

Jackie Henderson

From: Karl Moritz
Sent: Thursday, December 15, 2016 5:04 PM
To: City Council
Cc: Mark Jinks; Emily Baker
Subject: City of Alexandria comments on Weldon Cooper Center population estimates and projections
Attachments: Alexandria P&Z comments to Weldon Cooper 12-15-2016.pdf

Mayor Silberberg, Vice Mayor Wilson, and Members of the City Council:

At Tuesday's Legislative Meeting, the City Council discussed population projections by the Weldon Cooper Center under contract to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Councilwoman Pepper reviewed a presentation by NVRC demographer Ken Billingsley regarding concerns with the projections and the methodology behind them. City Manager Mark Jinks noted that Planning and Zoning has been analyzing these projections in partnership with Mr. Billingsley and demographers from Northern Virginia jurisdictions.

Today I submitted comments to the Weldon Cooper Center on the subject of the population projections and I have attached a copy of that letter for your information. Both NVRC and Arlington have submitted letters as well, which I am happy to share with you if you would like.

As to the projections themselves, **they are consistently higher than our projections by about 11,000 people. The problem appears to be Weldon Cooper's estimate of our 2015 population, which they estimate to be 159,571 and we estimate to be 147,646.** Weldon Cooper reported that they used a consistent statewide methodology for estimating 2015 population. As always, Northern Virginia's demographics do not behave the same way as the state average so it is not surprising that a statewide methodology would be "off" in estimating Alexandria's population. If Weldon Cooper's 2015 population estimate were accurate, it would mean that Alexandria had a rapid and unexplainable population growth spurt between 2010 and 2015 of almost 20,000 persons. We have estimated that the City's population grew by 7,680 between 2010 and 2015 and the Census Bureau estimates that the City's population grew by 13,545. City staff has previously documented that the Census Bureau over-estimates population growth for the City.

Estimates of Alexandria Population Growth 2010-2015

Source	2010	2015	Change	Percent
Weldon Cooper	139,966	159,571	19,605	14.0%
Census Bureau	139,966	153,511	13,545	9.7%
City of Alexandria	139,966	147,646	7,680	5.5%

Beyond 2015, while the actual growth rate that the Weldon Cooper Center has applied to Alexandria is not wildly different from ours, we are concerned about the methodology. They have estimated our future annual average growth rate (2015-2040) to be between 1.3%, while our estimate is 1.07%. We believe their methodology may give too much weight to 2010-2015 growth to predict the future, because among other things, means their methodology is highly dependent on having a very accurate population estimate for 2015, which we do not believe they have.

Estimates of Alexandria Population Growth 2015-2040

Source	2015	2040	Change	Annual Growth Rate
Weldon Cooper	159,571	221,049	61,478	1.3%

City of Alexandria	147,646	180,463	32,817	1.0%
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Please let me know if you have any questions.

Karl W. Moritz

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December 15, 2016

Meredith Gunter
Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service
P.O. Box 400206
Charlottesville, VA 22904

Dear Ms. Gunter,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed "Virginia Population Projections Methodology," released by the Weldon Cooper Center (WCC) on November 22, 2016. The City of Alexandria is pleased that WCC has included two comment periods and hopes that our comments will be addressed in the release of the provisional total population projections. Furthermore, the City of Alexandria anticipates that the process, method, and public comments will be thoroughly documented and made publicly available with the final release of the population projections.

The Department of Planning & Zoning has reviewed the above mentioned document; our primary concern is that using the WCC's 2015 population estimate as a data input will inflate population projections for the City of Alexandria. The WCC 2015 population estimate is about 12,000 higher than the City's estimates and 6,000 higher than the U.S. Census Bureau's estimates. The Department of Planning and Zoning requests that WCC further evaluate and explain the 2015 population estimates, provide additional documentation on how the number was derived, and explain the evidence supporting what would be a significant acceleration in the City's population growth rate between the last decennial count in 2010 and 2015 estimates. There have been few observable changes in household size or sufficient construction activity to account for a sharp increase in growth over that five year period.

While we understand WCC would prefer a single statewide methodology for estimating and projecting population, experience has not shown that doing so will result in accurate estimates/projections for Northern Virginia, especially inner-ring jurisdictions. The economic and demographic forces shaping Northern Virginia are quite distinct from those for the state as a whole. For example, WCC has used school enrollment rates to derive population estimates in the past, which while useful in certain localities, inaccurately inflates population growth rates for Alexandria. This is because while Alexandria's public school enrollment has grown at a rapid pace over the past ten years, the student-age population of Alexandria still accounts for a relatively low percentage of the total population. City staff encourages WCC to consider reviewing their assumptions for the 2015 population estimates and perhaps revising assumptions based on region or jurisdiction.

Reducing WCC's 2015 population estimate to something more consistent with our own estimate would result in population forecasts for Alexandria that are considerably more justifiable, in our view. However, we do believe the forecasting methodology also deserves additional scrutiny. The current methodology and current WCC population estimate results in an annualized population growth rate for Alexandria of 1.3 percent, and we believe a growth rate closer to 1.0 percent is more reasonable.

For the reasons stated above, the City hopes that WCC will revisit the methodology of its 2015 population estimates by jurisdiction, provide additional documentation and justification, and reconsider its position on a single statewide methodology for population estimates and projections. The City also hopes that thorough documentation of all methodology, comments, and public processes will be recorded and made available to the public. The City of Alexandria looks forward to reviewing the provisional population projections and providing additional comment to WCC at that time.

Sincerely,



Karl Moritz, Director
Department of Planning and Zoning

CC:

Dan Timberlake, Director, Virginia Department of Planning and Budget