

Budget Comments received after the City Manager's Proposed Budget

New Comments on Top

May 2, 2021

There is considerable debate about whether school resource officers (SROs) should be continued. I would simply like to state that if there are SROs in our schools, the following is a minimum standard that should be met: (1) students have the right to record ALL encounters; (2) no questioning should occur without the consent of the parent/guardian - not school administration; (3) transparency on interactions is shared with the public (while protecting students confidentiality); (4) there is a commitment to teaching students and parents about their rights in their native languages (if necessary, give the students laminated cards with their rights); and (5) there is a standing space for dialogue in the impacts of the SROs that include parents and students - with the necessary engagement that represents all voices (not just those that come to meetings).

April 30, 2021

Hello Mayor and city council members,

I am currently a 10th grader at Alexandria High School.

While in a pandemic setting and online classes, as black and brown youth in ACPS, I along with my peers have been advocating for police free schools nearly a year now. But for more than 3 years, I have been pushing for equity among my school community. Today along with other youth, we are able to grasp a bit of relief.

Tonight you as leaders showed us why we should not give up and that youth are being heard.

As a Latina and first generation youth, I can truly say I feel represented today by those in power.

We will continue working with you and hope we can continue to get your support on this issue next Monday so it can be adopted on the budget May 5th. Let's pass better policies and practices for our black and brown youth and ensure we have a brighter future in our city.

April 30, 2021

Hello mayor and city council members,

I am a former ACPS student and long time resident in the city of Alexandria and youth organizer for TWU.

For a long time, black and brown youth and parents along with many community organizations have had conversations with you all and the school board and advocated for the removal of SRO's in our middle and high schools and their funding to be invested in benefiting resources.

Tonight you did the right thing and had the opportunity to move forward with a proposal that supports mental health resources for students and families in the city. We are glad to have most of the council's support on the issue and are hoping to continue counting on your leadership on May 3rd.

It may not always be easy to take on bold decisions, but these are needed to create the long term change and progress our communities of color deserve.

The ALL Alexandria resolution sounds nice and all, but this is the moment you have to place it into practice. This is one of the many steps we need moving forward in combating social and racial issues that are directly impacting the success outcomes of our black and brown youth.

We hope to work together and ensure that along with our students and families, our communities can continue to see impactful equitable changes.

April 27, 2021

Dear City Council and City Manager Jinks,

The Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the Alexandria's FY 2022 proposed budget in order to ensure that the City's most vulnerable populations are supported. We acknowledge the COVID-19 pandemic has burdened funding resources and we appreciate how the City's budget demonstrates healthy allocations to address immediate needs in the City particularly in the areas of housing, food security and child care from expected federal dollars. The pandemic has cast a bright light on programmatic inequities in society's treatment of housing, food and child care. EOC's mission is to ensure that the lens of equity is imbedded in every policy and planning decision as the City grows.

The City must continue to evaluate the gaps in resources and adequately plan to fund City programs, to include the City's low-income residents. Only in this manner can the Alexandria fulfill its mission statement of being an all-inclusive city. While we are aware of the limitations of the budget process due to the pandemic, we wanted to highlight three areas demanding attention beyond the pandemic that Council has also deemed priority 1 and in some cases a lower funding area: Housing, Food Security and Child Care. In our 2019 Needs Assessment, EOC outlined recommendations to rectify the greatest needs identified by Alexandria's lowest-income residents. We continue to focus on three relevant areas. These three areas were the same areas identified by the Health Department's CHIP initiative. Despite the setback with the pandemic, we believe the City is on track to meet the aforementioned recommendations to support our most vulnerable populations.

Housing

Housing in the City is expensive, and as a result, the cost of housing is often a stress point for many lower-income families. In order to alleviate the strain of one of life's most essential necessities -- a roof over one's head -- the EOC supports many forms of housing initiatives, including rental support, and services such as utility support. The current proposal includes \$68 million for affordable housing over 10 years, which is excellent. Considering that about 67% of low to moderate income households consider housing cost a burden, public opinion has only grown that this burden will continue with the literal rise of expensive housing projects with only a portion of the units allocated for affordable housing. Furthermore, residents fear that in the next ten years additional housing will increase our city's density beyond its infrastructure capabilities. Safeguarding the City from overcrowding and ensuring housing for all residents should be ongoing balancing act.

The EOC wants to reemphasize our position on housing density, that when we set aside density for affordable housing, we commit to making housing more inclusive, thus permitting residents of low, middle to high income to have access to the same resources. This is a step in the right direction towards creating equity in housing policy. The set aside for some of our neighboring cities such as Washington, D.C. and Fairfax, Virginia range from 10% to 20%. The Commission would suggest that we adopt a 10% set aside for the whole city. Also, we would request that the set aside percentage be clearly linked to the income requirements (or the percentage of AMI) for low-income singles, families and seniors. It is worth remembering in the City Council's debates that even the middle income brackets could not afford to live in the City. In addition to providing affordable housing, EOC would encourage that there is equity in the manner in which affordable housing is built. Therefore, contractors should use the same quality of materials, including eco-friendly materials, in affordable homes as they would in market rate homes within the same building.

We are pleased that between \$5-\$6 million will be allocated to the eviction prevention/rental assistance programs in the City. However, supporting eviction prevention should be an annual budget item and not only a recovery focus. Moreover, the concern with eviction prevention includes the City's need to pay for program navigators that speak each of the resident's language. Navigators should be placed within each government agency and/or designated nonprofits to support the most vulnerable as they try to identify and understand the program supports available to meet their family's basic needs. In regard to the unhoused, in the budget, the City used 2016 data to measure the reduction of homelessness. We encourage the City to assess homelessness now in order to accurately evaluate the effects of the pandemic on the housing market.

Acknowledging that there have been health impacts from the pandemic, which was also noted in the Health Department's CHIP study, that correlates with the loss of housing or one's ability to maintain housing, the EOC is concerned that housing for the differently disabled and those suffering from mental illness has not been a priority 1 along with affordable housing. The EOC recommends that whenever housing projects are discussed, the disabilities and mental health of residents are discussed as well.

Food Security

Another hardship for many Alexandrians continues to be food security. This issue is more about access than availability; there are no food deserts in the City. Before the pandemic, however, almost fifty percent of low-income individuals and families run out of food before the end of the month. In this scenario, access to transportation to get to food banks becomes a challenge.

We believe that \$4-\$5 million to address food insecurity throughout the City is a great start. The nonprofits and faith organizations of Hunger Free Alexandria and ALIVE! have been a stabilizing support for vulnerable residents in pre-pandemic times, during the pandemic and will be post this pandemic. The EOC recommends that ALIVE! be provided the discretion to use some of their monies on PTEs/FTEs, or navigators within each neighborhood, designated to collect data on their community network partners to understand the needs of families within each zip codes.

The EOC also encourages the City to become more creative and expansive in their vision of eradicating food insecurity, which will come with an improvement of tracking systems and equity in programming. For example:

- Explore how cities have used emerging technologies to track the distribution of food or the delivery of food.

- To promote equity in food distribution, look to DC, Maryland and Virginia neighbors in how to create a food council. The City should include residents and city staff in the exploration of a food council and the staffing (e.g., regional coordinators) it will take to determine what resources need to be put towards it.
- Explore community indoor and outdoor food gardens in at risk zip codes to mitigate a transportation barrier to food banks.
- Consider investing in school or apprenticeship gardening programs for youth to learn food sustainability.
- Consider adding community gardens as a condition of affordable housing contracts.

Child Care

Childcare remains a problem citywide, especially for lower-income families. (It is worthy to note that the administration's infrastructure plan includes child care) EOC was pleased to see that the City budgeted \$505,500 to increase the availability and quality of early childhood education programs. The funds are expected to include local dollars for Smart Beginnings which is the city's proposed initiative to expand full-day pre-K and summer learning for low-income children- this was a high priority expressed by our constituents. We are concerned, however that Parent Support & Education was a priority level 3; we feel that this is critical in strengthening the connection between parent, child and school.

Because flexible extended child care hours and space are major requirements additional solutions need to be considered. Solutions could include child care within building contracts and places of employment to support working parents.

In speaking with residents and staff in Alexandria, we discovered there is a great need to conduct a comprehensive study of child care within the City. Requirements include mapping of the centers by the number of facilities within each zip code and the needs of daycare aged children. Moreover, there is a need for the City to require more daycare centers in each zip code, especially those within our most vulnerable neighborhoods, to accept child care assistance. Such improvements will bring equity into child care and continuum of care.

Additional Concerns

There is a nexus between neighborhoods, employment and community policing that we need to address as a City, especially as it relates to Equity.

- **Employment:** We are glad to see an increase in the Workforce Development Center budget and their concerted outreach, focus and innovative programs for Alexandria's unemployed. This is especially true in their youth and over 55 years old programs. However, we are concerned, that the Center is experiencing a decrease in FTEs which are vital to servicing the low income citizens, especially in the trades industries. The City does not allocate enough resources to assist the trades industry (e.g., construction workers, plumbers, electricians and others to be hired on city projects) and this needs to change.
- **Small Business:** Related to employment is protection for small businesses of all sizes. The pandemic caused many of our small businesses to close due to a shutdown of transportation services, dining in and shopping in-person throughout the past year. Small businesses employ and serve Alexandrians with care yet are not always consulted when construction projects or changes in transportation jeopardize their business. Small businesses are a valuable part of the City's neighborhood infrastructure; they often provide quality and affordable resources for residents. If the City plans to "strengthen small businesses", then when City planning occurs (e.g., transportation or housing related), small businesses should be at the table and contracted with as ongoing vendors for the community. The

City should develop a sustainable savings or matching fund for small businesses (according to size) so they can survive through a prolonged health crisis such as the pandemic.

- Community Policing: We acknowledge the pandemic has contributed to higher crime rates in the City, demonstrating a mindset of desperation in residents within or outside of Alexandria's City limits. However, the community policing unit within the Community Relations Division should not only assign officers to "specific neighborhoods" rather throughout all Alexandrian neighborhoods as to not contribute to stigma of one neighborhood as a high crime area over another. We do agree with the proposal for Residential Police Officers and Community Police Officers to reside in the same community they are assigned to patrol.

Conclusion

During this pandemic we experienced economic shifts nationwide. Alexandrians are feeling the health effects, not only in their bodies but in their housing, food access and work life. The City government is in an incredibly powerful position to help each resident become the best they can be. When we connect availability with access opportunities, our citizens will thrive. In order for Alexandria's community to thrive at its highest level, basic needs must be met in all the areas noted above.

Sincerely,
The Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC)

April 20, 2021

I have worked for the City for almost 35 years and feel that I have made a difference in the lives of older Alexandria residents and their families. I enjoy what I do and am grateful for the benefits received by the City. However, I feel that the City does not treat its employees equitably in terms of compensation, particularly those of us who have worked for the City for many years and are at the top of our pay scale. I would like to remind you what the City's Compensation Policy states, which is "The statement of compensation philosophy is intended to provide a broad framework for the City Council, management, employees and the citizens in order to understand and guide decisions that affect pay. It is designed to reflect the importance public employees play in the delivery of services and programs to the community; that compensation is a clear measure of that importance; and that there is fair and equitable treatment of all employees..." I don't feel that this policy is an accurate representation of the reality of what is proposed in the FY22 budget by not adding an additional step for general salary employees, nor has it been an accurate reflection for many years. For the past 8 years I have received only one step increase despite excellent annual evaluations. If no step increase is added in the upcoming budget that will be 9 years. Is this how the City Council chooses to show its most experienced employees how much they appreciate their service to Alexandria residents, particularly this past year? Although I am speaking for myself, I represent 20% of employees who are in the same situation. It is really disheartening to yet again be told that we are not deserving of a pay increase. We are your most experienced employees and you have relied on us time and time again, particularly this past year. I ask that you follow your own Compensation Philosophy and demonstrate that you value our work and will treat us equitably by adding an additional step to the general salary scale. I hope you do not choose to devalue our contributions to the City again.

April 12, 2021

According to the "City of Alexandria Proposed Budget in Brief for FY2022," the City Manager's Proposed Budget recommended a decrease in the current real estate tax rate from \$1.13 to \$1.11 per \$100 of assessed value but the City Council has authorized a rate of \$1.13 per \$100 of assessed value for purposes of advertising.

At a minimum, the City should retain the Manager's proposed property tax rate of \$1.11 per \$100 of assessed value, if not consider even a lower rate, taking into account recent additional federal funding the City has received subsequent to the completion of the proposed FY2022 budget. Relatedly, reevaluation and reduction of assessed Stormwater Utility Fees should also be a consideration.

City Manager Mark Jinks presented the Alexandria City Council with the proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 General Fund Operating Budget of \$767.6 million on February 16, 2021.

Subsequent to this February 2021 presentation the City of Alexandria received \$59.4 million under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) enacted March 11, 2021 according to multiple reports. Reportedly the funds are to be provided in two equivalent allotments during 2021 and 2022 for use through Dec. 31, 2021, and permitted for use in response "...to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households...; or...the provision of government services to the extent of reduction in revenue...due to such emergency...; or To make necessary investments in water, sewer or broadband infrastructure." (Alexandria Gazette Packet, March 25-31, 2021, "Bulletin Board" p. 5).

Relatedly, on Feb. 16, 2021, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the awarding of \$321 million under the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) to Alexandria Renew Enterprises for its RiverRenew Tunnel System project. See EPA Feb. 16, 2021 Press Release at <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/search>.

According to the EPA's press release: "EPA's WIFIA loan will finance nearly half of the total project costs. The remaining project funds will come from a Virginia Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan, state grants, and cash contributions from AlexRenew on behalf of city residents and from Fairfax County. This WIFIA loan will save AlexRenew an estimated \$63 million."

The accompanying project fact sheet states the award "• Saves the City of Alexandria an estimated \$63 million from financing with a WIFIA loan." See: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2021-02/documents/alexrenew_wifiaprojectfactsheet_loanclose.pdf. I hope these factors will be taken into consideration in finalizing the FY2022 Budget and associated property tax rates and fees.

April 4, 2021

With the additional funding from the federal government, I strongly support funding for a new Green Building staff position in the FY22 budget for Planning & Zoning department. This was recommended by the Environmental Action Plan 2040 (action # 3.1.7), and the plan recommended the position to have started last year to cover many actions and goals that are implemented with "existing staff resources." The city acknowledged a Climate Emergency back in 2019, and I appreciate the City Manager's efforts to include funding for programs to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and also adapt to the extreme weather effects already occurring. The American Rescue Plan funds that the City will receive should hopefully free up budget resources to include the Green Building Staff position in FY22. Buildings accounted for 57% of the City's greenhouse gas emissions in the most recent inventory. Further City actions that go beyond the current Green Building Policy are needed to achieve our adopted climate targets, as identified in the EAP. This new staff position will be critical to implementing the multiple EAP green building actions slated for completion by FY23 (and beyond) and to helping the Energy and Climate Change Task Force formulate effective strategies for the buildings sector.

April 2, 2021

Please support funding for a new Green Building staff position, as identified in the City's Environmental Action Plan 2040 (action #3.1.7). This position is critical to implementing the multiple EAP green building actions slated for completion by FY23 and to helping the Energy and Climate Change Task Force formulate effective strategies for the buildings sector. All of these steps are needed to achieve the City's adopted climate targets, and the City has recognized the climate emergency in its October 2019 resolution. Thank you for funding climate change mitigation and resiliency measures elsewhere in the manager's budget proposal. Hopefully the American Rescue Plan aid can free up other funding in the budget to include the Green Building Staff position.

March 31, 2021

I would hope Council can find a way to re-implement the 1.5% proposed increase to the general schedule payscale that was approved and then removed due to COVID. Merit increases exclude 20-25% of the current workforce who are at the end of their paygrade. We internally hear about being a High Performing Organization. Do HPOs continually ignore 20-25% of their staff? Senior leadership in the City have offered a comment that maybe folks should look somewhere else if they can't go higher in the organization or if there are no pay increases for them. Again, not sure this is HPO. These tenured employees have come to work during COVID and are continually asked to train/supervise newer staff to accomplish our many missions within the City. Is there anyway to give them some opportunity to increase their pay?

March 26, 2021

I am writing as the advocacy director of the Washington Bicyclist Association. Our organization would like to thank you for investing in Thank them for continuing to invest in trails, complete streets and capital bikeshare. Alexandria still has a high rate of traffic crashes when compared to the rest of the region and Alexandria could benefit from investing in a long-term plan to create a protected bike network for Alexandria. Alexandria has seen a major increase in residents who are biking during the pandemic, and unless Alexandria seriously invests in a connected bike lane network, Alexandria will see a rise in traffic injuries. The budget should fund a long-term study to create a plan to implement a protected bike lane network for Alexandria.

February 24, 2021

In reference to Stormwater management in the Hunting Creek watershed. I did not see anything specific in the budget for working with Fairfax County to clean up Hunting Creek and prevent further pollution. There is a complete automobile that has languished in Hunting Creek for over 11 years. Recently joined by two dumpsters, also floated off during heavy rains. Hunting Creek empties into the Potomac, which empties into the Chesapeake Bay. We spend tons of money cleaning up the Bay. It is the responsible and accountable action to provide for clean-up of Hunting Creek. Please include provisions in the 2022 budget to clean up this important waterway.

February 17, 2021

I applaud the city manager for preparing alternative revenue scenarios. Although as a property owner looking I'm looking at a 2nd consecutive year of a significant tax increase (due to appreciation of property value), I advocate for maintaining the tax rate at \$1.13 to expand the services the city operates. This can meet expanded needs of city residents and visitors, and model responsible fiscal behavior across the region.

February 16, 2021

I would like the budget to address my following concerns:

1. Energy and Climate Change Task Force (EAP 1.1.1, \$150,000 for consultant minus \$110,000 allocated FY2021, additional staff support time) – We request that the FY 2022 budget include funds to support the work of the Energy and Climate Change Task Force that will be fully operational in FY 2022.
2. Green Building New Staff Person (EAP 3.1.7, \$120,000 per year) – We request that you include funding for one full time green building staff person in the Department of Planning and Zoning as set forth under Section 3.1.7 of the EAP.
3. City Electric Vehicle Program funding (EAP 2.2.2, \$150,000 per year) – Implement recommendations of the new Alternative Fleet Fuel Policy and pilot programs for DASH, Alexandria City Public Schools, and the City vehicle fleet.
4. Tree Canopy Program and Guidelines (EAP 4.1.1, est. \$30-40,000 per year) – We request that funding to support achieving the tree canopy preservation goals be continued. This green infrastructure is critical for adapting to higher temperatures and rainfall events.