April 26, 2016

Maria Wasowski
Chair
Old Town North Small Area Plan Advisory Group

Dear Chair Wasowski:

I am writing on behalf of the Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) to recommend that your Advisory Group designate Old Town North an "Eco-District" and include clearly defined environmental policy objectives in the Small Area Plan (SAP) that set a new standard for sustainability in Alexandria. We were pleased to learn that City staff have been exploring the idea of establishing Old Town North as an "Eco-District", and that the Advisory Group's members have been broadly supportive.

Designating Old Town North as an "Eco-District" must entail helping Alexandria meet its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 80% below 2005 levels by the year 2050, as identified by the City's 2009 Environmental Action Plan (EAP). Accomplishing this goal will require an unprecedented effort to maximize the energy efficiency of our buildings and transportation options to dramatically reduce the overall energy demand for our community. Residents and businesses will also need more renewable and alternative energy options to meet this goal.

While Alexandria has made significant progress on many environmental actions recommended in the City's EAP, the Old Town North SAP (OTN SAP) provides an opportunity to accelerate their realization. As you may know, in June of 2015 Alexandria's Planning and Zoning staff and the EPC agreed to pilot new green building policies in the OTN SAP. These new policies would also inform the broader update of the City's green building policy, currently planned for 2018. Much more can be done in Old Town North.

To help the City define the "Eco-District" and set a new standard for future small area plans, we recommend that the OTN SAP:

- Set a goal, as consistent with the EAP, for OTN that by 2050 at least an 80% reduction from 2005 levels in emissions. Include specific actions and/or programs that will enable the achievement of these goals;
- Ensure that by 2020, as consistent with the EAP, all new buildings will achieve LEED Gold certification standards; that 60% of all existing buildings will achieve a 20% energy consumption reduction by 2025; that by 2025 all new buildings will achieve LEED Platinum standards; and that by 2030 all new buildings will be carbon neutral;

- Establish a schedule of specific FAR (floor area ratio) increases and other incentives (expedited approval, property tax rebates, etc.) for buildings in exchange for achieving exceptional performance beyond the City's current Green Building minimum requirements;
- Establish a new voluntary green building policy, including incentives, for new residential construction and renovation;
- Ensure that all new construction, especially in the area of affordable housing, maximizes future potential solar energy production and includes energy choice for buyers and renters so that they have the option to purchase natural gas, solar power, or other low or zero emission alternatives to meet their household energy needs;
- Set a goal to ensure that all multifamily buildings are individually metered for both electricity and gas so that tenants receive accurate, personalized information about their energy use;
- Prioritize green infrastructure over grey infrastructure when pursuing investments to meet the City's storm water and combined sewer goals;
- Require buildings to have storm water management systems meeting ASHRAE 189.1 or LEED standards;
- Increase the canopy coverage to a specific percentage by a specific date (e.g. 40% by 2025) in support of the City's overall canopy goals;
- Improve the resilience of areas of natural environment and increase investments in ecosystem services through use of native plants and pollinator habitat;
- Complete one or more "stretch" goals for the area, such as piloting a property-assessed clean energy (PACE) program for new and existing residents/businesses, or developing a Passive House project for affordable housing.

The Environmental Policy Commission appreciates the opportunity to help develop the OTN SAP. We would appreciate the opportunity to provide additional information, consultation, and input on "Eco-District" criteria as the Advisory Group continues its work.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jim Kapsis
Chair
Environmental Policy Commission