

## **City of Alexandria** **2020 Statement of Legislative Principles**

*“The City of Alexandria is committed to making our city a historic, inclusive city of kindness with distinct, vibrant and safe neighborhoods, a well-managed, government, flourishing arts, culture and recreation, a strong economy, thriving children and youth, active and secure older adults, environmental sustainability, healthy residents of all ages, and multimodal transportation.”*

*– City of Alexandria Vision Statement, Adopted Jan. 28, 2017*

This vision for our City drives and directs the work of City Council and City staff and is the foundation for the efforts that will make this vision of Alexandria a reality in our community. The work of City staff at the General Assembly each legislative session is key to ensuring that City staff and City Council have the legal framework, authority and funding necessary to achieve this vision for our community.

As we work to ***create and maintain distinct and vibrant neighborhoods*** throughout Alexandria, the City supports legislation that affords localities the authority necessary to encourage smart, appropriate development in our community, preserve the diverse, mixed-income character of our neighborhoods, and protect the historic fabric of our City.

As we work to ***be an inclusive city of kindness***, the City supports legislation that safeguards and expands the protection of the most basic human rights of all residents of, workers in and visitors to our City and our Commonwealth and opposes legislation that attempts to restrict these same basic rights. The City supports legislation to ensure Alexandria is a livable community for all, with affordable housing, a living wage, and workforce protections available to all Alexandrians. The City supports legislation to ensure immigrants, refugees, and their families can fully participate in the economic, civic, social, and cultural life of our city and our Commonwealth.

As we work to ***provide a well-managed government*** for our residents, businesses and visitors, the City supports legislation and appropriations that fund or remove unfunded mandates from our local government, provide additional revenue or revenue authority in order to support core municipal operations and services, and support the City’s facility needs and plans. The City supports the preservation of existing state aid to localities, requests the full funding of all state funding commitments to localities, and opposes efforts to shift the costs of shared services to localities. The City supports legislation that affords localities flexibility and additional authority in the areas of hiring and procurement, so localities can provide services efficiently and in a fiscally responsible manner while also encouraging hiring local workers and the involvement of local businesses in municipal projects and services. The City supports legislation that enhances the ability of localities to take full advantage of renewable energy sources and remove barriers to the deployment of these renewable energy sources.

As we work to ***create a safe and resilient city*** for every resident, worker and visitor in the City of Alexandria, the City supports legislation that helps our well-trained staff protect the most

vulnerable members of our community, including children, older adults, victims of domestic violence, individuals in behavioral health crisis, and those of differing abilities. The City supports common sense gun safety legislation, including “red flag” laws, stronger background checks for all gun buyers, and prohibiting the sale of assault weapons and certain ammunition, magazines and accessories. The City supports legislation that reforms our criminal justice system so it operates fairly and equitably for all members of our community, including the decriminalization of marijuana possession and the decriminalization of HIV. The City supports efforts to ensure that prisons and detention facilities are operated as part of the pursuit of justice rather than the pursuit of profit.

As we work to ***achieve a community with flourishing arts, culture and recreation opportunities***, the City supports legislation that would give localities the authority to determine the placement or relocation of Confederate statues and memorials located on city-owned property. The City supports funding for the preservation and interpretation of historic sites; in this 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the arrival of the first slave ship to Virginia, the City specifically supports funding for the preservation, maintenance, interpretation and operation of historic sites related to the history of slavery in our community and throughout the Commonwealth.

As we work to ***create a strong economy in our community*** that benefits every resident, business and worker in our city, the City supports legislation to raise the minimum wage in Virginia and to enact a state prevailing wage. The City supports efforts to encourage and incentivize family-friendly workplace policies in businesses throughout the Commonwealth. The City supports legislation to modernize Virginia’s alcoholic beverage laws to ensure our small, local businesses can be competitive in the region as well as efforts to increase efficiency and minimize the impact of the distribution and delivery of alcoholic beverages on our neighborhoods. The City supports efforts to create new markets for recycling and recyclable materials in the Commonwealth, as an opportunity for both job creation and environmental stewardship. The City supports legislation that assists in the deployment universal, affordable access to broadband technology and efforts to ensure a fair and open Internet.

As we work to ***ensure children and youth in our community are thriving***, the City supports legislation and budget priorities that fully fund K-12 education and acknowledge the true cost of K-12 education in education funding. The City supports efforts to ensure that our schools are safe and in good condition, free of environmental health and other hazards. The City supports legislation and budget priorities that invest in Pre-K programs, reduce the local match for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), and encourage flexibility and creativity in the delivery of VPI programs in our community. The City supports common sense gun safety legislation, including child access prevention laws to limit child access to guns and reduce suicides and unintentional gun deaths and injuries to children, as well as legislation prohibiting firearms of any kind of school property in the Commonwealth. The City supports legislation to protect vulnerable youth in our community, including legislation to ban conversion therapy practices that endanger LGBTQ youth.

As we work to ***create an environmentally sustainable city***, Commonwealth, nation and world, the City supports legislation that assists in our efforts to expand our tree canopy and attain clean air and clean waterways. The City supports legislation that will allow us to increase recycling rates in our community and reduce the use of plastic bags, single use plastics and Styrofoam. The City supports efforts at the General Assembly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Commonwealth 50% by 2030, including efforts to decarbonize the statewide electricity supply, give communities choice over their electricity supply, and other policy strategies included in the City's Environmental Action Plan 2040.

As we work to ***sustain and enhance the health of our residents***, the City supports legislation that promotes mental and physical well-being for every resident in our community. The City supports legislation and funding that reduces inequities in our health system, increases access to healthcare for all residents, and provides a system of support for residents with behavioral health needs. The City supports efforts in the General Assembly to identify and maintain adequate resources to respond to the emergent needs of residents experiencing a mental health emergency, including increasing the number of psychiatric beds available in the Commonwealth. The City supports legislation to tax products with a significant public health impact, including e-cigarettes and vapor products, and increase the tax on tobacco products.

As we work to ***support a wide variety of safe, connected, multimodal transportation options in our city*** that enable access to daily activities in our community and our region, the city supports legislation and budget priorities that ensure Alexandria has safe, reliable and frequent mobility choices regardless of resources or ability. As we work to create a community where various forms of transportation use, and share, our roads safely and efficiently, the City supports legislation that protects vulnerable road users, including bicyclists and pedestrians. The City supports efforts in the General Assembly that help us achieve our Vision Zero goal to eliminate all traffic deaths and serious injuries in our community by 2028.

## **City of Alexandria**

### ***2020 General Assembly Legislative Priorities***

The City of Alexandria considers the following proposals to be key initiatives for the City during the 2020 General Assembly legislative session:

#### **Increased State Investment in Infrastructure**

As both an older and a growing community, the City of Alexandria views “infrastructure” through a wider lens than the traditional definition. Roads, sewers and schools are all, clearly, core infrastructure that needs continued and increased investment from the Commonwealth. In addition, the City believes that transit and affordable housing are long-term assets that help our community, and our residents, grow and thrive, and considers them “infrastructure needs.”

The City supports legislation and budget items that support the ongoing and increased investment in infrastructure in our community.

**The City supports, and has requested, state funding to total 20-percent of the estimated cost to complete Alexandria’s legislatively mandated combined sewer overflow project by the 2025 deadline.**

The top priority for the City’s 2020 Legislative Package is the continuation of our efforts to secure state funding for Alexandria’s legislatively mandated combined sewer overflow (CSO) project.

The City of Alexandria is the subject of a specific legislative mandate for its CSO system. In 2017, the General Assembly passed legislation mandating that Alexandria eliminate certain CSO outfalls by 2025, at an estimated cost of more than \$400 million. Alexandria Renew Enterprises (AlexRenew) - the public service authority that collects and treats wastewater for Alexandria and part of Fairfax County - is the lead local agency to design, finance, and construct the City's CSO improvements to meet the General Assembly's mandate. The City and AlexRenew are partners in this endeavor and are working together to secure state investment in this project.

The legislatively mandated 2025 deadline creates an extremely aggressive timeline for such a significant infrastructure project. This aggressive timeline creates financial impacts for the project not borne by other similar CSO projects. To date, the state has provided \$25 million in Virginia Public Building Authority Bonds for the CSO project. To date, the state has made significant investments in similarly mandated CSO remediation projects in Richmond (\$68 million) and Lynchburg (\$51 million). The vast majority of Alexandria’s CSO project will be funded through increases in sewer-related fees to Alexandria residents over the next decade. However, the cost of this project should not be borne solely by Alexandria ratepayers and state investment in this project is both appropriate and necessary.

The state has long had a financial partnership with localities when it comes to capital infrastructure designed to improve water quality. This necessary financial partnership has existed due to the laws and regulations mandating water quality improvements and local governments' limited resources to undertake these massive projects alone.

The City supports additional state funding totaling 20 percent of the total projected cost of Alexandria's CSO project, in the form of a budget request for the FY 2021-2022 biennial budget for \$65 million in Virginia Public Building Authority Bonds.

**The City supports efforts to protect existing multimodal transportation funding and identify revenue options that will fully restore funding to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA).**

Dedicated funding for Metro and Virginia Railway Express (VRE) was a priority for Alexandria in 2018 and we were pleased that Virginia, Maryland, and the District came together to reach a historic funding agreement during the 2018 General Assembly session.

The City supports all efforts to preserve dedicated funding for vital transit in the Commonwealth.

Unfortunately, for Virginia – and Northern Virginia in particular – the funding agreement resulted in diverting significant funding away from multimodal transportation initiatives, some already programmed for local and regional projects. While some funding was restored as part of the I-81 package during the 2019 General Assembly session, NVTA's funding is still far short of the needs of the region, with localities forced to make up the difference and Alexandria's portion exceeding \$4.3 million this fiscal year alone.

Restoration of NVTA funding is critical to ensuring that the City, and our region, can address critical transportation challenges needed to support economic expansion and growth. Due to the redirection of existing revenue streams away from NVTA, several local and regional projects designed to move more people around Alexandria and throughout Northern Virginia and the broader DC region have been delayed, including Alexandria's West End Transitway, a project that scored well as a result of reduced congestion and economic development but was under-funded in NVTA's Six Year Plan.

The City of Alexandria supports efforts to identify and utilize a broad package of statewide funding sources to restore funding to NVTA.

**The City supports statewide programs and funding, as well as additional local tools and authority, to address the need for affordable housing in our community and the burden of housing costs on our most vulnerable residents.**

The City of Alexandria knows that affordable housing is a vital part of a strong economy and a thriving community, region and Commonwealth. We also know that there is no one solution to the need for affordable, workforce housing in our community and in communities across the

Commonwealth – what works for a dense, urban community like Alexandria may not work for other localities in Virginia.

The City supports a multi-faceted approach to increasing affordable housing in Virginia. In order to identify where gaps might exist, the City encourages the State to undertake a comprehensive review of State-level tools intended to encourage and support the provision of affordable housing in the Commonwealth. The City supports statewide options – including a permanent source of funding for the Virginia Housing Trust Fund and a public housing grant program for localities and housing authorities – as well as additional local authority to address the need for affordable housing in our community and in communities across the Commonwealth.

The City also understands that, once in housing, tenants are often rent-burdened – spending more than 30% of their income for housing – and may, in addition, face fee changes during their lease term that can, effectively, increase their housing costs at any time. The City supports the establishment of a State funded rental assistance program in Virginia to assist rent-burdened and severely rent-burdened households with the cost of decent housing. In addition, the City supports legislation that would limit the ability of a landlord to increase rents through fees and other charges during a lease term.

Specific to the City of Alexandria, we support legislation to amend current code to include Alexandria among the localities where a state income tax credit is available to landlords with qualified housing units participating in the Housing Choice Voucher program. Currently, only 18.5% of multifamily properties in Alexandria accept vouchers. The expansion of this tax credit to landlords in Alexandria would encourage participation in the program and potentially expand the affordable housing stock in Alexandria.

**The City supports the full funding of existing school construction funding options, including the Virginia Public School Construction Grant Program, as well as new, innovative funding and financing opportunities for new school construction as well as the renovation of older school facilities.**

Local governments are responsible for the majority of school capital costs. The state funding formula for education operating costs does not assist in most costs associated with new school construction or the costs to renovate crumbling school infrastructure throughout the Commonwealth.

The City supports legislation and appropriations to create innovative funding and/or financing opportunities for new school construction and renovation of older school facilities including, but not limited to, funding for the Virginia Public School Construction Grant Program, flexibility in bonding capacity, additional local revenue authority, and public-private partnership authority for localities.

## **Preservation and Expansion of Local Authority and Funding for Localities**

As a Dillon Rule state, local governments in Virginia are significantly restricted in their authority, as localities in Virginia may only engage in an activity if it is explicitly sanctioned by the General Assembly. In addition to this limited authority, an overemphasis on statewide uniformity often hampers the ability of localities like Alexandria from responding in a timely fashion to emerging problems or problems that are unique to our community.

Existing local government authority must be preserved. In addition, local authority should be expanded to provide localities more flexibility in the administration of local government and the provision of core government services, as appropriate community solutions differ significantly from one community to the next.

The City supports legislation and budget items that preserve existing local authority and funding for localities as well as the expansion of local authority and local revenue options.

### **The City supports efforts to modernize the local tax structure.**

With ongoing discussion of the need for comprehensive tax reform in Virginia, the City is supportive of the reassessment, or elimination, of the limitations currently placed on cities, counties and towns by the General Assembly with regard to revenue authority. Local government revenues need to be diversified, as we are currently overly reliant on property taxes and have little to no authority to raise revenue from other sources.

Short of comprehensive tax reform, the City is supportive of opportunities for additional local revenue authority to increase funding for local needs, including transit, transportation, school construction and renovation, and other significant capital needs.

### **The City supports legislation to modernize and reform the Communications Sales and Use Tax and protect the local portion of the revenue.**

The Communications Sales and Use Tax (CSUT) was established in 2006 and took effect in 2007 and was implemented to replace a series of local taxes and fees on telecommunications services with one, consolidated tax levied by the state. A portion of the tax is distributed back to localities, with Alexandria receiving \$9.2 million in FY 2019 from the CSUT.

Despite significant shifts in the telecommunications landscape and flourishing new communications services, the services subject to the CSUT have not changed since the implementation of the tax in 2006. While cable television services such as pay-per-view and video on demand are subject to the CSUT, audio and video content streamed over the internet is not. The Department of Taxation estimated in a 2015 study that if the CSUT had been imposed on streaming services in 2014, it would have generated an additional \$10 to \$20 million for distribution to localities. In addition, pre paid calling services are not subject to the CSUT, while post-paid monthly calling services are.

The City supports legislation to broaden the coverage of the Communications Sales and Use Tax (CSUT) to include audio and video streaming services and pre-paid calling services. In addition, the City supports setting the tax rate for the CSUT at the same level as the state sales tax rate. Finally, the City opposes any efforts to transfer revenue from the CSUT to the state general fund for purposes other than those explicitly stipulated in the Code.

**The City supports legislation to afford localities the authority to regulate firearms in government buildings and on government property.**

In our ongoing efforts to ensure that our community is safe and resilient, we continually confront the limited ability of localities, and duly elected local governing bodies, to enact gun safety measures in our city that our residents support – including in our own government buildings, libraries, recreation centers, parks, and public spaces.

We recognize that our inability to enact common sense gun safety measures in our community has a significant impact on our core responsibility to create a safe and resilient city for every resident, worker and visitor in the City of Alexandria.

The Alexandria City Council has expressed unwavering support for a number of common sense gun safety proposals, including “red flag” laws and stronger background checks. In the context of local authority, the City supports legislation that would grant localities the authority to adopt or enforce ordinances, resolutions, or administrative policies to prohibit or restrict the possession, transportation, or carrying of firearms in public buildings or on property owned or used by a locality.

**The City supports a study of the impact of the current 40-year constitutional limit on leases of city owned properties.**

Currently, cities and towns in Virginia are limited by Article VII of the Constitution of Virginia to a 40-year lease term on property owned by a city for any non-public use. Counties in Virginia are limited in Code to a 75-year lease term.

This has resulted in significant economic development impacts for cities because, although interest may exist to redevelop a city-owned parcel, the 40-year lease term is often too short for private sector development processes and economics. For example, many banks will not provide a mortgage on a 40-year land lease with acceptable terms for a developer. This often forces a city to sell land it would otherwise want to keep in its portfolio in order to access redevelopment opportunities that are right for the community.

Because this would require a constitutional change, deliberate study of this issue is appropriate and necessary.

The City supports a review of the economic development and local government budget implications of the 40-year lease limit on property owned by cities and towns included in Article VII of the Constitution of Virginia.

**The City supports increased State funding for positions in our community authorized by the State and funded through a combination of State and local funds.**

From the Health Department to the Court Services Unit to the Commonwealth's Attorney to the Sheriff's Department, dozens of employees work in the City of Alexandria government in positions funded through a combination of State and local funds. Due to the high cost of living in our area and competitive job market, the City is often required to supplement these positions to a significant degree in order to ensure that salaries are competitive and high-quality employees can be recruited and retained.

The City supports increased funding or reimbursement for all positions currently authorized by the State and funded through a combination of State and local funds.

**The City supports additional State funding for K-12 education costs, including the Cost of Competing, At-Risk Add On funding, and other outlays, to better reflect the true cost of education and the cost borne by localities.**

The City of Alexandria is committed to the investment necessary to create appropriate, accessible 21st century learning environments for all children in our public schools. However, we believe that the Commonwealth needs to recognize and fund the true cost of public education in our communities in a way that is not only adequate, but equitable.

The Standards of Quality do not recognize the true cost of education borne by localities, including pupil transportation, school support staff, providing and updating technology, and instructional staff and support salaries. Therefore, local governments match more than is required for basic state education dollars and struggle to identify scarce local tax revenue to keep up with the demands of meeting additional expanding, often unfunded, mandates.

The City supports additional state funding for K-12 education, including:

- Realistic and fully-funded Standards of Quality;
- Recognition of cost of living variations in state funding formulas, to more accurately determine a locality's true ability to pay, particularly for high cost of living areas;
- Restoration of full funding for the Cost of Competing Adjustment (COCA) for support positions. Full funding of COCA would ensure that our schools' salaries remain competitive and help us secure vital support positions such as nurses, School Resource Officers (SROs), school counselors and psychologists, technology support, and other positions critical to strong public schools; and,
- Appropriate recognition in state funding formulas of the increased costs required to serve children with higher level, more specialized needs, including special education students,

English language learners, and students living in economically disadvantaged households, to include At Risk Add-On Funding.

## **Access, Equity and Equality**

The City is committed to ensuring that Alexandria is an “inclusive city of kindness;” but the full realization of this goal can only be truly achieved in partnership with the Commonwealth. The City is keenly focused on ensuring that all members of our community have access to justice and democracy, are afforded equal protection under the law, are paid a fair, equitable wage, and the work is being done to acknowledge and address the core issues of inequity and inequality in our community and our state.

### **The City supports legislation to allow localities to increase the current assessment on court costs in order to expand access to local law libraries.**

The Alexandria Law Library – and law libraries across the Commonwealth – offers access to a variety of legal resources to its users, which include mainly pro-se litigants representing themselves in court actions, students, solo practitioners, and attorneys from small, local law firms. These resources include legal forms, consumer law information, and legal databases (such as Westlaw and Lexis Nexis). In addition, the law library provides access to no-cost notary services.

Unfortunately, funding for law libraries has dropped precipitously, threatening access to this valuable community resource. The City supports a “local option” for localities with publicly supported law libraries to increase the current court cost assessment on civil cases and utilize these funds to ensure access to this invaluable legal resource for all members of our community.

Law libraries in Virginia are currently the beneficiaries of a \$4 fee on civil litigation filed in the Commonwealth. This fee has been set at \$4 for more than 30-years and has not been raised since at least 1988. However, due to the high cost of civil litigation and the growing availability of alternative dispute resolution options, such as mediation, there has been a marked decrease in the number of civil suits filed. This has led to a significant decrease in funding for law libraries across the state. The City notes that each \$1 increase in the fee would result in \$12,000 to \$15,000 in additional annual revenue for Alexandria’s law library.

The Alexandria law library has implemented a number of significant austerity measures in order to work within the limited budget afforded to them, including focusing on high-quality staff, online resources and maintaining the hours the library is open, while decreasing materials purchases in each of the past several years.

The City supports legislation to allow localities that operate law libraries to increase the existing assessment on civil cases from \$4 to no more than \$7 in order to ensure access to this invaluable legal resource for all members of our community.

**The City supports legislation to incrementally raise the minimum wage in the Commonwealth to \$15 per hour.**

Under Virginia law, cities and counties are unable to raise the minimum wage at the local level, despite the rising costs of living throughout the Commonwealth. Currently, 29 states and the District of Columbia have minimum wages that are higher than the federal one, according to the U.S. Department of Labor – including our neighboring states of West Virginia (\$8.75 per hour), Maryland (\$10.10 per hour), and Washington, D.C. (\$13.25 per hour).

To maintain the City’s livability, improve equity in our State, assist in attracting workers in a competitive labor market, and encourage further economic growth, the City supports legislation that would raise the minimum wage in Virginia, incrementally, to \$15 per hour.

**The City support efforts to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in Virginia and supports legislation to address the core issues of gender inequality in our Commonwealth.**

The City of Alexandria believes that in order to fully provide women in our Commonwealth – and across our nation – the protections that the government affords them, the United State Constitution needs to be amended to make clear that we believe that people ought not to be discriminated against on the basis of their gender. Virginia has the opportunity to be the 38th state to ratify the ERA and advance this effort to constitutionally protect women’s rights to education, welfare and a fair workplace. Alexandria supports this effort to ratify the ERA.

Moreover, while women have made undeniable advances since the ERA was first proposed, gender disparities remain, especially in low-income or rural areas and in communities of color. In addition to supporting the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, the City supports legislation to address the core issues of gender inequality, including equal pay, affordable childcare, paid family leave, access to appropriate healthcare, and protection from violence.

**The City supports legislation to ensure access to voting for all Virginia citizens.**

The City believes that voting is a fundamental right in our democracy and must be protected. Since the courts have weakened the Voting Rights Act, states must work to ensure access to the voting booth and make it easier for Virginia citizens to exercise their right to vote.

The City supports legislation to ensure and expand access to voting for all citizens in our community, including permitting voters to use a photo ID that was a valid form of voter ID but has expired, expanding weekend early and absentee voting hours, and establishing a streamlined process in Code for the restoration of voting rights for felons who have made restitution, rather than relying on the good will of each governor to implement such a process by executive order.

**The City supports passage of the 2019 constitutional amendments to reform the redistricting process in Virginia, so that the process is bipartisan and “gerrymandering” does not occur.**

In the 2019 session, both houses of the General Assembly overwhelmingly passed joint resolutions (SJ306/HJ615) that would amend the Virginia Constitution to establish the bipartisan Virginia Redistricting Commission to draw district maps for both state and federal elections in the Commonwealth. The Commission would operate in a balanced and public fashion to draw districts more fairly than could occur under the current system. The City believes that this commission will eliminate the partisan “gerrymandering” of districts that disenfranchises minority voters.

The City supports the passage of these amendments in the General Assembly during its 2020 session, so the amendment can go before the voters in a referendum on Election Day in 2020 for final approval. This timing is critical in order to have the new redistricting commission in place ahead of the decennial census, when redistricting must occur.