

November 6, 2018

Honorable Mayor Allison Silberberg and Members of City Council
City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: EPC Support of Draft WasteSmart Plan

Dear Mayor Silberberg and Members of Council:

The Resource Recovery Division recently issued the Draft WasteSmart Plan (Plan) for the City and has asked the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC or Commission) to support it. The EPC strongly supports the Plan – it is comprehensive, aligns with the EPC’s recommendations in Phase 1 of the Environmental Action Plan (EAP) update that was recently adopted by Council, and is the result of a thorough, transparent process that provided stakeholders ample opportunities to provide input on, and guide the direction of the Plan. The EPC urges Council to adopt the Plan so that the Division can continue its efforts to modernize the resource recovery system in Alexandria and set an example for our region of how municipalities can adapt practices to reflect changes in local, regional, and even global markets for recovered and recycled goods. The Commission believes the merits of the Plan are clear and would like to highlight some specific elements that are particularly noteworthy and important to the Commission, particularly in light of the City’s ongoing efforts to update the EAP.

1. **Holistic Approach.** The Plan reflects the Division’s broader, holistic vision of how the City should address solid waste, and in particular, makes recommendations that consider the effects of operations on the City’s overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As stated early in the Plan: “Reducing GHG has emerged as an important objective in solid waste management and targets were established during the Environmental Action Plan update process.” The Commission urges the City, and Resource Recovery Division in particular, to prioritize reducing GHG emissions as it finalizes and ultimately implements the WasteSmart Plan.
2. **Alignment with the EAP.** The Draft WasteSmart Plan was developed concurrently with the Phase 1 update of the EAP, and the two documents are complementary. Phase 1 goals related to solid waste are incorporated directly into the WasteSmart Plan, and the Plan embraces the broader EAP theme of mitigating climate change via GHG emission reductions. The Commission looks forward to our proactive collaboration with the Division during Phase 2 of the EAP update to develop the related mid- and long-term goals.
3. **Hard Choices.** As we have discussed with Council as part of the EAP update, the market for recycled glass has shrunk dramatically, so much so that it is now no longer financially viable to recycle glass that was collected in single-stream systems. This is a sea change for how many residents think about recycling -- particularly those conscientious recyclers that have grown up with the philosophy that glass can and should always be recycled. The related action items in the Plan show that the Division is coming up with creative strategies to make recycling glass in the City viable again, which the Commission applauds. The City should prioritize these initiatives so that we are honestly confronting and adapting to the economic realities that affect the recyclability of

glass while at the time continuing to support a culture of recycling and reuse in our community.

4. **Legislative Action is Needed.** Whether it's supporting the expansion of regional composting infrastructure or imposing fees or outright bans on plastic bags in the City, the Plan highlights the need for legislative action in Richmond in order to achieve some of the City's solid waste goals. This is an issue highlighted throughout the EAP update and will continue to be a barrier to the City achieving its broader sustainability goals. The City should intensify its work with other jurisdictions to amplify the importance of these issues in Richmond and push for increased local authority.

Finally, while outside the scope of the WasteSmart Plan, the EPC strongly encourages the City to adapt its procurement policies across departments to incorporate the findings and goals of the Plan, including reducing the purchase of single-use plastic containers (e.g. water bottles), to lead by example.

The EPC looks forward to working with the Resource Recovery Division and City Council to finalize this Plan, preparing the related mid- and long-term goals in Phase 2 of the EAP update this year, and ensuring effective implementation of both plans in the future.

Thank you for your continued leadership and steadfast commitment to the City's Eco-City Charter.

Sincerely,



Jim Kapsis
Chair
Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission