

# *Draft City of Alexandria 2023 General Assembly Legislative Package – Principles and Priorities by Council Priority*

## **City of Alexandria 2023 General Assembly Legislative Package**

In March 2022, Alexandria City Council adopted six priorities that provide a cohesive framework for the City’s budget and policy decisions for the upcoming fiscal year:

- Recover from the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Provide Diverse Housing Opportunities
- Support Youth and Families
- Foster Economic Development
- Develop a Compensation Philosophy
- Define our Community Engagement Approach

These priorities do not take away from the City’s ongoing commitment to continuing core services and accountability for the delivery of those core services; rather, they bring focus to Council, and the community’s, greatest concerns and highest needs.

The City’s 2023 Legislative Package is structured around these six City Council priorities in order to create a clear nexus between Council’s priorities and the legislative and funding measures necessary to accomplish them. 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 provide core government services efficiently and effectively and accomplish those priorities identified by City Council.

In addition, Council, and staff, are working to view each budget and policy proposal intended to accomplish these six Council Priorities through the lenses of equity, environmental justice, civility and respect, transparency and service. These lenses also guide the Legislative Principles included in the 2023 Legislative Package.

## **City of Alexandria 2023 Statement of Legislative Principles**

As we work to **identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers to our City’s systems and services**, the City supports legislation and funding that helps City staff protect the most vulnerable members of our community, including children, older adults, survivors of domestic and sexual violence, individuals in behavioral health crisis, and those of differing abilities. The City supports legislation that reforms our criminal justice system so it operates fairly and equitably for all members of our community. The City supports legislation and budget priorities that ensure Alexandria has safe, reliable and frequent mobility choices regardless of resources or ability and provide 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 efforts to reduce inequities in our health system, increase access to necessary, appropriate healthcare for all residents, and achieve health equity related to tobacco use. The City supports legislation and funding to ensure access to voting for all Virginia citizens. The City supports legislation to expand local authority to utilize automated traffic enforcement solutions. The City supports legislation to protect vulnerable road users, including bicyclists and pedestrians, and help us achieve our Vision Zero goals.

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As we work to **provide equitable access to a healthy environment and take proactive measures to mitigate and adapt to future climate change**, the City supports legislation and the funding necessary to plan for and mitigate urban and inland flooding that is often the result of climate-triggered historic rain events. The City supports legislation that assists in our efforts to expand our tree canopy, attain clean air and clean waterways, and increase recycling in the Commonwealth, including container deposit laws to reduce beverage container litter. 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. The City supports legislation to increase energy efficiency in existing buildings and to mitigate greenhouse gas emission impacts of the transportation sector. The City supports legislation to provide localities with the authority to regulate the use of commercial gas-powered leaf blowers.

As we work to **recover from the COVID-19 pandemic**, the City supports legislation and funding that ensures all residents, students, workers and businesses in our community, and across the Commonwealth, continue to experience a healthy, resilient, and equitable recovery from the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19. The City supports legislation that promotes the mental and physical well-being of every resident in our community and provides a system of support for residents with behavioral health needs. The City supports efforts to separate access to behavioral health services, care, and support from the criminal justice system. 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.

As we work to **provide diverse housing opportunities in our community**, the City supports the protection of local authority to plan, zone, and enforce land use regulations, without restricting local zoning authority or the zoning process. 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, maintain and expand our stock of affordable housing, and protect the historic character of our City. The City supports legislation to enhance building safety in the Commonwealth, particularly in high-rise buildings.

As we work to **support youth and families in our community**, the City supports legislation and funding 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 efforts to increase access to and affordability of high-quality early childhood education and childcare. The City supports efforts to encourage and incentivize family-friendly workplace policies in businesses throughout the Commonwealth, including the need for paid family leave for all workers. The City supports efforts to provide comprehensive crisis mental health care specifically for youth/adolescents. The City supports common sense gun

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safety legislation, especially efforts that focus on youth access to firearms. The City supports efforts to ensure that marijuana legalization efforts include protections for children and youth.

As we work to **foster economic development in our community**, the City supports legislation and funding that aids our efforts to utilize budgetary, land use, regulatory and other economic development tools to foster sustainable and equitable development, diversify revenue, and allow greater investment in our infrastructure. The City supports legislation to enact a state prevailing wage and protect workers from wage theft. The City supports legislation that assists in the deployment of universal, affordable access to broadband technology, in both unserved and underserved areas, and efforts to ensure a fair and open Internet. 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.

As we work to **develop and implement a compensation philosophy**, the City supports legislation and funding that better reflects the true cost of compensation for employees supported – either statutorily or practically – through a combination of State and local funds, including employees in our Health Department, Court Services Unit, Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office, Sheriff’s Department and public schools.

As we work to **define our community engagement approach**, 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. The City supports efforts to make membership on public bodies more accessible to residents.

As we work to **provide core government services efficiently and effectively and accomplish those priorities identified by City Council**, 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 and funding that encourages civility, respect and a healthy exchange of ideas and perspectives, supports transparency and efforts to operate in a way that is easy for others to see and understand, and puts public service and the public interest first.

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**City of Alexandria 2023 General Assembly Legislative Priorities**

The City of Alexandria considers the following proposals to be key initiatives for the City during the 2023 General Assembly legislative session:

**Recover from the COVID-19 Pandemic**

While COVID-19 recovery is very clearly about ensuring the public health needs of all Alexandrians are met and future public health emergencies are mitigated, we believe that COVID-19 recovery is about more than public health. COVID-19 recovery is about ensuring businesses throughout the City will recover from the impacts of the pandemic and thrive, ensuring every Alexandrian's basic needs are met, and supporting a recovery that lifts all Alexandrians.

The City of Alexandria supports legislation and budget items necessary to ensure all residents, students, workers and businesses in our community, and across the Commonwealth, continue to experience a healthy, resilient, and equitable recovery from the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19, including:

- Legislation to provide the City of Alexandria with the **authority to establish a locally administered health department**, under contract with the Virginia Department of Health, and ensure the City's investment in its public health system is focused on and responsive to the needs of all Alexandrians;
- **Protect and increase investment in workforce development initiatives** to help workers acquire the skills needed to fill critical jobs in our community, particularly those in childcare and healthcare, including funding for the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, Virginia Jobs Investment Program, and the G3 community college grant program.
- **Invest in programs to mitigate and recover from COVID-19 related learning loss among Virginia students**, especially among students with higher level, more specialized needs, including special education students, English language learners, and students living in economically disadvantaged households.

**Provide Diverse Housing Opportunities**

The City supports statewide programs and funding, as well as additional local tools and authority, to address the need for additional affordable housing in our community, to preserve currently affordable housing stock, and to protect those vulnerable residents who may be precariously housed or living in affordable housing in our community.

The City of Alexandria supports legislation and budget items that facilitate a housing economy in Alexandria, and across Virginia, that helps provide the necessary range of price points, safe and

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sustainable housing options, and the associated services to meet the needs of a thriving city, and a thriving Commonwealth, including:

- An **increase in funding for the Virginia Housing Trust Fund (VHTF)**, one of the Commonwealth's most important tools to assist local and regional efforts in crafting housing affordability solutions. Increased funding to the VHTF will allow localities to more fully address critically important housing assistance programs, affordable housing projects and homelessness prevention efforts;
- Legislation and budget items that prevent evictions protect individuals and families who are precariously housed and facing housing challenges, including legislation to **reinstate the 14-day pay or quit notice**, provide localities with **authority to enforce the provisions of the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act related to health and safety of tenants**, and efforts to **simplify the Unlawful Detainer Form and make it more accessible** to all Virginians.
- *Hold for more details on the Governor's "Make Virginia Home" plan/legislation – increasing the supply of land for housing, removing regulatory barriers to housing development, aligning housing development with economic growth.*

### **Support Youth and Families**

The City of Alexandria supports legislation and budget items that assist in our efforts to expand academic, social and emotional services and physical supports to all youth in Alexandria, and across the Commonwealth, as well as their families, including:

- Efforts to **increase funding for the state's childcare subsidy program and enact changes to increase participation of child-care providers in the program**. These changes include, but are not limited to, reducing the administrative burden, and increasing reimbursement rates to account for administrative costs and the actual cost of tuition in a locality. Local flexibility to administer or expand support services for childcare is critical;
- Studies and legislative efforts to **ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system**, including impacting reunification rates, speeding up permanency, reducing disproportionality, reducing entries, and providing parents access to adequate, effective legal representation and support during child welfare proceedings.

### **Foster Economic Development**

The City of Alexandria supports legislation and budget items that aid in our work to utilize budgetary, land use, regulatory and other economic development tools to foster sustainable and equitable development, diversify revenue and allow greater investment in our infrastructure, including:

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- Legislation and budget items that **preserve existing local authority and funding for localities, expand local authority and local revenue options, and create opportunities for additional local revenue authority to increase funding for critical local needs**, including transit, transportation, school construction and renovation, and other significant capital needs;
- Efforts to **ensure the Commonwealth’s planning, policy development, and funding structures related to flood protection and resilience be inclusive of inland flooding**, including the expansion of the Virginia Coastal Resilience Technical Advisory Committee and the membership of the Joint Subcommittee on Recurrent Flooding;
- Efforts to **protect existing multimodal transportation funding and fully restore funding to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTa)** in an amount equal to what was diverted, to ensure that transportation projects continue to advance in Northern Virginia after decades of state underfunding;
- **Protecting the provisions of the Virginia Clean Economy Act**, with a focus on legislative strategies that provide a sustainable and reliable power grid while achieving lower emission levels associated with renewable energy sources in the Commonwealth;
- **Additional, innovative school construction funding options for new school construction and the renovation of older school facilities**, including, but not limited to, flexibility in bonding capacity, additional local revenue authority, and public-private partnership authority for localities.

**Develop a Compensation Philosophy**

The Alexandria City Council has identified the need for the City to develop and implement a compensation philosophy that assists the City in recruiting and retaining high quality public servants.

The City of Alexandria supports legislation and budget items that help ensure that local government employers are able to attract and retain qualified employees, especially in critical service areas including public safety and behavioral/mental health, and that the City is able to offer compensation and benefits that position us as a competitive employer, including:

- Legislation to make it easier for law enforcement agencies, including the Alexandria Police Department and Alexandria Sheriff’s Department, to **recruit and hire non-citizens who have been in the country for five years and are on the path to citizenship**;
- **Regionally scaled, adequate funding for positions in our community authorized by the State and funded through a combination of State and local funds**, including

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

- **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 counselors and psychologists, technology support, and other positions critical to strong public schools.

### **Define Our Community Engagement Approach**

The Alexandria City Council has identified the need for the City to use both new and traditional outreach methods to ensure that community engagement is efficient, effective and accessible to all stakeholders, creating a clear connection between community input and its effects on policy decisions, infrastructure needs and financial considerations.

The City of Alexandria supports legislation and budget items that will assist the City in connecting and engaging with members of the Alexandria community, and support efforts to ensure all members of our community are able to engage with their government and see themselves represented in their government, including:

- Legislation to **increase opportunities for electronic participation by members of public advisory bodies** and members of the public accessing meetings of public bodies;
- Legislation to **replace the words “handicap” and “handicapped” in Virginia Code** with people-first language which better reflects the individuality, equality, and dignity of people living with disabilities;
- Legislation to **remove the requirement that members of the Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission secure a \$10,000 surety bond** in order to serve on the Commission;
- A Constitutional amendment to **automatically restore the voting rights** of people convicted of felonies when they return to society.