



December 23, 2015

Honorable Mayor William D. Euille and Members of City Council
City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: FY17 Budget

Dear Mayor Euille and Members of Council:

On behalf of the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC), I am writing to provide our perspective on the City's environmental policies and resources, six years after Council approved the Environmental Action Plan--2030 (EAP), and to highlight areas of the FY2017 budget where EPC believes that Council can continue to advance the EAP's goals.

The EAP is a wide-ranging collection of goals, action steps, and targets to guide the City's environmental performance improvement efforts, as part of the "Eco-City Alexandria" initiative. The adoption of the Eco-City Charter and the EAP positioned Alexandria in the vanguard of Virginia cities and other cities in the U.S. of its size, establishing a vision and road map for more wisely managing finite natural and financial resources.

Despite continued progress, there is more work to be done to realize the vision of the Eco-City Charter. Local governments have a substantial impact on emissions through their decisions on transportation policy, neighborhood planning and community development, and building codes and assistance. Alexandria can pursue such efforts responsibly in a way that reduces operational expenses related to the City's energy and water use and that defers future capital expenditures associated with growing resource demand.

It is on this basis that the EPC would like to share the following priorities for the City Manager's proposed FY2017 budget. We urge Council to support the following:

- **Sustainability Coordinator:** As presented in our letter to Council dated Nov 17, 2015 requesting a new position be created for a Sustainability Coordinator, the EPC urges Council to include funding for this position in the FY17 budget. The Sustainability Coordinator would be responsible for integrating sustainability practices into the City's economic development and community planning, and engaging the public, particularly the local business and development community, to advance the City's sustainability

goals. Given the City's current fiscal situation, one of the central goals of this position would be to generate a positive return on investment so that the role effectively delivers an overall benefit to taxpayers.

- **Plan Updates:** Two of the EPC's priorities for FY2016 were to begin updating the EAP and the City's Green Building Policy. While we were disappointed by the lack of funding in the FY2016 budget to support these important updates, we have appreciated the opportunity to work with staff to incorporate some innovative green building approaches into the Old Town North Small Area Plan (SAP) process and to advance the concept of an Eco-District. However, these larger planning updates remain overdue. The Long Range Work Plan (LRWP) agreed to last June includes updates of the EAP in FY17 and the Green Building Policy in FY18. The EPC urges the Council to maintain the current schedule for the update of the EAP and asks that they direct staff to move up the timeframe for updating the Green Building policy to FY17. We believe that this will lead to planning efficiencies and ensure our policy updates are more consistent with previous Council decisions.
- **Trees:** The EPC has two recommendations for enhancing our urban forest. First, we urge Council to support the creation of a multi-commission and cross-departmental work group to help implement key recommendations contained in the Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP) and the EAP. Included among this work group's tasks would be an update of the City's Landscape Guidelines. The Guidelines, first published in 1997, were last updated in 2007, and have never been updated to reflect goals and recommendations contained within the UFMP and EAP, both approved by City Council in 2009. Second, we recommend that Council support additional funding in the FY 2017 Operating and Capital Budgets for tree plantings and tree maintenance, as both are essential to expanding the City's tree canopy coverage to meet the goals of the approved UFMP and the EAP.
- **Stormwater Utility Funding:** The City faces real challenges in meeting its stormwater obligations over the next 10 years with the current real estate tax dedication for stormwater. Staff has wisely included an additional FTE in the Capital budget to support the study, and possible implementation, of a Stormwater Utility. EPC continues to support the City's efforts to study the establishment of a Utility, which has the potential to more equitably pay for the costs of stormwater management by tying those costs to actual services provided. This aligns with the Eco City Charter Vision to "Share Responsibility" with the community to achieve common goals.

The EPC understands the budget gaps the City is facing, and while asking for funding to advance efforts in support of the EAP, we are continuing to investigate areas that could be considered for reallocation or improved cost efficiencies to help close these gaps. One opportunity we uncovered in conversation with City staff is the Transportation Management Program.

- **Maximize Use of Transportation Management Program (TMP) Funds:** While not a new source of funding, the TMP funds provided by developers to the City help pay for transportation related costs that reduce single occupancy vehicle trips. In the past, and during this current year, some TMPs do not fully expend their funds. For example, for developments located near Capital Bikeshare stations, TMP funds could be used each year to help offset City operating funds for the operations and maintenance of the system. The City's current operating cost per station is \$10,000 each year, which is paid for out of the general fund.

The EPC appreciates Council's consideration of our input during this difficult budget year and your on-going support for the Eco-City Charter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jim Kapsis
Chair
Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission

cc: Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission
Alexandria Transportation Commission
City Manager Mark Jinks
Deputy City Manager Emily Baker
Yon Lambert, Director, T&ES
Karl Moritz, Director, P&Z