



# **Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Report**

**July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015**

**SUBMITTED JULY 24, 2015**

## 1. Introduction

The Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) was established under Chapter 4, Article M, of the City Code to “advise and make recommendations to the City Council and, when appropriate, to the Planning Commission and City Manager.” This report provides a summary of EPC activities during Fiscal Year 2015 (FY 15).

## 2. Who We Are

The Alexandria City Council established the EPC in 1970 to advise and make recommendations to the City Council and, where appropriate, to the Planning Commission and City Manager, on matters relating to the following:

- Clean air;
- Land use;
- Noise pollution and abatement;
- Pesticides, herbicides and contaminants;
- Solid waste;
- Water quality and supply;
- Other matters referred to the EPC by the City and citizens; and
- Other topics relating to the conservation and protection of Alexandria’s environment.

The EPC consists of 13 members, including five members from the field of environmental sciences, five citizen-at-large members, one member from the field of urban planning, one member with experience in Federal or state environmental statues/regulations, and one representative from the Alexandria business community. The EPC regularly works with other organizations to further the environmental aims of the City.

The table below identifies the Alexandrians who served on the EPC during FY15.

James Kapsis ( <i>Chair</i> )	Aaron Karty
Susan Gitlin ( <i>Vice Chair</i> )	Jessica Lassetter
Patrick Holman ( <i>Secretary</i> )	Stephen Milone
Wendy Adams	Annika Moman
Scott Barstow	Tyler Orton
Jud Bullock	Monica Starnes1
Natasha Garcia Andersen	Ryan Wojtanowski
Geoffrey Goode	

The EPC is also very grateful for the help and assistance given by past members, particularly in support of the City of Alexandria’s annual Earth Day celebration.

The EPC meets twice a month: one working meeting and one business meeting. The Chair may call other meetings as deemed necessary. All meetings are open to the public and notification of meetings is given in due time through the normal City routines. Minutes of these meetings may be found on the EPC City website: <http://alexandriava.gov/EnvironmentalPolicyCommission>

Throughout the year, the EPC has been well supported by the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES), Office of Environmental Quality. The EPC wishes to express its gratitude for the time, expertise and devotion to duty shown by T&ES leadership and staff.

### **3. FY15 EPC Annual Retreat**

On September 7, 2014, the EPC held its annual retreat to discuss in-depth three key issues for review and action over the next year –

- Updating the Environmental Action Plan (EAP)-2030;
- Updating the City's green building policy;
- Reviewing policies related to plant selection and invasive species.

At the retreat, EPC members heard presentations on each of the topics and established a strategic path forward for engaging the City and other stakeholders to realize progress in each area, in addition to the Commission's usual work with other boards and commissions, on Earth Day 2015, and with City staff on other issues.

An additional priority emphasized during the retreat was to continue work with City staff, with Council, and with the community to highlight the connections between the City's budget and capital improvement project planning, and our community's unsustainable way of life.

### **4. FY15 EPC Activities**

Throughout the year, EPC focused most of its time and effort on its three FY 15 priorities, while actively engaging in other key issues arising during the year. Brief summaries of activities and accomplishments are described below.

#### **Updating the Environmental Action Plan-2030**

As it has regularly since the adoption of the EAP-2030, the EPC worked closely with City leadership and staff to develop a substantive plan for reviewing and updating the EAP to reflect current challenges and opportunities, especially in areas such as climate change. To this end, EPC, City staff, and the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech worked collaboratively during Fall 2014 to develop a multi-year plan of action for updating the EAP. A scope of work defining Virginia Tech's support was ultimately agreed upon with EPC and the City, and funded by the City's Department of Transportation and Environmental Services.

Kicking off in January 2015, Joseph Schilling, Professor of Practice, Urban Affairs and Planning, led a team of graduate students in conducting comprehensive analyses in eight policy areas related to the EAP, including climate change and urban greening; green buildings and community energy planning; land use planning, housing and transportation; and financing for EAP activities. In addition, EPC members conducted interviews with City staff to collect feedback on EAP-2030 successes and challenges. EPC received preliminary briefings on these policy areas from the students in April and May 2015, and will receive Virginia Tech's final analysis during Summer 2015.

The collaboration between EPC, the City and Virginia Tech is expected to continue in FY 16, and to focus on developing a revised EAP-2030 for review and comment by the public and City Council. The adoption of the Eco-City Charter and the EAP-2030 positioned Alexandria in the

vanguard of Virginia cities and other cities in the U.S. of its size, in establishing a vision and road map for more wisely managing finite natural and financial resources. The EPC is committed to ensuring that the City retains this leadership role with an updated EAP that reflects current environmental challenges and opportunities.

### **Updating the City's Green Building Policy**

EPC's focus on updates to the City's green building policies reflects the tremendous potential that appropriately focused policies may have on sustainable development within the City of Alexandria. The ever-increasing affordability and availability of energy efficient technologies make current sustainability standards (such as LEED) easier to meet, though do not necessarily provide all the benefits anticipated.

With this in mind, during FY 15, EPC developed a list of green building policy options, and worked closely with the City's Office of Planning and Zoning to establish a tentative plan for a multi-year green building work program. To help facilitate this plan, EPC actively engaged City Council and staff on the importance of reviewing and assessing potential policy updates that could significantly improve sustainability performance, including sending a letter to City Council in December 2014 outlining EPC's proposed approach to updating the Green Building policies.

Based on these efforts, City staff has developed a concept for the work program that would address some immediate needs as well as lay the groundwork for a comprehensive update to the Green Building Policy in FY 18. In advance of the City's Green Building Policy, City staff will work with EPC and other relevant stakeholders to conduct a multi-phase research effort that will inform the policy update and provide guidance on its content. These phases reflect areas of importance identified by EPC, including the environmental issues to be addressed in the Old Town North Small Area Plan, prioritization of green building elements, and updated looks at LEED equivalency and other benchmarking.

### **Plant Selection and Invasive Species Policy Review**

Urban forestry is an important component of the EAP-2030, and presents perhaps one of the most challenging areas for the City. During FY 15, the EPC engaged with a wide variety of City staff from various Departments with equities in urban forestry to determine how decisions are made regarding plant selection. These engagements have revealed a complex patchwork of responsibilities and authorities that EPC will continue to assess in FY 16, with the ultimate goal of developing recommendations for the City to help enable a more coordinated and sustainable approach to urban forestry.

### **Other Activities**

In April 2015, EPC submitted a letter to City Council communicating its priorities for the FY 2016 budget. This letter encouraged greater overall investment in climate change mitigation efforts, and support for the expansion of the Capital Bikeshare program, recycling and composting. In addition, EPC supports the City's plan to provide the resources necessary to study a potential stormwater utility to help the City meet its stormwater obligations over the next 10 years. While EPC appreciates Council's support of our joint agreement with City staff to advance EAP-2030 and Green Building Policy updates with existing resources, we hope that the City Council will consider providing additional funding for these activities in future budgets.

In addition, the EPC also wrote to the City Council, or to other City commissions, on several other issues, including:

- Coordinated Park and Open Space Plan for the Cameron Run Area
- Parking Standards for New Development Projects
- Potomac Yard Metrorail Preferred Alternative Endorsement
- Windmill Hill Park Shoreline Rehabilitation Project

During FY 15, the EPC worked with several other City commissions and groups to address water quality, energy, air quality, green building, transportation and open space issues facing the City. Members of the EPC continued serving in an official capacity on the following City commissions and working groups:

- Potomac River Generating Station Monitoring Group
- Ad Hoc Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group
- Waterfront Commission
- Transportation Commission
- Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Working Group
- Eisenhower West Small Area Plan
- Four Mile Run Task Force
- Underground Transmission Line and Substation Working Group

In addition, EPC members attended planning meetings, Alexandria City Public School meetings and other commission meetings, such as the Affordable Housing Advisory Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission, in an informal capacity.

### **Alexandria Earth Day**

Alexandria Earth Day 2015 was celebrated at Ben Brenman Park on April 25, 2015. The theme for the 2015 Earth Day was "It's Your Turn to Lead". Hosted by the Department of Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES), Office of Environmental Quality, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities and EPC, the event included educational exhibits and demonstrations, hands-on activities for children, and the annual Trashion Fashion Show, where Alexandria City Public School students showcased 'upcycling' through fashion, art, or song. The nearly 50 exhibitors were required to sign a zero-waste contract in order to participate in the event in an effort to recycle or compost all waste materials.

### **Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award**

In FY 09, the EPC partnered with the Alexandria Sanitation Authority (now AlexRenew) to establish the Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award. This is the first award program in Alexandria to formally recognize outstanding citizens who have demonstrated their commitment to protecting the natural environment and promoting sustainability. In addition to citizens, an Alexandria group, club, organization or corporate neighbor were also eligible to be nominated. The award is named in honor of Frances Ellen Pickering's lifelong dedication to preservation and conservation in the City of Alexandria.

During the Earth Day celebration, the EPC and AlexRenew announced the selection of Pete Raack, Green Team Leader at Matthew Maury Elementary School, as this year's winner of the Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award. Mr. Raack champions the Maury Green Team's Compost Captains program, which helps educate students on the importance of composting. He also serves as the multi-year leader of the Maury Environmental Kids' Club after-school program

to teach students the importance of keeping Maury green. Mr. Raack led Maury's participation in this year's Earth Day celebrations, and organized many events leading up to Earth Day, including a campus-wide cleanup with school volunteers, a field trip to AlexRenew's Four Mile Run Pump Station, and the Second Annual "Run for the Trees" fun run for all Maury students.

## **5. FY16 EPC Priorities**

The EPC's FY 2016 retreat is planned for August 22, 2015. EPC will review its progress against the three priority areas identified at the FY 15 retreat, and establish strategies for continuing momentum created this year. EPC will also discuss and determine any additional priorities for the coming year.

## **6. EPC Membership Recruitment**

During the later half of FY 15, EPC membership stabilized from the high turnover experienced in FY 14. The current membership consists of a full complement of 13 members. With a large population of environmental professionals living in the City, the commission is able to draw on a wide collection of colleagues and acquaintances in the area with expertise in environmental policy issues.

## **7. Leadership Framework**

The commission elects five leadership positions (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Earth Day Chair and Co-Chair) on an annual basis. Leadership elections for FY 16 were held on June 15, 2015. James Kapsis, Susan Gitlin, and Natasha Garcia Andersen were re-elected as Chair, Vice-Chair, and Earth Day Chair, respectively; Tyler Orton was newly elected as Secretary. Election of the Earth Day Co-Chair position was deferred to a later meeting.

In addition to EPC leadership positions, EPC members take on additional representational responsibilities in several specific issue areas, serving as EPC liaisons to a wide variety of other advisory groups and organizations (listed in Section 4 above). In addition to the value of understanding the environmental impacts associated with the activities of the groups listed above, the broad participation by EPC members helps ensure EPC is able to achieve smooth, seamless, leadership transitions for the elected positions each year.