



December 13, 2016

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

Re: Environmental Policy Commission recommendations for fiscal year 2018 budget

Dear Mayor Silberberg and Members of City Council:

On behalf of the City's Environmental Policy Commission (EPC), I am writing to provide our perspective on the fiscal year 2018 (FY2018) budget. Our recommendations reflect our commitment to the *Eco-City Charter*, adopted in 2008, and the *Environmental Action Plan 2030*, adopted in 2009. They are also consistent with the "Environmental Sustainability" theme in the draft FY2018-2022 Strategic Plan. Since we recognize that the City continues to face significant budgetary challenges, we appreciate the Council's steadfast support for the City's environmental priorities.

The EPC has the following recommendations:

First, **the EPC recommends that Council continue its support for the new sustainability coordinator position in the FY2018 budget.** The EPC applauds Council for its support for the creation of this position in the FY2017 budget. The position will be filled at the beginning of calendar year 2017. This position will integrate sustainable practices into the City's economic development and community planning, and engage the public, particularly the local business and development community, to advance the City's sustainability goals. One of the first major tasks of this new sustainability coordinator will be to facilitate the effort to update the City's Environmental Action Plan (EAP), which is set to begin in early 2017. The EPC will continue to coordinate closely with staff to support this position's success.

Second, **the EPC urges Council to keep the updates to the *Environmental Action Plan* and the *Green Building Policy* firmly on schedule as approved in the FY17 Interdepartmental Long Range Work Program.** The EAP update is set to commence in the first half of calendar year 2017 and continue through FY2018. **We recommend that Council commit \$30,000 for community outreach in support of the update so that we can effectively incorporate the community's views.** The Green Building Policy update is scheduled to commence in FY2018. Alexandria will not be able to meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals without dramatic improvements in the energy performance of our built environment. We are not keeping pace with current local government best practices in guiding and incentivizing such development. **We recommend that Council commit \$90,000 for consultant and community outreach support, and another \$15,000 to train planning staff on new developments in green building.** As we have highlighted for Council in the past, the

EPC is charged with updating both plans every five years and both are now several years behind schedule.

Third, **we would like to reiterate our request that the FY2018 Work Program include the establishment of an Urban Forestry Work Group.** (Please see the letter from four commissions sent to you on April 19 of this year.) It is our hope that the Work Group will be established in the second half of FY2017 and then continued in FY2018. The health of our urban forest depends on the combined decisions of both the private and public sector. City policies and guidelines affect plant selection and canopy coverage in private developments as well as on City-owned land. Cross-departmental cooperation is essential for creating a common policy, achieving common goals, and providing input to other initiatives in the Long-Range Work Program, including the EAP and the revisions to the Landscape Guidelines.

Fourth, **the EPC recommends the City include the new stormwater utility fee in the FY2018 budget.** As I highlighted in the public meeting that we co-hosted with City staff in October, the proposed stormwater fee is sound policy and is consistent with the “polluter pays” principle that is a cornerstone of U.S. environmental law. In short, entities should pay their fair share. Today, the financial burden of growing stormwater remediation efforts is falling disproportionately on residential households and small businesses. The stormwater utility fee will address this inequity while also providing the City with the resources required to meet its regulatory obligations to reduce pollution in our waterways. We also firmly support the establishment of a credit system that will create a market in the City that will help firms and households reduce their stormwater fee in exchange for investing in stormwater management technologies and practices on their property.

Separately, we were encouraged by Council’s recent action to approve City Staff’s recommendations to accelerate the remediation process for Outfall 001 in Oronoco Bay. We would like to affirm our support for the feasibility study and urge the City to begin it in FY2018.

Fifth, **given recent pedestrian fatalities, the EPC urges Council to maintain funding levels for the Complete Streets program, especially the investments focused on improving pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular safety.** Without safe streets, our citizens will be less inclined to walk or cycle, which undermines our goal of a more sustainable, environmentally friendly City.

Finally, 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. We believe strongly that the City should prioritize identifying budget efficiencies and new sources of revenue before making cuts to key policies and services that advance our environmental priorities.

To that end, **the EPC encourages City staff to review the Energy Efficiency Loan Program, which is designed to make low interest loans to income eligible homeowners in the City to lower their energy bills.** The program has not generated significant interest in the market. We encourage Council to request that staff present a plan for how it plans to quickly and effectively improve the program in FY2018; to revise the program to support renewable energy systems such as those provided by Solarize Alexandria; or for a proposal to support other environmental priorities, such as those stated above.

In closing, EPC appreciates Council's consideration of our input during this difficult budget year and your on-going support for Eco-City Alexandria. We continue to be grateful as well for the extensive support we receive from the City's wonderful staff.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Kapsis', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jim Kapsis
Chair
Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission