City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JIM PARAJON, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: COUNCIL UPDATE: TOWING ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATION ON TOWING RATES

The purpose of this memo is to inform the Mayor and Members of City Council that staff recommends rejecting the Towing Advisory Board's recommendation to increase the private towing fee from the current maximum of $135 to a maximum of $150.

BACKGROUND: Virginia Code § 46.2-1233.1 was amended in 2020 to increase the maximum fee that can be charged by private companies for towing passenger cars to $150.00, however, the City Code remained at a maximum towing fee of $135. The Towing Advisory Board met in June 2021 and voted to increase the maximum fee that can be charged by private companies to $150, however, this never went to Council and was not adopted in the Alexandria City Code.

DISCUSSION: The fees under consideration are the fees charged by private companies for trespass tows. These are tows, without the vehicle owner's consent, of vehicles from private properties, such as, apartment buildings. The Towing Advisory Board recommended increasing the tow fee to allow the industry to recoup the cost for providing the service and to be in line with neighboring Fairfax County. Section 82-5-32. (g)(2)(A)(iii) of the Fairfax County code allows towing companies to charge $150 per tow. Section 14.3-9. B. 1. of the Arlington County code allows towing companies to charge $135 per tow. The reason alignment with the Fairfax code was considered important is because many vehicles towed from Alexandria are taken to storage lots in Fairfax County which has a higher rate. Multiple rates at a tow yard can sometimes lead to confusion and overcharging of citizens when they retrieve their car. The Towing Advisory Board's justification that the rate should be increased because State Code allows it and Fairfax allows it, does not justify raising the rates in Alexandria. Nowhere has the towing industry provided documentation addressing the increased cost of doing business and what their profit margins are. Furthermore, staff does not believe it appropriate to increase these fees which are typically borne by lower income families just to help towing companies increase their profits. However, staff would be willing to docket this issue for an ordinance change if Council believes appropriate to do so.

STAFF:
Yon Lambert, Deputy City Manager
Philip Pugh, Deputy Director, Public Works, Transportation and Environmental Services
Bob Garbacz, Division Chief, Traffic Operations, Transportation and Environmental Services