



November 17th, 2015

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

Re: Establishing a Sustainability Coordinator Position in the FY17 Budget

Dear Mayor Euille and Members of City Council:

Since the City Council's approval of the Eco-City Charter in 2008 and the Environmental Action Plan (EAP) in 2009, city staff, primarily led by the Office of Environmental Quality (OEQ), have accomplished many of the EAP's short-term action steps despite a challenging fiscal environment. These accomplishments have received both regional and national recognition. For example, for eight years in a row, the Virginia Municipal League has awarded Alexandria their "Go Green" award, and the Water Environment Federation recently awarded the City a national award for innovation. However, staffing constraints and a lack of focused coordination among City departments are limiting the City's ability to more fully implement the EAP. Further, new trends in urban sustainability suggest that the City could more effectively leverage its investments in sustainability to advance the City's economic development goals.

For these reasons and those documented in more detail below, the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) recommends that Council create a new Sustainability Coordinator position in the FY17 budget, and include such request in its guidance to the City Manager. The Sustainability Coordinator would be responsible for integrating sustainability practices into the City's economic development and community planning and engage the public, particularly the local business and development community, in advancing the City's sustainability goals. The role would be charged with implementing the EAP, which serves as the broad road map for city leaders, staff, and citizens to implement the sustainability vision set forth in the Eco-City Charter. 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.

More than 150 American cities, including the Virginia cities of Richmond, Charlottesville, Fairfax, and Roanoke, and dozens of medium-sized cities as varied as Dubuque, Iowa; Santa Monica, California; and Charleston, South Carolina, have positions that are focused on coordinating sustainability efforts. The 2009 Environmental Action Plan includes a recommendation that the City establish such a position, as does the recent report "EAP 2015 - Insights and Ideas to Recalibrate Alexandria's Environmental Action Plan and Eco-City Initiative" prepared for the City by the Virginia Tech Urban Affairs and Planning Department¹.

While the EPC will be sending a more comprehensive budget guidance letter before the end of the year, we wanted to ensure that Council had ample background and time to consider this new budget request.

¹ See copy of the report in Appendix A.

Role Justification:

- **Sustainability is not systematically integrated into the City's economic development and community planning:** Sustainable approaches can yield multiple co-benefits to the City. For example, the use of green infrastructure can prevent localized flooding from rainstorms, help meet CSO and MS4 compliance goals, and increase property values, thus increasing the tax base. Energy efficient buildings save citizens and businesses money, and reduce the operating costs of City buildings. Due to sustainability's recognized co-benefits, other jurisdictions, such as the District of Columbia, Arlington County, Charlottesville, and Richmond, have made sustainability core to their economic development strategy. Sustainability efforts are focused on creating jobs, drawing private investment into the City, and delivering a return to taxpayers. The sustainability coordinator in Richmond, for example, pursued policies in the first year that yielded a positive ROI for the City.
- **There is insufficient citywide ownership of the Environmental Action Plan (EAP):** While nominally owned by the Office of Environmental Quality (OEQ) and overseen by the EPC², implementation of the EAP has been uneven across the City and offices outside of OEQ do not consistently feel ownership of the plan. Further, there is currently no single person charged with coordinating and driving the implementation of the EAP. This lack of citywide ownership and a point person accountable for the EAP's implementation has led to inconsistent implementation and a lack of integration with other plans. Outside of a general annual progress report to City Council by OEQ, there is also no regular tracking mechanism that provides Council with the status of the plan's implementation or identifies which goals belong to what departments.³
- **There is insufficient interdepartmental coordination on sustainability:** While several departments and plans within the City have sustainability objectives (e.g. the Transportation Master Plan, the Energy and Climate Action Plan, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility Plan), there is not sufficient coordination and consistency among them. Creating a position whose purpose is to help ensure consistency across many City plans will lead to increased planning efficiency and ensure that the City is speaking with one voice on sustainability issues. For example, EPC learned recently that Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) cut its budget in FY16 for its environmental stewards program⁴ and stopped its composting program, both decisions which are inconsistent with the City's commitment to sustainability. Further, sustainability practices are not consistently integrated into each department's operations nor do departments consistently have sustainability metrics in their Results Alexandria and AlexStat performance reporting.
- **There is a public engagement gap:** There is no one City staff member responsible for public engagement related to the EAP and sustainability more broadly. As a result, there is a lack of consistent, coordinated and strategic engagement with local business, neighborhood groups, and other public organizations around the EAP's goals. This has led to three problems. First, the public is broadly under informed of the City's many sustainability successes and policies. Second, the City is not effectively leveraging the

² "The Environmental Policy Commission, in collaboration with the Office of Environmental Quality, [shall] monitor, measure, and report on the implementation of the Environmental Action Plan and revise it as circumstances and conditions change." *Environmental Action Plan*. Pg. 60

³ See Sustainable DC's tracking document for an example of an alternative approach: <http://www.sustainabledc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Sustainable-DC-Progress-Report-April-2015.pdf>

⁴ The environmental stewards program helped fund environmental clubs in the schools and supported teachers for running programs, such as recycling, community gardens, and helping plan the City's annual Earth Day celebration.

public to advance the EAP's goals. Engaging the community can multiply the impact of existing programs and deliver greater value to the City. Third, capacity constraints have prevented the City from applying for public grants that could advance the City's sustainability goals. For example, earlier this year, EPC recommended that Staff apply for the Georgetown Energy Prize, a national competition among localities with a \$5 million prize. Other local jurisdictions, including Arlington and Charlottesville applied, but City Staff was forced to decline due to capacity constraints.

Responsibilities⁵: While no single person can address all of the above areas, a sustainability coordinator could begin to address many of them. We propose the following responsibilities for the position:

1. Accountable for implementation of the Environmental Action Plan (EAP), including coordinating with relevant City Departments (e.g. T&ES, DPI, RPCA, General Services), the Manager's Office, and ACPS.
2. Consults with Departments to implement and/or design sustainability programs and policies that deliver a positive ROI for the City and advance the City's economic development goals in coordinating with the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP).
3. Integrate sustainability principles into land use policies affecting the natural and built environment, including the Strategic Plan, neighborhood Small Area Plans (SAP)'s, SUPs, business overlays, revitalization plans, transportation strategies, infrastructure plans, economic development projects/strategies, and historic preservation.
4. Serves as liaison between public and private sectors, the community and neighborhood groups. Develop public relations/outreach approaches, including leading campaigns to engage the public to advance specific policy outcomes.
5. Seeks grant opportunities and builds partnerships to develop, coordinate, and help fund the implementation of the City's sustainability goals.

First Year Objectives:

- Coordinate with Departments and Manager's office to prioritize implementation of the remaining EAP goals and share with progress report quarterly with Council.
- Coordinate with Departments and Manager's office to incorporate EAP goals into departmental performance reporting and develop a sustainability dashboard for City Council.
- Develop a plan to generate a positive ROI for the City through sustainability programs and policies.
- Develop a process for incorporating sustainability principles consistently into City planning and development review.
- Develop and implement a public engagement strategy to advance the goals of the EAP.
- Identify and apply for federal, state and other grants to support the City's sustainability goals.

Location of Role: Most sustainability coordinators in other jurisdictions report to the City Manager. Given the necessity to effectively work and coordinate across all Departments and operations, location in the City Manager's Office would provide the coordinator the authority and flexibility to work on behalf of all departments equally. A second option could be to place this role in Planning & Zoning (P&Z) given the significant role this person would play in implementing, integrating, and coordinating sustainability principles into the development and implementation of

⁵ See Appendix B for a sample of different job descriptions of sustainability leaders in other jurisdictions, including a template from the Urban Sustainability Director Network.

City plans. If the role is placed in P&Z, we recommend that it report to the Director with an explicit mandate to engage other City departments and participate in City Manager staff, Director and related meetings. A third option could be to define this role more narrowly as “sustainability planner” and limit its function to integrating sustainability into planning and development review.⁶ For example, such a person would be responsible for functional planning, such as updating the Green Building Policy. However, a “sustainability planner” would not address the larger coordination issue.

We commend the Council for your ongoing commitment to the Eco-City Charter and implementing the EAP, and we appreciate your consideration of the Commission’s proposal as part of the FY 2017 budget guidance. Please let me know if you have any questions.

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

⁶ See p. 36 of the Virginia Tech paper in Appendix A for a discussion on sustainability planning.