

October 1, 2019

The Honorable Justin Wilson, Mayor
The Honorable Elizabeth B. Bennett-Parker, Vice Mayor
The Honorable Canek Aguirre
The Honorable John Taylor Chapman
The Honorable Amy Jackson
The Honorable Del Pepper
The Honorable Mohamed Seifeldein
City of Alexandria
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA. 22314

Dear Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Bennett, and Members of Council:

We are writing to ask that Alexandria government begin cutting its greenhouse gas emissions on an annual basis commensurate with the reductions needed to avoid catastrophic climate change.

This July 9th, City Council voted unanimously to adopt the Environmental Action Plan 2040 (EAP-2040). Coincidentally, on July 8th Alexandria received more than three inches of rain in less than an hour, resulting in extreme flash flooding causing millions of dollars in damages. The weekend of July 20th and 21st annual events in the city were canceled because of extreme heat, something that will happen with growing frequency, as annual average U.S. temperatures are expected to rise roughly 2.5°F by mid-century relative to the recent (1976-2005) average.

Similarly, on May 22nd of last year Council held a work session which included discussion of the Environmental Policy Commission's recommendations for the phase 1 update of the Environmental Action Plan. Just three days before this, a CSX freight train derailed in Alexandria after several inches of rainfall over the previous week washed out rocks supporting the track. Again, millions of dollars in damages occurred.

These incidents show the critical importance of Council adopting a goal of reducing community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030—achieving roughly 5% emissions reductions each year for the next ten years—as part of the EAP 2040. They also show that the future impacts and unexpected costs we will face if we don't rapidly phase out greenhouse gas emissions will be far larger than the investments needed to do so. Swiftly ending our greenhouse gas emissions isn't ambitious, it is instead the only logical, moral choice we have.

Making these changes will not be easy. To quote from the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change special report on the impacts of warming of 1.5°C, "All pathways [to provide at least a one-in-two to two-in-three chance of avoiding catastrophic climate changes] begin now and involve rapid and unprecedented societal transformation." In other words, it will not be

enough simply to have an energy and climate plan to reduce emissions, or to marginally improve our emissions reduction efforts. Rather, we must make sure we meet or exceed the 2030 emissions reduction target if humanity—including current and future Alexandrians—is to have a fighting chance of maintaining a recognizable, habitable environment.

We are hopeful that the Energy and Climate Change Task Force called for by the EAP-2040 will lead the development of an action plan to enable our community's rapid transition away from fossil fuel use. More immediately, however, we believe Alexandria city government must begin this transition for its own operations starting now.


We urge you to instruct the City Manager to develop a budget proposal for 2021 that reduces Alexandria City government's aggregate greenhouse gas emissions from all sources by at least 5% by the end of the 2021 fiscal year, and reduces electricity use by 5%. As Mayor Wilson stated upon the EAP-2040's adoption, "Alexandria must do its part to combat the climate crisis...we intend to lead by example." City government planning to achieve substantial, steady emissions reductions will raise awareness among the city's residents and businesses of energy use changes, help inform private sector initiatives, and demonstrate the city's commitment to live up to its Eco-City aspiration. It will be difficult to convince residents and businesses to reduce emissions on pace to meet the 2030 objective if Alexandria City government is not practicing what it preaches.


The climate change-related impacts referenced above are not the "new normal" for our city, they are instead a glimpse of our future as our continued emissions of greenhouse gases lock in even more extreme weather—heat waves, flash floods, sea level rise, dangerous storms, and public health risks—far longer into the future than recorded human history.


We cannot wait any longer to take aggressive action. We urge you to direct City government to take strong steps to adequately respond to the climate crisis.

Sincerely,



Scott Barstow

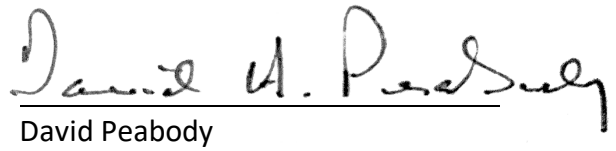
Stephen Koenig

Boyd Walker

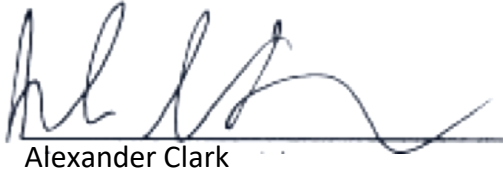
Steve Banashek



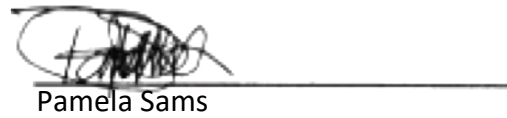
Kathie Hoekstra



David Peabody



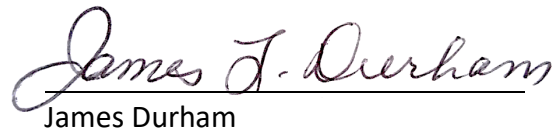
Alexander Clark



Pamela Sams



Paul Kaplowitz



James Durham



Bill Pugh



Melissa McMahon