

**DRAFT Joint Letter to Alexandria City Council regarding Climate Emergency Response –
Planning Commission, Environmental Policy Commission, Transportation Commission
For Planning Commission consideration – February 1, 2022 Planning Commission Meeting**

February 2, 2022

Dear Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor and City Council Members,

We the undersigned, representing the Planning, Environment, and Transportation Commissions, strongly urge Council to take the following actions to address the Climate Emergency City Council declared on October 22, 2019. We must mobilize city leadership, staff, the private sector and the community at large to do more to address this defining challenge of our time.

The climate crisis is the single largest threat to the long-term health and prosperity of the City of Alexandria. We have all seen the disturbing images of flooding and listened to heart-breaking stories from our residents. It will not be possible to be the caring, kind, compassionate, fair, just, and equitable city that is an affordable, livable community for all if we do not implement effective actions to address this emergency. How will we demonstrate why people should want to live here, if we are not leading by employing proven, cost effective measures to fight the climate crisis along with our neighbors?

The Climate Emergency Declaration¹ recognized three critical facts demonstrating the urgency for action.

- 1) The cost to address emissions today is far less than the cost of not addressing them.
- 2) Marginalized populations in Alexandria and worldwide are disproportionately burdened by the climate crisis.
- 3) It's estimated that \$100 million to \$250 million dollars of Alexandria property will be affected by a rise in sea level of one to five feet with many residents displaced.

In the Council Declaration our community committed to the following direct actions:

- “a citywide just transition and mobilization effort”
- “ending Citywide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as quickly as possible”
- “accelerating adaption and resilience strategies”
- “underscoring the need for full community participation, inclusion and support”
- “being integral to and in the leadership of the mobilization effort”

Alexandria has demonstrated progress fighting the crisis such as requiring all new public buildings to meet a net-zero energy standard, providing free DASH bus service,² approving a new Mobility Plan,³ and has empaneled an Energy and Climate Change Task Force to update the 2011 Plan and explore ways to implement the targets of the Environmental Action Plan 2040 (EAP2040).⁴ However with accelerating costs and diminishing options which do not require major lifestyle changes, this emergency requires immediate action by Council.

Now is the time for further action by the City to make certain the climate crisis is being adequately addressed by providing additional tools and resources to align City priorities. Nearby communities require/encourage new technologies, monetize these investments, and explore novel funding sources, however we need stronger policies that encourage our staff to urge permit applicants to explore these options here. The City will fail to meet the EAP2040 targets if there are conflicting priorities, insufficient

funding, and inadequate policies to guide decisions, development plans and actions. Therefore we urge you to immediately address the following recommendations before more costly options are all that remain.

Our recommendations:

- 1) **Sustainable Development:** Integrate the EAP2040 targets with our land use development process to ensure that future development adequately contributes to the city-wide target of reducing GHG emissions by 50% by 2030 over 2005 levels and 80-100% by 2050. Relying solely on the current Green Building Policy will leave us far short of the EAP2040 target for 2030 and 2050.⁵ Further, the inconsistent treatment of this issue across small area plans creates uncertainty for developers, commissions and the community about what is necessary and expected.
- 2) **New High Performance Buildings and Renewable Energy:** Provide funding for the City to build staff knowledge and experience to optimize development of high performance buildings and renewable energy investment. This will help staff maximize city priorities and better utilize tax incentive funding mechanisms permitted under Virginia law.⁶ While no single project will help the City achieve its climate targets on its own, all projects must make a meaningful contribution to achieving our targets.⁷
- 3) **Sustainable Building Renovations:** Create stronger educational, outreach and technical assistance staff and services for residents, redevelopers and potential Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) applicants on the benefits/costs of energy efficient retrofits, electrification conversions, solar and battery options, potential microgrids and other ways to reduce GHG emissions and provide for more resilience by both residential and commercial properties.
- 4) **Transportation, Land Use and Housing:** Lowering emissions to meet our climate target requires: A) reducing the need to travel through good land use planning and sufficient affordable housing, B) making sustainable travel modes safer and more convenient (walking, biking, and transit), and C) rapidly electrifying all vehicular modes (buses, fleet vehicles, trucks, ride hail services, private cars). The City needs to implement the Alexandria Mobility Plan, Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Readiness Strategy, and Alternative Fuel Fleet Policy while also supporting regional transportation decisions consistent with climate plans.
- 5) **Prioritized Administration:** Direct the City Manager to organize and administer the above work as the critical priority that such an “Emergency” Declaration warrants. This includes fully funding staffing, and coordinating the implementation of EAP2040 targets across all City Departments and agencies, future Energy and Climate Change Action Plan (ECCAP) recommendations, Vision Zero, and the City Energy Office plans/programs.

Our commissions stand ready to fulfill our obligation to help Council in every way possible to honor the commitments made in its Emergency Declaration and find specific, fiscally sound and legal ways to implement them now and to facilitate continuous and open dialogue with Council, Manager, Staff and the

community on future measures. Alexandria can demonstrate why people should want to live here, as the Mayor suggested recently, if we lead in policy and innovation when meeting the climate crisis.

Sincerely,

PC Chair

EPC Chair

TC Chair

¹ Link to Emergency Declaration: https://www.alexandriava.gov/news_display.aspx?id=111923

² <https://www.dashbus.com/ride-dash/fares>

³ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/MobilityPlan>

⁴ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/tes/eco-city/info/default.aspx?id=118548>

⁵ As noted in the Declaration, we need 4-5% annual reduction in GHG emissions to meet our EAP2040 targets, while current rates are only 1.4%.

⁶ <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title58.1/chapter32/section58.1-3221.2/#:~:text=Real%20Property%20Tax-%C2%A7%2058.1%2D3221.2.,A.&text=The%20governing%20body%20of%20any,levied%20on%20other%20real%20property.>

⁷ For instance, applicants providing an Energy and Resilience Plan that includes information on proven technologies, using potential alternative funding sources, or monetizing investments could reduce the need to choose between other city priorities or the use of tax incentives funding mechanisms permitted under Virginia law to promote high performance buildings and investment in renewable energy systems.

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