



October 7, 2023

Subject: Environmental Policy Commission's 2024 Legislative Agenda to address the City's Strategic Priorities including equity, environmental justice, civility, transparency, respect and service.

Dear Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor, other City Council members and City Manager,

Alexandrians feel the impacts of the climate crisis every day, with serious health effects and high energy bills to our most vulnerable, heat stress suffered by our essential workers, as well as the financial burden from floods caused from all-too-often, extreme weather events.

Therefore, to create an equitable, safe and resilient City we support legislative actions that will reduce or enable a better and more equitable management of these impacts from the climate crisis.

Our first priority is not to add more fuel to the fire by reducing as fast as possible the use of fossil fuels to produce electricity or heat our homes; thus we would oppose any act to weaken the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA),ⁱ the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)ⁱⁱⁱⁱ and the Clean Cars Act.^{iv} We also support any ban on the building of additional fossil fuel plants. We also oppose any legislation that requires ratepayers to support unproven technology such as small nuclear reactors so we do not follow in the footsteps of ratepayers in South Carolina that paid for a \$9 billion dollar hole in the ground for a nuclear plant never built.^v Only shareholders should fund unproven technology.

Second, we must take immediate steps to stop adding to the cost burden of housing units making them less affordable by making buildings more energy efficient and setting a short timeline to net zero building codes. Our own Energy and Climate Change Action Plan (ECCAP) called for 95% of all new buildings to be net-zero (producing as much or more energy on-site than is used by its residents). Other local jurisdictions in DC, Maryland and Virginia have set a net zero requirement for their new buildings.

Alexandria must maintain its high Eco-City standards so we keep our buildings competitive in future markets. Net-zero buildings make their residents more comfortable, healthier and reduce costs. Pairing solar panels with backup batteries also makes our buildings more resilient during power outages caused by extreme weather events.

Therefore, we urge the City to support this **summary list** with further explanation and reasoning below:

- a) Grant local authority to impose more energy efficient building codes
- b) Support building energy benchmarking to encourage existing buildings to use rebates, grants and low interest loans to make their buildings more energy efficient
- c) Follow other localities lead and fund a new clean-energy jobs program targeting young people
- d) Fully fund the state Department of Energy and their implementation of the state administered rebate program for energy efficiency funded via the federal Inflation Reduction Act
- e) Grant local authority to regulate and incentivize the replacement of electric vs. gas-powered lawn equipment,

- f) Support the removal of high administrative fees imposed by utilities that make shared solar too expensive for residents to use
- g) Fund a study to determine where the positive return on investment point is for cities and counties for “smart surfaces” to reduce heat islands
- h) Provide funding for the existing state EV rebate program to compliment the federal one, and
- i) Support limiting and forcing accountability on utilities and their trade associations who use ratepayers and high electric bills to fund lobbying of legislators.

Our expanded list and references:

- 1) Support granting more local control to Cities and Counties to permit “stretch” or “high performance” buildings codes, e.g. ones that are more energy efficient than statewide codes thus requiring developers to build housing and businesses that reach for net zero per Alexandria’s ECCAP guidance and EAP2040 targets. Nevertheless, at the very least mandate Virginia adopt updated energy codes updated on a 3-year cycle faster and **WITHOUT** exceptions that weaken it.
- 2) Pair the high performance building standards immediately above with required benchmarking (disclosure of individual energy use to a City database) to allow Alexandria to focus incentives to existing residents and businesses to convert/upgrade/retrofit them to electricity and increase their energy efficiency per the ECCAP requirement (it requires retrofitting 53,000 housing units with efficiency upgrades and 40% of housing units to use electricity for heating by 2030)^{vi}
- 3) Support the funding of a new clean-energy jobs program geared toward Virginia residents ages 18-24. The program should provide training and on-the-job experience for careers in the clean-energy sector and focus on recruiting participants from communities of color and women in Opportunity Neighborhoods.^{vii} Columbus, Ohio just created this type of program and a similar one here would address our Environmental Justice and Equity Principles.
- 4) Support the implementation of the state-run and federal funded energy efficiency/conversion from gas to electric programs for low- and moderate-income residents so Virginians can take advantage of “point of sale” rebates for energy efficient appliances, insulation work, electrical upgrades etc. as well as moving from gas to electric thus supporting ECCAP action requirements.^{viii}
- 5) Support any legislation that gives Alexandria more local authority to regulate buildings, gas-powered lawn equipment, stormwater reduction, and electrification as well as direct authority to incentivize rebates on various energy efficiency appliances (like heat pump hot water heaters, etc.), transportation modes other than autos (e-bikes, scooters), or widgets (i.e. smart thermostats) for income-dependent residents, thus addressing ECCAP requirements.
- 6) Support legislation to removing current financial barriers to shared/community solar so renters and others can reduce their energy costs without paying unrealistic and exorbitant administrative fees to the utility - see SB1266/HB1853.^{ix} This supports the City’s EJ and Equity principles.
- 7) Fund a study for State/City/County-wide review of “smart surfaces” to determine where in Virginia and Alexandria the return on investment (benefits outweigh costs) is present for everything from reflective/green roofs, porous pavements, increased use of solar, increased tree canopy, reflective roads, combined approaches, and/or sequestering carbon in concrete. A study in Baltimore

showed a 10:1 ratio of benefit to cost of smart surfaces.^x Focusing on mitigating heat island effects that are most prominent in LMI communities would likewise address Alexandria’s EJ and Equity Principles.

- 8) Fund the GA 2021 legislation (HB1979) creating an electric vehicle rebate program with an expiration date January 1, 2027. This funding would complement federal tax credits and lower the up-front cost of new and used electric vehicles. This legislation allocates 55% for low- and moderate-income applicants; the rebate would put electric mobility within reach for more Virginians.^{xi} This supports the City’s EJ and equity principles and supports ECCAP action of 50% EV sales by 2030.
- 9) Support legislation that restricts or eliminates utility lobbying funding, lack of transparency of lobbying funding and imposes enforcement of penalties for failure to comply with accountability requirements. See model language created by Solar United Neighbors implemented in Colorado and Connecticut.^{xii}

The City cannot ensure an equitable, safe, healthy and resilient community or meet its EAP2040 targets or ECCAP actions without the legislative authority to take immediate action to address the climate crisis and adequately respond to its declared climate emergency. If you have any questions, please contact me at 391detlacharlie@gmail.com or 571-388-9423

Kathie Hoekstra

Kathie Hoekstra,
EPC Chair

ⁱ <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+sum+HB1526>

ⁱⁱ We recognize that the Governor has already attempted to pull Virginia out of RGGI, but he is being challenged in court and the EPC strongly encourages the City to join in this lawsuit.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+HB20>

^{iv} <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?212+sum+HB1965>

^v <https://theintercept.com/2019/02/06/south-caroline-green-new-deal-south-carolina-nuclear-energy/>

^{vi} https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-07/ECCAP%20Final_07.2023.pdf page ES-7

^{vii} <https://www.columbus.gov/Templates/Detail.aspx?id=2147524830>

^{viii} <https://www.energy.gov/scep/home-energy-rebate-program>

^{ix} <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=231&typ=bil&val=SB1266>

^x <https://smartsurfacescoalition.org/analysis/baltimore-report>

^{xi} <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?211+sum+HB1979>

^{xii} <https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/news/beat-back-monopoly-utility-bullies/#bill>