

Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission



**Report for Fiscal Years 2003 –
2005**

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, where appropriate, to the Planning Commission and City Manager." This report provides a summary of EPC's activities during Fiscal Years 2003 (FY03), 2004 (FY04) and 2005 (FY05). This report also includes descriptive information on the EPC.

2. Who We Are

In April 1970, million of Americans participated in the first Earth Day. The outpouring of support for the idea of preserving and improving the natural environment led directly to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and many local environmental agencies.

The Alexandria City Council established the EPC in 1970 to advise and make recommendations to the City Council and City Manager, where appropriate, 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
 - Other topics relating to the conservation and protection of Alexandria's environment
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- During FY03 and FY04, the EPC consisted of 15 members and is supported by the City of Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES).

On March 24, 2004, the EPC sent a letter to Alexandria City Manager Phil Sunderland, requesting that the EPC Charter be changed to modify existing position roles and to reduce the number of members from 15 to 13. The EPC was having trouble filling some the narrowly defined positions, and the ability to make decisions was sometimes hindered by the 15-member size. After discussions with T&ES staff and EPC members, the 13-member EPC now consists of five members from the field of environmental sciences, five citizen-at-large members, one member from the field of urban planning, one student attending high school in the City of Alexandria and one member with experience in Federal or state environmental statues, regulations, and procedures.

3. Environmental Policy Commission Highlights: FY03-FY05

During FY03, FY04, and FY05, the EPC worked with other city commissions and groups to address water quality, energy, green building, transportation and open space issues facing the City, and to increase the visibility and importance of environmental issues to city residents. Key highlights of the EPC's activities are described below.

3.1 Urban Forestry Plan

On April 21, 2003, the EPC approved a resolution to establish a Tree Subcommittee to begin informal discussions with interested citizens, staff from city departments such as Recreation, Parks, & Cultural Activities, Transportation and Environmental Services, Planning and Zoning and Health, as well as the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Beautification Commission, the Planning Commission, neighborhood associations and other interested parties regarding ways to promote and encourage tree conservation in Alexandria. Area of interests to focus discussion include the following:

- planting and maintaining trees on public property
- improvements to existing rules and regulations related to tree preservation and planting associated with new development
- tree preservation on private land
- development of an urban forestry plan for the City

The subcommittee conducted background research and outreach through summer 2003, resulting in an Urban Forestry Action Plan, which was submitted with recommendations on July 1, 2004. The City Manager subsequently established the Urban Forestry Steering Committee that includes representation from the EPC and is currently developing a Urban Forestry Plan for the City.

3.2 City Budget

The EPC sent formal comments on the proposed FY 2004 City Budget in a letter to the Mayor and Members of City Council. The City Manager was commended for including the following items in the Capital Improvement Program and Operating Budget relating to environmental quality.

- An additional \$11.8 million over six years in FY2004, for a total of \$15.7M, for the evaluation and correction of infiltration/inflow problems in the City's separate sewer systems.
- \$200,000 per year extended to FY 2009 for use as seed money for land acquisitions and preservation of open space.
- \$450,000 over five years to implement and study ways to increase energy conservation in buildings.
- Continued funding for infrastructure improvements.
- \$325,000 total (\$25,000 in prior year unallocated monies and \$100,000 in FY 2004, FY 2006 and FY 2008) for environmental restoration.
- The addition of one Water Compliance Specialist in Environmental Quality and one Transportation Engineer IV in Transportation.

In a letter sent to the Mayor and Members of City Council on the proposed City Budget for FY2005, the EPC stated that it feels strongly that T&ES remains under-funded and under-staffed on environmental programs compared to its counterparts in other jurisdictions and in relation to the responsibilities assigned to it by the Council.

The EPC also strongly encouraged the City to maintain the existing \$100,000 bi-annual funding for environmental restoration in the Capital Improvement Project budget.

The EPC felt that T&ES is understaffed in the environment programs area and is in need of the following:

- 1) a dedicated staff member to implement and enforce existing environmental programs, public outreach, and proactively develop policies for upcoming environmental program areas
- 2) a dedicated volunteer coordinator and grant writer/development officer who could help mobilize Alexandrians to participate in environmental initiatives, and also develop grant proposals to help fund existing and future environmental initiatives.

In addition the EPC recommended that the City fund the purchase of software (such as CITY green), with sufficient licenses and training. This software would be used in conjunction with existing City geographic information systems (GIS) to assist with implementing an urban forestry plan. This is one of the recommendations of the Open Space Plan. Subsequently the City has purchased the City Green software, which is being used by the City Arborist and the Urban Forestry Steering Committee.

3.3 Open Space Plan Implementation

On April 21, 2003 the EPC approved a resolution supporting the funding of Open Space Acquisitions in Alexandria. As a step to fulfilling the City's open space needs identified in the draft Strategic Master Plan for Open Space, Parks and Recreation, the EPC strongly encouraged the Planning Commission and the City Council to enact Councilman David Speck's proposal to earmark \$0.01 of every \$100 of assessed real estate property value to generate funds for open space acquisition.

In September 2003, the City formed an Open Space Steering Committee as recommended in the Open space Plan, and the committee held the first meeting. Cindy DeGrood and Kenyon Larsen represented EPC on this committee. The Committee has provided the City with a list of parcels within the City that should be evaluated to remain Open Space.

On February 9, 2004 the EPC approved a resolution supporting the easement for a Public Right of Way for SUP #2003-0036. The Planning Department staff recommended the widening and extension of the existing public right-of-way between N. Pickett Street and Polk Avenue in the recent consideration of the SUP#2003-0036. The Planning Commission removed the recommendation during a hearing on February 3, 2004. The EPC felt strongly about supporting the staff recommendation, since the City formally adopted an Open Space Plan in Spring 2003 that identified this particular area as a means of creating an inner-connected trails system in Alexandria, and removal of this easement denies the public the opportunity to debate the merits of creating a trail as specified in the Open Space Plan.

3.4 Watershed Management

Chesapeake Bay/ Environmental Management Plan

On May 3, 2004 the EPC approved a resolution in support of proposed amendments to the Alexandria Environmental Management Ordinance. The Virginia Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Designation and Management Resolution require that the City of Alexandria adopt provisions to protect the water quality and habitats of the Chesapeake Bay from pollution. The City complied by adopting the Environmental Management Ordinance (Article XIII of the City Code) in 1992 and the Water Quality Management Supplement to the City's Master Plan in 2001. The Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance Board adopted amendments to the State regulations that require the City to make changes to the Environmental Management Ordinance, including a key requirement that all "water bodies with perennial flow" be protected by a 100-foot Resource Protection Area (RPA) buffer area. The City has undertaken a comprehensive stream classification study to identify the location and extent of both perennial and intermittent streams and has undergone an extensive ordinance development and review process, including several presentations to the EPC and two public meetings. The EPC provided comments on the first draft of the Ordinance in a letter on October 27, 2003 to Rich Baier, Director of the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services. The EPC felt these comments and comments from the public were addressed and that the Ordinance maintained the City's position as a leader in protecting Virginia's environment while balancing the unique challenges presented by the City's urban environment. Therefore it endorsed the proposed amendments specifically pointing out the following provisions:

- Protect intermittent streams in natural channels, as well all non-tidal wetlands not included as Resource Protection Areas, with a 50-foot vegetated area;
- Establish the EPC as an advisory body to the Planning Commission during RPA exceptions hearing process; and
- Strengthen maintenance requirements for owners of structural stormwater management facilities.

The EPC commended the City for its proactive effort to map perennial and intermittent streams and its extensive community outreach efforts.

Stream Maintenance

Holmes Run Update: As of May 2003 maintenance was wrapped up on a Holmes Run project. The silt banks between Eisenhower and Duke Street have been removed and citizen feedback was positive.

Due to flood issues, the City had been clear-cutting the banks of Holmes Run. Citizens in the area were upset about how the cutting was done. The City asked FEMA to conduct a study of the flooding in Holmes Run. The FEMA study was requested to look at options for dealing with the problem, and has since been completed. The study led to the present policy and plan, presented to the City Council in April 2002. The City has a legal obligation to limiting flood damage as part of the National Flood Insurance Program.

There are two parts to maintenance: dealing with sedimentation and managing vegetation on the banks of Holmes Run. B. Skrabak circulated photographs of Holmes Run during low-flow conditions and during a small storm. Some areas of particular concern are near Beatley Library, Beatley pedestrian bridge, Cameron Lake, and Eisenhower Avenue. High priority is at

the confluence of Holmes Run and Backlick Run. Second priority is vegetation near bridges and other manmade structures. Consistent with the vegetation management plan, vegetation will be removed. Third priority is sandbars, which are three or four feet deep. Sediment has been sampled and may be used at the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project or Potomac Greens. Fourth priority is areas where all woody growth is to be removed periodically. A recent walk-through to describe the City's plans attracted about 15 people, including some members of City Council and representatives of the Alexandria Seaport Foundation. One citizen is consistently opposed to the City's activities on Holmes Run. The City has not been successful in removing kudzu. This may require the application of herbicides in a very limited area. Mitigation measures may include replanting, lining of a gully with natural stone, and improvements to a bike trail along Holmes Run.

Holmes Run Implementation Plan: A resolution was passed by the EPC on January 27, 2003, supporting the Holmes Run Implementation Plan for maintenance of the water body. The resolution states that the EPC supports the implementation plan for First Quarter 2003 and, to the extent possible, that the EPC have continued involvement with anticipated future actions, activities and maintenance related to Holmes Run, and be consulted of any policy or plan changes as appropriate.

Holmes Run Maintenance Policy and Plan: On March 18, 2003 the EPC approved a resolution on the Holmes Run Maintenance Policy and Plan stating that the EPC supports the public out reach process used by the City to develop the Policy and Plan and recognizes that the final plan strikes a balance of maintaining the functionality of Holmes Run while minimizing impacts on the environment. The EPC felt the process of development of the Policy and Plan was inclusive and took into account the concerns and comments of the stakeholders. In addition, to the extent possible, the EPC requested notification of anticipated future actions, activities such as stream walk-throughs and maintenance activities related to Holmes Run. Should the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services change the Policy and Plan, the EPC and other stakeholders should be appropriately consulted.

Four Mile Run Restoration

In FY03 the City and Arlington County received a \$1 million restoration grant for an environmental restoration project in Four Mile Run. This is a joint effort with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission. The Corps brings significant resources to the project, allowing the money to be spent on additional activities. A Joint Task Force was formed with EPC representation to solicit input from stakeholders in the Alexandria and Arlington Communities. Another project, in cooperation with Arlington, is adding signage for Four Mile Run corridor as well as installing storm drain markers to discourage dumping.

3.5 Green Buildings

Green TC Williams Forum: In December 2002, David Peabody spoke to the EPC as a representative of Alexandrians for a Green T.C. The group is encouraging the City School Board to include green approaches to construction of the new high school. Mr. Peabody wrote a letter on the benefits of green schools. Kenyon Larsen moved that the EPC co-sponsor an upcoming Green T.C. forum and participate in promoting green construction of the new high school. The motion passed unanimously.

The Green T.C. Forum was held at Minnie Howard School on Wednesday, January 24, 2003. About 150 people attended the forum. Speakers included William G. Reed, Kim Schafer, Joan Kelsch, and Brynna Dunn. The School Board and Alexandrians for a Green T.C. are interested in building the new school to the gold standard (42 points) of LEED certification. Green building seems to be possible in an aesthetically pleasing and economically viable manner. Kenyon Larsen said the Alexandrians for a Green T.C. received an e-mail of support from the chairman of the School Board. There seems to be a great deal of support for this effort among the School Board.

Green Building Policy: On December 16, 2003 an EPC resolution recommended a Green Building Policy for all new and renovated buildings within the City and that the City take leadership in implementing the policy. Since the overall goal of sustainable building is to protect human health, be environmentally responsible, and fiscally prudent over the life of any building, a number of items were established to meet this goal. One section was for the construction planners, engineers, contractors and approval authorities, while the other applied to the City in implementing the policy. Goals include the following:

- exceed environmental standards
- use resources efficiently during the entire life of the building
- maximize reuse of resources
- minimize or eliminate toxic materials
- use renewable energy sources
- protect and restore the natural environment
- promote a healthy environment
- provide long term durability.

The City was urged to utilize a precautionary approach, life cycle analysis, pollution prevention, leadership and education, and continual improvement of operational methods.

The EPC sent a letter supporting Green Building to the Mayor and Members of Council, in response to a Memorandum on the subject of Green Building that Councilmember Rob Krupicka circulated on October 30, 2003. The letter supported the Memorandum because it was consistent with the policy that the EPC recommended in past resolutions. EPC encouraged the City to use this as a starting point in taking leadership in facilitating the construction of green buildings in the City.

3.6 Solid Waste Management Plan

On June 6, 2004 a letter was sent by the EPC to Rich Baier, Director of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) commenting on the Draft Solid Waste Management (SWM) Plan that Alton Weaver presented at the April 2004 EPC meeting. Following this presentation, the EPC reviewed the draft plan and forwarded draft comments to T&ES. The comments were addressed in a May 14, 2004 letter from T&ES and have been incorporated to the extent feasible into the current SWM Plan. As a result of this review, the EPC was pleased to support the overall plan.

3.7 Transportation Motion

In the spring of 2003, the Comprehensive Transportation Plan was presented by Tom Culpepper to the EPC. Members Vic Addison and Adam Wilson asked to review the

comprehensive plan. In November 2003, City Council directed that a transportation commission workgroup be formed to report on the feasibility and parameters of the proposed commission. The Work Group was requested to report back to Council in January, 2004. At the December 2003 meeting, T&ES staff updated the EPC on transit incentives and the Transportation Management Plan (TMP). The TMP program began in 1984; currently there are 40 TMPs, which are combinations of residential and nonresidential. The Department conducts an annual survey of employees regarding their commuting patterns.

During its December 22, 2003 meeting, the EPC discussed the concept of a Transportation Commission and passed the following motion, which was forwarded to the City Manger in a letter:

“The Environmental Policy Commission recommends that the Working Group formed to consider the establishment of a Transportation Commission for the City consider recommending to City Council the inclusion of a member with a background in environmental issues and a member with a background in alternative modes of transportation on the proposed Transportation Commission.”

3.8 Mirant Power Plant

On June 21, 2004 the EPC approved a resolution on environmental concerns regarding the Mirant Power Plant which was constructed in 1949 and has not undergone recent significant upgrades to improve air quality. The Mirant Power Plant is an incompatible land use with the surrounding residential neighborhoods and sensitive environmental receptors. A study commissioned by the City of Alexandria and prepared by Dr. Jonathan Levy of the Harvard School of Public Health concludes that the Mirant Power Plant is likely the single source that contributes most to particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) levels in Alexandria. According to Dr. Levy's study, the Mirant Power Plant is one of the highest contributors of PM_{2.5} per megawatt of power produced of any of the five power plants in the region evaluated in the study. Dr. Levy's study estimates that the Mirant Power Plant contributes to approximately 0.9 deaths, 0.7 cardiovascular hospital admissions, and 0.4 pediatric asthma emergency room visits in Alexandria per year. The study concludes that reducing emissions from the Mirant Power Plant would provide the most health benefits to Alexandrians.

The electricity needs of the region are currently dependent on the Mirant Power Plant making it a complicated regional decision to take the plant off line. The EPA has heard from concerned citizens and the City of Alexandria staff on the impacts of the Mirant Power Plant and in the City's limited authority to regulate the plant, it has made recommendations to the State to be incorporated into the permit issued to the Mirant Power Plant. The EPC's resolution recommended that the City's goal should be to close Mirant Power Plant, and that the City do the following:

- rezone the parcels of land currently occupied by the Mirant Power Plant consistent with the future uses that the City anticipates after the plant is closed
- work closely with elected State officials to create legislation that will hasten the closure of the Mirant Power Plant
- support efforts by the State to ensure that nearby citizens and the environment are protected to the maximum degree possible until the facility is closed.

In addition, the EPC commended the City for its proactive efforts to retain Dr. Levy to conduct a city-specific study of the plant and commends the efforts of Elizabeth Chimento and Poul Hertel to represent the citizens living directly adjacent to the plant.

3.9 Oronoco Outfall / Alexandria Town Gas Site Update

City staff provided the EPC with regular updates regarding the City's ongoing efforts to address the problem of contamination at the foot of Oronoco Street. Public outreach is essential to this effort. The site, originally owned by Alexandria Town Gas, was also once owned by Washington Gas, which as a result agreed to provide funds for a portion of the remediation. The City has also budgeted funds in the Capital Improvement Budget for this project. A large storm sewer is located at the foot of Oronoco Street, which may have created a preferential pathway for contamination. Contaminants of most concern include volatile organic compounds (VOCs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), coal tar and creosote. Previous attempts to keep the contamination out of the storm sewer have failed. The City has entered the site into the Virginia Voluntary Remediation Program, which allows owners and previous owners to participate in the clean up. The City has completed extensive site characterization work and continues to address Virginia DEQ's concerns through additional sampling and analysis. The City has maintained floating oil-containment and absorption booms at the mouth of the storm sewer for several years. The City has also installed free product recovery wells on the site to begin remediation. Future soil disturbances created by utility workers may require special provisions. A conceptual remedial action plan has been submitted to the VADEQ that includes relining the storm sewer pipe, installing hydraulic controls (a pump and treat system) to intercept the contamination before it reaches the river and after that is completed, dredging the most contaminated sediments from the river. The EPC has requested to receive regular updates on the City's activities regarding this site.

Attachments

T&ES Water Quality Management Supplement Progress Report