

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 26, 2020

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR WILSON AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: FY 2021 INTERDEPARTMENTAL LONG-RANGE PLANNING WORK PROGRAM

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**ISSUE:** What planning work priorities should be established for FY 2021?

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council adopt the proposed Long-Range Planning Interdepartmental Work Program for FY 2021.

**BACKGROUND:** In February 2020, the Planning Commission and the City Council provided input on the Draft FY 2021 Long Range Planning Interdepartmental Work Program to help inform the FY 2021 budget and the final FY 2021 Work Program. Since that time, the City's budget and circumstances for planning have dramatically shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised draft FY 2021 work program, provided as Attachment 1 ("Bar Chart"), reflects revisions due to the revised FY 2021 Budget, new priorities to address the impacts of the pandemic, near term community needs, and the altered climate for community engagement.

Description of all projects included in the work program can be found in Attachment 2. Background on development of the annual work program as well as previous years' work programs can be found at [www.alexandriava.gov/planning/info/default.aspx?id=91530](http://www.alexandriava.gov/planning/info/default.aspx?id=91530).

**DISCUSSION:** The following sections provide highlights of the major land use planning efforts scheduled for FY 2021 and primary revisions to the work program since it was presented earlier this year. The work program reflects new planning priorities to address COVID-19 impacts and some delays due to a combination of pandemic-related impacts such as a suspension of engagement activities, budget changes, and staff constraints. The following priorities guided development of the revised FY 2021 work program:

- Near term community needs/issues and equity considerations;
- COVID-19 response; and
- Economic recovery and development.

### **Prioritized projects:**

The projects below reflect high priority projects that continue to be prioritized in the work program for completion. Internal work has continued, some online community engagement has occurred when necessary, and the processes are generally on track. As discussed in the April 24, 2020 Policy Guidance Memorandum adopted by City Council, land use regulatory cases will continue to move forward through online engagement and virtual meetings, however policy issues such as small area plans or text amendments won't go to public hearing until there is an opportunity for in-person engagement.

Since the fall of 2019, the City, JBG and Virginia Tech have been working together to bring **North Potomac Yard and the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus** to fruition. City Council approved amendments to the Master Plan in March, Planning Commission recommended the zoning update for approval in June to be followed by City Council public hearing, after which Development Special Use Permit reviews will be considered at October 2020 public hearings. Virginia Tech anticipates opening the first portion of their campus in 2021 followed by the opening of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station in 2022.

In early 2020, Inova Health System and Stonebridge announced an agreement to construct an **Inova HealthPlex within the Oakville Triangle** redevelopment site. With the Inova HealthPlex as an anchor use, the applicant, Stonebridge, is proposing amendments to the Oakville Triangle Plan. The proposed amendments call for mixed-use development with ground floor neighborhood-serving retail and a mix of residential buildings from townhouses to multi-family buildings as well as further expansion and improvements to Mount Jefferson Park. The Master Plan/CDD Concept Plan amendments are anticipated for review by the Planning Commission and City Council this fall and development special use permits in early 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting challenges for Census Enumerators to do their work in the field and for residents to fill out their census forms, the time period for Census self-reporting has been extended through October 31, 2020. Although in-person census outreach is largely on-hold, the City Council appointed **Census Complete Count Committee**, whose charge is to work in pursuit of a "complete count" for all Alexandria residents in the 2020 Census, will continue to implement a variety of communications strategies to encourage traditionally undercounted residents to participate in the Census. Since many funding, budget and other decisions are based on a locality's population, and the decennial census is the one chance every ten years to get it right, it is important that every Alexandrian be counted.

Planning Commission and City Council received an update on the process to update the **Mount Vernon Avenue Plans covering Del Ray and Arlandria** in early 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, staff reported on progress and momentum gained during the fall community listening sessions. Now, as a result of delays in the ability to engage with the community and resource constraints, staff is proposing to divide the planning process into two separate phases to ensure appropriate community engagement for both neighborhoods. The first phase will focus on the Arlandria-Chirilagua neighborhood, and will begin with the most time sensitive planning topic of housing affordability so that expectations to potentially guide future

development can be established early. Engagement in Arlandria-Chirilagua will be Spanish-first with English translation and in person engagement will resume when it is safe to do so. Until that time, Staff will rely on a combination of low and high-tech communication strategies to ensure appropriate engagement. Assuming engagement can proceed at an appropriate level, Staff anticipate bringing a housing strategy and recommendations to Planning Commission and City Council for their consideration in early 2021. The remaining plan topics related to Arlandria-Chirilagua would follow for completion and approval at the end of 2021. The Del Ray plan update will take place in 2022. The **Citywide Economic Recovery Project**, a new project described below, will address the business recovery needs of the Mount Vernon Avenue corridor in the near term, covering both Del Ray and Arlandria.

Other priorities in FY 2021 will include continued work on updates and efficiencies related to **Small Business Zoning**, with particular focus on reflecting lessons learned from COVID-19 and recovery phases, as well as continued work on housing initiatives that add new tools and flexibility to incentivize affordable housing production into the future. These efforts include:

- ***Housing Contributions Review Work Group***

The two principal goals of this process are: (1) to provide greater clarity, consistency, and certainty for all parties with respect to the City’s affordable housing contribution policies; and (2) to create a baseline against which the City’s FY2020 assessment of inclusionary zoning could be evaluated. These will be vetted with stakeholders during Summer 2020, with final recommendations to be presented to Planning Commission and City Council in Fall 2020. The recommendations may inform recommendations in the upcoming inclusionary zoning study.

- ***Zoning for Housing***

This effort will examine opportunities to increase the amount, types, and locations where housing may be built, with a continuous focus on affordability goals. An early part of this effort will be to identify a range of potential actions, from the comprehensive to the specific. Potential examples include changes to existing zones, creation of new zones, and expanding where the City would consider rezoning to higher densities without a small area plan study. The study will take into account implications for infrastructure and public facilities as well as proximity to transportation corridors and neighborhood services and amenities. Initiatives with the highest potential to achieve desired outcomes would be pursued. Opportunities for public discussion and consideration throughout the process will be critical. The Zoning for Housing project will support Alexandria’s ability to achieve its overall Housing Master Plan goals and its housing production and affordability target goals pursuant to the 2019 COG regional housing initiative that was endorsed by City Council in March 2020.

- ***Accessory Dwelling Unit Feasibility Analysis***

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) — also referred to as accessory apartments, second units, or granny flats — are additional living quarters on fee simple properties that are independent of the primary dwelling unit. Funds for consultant support of this project were included in the FY 2020 budget and the study, including public engagement, is underway. Due to the pandemic, engagement is occurring virtually with significant community feedback. Plans to proceed are being developed that might still enable ADU legislation being considered in time to be included

in the Alexandria's 2021 General Assembly legislative package, should there be sufficient opportunity for non-virtual engagement typical of a policy issue of this kind.

- ***Inclusionary Zoning Policy Feasibility Analysis***

This analysis will evaluate the feasibility and desirability of an Inclusionary Zoning policy for the City. Inclusionary Zoning policies require developers to set aside a certain percentage of housing units in new or rehabilitated projects for low- and moderate-income residents. The analysis will examine whether new development will facilitate production of more affordable units than are yielded currently through existing City housing policy and investment. Economic analysis has been undertaken this spring by a third-party consultant that is reviewing successful inclusionary zoning programs in this market and elsewhere, to evaluate how such a policy may impact Alexandria's real estate development market. The study will also consider how an Inclusionary Zoning program can be most efficiently administered, and what legislative actions might be required to facilitate an inclusionary zoning policy here. While public engagement strategies are being developed, it is anticipated that recommendations might still be completed on a schedule to potentially inform the City's 2021 Legislative package to the General Assembly.

**New projects added to FY 2021 Work Program for pandemic recovery:**

The **Citywide Housing Recovery Project** will develop and implement initiatives to provide resources and policy guidance to stabilize and support the City's housing ecosystem from pandemic response through recovery. In the short term (Summer 2020), the Project will include two rental assistance programs (one for residents of affordable housing developments sponsored by the City in partnership with nonprofit partners and affordable set-aside units yielded through the development process) and a second, citywide rental assistance project prioritizing households with incomes at or below 50% of the Virginia median income. The project will also incorporate expanded landlord-tenant mediation services to prevent evictions and/or displacement, expanded access to housing counseling services to prevent foreclosures; expanded condominium governance education and training for boards and residents of common interest communities; a review of tax relief programs for low income homeowners as part of the FY 2022 budget process; and other rental or homeownership assistance programs as may be developed to help Alexandrians maintain their housing affordably in response to COVID-19 and its impacts.

The **Citywide Economic Recovery Project** jointly led by the Department of Planning and Zoning and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership will develop and implement a series of relief initiatives through Fiscal Year 2021, and beyond if appropriate, to help Alexandria businesses and commercial property owners recover from the loss of revenue and instability created by COVID-19. At least 12.7% of City revenues is directly attributable to consumption in Alexandria businesses and COVID-19 has already negatively impacted the City's revenue collection by an estimated \$92 million in lost meals taxes, Transient Lodging taxes, Business License taxes, Sales taxes, Real Property taxes, and a number of other City revenues. Following the direction of the Mayor and City Council, the rescue and stabilization of small businesses throughout the City has been prioritized. Tactics will include delayed and reduced taxes, grants to businesses and changes to a variety of regulatory policies to ease and encourage business in the City as we enter the recovery phase, all deployed as quickly as possible while maintaining transparency and accountability. The project will be approached in

three-phases: Phase 1- Immediate Response (currently underway), Phase 2- Stabilization and Phase 3- Recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly shifted nearly all forms of civic engagement to online formats. While the shift to online engagement expanded the City's capabilities and reached many new stakeholders, there are important elements of real community engagement that are not possible to duplicate online, and there isn't equal access to digital forums for public decision-making. An interdepartmental group will collaborate on an **Update to the City's Community Engagement procedures** post pandemic. As we emerge toward a new normal and it is possible to re-engage, a goal is to have a balanced and comprehensive engagement approach that spans both the digital and "in-person" experience. The update will reinforce the City's existing principles of engagement established in the What's Next Alexandria civic engagement handbook, such as *Respect, Inclusiveness and Equity, Transparency, Early Involvement, Easy Participation, and Meaningful Dialogue*, and will consider both gained efficiencies and necessary changes to create updated guidelines for in-person and online engagement and consistency across departments. The draft update will be shared for community review and feedback once in-person engagement is again possible, followed by City Council adoption.

**Projects that have been delayed due to pandemic impacts or re-prioritization:**

The revised work program proposes a delay to the Duke Street Vision Plan for a number of reasons, including pandemic related delay of the Mount Vernon Avenue Plan updates, as well as the recommendation to postpone work on this project until progress is made on the transportation planning efforts currently underway in the corridor, including the transitway corridor plan, the central Alexandria traffic improvement plan, and improvements planned for the Duke Street/Telegraph Road intersection. The transportation studies will then inform potential land use strategies for the corridor. Another change to this project is the recommendation to address it as a corridor-wide land use plan, rather than focusing on the eastern section only, enabling a more holistic, high-level view of land use and infrastructure for the corridor. Postponing the Duke Street Vision Plan also allows time for the City's Witter Wheeler Campus Master Plan (an effort to plan for more effectively meeting the spatial needs of the City Services Departments which are located on the campus), to wrap up.

The Duke Street planning process, scheduled for FY 2022, will provide updated guidance for redevelopment sites and ensure that infrastructure and amenities are planned to meet the needs of existing and future redevelopment. An updated small area plan for this portion of the City will address community needs, infrastructure needs, affordable housing, open space, and economic development. The planning effort will engage the community in establishing a long-term vision for the area so that redevelopment occurs in a coordinated manner consistent with the City's policies and vision for the future. Staff have been coordinating with ARHA regarding their Cameron Valley site on timing with the agreement that Cameron Valley will be included in the land use planning process.

Revisions to the FY 2021 budget have resulted in some project delays, including the **Waterfront History Implementation Plan** now planned for FY 2022, and the **Stream Valley and Trail Plan**, which has not been funded.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The proposed FY 2021 work program takes into account the resources allocated to the recommended planning initiatives in City Council's approved FY 2021 Budget, including the FY 2021 to FY 2030 Capital Improvement Program.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Revised FY 2021 Interdepartmental Long-Range Planning Work Program (Bar Chart)
2. Project Descriptions

**STAFF:**

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