



# ECO-CITY CHARTER 2008

city of alexandria, virginia

**COMPILED BY:**

Environmental Policy Commission  
City of Alexandria

The Urban Affairs and Planning Program  
Virginia Polytechnic & State University  
Alexandria Center

**SUBMITTED TO:**

Alexandria City Council  
Mayor, William D. Euille  
Vice Mayor, Redella S. "Del" Pepper  
Councilman Ludwig P. Gaines  
Councilman Rob Krupicka  
Councilmember Timothy B. Lovain  
Councilman Paul C. Smedberg  
Councilman Justin M. Wilson

**ADOPTED:**

June 14, 2008



## **Eco-City Charter**

City of Alexandria, Virginia

### **Vision**

**Definition of Sustainability**

**Guiding Principles**

**Roles & Responsibilities**

**Pledge & Commitment**

**JUNE 14, 2008**



# vision

On September 14, 2004, the City Council of Alexandria, Virginia adopted the 2004-2015 Strategic Plan\* that sets forth the following vision:

***Alexandria is a Vibrant, Diverse, Historic, and Beautiful City with Unique Neighborhoods and Multiple Urban Villages where we take Pride in Our Great Community.***

Using the 2015 Strategic Plan as our guide, we offer the following Eco-City Vision in which Alexandria's citizens, businesses, and City government participate in a vibrant community that is always mindful of the needs and lifestyles of the generations to come.

We see Alexandria as a city where social well-being is supported by a strong economy and sustained by a healthy environment. Specifically, we envision Alexandria as a city that:

## **Builds Wisely**

Where our built environment preserves and maximizes open spaces, natural landscapes, historic resources, and recreational opportunities, while protecting and improving our natural environment and public health.

## **Embraces Natural Beauty**

Where we create beautiful parks, gardens, streetscapes, trails, and open spaces that embrace Alexandria's natural beauty, preserve our biodiversity, increase our tree canopy and streamside vegetation, and encourage a healthy, active lifestyle for all of our residents.

## **Improves Water Quality**

Where we celebrate our heritage as a great port city by improving the Potomac River waterfront, eliminating combined sewer overflows, reducing storm water runoff, and improving the quality of our streams so that they are once again fishable and swimmable.

## **Clears the Air**

Where we reduce significantly air pollution from all sources including vehicles, industrial sources, and power plants.

\* See <http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/council/info/strategicplan.pdf>

### **Moves Smartly**

Where we travel less and less by car and increasingly by mass transit, walking, and bicycling.

### **Conserves Energy and Resources**

Where we reduce our energy and water use and minimize our environmental footprint.

### **Minimizes Waste**

Where we reuse and recycle materials and significantly reduce our volume of solid waste and toxic chemical releases.

### **Supports Healthy Living**

Where we create environmental policy and programs not only for a healthier planet but also for a healthier and safer citizenry.

### **Readies for Change**

Where we foresee and mitigate the impacts of environmental threats such as climate change.

### **Leads Intelligently & Holistically**

Where we implement change harmoniously and synergistically across interdependent areas.

### **Shares Responsibility**

Where individuals take responsibility, decision-making is shared, and the community works together to achieve common goals that reflect the interests of a growing, diverse, and well-informed population.

# definition of sustainability

Sustainability means meeting our community's present needs while preserving our historic character and ensuring the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing and integrating environmental, economic, health and social issues so as to maximize the quality of life for all of Alexandria's residents. Sustainability also requires us to consider the impacts of our decisions and actions beyond the City of Alexandria and seek the continuous evolution of policies and programs.

# guiding principles

The following guiding principles are rooted in the definition of sustainability and reflect the goals established in Alexandria's 2015 Strategic Plan. This interdependent network of guiding principles and policies is consistent with a systematic and integrated approach to sustainability.

## LAND USE & OPEN SPACE

The City's land use and open space policies must harmonize its built and natural environments to ensure that growth does not jeopardize environmental sustainability and preserves Alexandria's character. The City's land use policies will accommodate increases in people and jobs through green development that:

- Ensures that land use is designed to encourage walking, biking, and public transportation through mixed-use zoning, interconnected pathways, and targeted density increases around public transportation hubs.
- Creates greater opportunities for sustainable compact development and redevelopment that requires the use of green building practices and prioritizes provision of usable open space and recreational areas.
- Ensures that City building codes, zoning ordinances, and other land use regulations reflect the goals of this Charter, so that sustainability requirements are consistently applied to all preservation, redevelopment, and development across Alexandria in ways appropriate to the character of the particular neighborhood.
- Ensures that development protects and enhances natural resource capacity.
- Protects, enhances, and increases Alexandria's open space and green infrastructure including wildlife habitat, parks, trails, tree canopy, and watersheds.
- Ensures that land use decisions do not foster or perpetuate social injustice.

## WATER RESOURCES

Alexandria's past, present, and future are indelibly linked to the Potomac River and the quality of life the river sustains. Water quality in Alexandria will be managed in a sustainable manner consistent with good stewardship of the local streams, the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay for the public health, ecological and recreational benefits of current and future generations. The City will:

- Promote public health by continuing to ensure safe and reliable drinking water.
- Use environmentally responsible flood management, stormwater control, and wastewater treatment to protect the public's health and property.
- Promote - through sustainable practices - safe, swimmable, and fishable waterways for its citizens and visitors, and enhance the ecological integrity of its downstream waters, by minimizing stormwater runoff and pollutants draining to the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay.

- Advocate water conservation and reuse in order to preserve the quantity, not just the quality, of our water resources.

## AIR QUALITY

Alexandria faces significant challenges in improving air quality including those presented by emissions from vehicles, older industrial facilities, and the regional transport of air pollution. Given that one in eight residents have respiratory illnesses, the City should influence and control emissions sources in a manner that reflects the choices and wishes of the community. The City and its citizens will:

- Enhance their ability to manage outdoor air quality from damaging pollutants in its jurisdiction and will consider emerging threats when establishing outdoor air quality goals and regulatory approaches.
- Be proactive in protecting public health and ecological quality by lowering the amount and number of sources of air, light, and noise pollution.
- Educate those who manage commercial and public buildings on methods for improving indoor air quality and educate citizens on the harms associated with poor indoor air quality.

## TRANSPORTATION

The City of Alexandria will encourage modes of transportation that reduce dependence upon the private automobile by promoting mass transit and pedestrian- and bike-friendly transportation networks. The City will integrate transportation options with land use decisions in order to ensure a healthy environment while continuing economic growth. The City will:

- Provide all its citizens - regardless of age, income, race or ability - with safe, accessible, efficient, and affordable transportation options.
- Prioritize walking, biking, and public transit in order to discourage single-occupancy vehicles.
- Reduce the environmental footprint of travel by introducing, designing and encouraging sustainable methods of transport and infrastructure.

## ENERGY

The quantity and sources of energy used by Alexandria's government, businesses and residents impact our environment and quality of life—whether it be through pollutants added to the air, negative effects on water quality or local contributions to climate change. Recognizing this, Alexandria commits to managing its energy—both the electricity that powers our buildings and homes and the fuel that powers our vehicles and other equipment—based upon the following principles:

- Reduce energy consumption through conservation.
- Produce energy locally and sustainably, through installation and promotion of the use of renewable and efficient energy technologies.
- Convert existing uses of fossil-fuel energy to renewable energy. We envision and work toward a day when Alexandria relies solely on renewable energy sources.

## BUILDING GREEN

Alexandria's government, businesses, and citizens impact our environment through the choices they make when renovating existing structures and constructing new ones. These choices manifest themselves in the quantity and types of energy we use, the impact we have on our water quality, the amount of waste we create, the amount and quality of green space available to us, and our public health. Therefore, the City's building practices will:

- Adopt and maintain initiatives that require best in practice measures to reduce overall environmental impact of renovation, redevelopment, and new development.
- Integrate green building and sustainability standards into all private and public development, including historic preservation, renovation, and new construction.
- Encourage the preservation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and promote the reuse and recycling of building materials in all development.

## SOLID WASTE

Recognizing that managing waste is a public health issue as well as a quality of life issue, Alexandria will maintain its well-preserved public image by managing, handling, and disposing of solid waste in an environmentally sustainable manner. Alexandria will manage waste as a hierarchy of uses with the following priorities:

- Priority One: Reduce
- Priority Two: Reuse
- Priority Three: Recycle
- Priority Four: Resource recovery (e.g., convert to energy, composting, etc.)
- Priority Five: Proper disposal

## ENVIRONMENT & HEALTH

Sustainability is not just about the health of the earth; it is also about human health. Indoor and outdoor air quality, water quality, land use planning, toxic chemical exposure, noise and light pollution, and the safety and habitability of buildings directly impact human health and the natural environment. Alexandria will:

- Promote and support policies and individual decisions that reduce exposure to toxins and pollutants, minimize environmental impact, and encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- Increase equitable access to safe, healthy, and organic food, in particular for children and adolescents, and encourage local and regional food production.

## EMERGING THREATS

Alexandria must be adaptive and responsive to emerging and unforeseen environmental threats – such as climate change – that could strain infrastructure, deplete natural resources, disrupt the economy, and threaten public health. Failure to respond quickly and appropriately to such threats will likely have severe consequences for the health and economy of Alexandria and its citizens. To better prepare for and avert environmental crises, Alexandria will:

- Make policy, infrastructure, and land use decisions that prepare for flooding, drought, disease, and other impacts to humans and wildlife from environmental threats such as climate change.
- Conserve energy and achieve carbon-neutrality.



- Identify ways to reduce/eliminate nutrient loading to waterways.
- Conduct accurate and continual assessments of resource and infrastructure capacity when planning to ensure growth and development does not exceed capacity.
- Ensure that Alexandria understands these threats, its role in the problem, and its part in the solution.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Improving environmental quality, conservation and the public welfare requires a harmonized approach to implementation, as well as collaboration both within and around Alexandria. The primary responsibility of environmental stewardship shall be equally shared by all Alexandrians. In order to achieve the Eco-City Vision and the Guiding Principles set forth in this Charter, the City will:

- Educate and engage its citizens, visitors, local businesses, schools, and civic organizations on the City's concept of sustainability, the importance of identifying goals for environmental quality, and the vision and principles of this Charter.
- Develop and encourage more public-private-civic partnerships within Alexandria and beyond, and work with federal, state, and neighboring governments to implement these principles and achieve sustainability.
- Conserve resources, make sustainable purchasing choices, and make the long- and short-term investments necessary to achieve the principles of this Charter.
- Ensure city policies give incentives for achieving the vision and principles of this Charter and disincentives for behaviors that impede sustainability.
- Become a leader, educator, advocate, facilitator, integrator, and innovator in sustainability.

# roles & responsibilities

The Eco-City Charter serves as a guide for moving the city towards a sustainable future. Fulfilling this Charter requires coordinated participation and commitment by the EPC, City government, and the community. The Charter's success depends on each of these parties taking an active and innovative role as stewards and guardians of this Charter's principles and vision.

## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY COMMISSION

- Develop an Environmental Action Plan that adheres to the principles outlined in this Charter and advances the City towards the vision of a sustainable city; review and revise the Action Plan as needed, but no less than once every five years.

- Inform and educate the community on the vision, principles, and policies outlined in the Charter and the Environmental Action Plan.
- Identify specific steps that citizens and businesses can take to help Alexandria achieve the principles and vision set forth in this Charter.
- Work with and support City Departments, Boards, and Commissions to promote and ensure that the principles within the Charter are considered in key decisions and infused in City programs and policies.
- Produce an annual report card that evaluates the progress of the City toward meeting the sustainable vision set forth in the Charter and Environmental Action Plan.
- Review the Charter no less than every ten years and amend as necessary to ensure that it continues to meet emerging sustainability issues and the needs of the City and its residents.

### CITY COUNCIL, CITY MANAGER, CITY DEPARTMENTS, BOARDS & COMMISSIONS

- Lead by example: identify and implement specific projects for the City government to become more sustainable and create incentives for Alexandria citizens to do the same.
- Maintain our best environmental practices while investing in new ideas to achieve the vision and principles of this Charter.
- Incorporate sustainability practices, and encourage interdepartmental coordination to ensure all City decisions are compatible with the principles of the Charter.
- Work with the Environmental Policy Commission to advance the principles in the Charter and the steps set forth in the Environmental Action Plan.
- Work to make sustainability the natural, easy, and preferred choice for decisions by the City as well as its citizens and businesses.
- Develop and implement an outreach program to educate the community on the vision and principles in the Charter, with particular attention on ensuring that the City's youth are given a foundation of knowledge in the principles of environmental stewardship.
- Identify and develop key regional partnerships to address the sustainability challenges of the region.

### CITIZENS & COMMUNITY

- Take responsibility for the social, environmental, economic, and health impacts of our decisions and be accountable for our actions.
- Encourage children, businesses, neighbors and community organizations to practice and demand sustainability.
- Engage in and contribute to the City's sustainability planning processes and bring forth ideas to ensure the Charter and the Environmental Action Plan are current and meet the needs of the community.
- Hold local, regional, state, and national leaders accountable for achieving sustainability.

This charter is the result of a collaborative effort between the City of Alexandria, its Environmental Policy Commission, and Virginia Tech's Urban Affairs & Planning Program in Alexandria.

