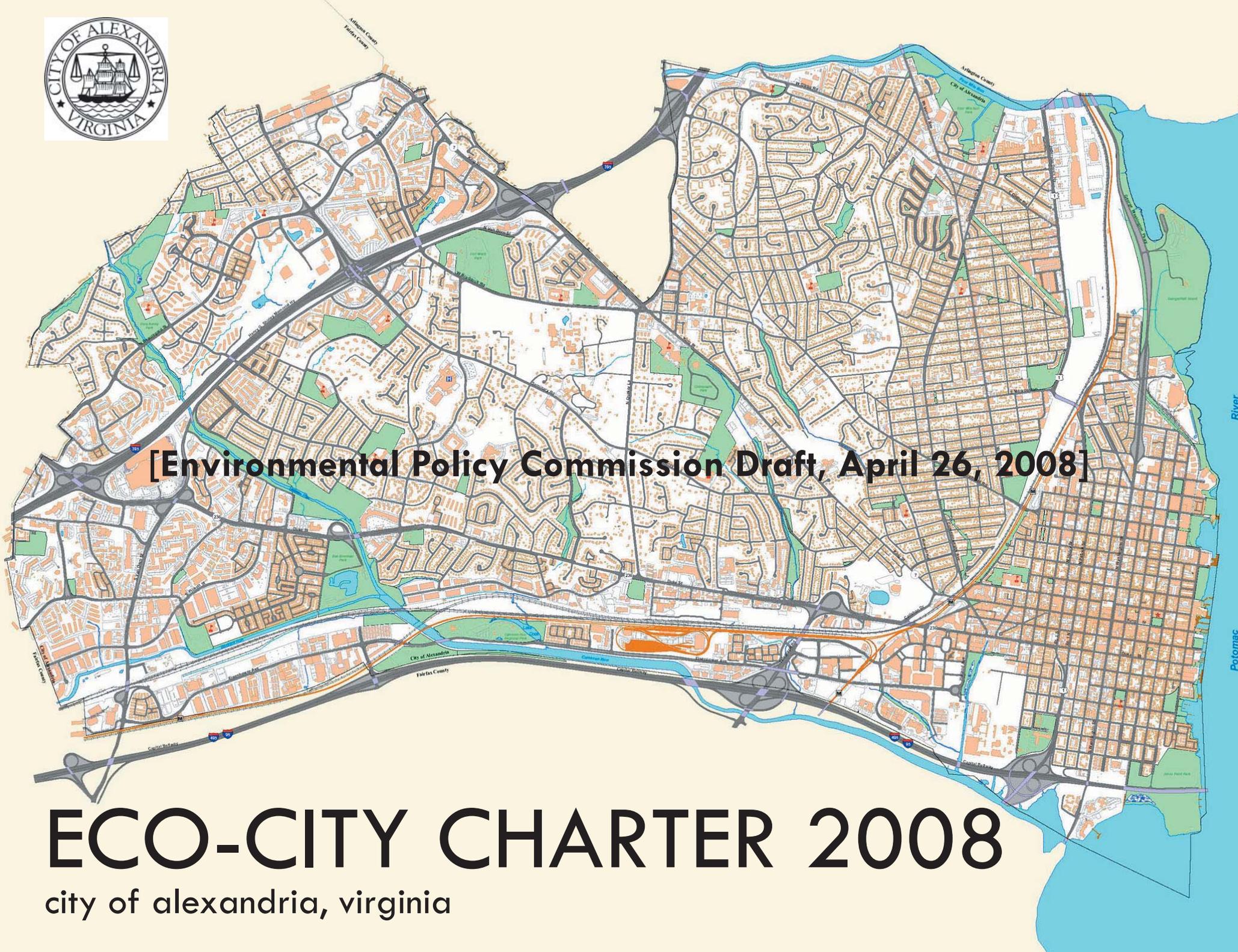




[Environmental Policy Commission Draft, April 26, 2008]

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



Eco-City Charter 2008

City of Alexandria, Virginia

[Environmental Policy Commission Draft]

Vision

Definition of Sustainability

Guiding Principles

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APRIL 26, 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 minimizing harm to the environment and to 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 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.

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

Clears the Air

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

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.

Lives Healthy

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 without sacrificing either our historic past or 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 adversely affect Alexandria's character. The City's land use policies will accommodate projected 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 development and redevelopment across Alexandria in ways appropriate to the character of the particular neighborhood.
- Ensures that development does not exceed natural resource capacity.
- Protects and enhances Alexandria's open space and green infrastructure including wildlife habitat, parks, trails, tree canopy, and watersheds.

WATER QUALITY

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 and promote water conservation and reuse practices, and take an active role in regional, national and international water quality initiatives that address the interconnected nature of our global water resources.

AIR QUALITY

Alexandria faces significant challenges in maintaining 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 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 the use of alternative modes of transportation to reduce dependence upon the private automobile by promoting mass transit and pedestrian- and bike-friendly village centers. The City will provide Alexandrians with a variety of transportation options to ensure continued economic growth and a healthy environment. The City will:

- Provide all its citizens regardless of age, income, race or ability with safe, efficient, and affordable transportation that prioritizes walking, biking and public transit and discourages single-occupancy vehicles in accordance with the advice set out by the National Complete Streets Coalition.
- 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 of renewable energy technology.
- 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 constructing new structures and renovating existing 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 new development, redevelopment, and renovation.
- Integrate green building and sustainability standards into all private and public development, including new construction, renovation and historic structures.

SOLID WASTE

Recognizing that dealing with waste is a public health issue as well as a quality of life issue, and mindful that the City's landfill options are dwindling while costs for disposal increase, Alexandria will maintain its well-preserved public image by managing, handling, and disposing of solid waste in an environmentally sound manner. Alexandria will manage waste in the following "highest use first" manner, with the ultimate goal of achieving a zero-waste future:

- Reduce
- Reuse
- Recycle
- Convert to energy ("resource recovery")
- Proper disposal

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Sustainability is not just about the health of the earth; it is also about human health. Air and water quality, land use planning, pesticide use, toxic chemicals, 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 encourage a health lifestyle and a low environmental impact.
- Increase equitable access to healthy and organic food, in particular for school-aged children and adolescents, and encourage local and regional food production.

EMERGING THREATS

Alexandria must be adaptive and responsive to emerging and unforeseen environmental threats that could strain infrastructure, deplete natural resources, disrupt the economy, and threaten public health, and will:

- Make development and land use decisions that prepare for climate change-related flooding, drought, disease and other impacts from severe weather events.
- Conserve energy and achieve carbon-neutrality.

- Identify ways to reduce/eliminate nutrient loading to waterways, and educate Alexandrians about the influence of the nutrient cycle on both air and water quality.
- Conduct accurate and continual assessments of resource and infrastructure capacity when planning to ensure growth and development does not exceed capacity.

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. When implementing the principles within the Charter, the City will:

- Develop and encourage more public-private-civic partnerships both within Alexandria and throughout the region, and cooperate with federal, state and neighboring governments in achieving the sustainability principles set forth herein.
- Educate its citizens, local businesses and civic organizations on the City's concept of sustainability, its importance in identifying goals for environmental quality, and the principles set forth in this Charter.
- Conserve resources and make sustainable purchasing choices.
- Become a leader, advocate, facilitator, integrator, and innovator in all of the Charter's principles.

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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.
- Incorporate sustainability practices, and encourage interdepartmental coordination to ensure all City decisions are compatible with the principles of the Charter.
- Work with the EPC to advance the principles in the Charter and the steps set forth in the Environmental Action Plan.
- Develop and implement an outreach program to educate the community on the vision and principles in the Charter, with particular attention on teaching Alexandria's youth to promote a culture of sustainability.
- 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.

pledge & commitment

We the undersigned will guide the City of Alexandria to a sustainable future. To achieve this, we commit our active participation and support to the actions outlined in this Charter.

Final version may include signature lines for the following:

Mayor

City Council

City Manager

City Departments

Environmental Policy Commission

Community Leaders

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.

