation; approval processes are sometimes perceived as cumbersome and time-consuming; the City does not have a history of offering incentives or participating in Public Private Partnerships (PPP’s); competitive markets are ones that can attract and retain successful firms and maintain or increase standards of living for its inhabitants.

All of these themes have historically been viewed as high barriers to market entry in Alexandria; competitiveness in region means that the City must better communicate the long-term value which accrues from these premium processes and policies for development; they ultimately reduce competition and increases value over the long term for the community and property and business owners.

Through increased/targeted/new branding, marketing and advertising, Alexandria will more assertively communicate its position as a business destination in the region.

Supporting conditions: Feedback from existing tenants, developers, and brokers shows that the perceptions of the marketplace are not keeping pace with changes in City processes and policies; results from Economic Sustainability Working Group are not being experienced because of decrease in activity due to fall of the economy.

Since 2000, 7 million square feet of non-residential space and 8,200 housing units have been constructed in the City. The City has approved plans that would allow the approval of more than 27 million square feet of new development.

Desired results: The initiatives proposed in support of Goal 1 seek to increase the economic success (e.g., revenue per square foot) of businesses in Alexandria - in part by attracting new customers and increasing spending per customer; to attract and sustain high-quality, and high-paying jobs; to encourage desired economic activity with improved regulatory processes; and by making strategic public investments where the potential for economic return is great.

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Strategic Principles: At the outset of this, the 2009-2010 Strategic Planning effort, the City Council re-affirmed the City's commitment to the principles in the 2004-2015 Strategic Plan as amended in 2006. Many of the principles provide important context for the recommendations on the following pages. In other words, these recommendations envision the City pursuing these goals and initiatives while continuing to honor these important principles. Some of the principles that are most relevant to Goal 1 are:

Vibrant:

- Alexandria is an exciting place to live, to work and to visit.
- The community is inviting to small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- People come together to enjoy a variety of community events and festivals.
- Alexandria is always looking to the future and for ways to get better.

Historic:

- We preserve and celebrate our historical roots and diverse heritage.
- We preserve our historic resources including neighborhoods, buildings, structures, places, and archaeological sites.
- We maintain our distinctive architectural character and design.
- We plan new developments so that they are compatible with historic buildings and neighborhood character.
- Residents understand and appreciate Alexandria's heritage.
- Alexandria's history contributes to the local economy through tourism development

Beautiful

- The City has achieved a balance between open space and development.
- Public art is in many places throughout the community.
- Our new developments and new city infrastructure are environmentally sensitive.

Unique Neighborhoods

- Neighborhoods have their own distinct character and feeling.
- Neighborhoods are protected from the impacts of non-residential traffic.
- New development and redevelopment are integrated into the neighborhood.
- Residents enjoy convenient access to walkways, trails and public transit.

Urban Villages

- The City has a variety of mixed use developments that provide places to live, work, shop and recreate.
- Urban villages are integrated with nearby neighborhoods, maintaining Alexandria's diverse character and charm.
- The City retains our small-town "main street" feeling with community gathering places.
- People enjoy pedestrian-friendly designs and signs that allow them to walk throughout the community while offering public places to rest.
- Transit-oriented designs maximize the use of public transit.

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- Parks, trails and greenspaces are incorporated in the urban center and coordinated with nearby neighborhoods.
- Convenient retail shopping and restaurant opportunities are available serving residents of the urban village and attracting others to come there.

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Potential Objective 1: Increase the vitality and economic success of the City Waterfront and King Street Corridor

Themes: Proximity to the waterfront and authentic historic fabric make this corridor a unique and valuable asset that distinguishes Alexandria from competitors; from an economic point of view it is an underperforming asset; immediate actions could yield results within the plan's 3 year timeframe.

Supporting conditions: Several different studies demonstrate lower than average spending per customer and per square foot at King Street and Waterfront businesses. Hotel occupancy is doing well compared to other areas but is declining as the number of rooms increases.

Plans and studies: King Street Retail Strategy, Waterfront Plan*, Torpedo Factory Strategic Plan*, Parking Plan*, AEDP's Tourist Infrastructure Study*, ACVA branding analysis.

Potential initiatives:

1. Increase the appeal of King Street and the Waterfront to shoppers and diners.

Possible tactics to support this initiative:

- a. Pursue initiatives to increase appeal and sales to shoppers and diners, such as by restoring the lights in trees and trolley service; supporting later hours with parking, marketing, or other initiatives; and increased attention to streetscaping. Investigate the possibility of a partnership with a merchant's group and provide incentives for membership.
- b. Implement a pilot food cart program on Market Square in summer of 2010.
- c. Complete a Waterfront Plan and a Torpedo Factory Strategic Plan that together create a stronger anchor for the King Street retail corridor. Give implementation priority to plan recommendations for the City Dock/foot of King/and the Strand and to Robinson Terminal redevelopment.
 - i. Optimize the appeal and success of existing attractions, such as the Food Court site and the Torpedo Factory.
 - ii. Improve access to and along the river and provide improved and expanded open space. Consider adding a carousel and other appropriately scaled attractions and activities to the Waterfront open space.
 - iii. Plan for additional commercial redevelopment, including additional waterfront dining and lodging(s).
 - iv. Improve marina operations to attract and service transient and commercial boaters.

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v. Ensure that new development is compatible with existing neighborhoods, natural environment, and historic character.

d. Preserve, maintain and interpret the City's historic assets.

2. Support a vital hotel sector by attracting more overnight guests.

Possible tactics to support this initiative: Identify demand generators (which may include increased marketing, office mix, retail enhancements, more/improved anchors and waterfront features, meeting space) that support hotel occupancy - increased numbers of visitors and/or encouraging the same visitors to spend more - and implement programs, policies or regulations to increase them.

3. Improve access, circulation and parking: make it easier and more pleasant for visitors and residents to travel by all modes to the King Street/Waterfront area, to locate their intended destination and parking options, and to discover additional places of interest.

Possible tactics to support this initiative:

a. Increase operating hours and frequency of King Street Trolley to achieve higher use. Upon completion of the Waterfront Plan, implement the recommended set of circulation improvements.

b. Achieve a balance of customer and employee parking demand and supply (consistent with the City's transportation objectives) to improve the customer experience, increase sales, support businesses with employee parking options that do not conflict with customers, maximize the use of existing spaces, and generate revenue.

i. Upon completion of current parking study and the Waterfront Plan, implement the recommended set of parking initiatives, which may include the number, location, pricing and modernizing of meters; garage pricing and availability, employee parking programs, valet parking, access to currently-private garages, etc.

ii. Complete and implement a wayfinding program, giving priority to those aspects that direct visitors to parking resources, and encourage incremental commercial activity.

iii. Upon completion of the Waterfront Plan, implement the improved facilities for non-driver visitors, such as increasing the availability of secure bicycle parking.

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Potential Objective 2: Increase office and retail occupancy rates through business recruitment, retention, and expansion.

Themes: Vacant space is a ready asset for increased economic growth; as it is filled, vacant space returns tax dollars to the City, thus a close relationship to City fiscal health; the City is attractive to federal tenants because of its close proximity to major government facilities and military installations; some of these federal agencies have contractor “tails”- these firms are a significant opportunity for Alexandria; recruitment of anchors and high traffic retailers also help nearby existing retailers. Small businesses are a good fit for Alexandria, in part because of the type of existing buildings and variety of floorplans.

Supporting conditions: The City’s office vacancy rate is 12% and its retail vacancy rate is 3%. The federal government is looking for space to lease in excess of 10 million square feet. Businesses smaller than 20 employees account for 91% of the City’s employers.

Plans and studies: AEDP’s SWOT analysis.

Potential initiatives:

1. Target federal users and associated contractors (in leased, not owned space) as a primary opportunity for economic development in Alexandria.

- Focus on locations with metro or other enhanced transit.
- Focus on location where public infrastructure is in place.
- Recruit agencies that are a good fit with Alexandria’s urban form, where appropriate.
- Recruit agencies with quality jobs where workers will shop and dine in the office neighborhood.

2. Support recruitment, retention and expansion by proactively determining and quickly implementing actions the City can take to enhance its competitiveness.

Examples include:

- When necessary and consistent with the City’s policies:
 - Make minor adjustments to regulatory requirements (such as parking), agree to improve a sidewalk that connects to the nearest transit station, and coordinate permit reviews onsite to meet a specific schedule.
 - In special cases, pursue formal or major public investments to support quality growth, such as TIFs or other taxing districts,

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joint development agreements, and assistance with tax credit applications.

- Identify consolidation opportunities where vacant and underperforming office and retail space exist. Work with owners to determine if renovation or complete redevelopment would improve the asset's competitive position and whether the City can facilitate investment, through regulatory or other means.
- Work with state and federal government on economic grants and subsidies to support priority development.

3. Recruit businesses and developers that complement and strengthen the City's long-term economic vision to balance the residential and commercial tax base.

Examples include:

- Recruit appropriate federal tenants to leased (not owned) office space, e.g. Victory Center.
- Recruit federal contractors; further capitalize on US Patent and Trademark Office and status as "intellectual property capital" of the nation.
- Recruit mid-size office users to vacant space in Carlyle.
- Recruit retail brands that complement and support the existing base of independent retailers.

4. Implement a business retention and expansion strategy that focuses attention on high priority firms with the best potential for growth.

Examples include:

- Determine and implement initiatives to strengthen, retain, and expand Alexandria's association and non-profit cluster.
- Identify and build relationships with the 100 companies (size, growth potential, visibility) that Alexandria cannot afford to lose.
- Increase the capacity and impact of programs focused on small business growth and development.
- Improve communication between government and small businesses.
- Actively engage with successful small businesses in key sectors and, with their help, identify actions which would strengthen their ability to expand.
- Support and foster the growing "commercial creative" cluster.

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Potential Objective 3: Become more business-friendly.

Themes: The City desires to be well-positioned in competing for new office and retail uses in both existing and new development, in retaining our valued existing office and retail uses, and in nurturing small businesses. We recognize that high quality development is a competitive advantage and this is achieved in part by careful public review; however, there are opportunities to create a strategic advantage through adoption of new technology; through staff training in teamwork and problem-solving; through a more responsive, nimble and focused small area planning process; and through improvement of City processes in a variety of development and permitting activities.

Supporting conditions: A substantial amount of work has been done. There is a new Permit Center with one-stop 24-hour turnaround. More types of permits can be approved administratively for small business uses and for signs in historic districts. Small businesses are permitted to advertise on King Street with A-frame signs. Many types of applications now have updated and complete checklists. Staff reports are shorter, with larger graphics.

Plans and studies: Virtual IT permit process study; GIS strategic planning; Small Business Taskforce Report; Economic Sustainability Task Force Report.

Potential initiatives include:

1. **Improve processes to increase clarity, transparency, and access to services by...**
 - a. **...using technology to improve efficiency of and customer access to development review and permit processes**
 - i. Implement electronic plan technology for customer plan submittals
 - ii. Continue development and expansion of web-based process applications and permit approvals
 - iii. Improve customer access to web-based tracking of the building permit process electronically through the City process
 - iv. Implement project based customer information that crosses all departments in print and electronically
 - v. Increase use of GIS based technology to enhance information availability and interdepartmental communication
 - b. **...ensuring that regulations and permit processes add value to the economic sustainability and quality of life of the City:**
 - i. Remove requirements that increase regulatory burdens with little or no added value.

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- ii. Encourage application of green building technology through the Building Code and Zoning Ordinance
 - iii. Increase administrative approvals for additional uses and activities in certain locations and circumstances, (such as valet parking, restaurants, outdoor dining)
 - iv. Increase administrative approvals for minor historic district alterations.
 - v. Refine building permit interdepartmental review process to include simultaneous reviews
 - vi. Provide clear process information and improve accuracy of incoming application completeness reviews
- c. ...communicating successes
- i. Continue/expand communication and feedback through the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups.
 - ii. Publicize specific examples of how the changed processes are working for businesses and the community.
 - iii. Use brand ambassadors, social media and other non-traditional techniques
- d. ...emphasizing the integration of transportation and land use, strengthening that integration where needed, and
- e. clearly and succinctly describe the benefits and tradeoffs of development applications and SUPs in staff reports.

2. Improve the City's readiness for quality economic growth

- a. Small Area Plans - Prepare the City for improved market conditions through a yearly work program that provides resources for smaller, more focused projects that take advantage of development proposals in targeted areas or to implement specific City policies (such as areas in need of revitalization, development that includes mixed income and affordable housing, development at metro stations, new office, retail and hotel development and federal tenants)
- b. Produce versions of adopted plans - as well as supporting materials - that highlight the economic opportunities they contain and identify the clear path to approval of proposals that meet plan objectives
- c. Invest in improving multi-disciplinary skills of City staff through cross-training, rotations through different divisions, customer service training, and other skill-building opportunities. Recognize and reward successful staff.