

November \_\_, 2018

Honorable Mayor Allison Silberberg and Members of City Council  
City Hall  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

**Re: EPC Support of Draft WasteSmart Plan**

Dear Mayor Silberberg and Members of Council:

The Resource Recovery Division recently issued the Draft WasteSmart Plan (Plan) for the City and has asked the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC or Commission) to support it. EPC strongly supports the Plan – it is comprehensive, aligns with the EPC’s recommendations in Phase 1 of the Environmental Action Plan (EAP) update that was recently adopted by Council, and is the result of a thorough, transparent process that provided stakeholders ample opportunities to provide input on, and guide the direction of the Plan. EPC urges Council to adopt the Plan so that the Division can continue its efforts to modernize the resource recovery system in Alexandria and set an example for our region of how municipalities can adapt practices to reflect changes in local, regional, and even global markets for recovered and recycled goods. The Commission believes the merits of the Plan are clear and would like to highlight some specific elements that are particularly noteworthy and important to the Commission, particularly in light of the City’s ongoing efforts to update the EAP.

1. **Holistic Approach.** The Plan reflects the Division’s broader, holistic vision of how the City should address solid waste, and in particular, makes recommendations that consider the effects of operations on the City’s overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As stated early in the Plan: “Reducing GHG has emerged as an important objective in solid waste management and targets were established during the Environmental Action Plan update process.” The Commission urges the City, and Resource Recovery Division in particular, to prioritize reducing GHG emissions as it finalizes and ultimately implements the WasteSmart Plan.
2. **Alignment with the EAP.** The Draft WasteSmart Plan was developed concurrently with the Phase 1 update of the EAP, and the two documents are complementary. Phase 1 goals related to solid waste are incorporated directly into the WasteSmart Plan, and the Plan embraces the broader EAP theme of mitigating climate change via GHG emission reductions. The Commission looks forward to our proactive collaboration with the Division during Phase 2 of the EAP update to develop the related mid- and long-term goals.
3. **Hard Choices.** As we have heard in many fora within the last year or two, the market for recycled glass has shrunk dramatically, so much so that it is now no longer financially viable to recycle glass that was collected in single-stream systems. This is a sea change for how many residents think about recycling -- particularly those conscientious recyclers that have grown up with the philosophy that glass can and should always be recycled. The related action items in the Plan show that the Division is coming up with creative strategies to make recycling glass in the City viable again, which the Commission applauds. The City should prioritize these initiatives so we don’t risk losing the collective instinct to recycle glass.

4. **Legislative Action is Needed.** Whether it's supporting the expansion of regional composting infrastructure or imposing fees or outright bans on plastic bags in the City, the Plan highlights the need for legislative action in Richmond in order to achieve some of the City's solid waste goals. This is an issue highlighted throughout the EAP update and will continue to be a barrier to the City achieving its broader sustainability goals. The City should intensify its work with other jurisdictions to amplify the importance of these issues in Richmond and push for increased local authority.

EPC applauds the work that has gone into creating the Draft WasteSmart Plan and believes that this document reflects a thoughtful and holistic approach to guide the City in these efforts in the future.

EPC looks forward to working with the Resource Recovery Division and City Council to finalize this Plan, preparing the related mid- and long-term goals in Phase 2 of the EAP update this year, and ensuring effective implementation of both plans in the future. Thank you for your continued leadership and steadfast commitment to the City's Eco-City Charter.

Sincerely,

Jim Kapsis  
Chair  
Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission