

City of Alexandria

Proposed 2021 Statement of Legislative Principles

“The City of Alexandria is committed to making our city a historic, inclusive city of kindness with distinct, vibrant and safe neighborhoods, a well-managed, government, flourishing arts, culture and recreation, a strong economy, thriving children and youth, active and secure older adults, environmental sustainability, healthy residents of all ages, and multimodal transportation.”

– City of Alexandria Vision Statement, Adopted Jan. 28, 2017

This vision for our City drives and directs the work of City Council and City staff and is the foundation for the efforts that will make this vision of Alexandria a reality in our community. 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 achieve this vision for our community.

As we work to ***create and maintain distinct and vibrant neighborhoods*** throughout Alexandria, 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, and protect the historic fabric of our City.

As we work to ***be an inclusive city of kindness***, the City supports legislation that safeguards and expands the protection of the most basic human rights of all residents, workers and visitors in our City and our Commonwealth and opposes legislation that attempts to restrict these same basic rights. The City supports legislation to ensure Alexandria is a livable community for all, with affordable housing, a living wage, and workforce protections available to all Alexandrians. 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.

As we work to ***provide a well-managed government*** for our residents, businesses and visitors, 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 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. The City supports legislation that enhances the ability of localities to take full advantage of renewable energy sources and remove barriers to the deployment of these renewable energy sources. The City supports efforts to make membership on public bodies more accessible to residents by expanding allowances for participation in meetings electronically.

As we work to ***create a safe and resilient city*** for every resident, worker and visitor in Alexandria, the City supports legislation that helps our well-trained, highly respected staff protect the most vulnerable members of our community, including children, youth, older adults, survivors of domestic 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 common sense gun safety legislation. The City supports efforts to ensure that prisons

and detention facilities are operated as part of the pursuit of justice rather than the pursuit of profit. The City supports legislation that would strengthen efforts to reduce unsafe cut-through traffic on residential streets.

As we work to ***achieve a community with flourishing arts, culture and recreation opportunities***, the City supports funding for the preservation and interpretation of historic sites and specifically supports funding for the preservation, maintenance, interpretation and operation of historic sites related to the history of slavery and civil rights in our community and throughout the Commonwealth.

As we work to ***create a strong economy in our community*** that benefits every resident, business and worker in our city, the City supports legislation to enact a state prevailing wage and protect workers from wage theft. The City supports efforts to encourage and incentivize family-friendly workplace policies in businesses throughout the Commonwealth. The City supports legislation to modernize Virginia's alcoholic beverage laws to ensure our small, local businesses can be competitive in the region as well as efforts to increase efficiency and minimize the impact of the distribution and delivery of alcoholic beverages on our neighborhoods. The City supports efforts to create new markets for recycling and recyclable materials in the Commonwealth, as an opportunity for both job creation and environmental stewardship. The City supports legislation that assists in the deployment of universal, affordable access to broadband technology and efforts to ensure a fair and open Internet.

As we work to ***ensure children and youth in our community are thriving***, the City supports legislation and budget priorities 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 accessibility and affordability of high-quality early childhood education and childcare. The City supports legislation to protect vulnerable youth in our community, especially those youth who cross-over between our human services and juvenile justice systems.

As we work to ***create an environmentally sustainable city***, Commonwealth, nation and world, the City supports legislation that assists in our efforts to protect and expand our tree canopy and attain clean air and clean waterways. The City supports stormwater legislation and funding to plan for and mitigate urban and inland flooding that is often the result of climate change-triggered historic rain events. 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.

As we work to ***sustain and enhance the health of our residents***, the City supports legislation that promotes mental and physical well-being for every resident in our community. The City supports legislation and funding that reduces inequities in our health system, increases access to healthcare for all residents, and provides a system of support for residents with behavioral health needs. 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 ***support 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 legislation and budget priorities that ensure Alexandria has safe, reliable and frequent mobility choices regardless of resources or ability. The City supports efforts in the General Assembly that help us achieve our Vision Zero goal to eliminate all traffic deaths and serious injuries in our community by 2028. The City supports legislation that protects vulnerable road users, including bicyclists and pedestrians, and specifically supports legislation to reform Virginia's negligence laws to more fairly compensate those injured in accidents, especially vulnerable road users.

City of Alexandria

2021 General Assembly Legislative Priorities

The City of Alexandria considers the following proposals to be key initiatives for the City during the 2021 General Assembly legislative session:

Funding and Authority for Infrastructure Investments in Alexandria

As both an older and a growing community, the City of Alexandria continues to view “infrastructure” through a wider lens than the traditional definition. Roads, sewers and schools are all, clearly, core infrastructure that need continued and increased investment from the Commonwealth. In addition, the City believes that transit and affordable housing are long-term assets that help our community, and our residents, grow and thrive, and considers them “infrastructure needs.”

The City supports legislation and budget items that support the ongoing and increased investment in infrastructure in our community. In addition, the City supports additional authority and flexibility in implementing solutions to address investment in core infrastructure in Alexandria.

The City supports the protection of \$25 million in bonds in the current FY 2020-22 biennial budget, and codifying the General Assembly’s commitment to another \$40 million in bonds in the next biennial budget, to support Alexandria’s legislatively mandated combined sewer overflow project.

The City continues its efforts to secure and protect state funding for Alexandria’s legislatively mandated combined sewer overflow (CSO) project. The City and Alexandria Renew Enterprises (AlexRenew) - the public service authority that collects and treats Alexandria’s wastewater and is the lead agency to design, finance, construct and operate the CSO River Renew project - are partners in this endeavor and continue to work together to secure and protect state investment in this more than \$500 million, generational infrastructure project which will reduce pollution in the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay.

The City is grateful to the General Assembly and the Administration for acknowledging that the Commonwealth has long had a financial partnership with localities when it comes to capital infrastructure designed to improve water quality and for providing bond funding to support this project.

The City supports the protection of the \$25 million in Virginia Public Building Authority Bonds in the current biennial budget and will work to codify the General Assembly’s commitment to another \$40 million in bonds in the next biennial budget, which will be considered in 2022.

The City supports 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.

The City supports all efforts to preserve dedicated funding for vital transit in the Commonwealth. During the 2018 General Assembly Session, actions taken to address funding needs and governance reforms for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) addressed WMATA needs at the expense of other significant projects throughout Northern Virginia by diverting existing funding from NVTa to WMATA, reducing funding available for other critical transportation projects in Northern Virginia by \$102 million per year. NVTa's funding is still far short of the needs of the region, with localities forced to make up the difference and Alexandria's portion exceeding \$4 million this fiscal year alone.

Restoration of NVTa funding is critical to ensuring that the City, and our region, can address transportation needs which are vital to economic expansion and growth. The City of Alexandria supports efforts to identify and utilize a broad package of statewide funding sources to restore funding to NVTa and supports the full restoration of funding to NVTa in an amount equal to what was diverted in 2018.

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 living in affordable housing in our community.

The City of Alexandria knows that affordable housing is a vital part of a strong economy and a thriving community, region and Commonwealth. We also know that there is no one solution to the need for affordable housing in our community and in communities across the Commonwealth – what works for a dense, urban community like Alexandria may not work for other localities in Virginia.

The City supports a multi-faceted approach to increasing affordable housing, preserving existing affordable housing stock, and protecting residents currently living in affordable housing in our community, including:

- Legislation to provide localities with “bonus points” or prioritization on Virginia Housing (VHDA) funding requests to local jurisdictions making zoning policy changes to support affordable housing development;
- Legislation to allow localities with affordable dwelling unit ordinances to require mandatory contributions from developers for affordable housing, rather than those contributions being voluntary and variable;
- Legislation to allow a locality, by ordinance, to require a property owner or developer to reimburse tenants whose lease is terminated due to the work on the property for expenses directly related to the tenant's need to relocate from the property and return to the property, if there is a right to return. This provision would apply to the owner or developer of a multi-family property with more than four units that is undergoing rehabilitation, demolition, redevelopment, or a change in use;
- Legislation to allow any tenants of a property converting from sole ownership to individually sold condominiums to assign the purchase rights to their unit to a government agency, housing authority, or nonprofit housing corporation. The agency, authority, or nonprofit corporation would then be required to offer the tenant a lease of the unit at an affordable rent. This right currently is only afforded in Virginia Code to tenants who are disabled or elderly.

The City supports authority and funding to support localities dealing with the impacts of inland and urban flooding, especially in low-income neighborhoods and impacting vulnerable communities.

Like many urban, inland localities, the City of Alexandria is dealing with the impacts of flooding in our community. Over the last 15 months, three climate change-triggered severe rainfalls have resulted in major flash flooding in certain areas of the City, including neighborhoods with significant low-income and vulnerable populations. These once rare rain events are likely to occur more frequently in future years, causing property and infrastructure damage, as well as threatening the health and safety of City residents and businesses.

While the Commonwealth has invested significantly in programs related to water quality, the issue of water quantity is one that has not had the same amount of focus or investment. There is no one solution to these flooding events and strategies must include consideration of infrastructure investments, development standards, permit requirements, and grant and tax-incentive programs to plan for and address these issues.

The City supports a collaborative approach to addressing inland and urban flooding including:

- Legislation to authorize a Joint Subcommittee on Inland and Urban Flooding. The General Assembly currently has a Joint Subcommittee on Coastal Flooding to formulate recommendations for the development of a comprehensive and coordinated planning effort to address recurrent flooding in coastal areas. The City recommends the authorization of a similar joint subcommittee to consider issues related to inland and urban flooding and recommend actionable short-term and long-term strategies and funding opportunities for minimizing the impact of flooding in inland and urban areas across the Commonwealth.
- Legislation evolving the existing authority granted to localities to establish a local Stormwater Management Fund, consisting of funds appropriated by the City, to include the authority to use the grant funds on private property for flood mitigation and protection measures with a clear public benefit, such as floodproofing and flood protection products, and grading.
- Legislation to amend current law to expand local authority to regulate additions/modifications to single family detached residential structures where land disturbance is less than 2,500 square feet in order to review the land disturbing activity for potential stormwater impacts.

The City supports the full funding of existing school construction funding options, including the Virginia Public School Construction Grant Program, as well as new, innovative funding and financing opportunities for new school construction and the renovation of older school facilities.

Local governments are responsible for the majority of school capital costs. The state funding formula for education operating costs does not assist in most costs associated with new school construction or the costs to renovate crumbling school infrastructure throughout the Commonwealth.

The City supports legislation and appropriations to create innovative funding and/or financing opportunities for new school construction and renovation of older school facilities including, but not limited to, funding for the Virginia Public School Construction Grant Program, flexibility in bonding capacity, additional local revenue authority, and public-private partnership authority for localities.

Preservation and Expansion of Local Authority and Funding for Localities

As a Dillon Rule state, local governments in Virginia are significantly restricted in their authority, as localities may only engage in an activity if it is explicitly sanctioned by the General Assembly. In addition to this limited authority, an overemphasis on statewide uniformity often hampers the ability for localities like Alexandria to respond nimbly to emerging issues or problems unique to our community.

Existing local government authority must be preserved. In addition, local authority should be expanded to provide localities more flexibility in the administration of local government and the provision of core government services, as appropriate solutions differ significantly from one community to the next.

The City supports legislation and budget items that preserve existing local authority and funding for localities as well as the expansion of local authority and local revenue options.

The City supports regionally scaled, adequate funding for positions in our community authorized by the State and funded through a combination of State and local funds.

The recent public health crisis of COVID-19 combined with the General Assembly's ongoing, historic efforts to reform our criminal justice system have shined a bright light on the value of the dozens of critical employees whose positions are funded through a combination of State and local funds. In addition, it has highlighted the chronic underfunding of these critical positions as Commonwealth salaries for positions in these vital areas have long lagged the market.

Due to this chronic underfunding, as well as the high cost of living in our area and competitive job market, the City is often required to supplement these critical positions to a significant degree in order to ensure that salaries are competitive and high-quality employees can be recruited and retained.

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

The City supports additional State funding for K-12 education costs, including the Cost of Competing, At-Risk Add On funding, and other outlays, to better reflect the true cost of education and the cost borne by localities.

The City of Alexandria is committed to the investment necessary to create appropriate, accessible 21st century learning environments for all children in our public schools. However, the Commonwealth must clearly recognize and fund the true cost of public education in a way that is not only adequate, but equitable. The Standards of Quality do not recognize the true cost of education borne by localities, including pupil transportation, school support staff, providing and updating technology, and instructional staff and support salaries. Therefore, local governments match more than is required for basic state education dollars and struggle to identify scarce local tax revenue to keep up with the demands of meeting additional expanding, often unfunded, mandates.

The City supports additional state funding for K-12 education, including:

- Addressing revenue and education funding shortfalls resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, including those due to reduced student population counts (or Average Daily Membership);
- Realistic and fully-funded Standards of Quality;
- Recognition of cost of living variations in state funding formulas, to more accurately determine a locality's true ability to pay, particularly for high cost of living areas;
- 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; and,
- Appropriate recognition in state funding formulas of the increased costs required to serve children with higher level, more specialized needs, including special education students, English language learners, and students living in economically disadvantaged households, to include At Risk Add-On Funding.

The City supports efforts to modernize the local tax structure.

With ongoing discussion of the need for comprehensive tax reform in Virginia, the City is supportive of the reassessment, or elimination, of the limitations currently placed on cities, counties and towns by the General Assembly with regard to revenue authority. Local government revenues need to be diversified, as we are currently overly reliant on property taxes and have little to no authority to raise revenue from other sources. In addition, the impacts of COVID-19 on the limited revenue sources available to localities have forced localities like Alexandria to do more with less with few options to rebalance revenue away from the most highly impacted sectors of the economy.

Short of comprehensive tax reform, the City is supportive of opportunities for additional local revenue authority to increase funding for local needs, including transit, transportation, school construction and renovation, and other significant capital needs.

The City supports legislation to expand local authority to preserve and expand the tree canopy.

Trees are most often recognized for their environmental benefit to the community. They help maintain clean air and water, reduce soil erosion, and can even lower the cost of energy for residential heating and cooling. In addition, trees also have economic and social benefits, including in the areas of tourism, public health, and property value.

The City has set a goal of achieving a 40% tree canopy cover by 2035. In order for us to achieve that goal, the City needs the authority to protect existing tree canopy and regrow trees lost during development, or redevelopment, more quickly.

The City supports legislation expanding local authority to preserve trees during new development and restore trees removed during development at a faster rate.

Protecting our Most Vulnerable Residents

The City is committed to providing services to protect our most vulnerable residents, including children, youth, older adults, survivors of domestic violence, individuals in behavioral health crisis, and those of differing abilities. In order to implement creative, innovative programs to serve these members of our community, the City must look to the Commonwealth for additional support, authority and flexibility.

The City supports legislation to provide permissive authority to local Human Rights Commissions to enhance their ability to enforce local human rights ordinances.

The Alexandria Human Rights Commission is responsible for setting the human rights policy of the City and for hearing complaints that are not resolved at the staff level. It can research, study and hold public hearings on matters that affect the equal rights of the general public. It is one of a number of Human Rights Commissions in Virginia with enforcement authority who work to safeguard Virginians from unlawful discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodation and education.

The City supports legislation that would authorize local Human Rights Commissions that have enforcement authority to investigate and adjudicate complaints of discrimination, including the recommendation of damages, contingent on approval by the local governing body.

The City supports legislation to allow for limited, narrowly-tailored information sharing between and among local agencies serving vulnerable youth who are, or are at risk of being, involved with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

City staff have been working to create innovative partnerships and programs to address the unique needs of particularly vulnerable youth in Alexandria who “crossover” between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Some of the goals of the “Crossover Youth Practice Model” (CYPM) include reducing the number of youth “crossing over” and becoming involved in both systems and reducing the disproportionate representation of youth of color in the “crossover” population.

However, in working to implement the CYPM in Alexandria, staff has identified the inability to share data between and among agencies, due to certain Code restrictions, as a barrier to serving these vulnerable “crossover youth.”

The City supports narrowly-tailored legislation which would allow for limited data and information sharing between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems in order to implement the Crossover Youth Practice Model in our community, and in communities across the Commonwealth, and better serve these vulnerable “crossover youth.”

The City supports legislation to expand the pool of participants who can serve on local teams that manage and assess local programs to support vulnerable children and families that are funded by the Children’s Services Act.

Families involved in multiple systems may request state funding through the Children’s Services Act (CSA); this funding comes with a local match requirement. The Virginia Code dictates who is represented on the local teams that manage (Community Policy and Management Teams) and assess (Family Assessment and Planning Teams) CSA funds. It is a statewide challenge to maintain required family representation on the teams under current law.

The City supports legislation to expand the pool of participants who can serve on these teams to include the possible participation of family peers. Legislation would eliminate language in Code disallowing family representatives to be employed by child-serving agencies, which will open up the field of qualified applicants while maintaining uniform conflict of interest requirements for all team members.

The City supports efforts to streamline the SNAP application for seniors on fixed incomes and increase their SNAP benefit amounts.

Currently only 55% of Alexandria residents eligible for SNAP benefits are receiving them, with the majority of those unserved being seniors, many of whom reference the cumbersome application process and relatively low level of benefits as barriers to participating in this vital program.

The City supports efforts to implement a streamlined SNAP application process for seniors on a fixed income and an increase in SNAP benefits for seniors who receive these often vital benefits.

Promoting Access, Equity and Equality

The City is committed to ensuring that Alexandria is an “inclusive city of kindness;” but the full realization of this goal can only be truly achieved in partnership with the Commonwealth. The City is keenly focused on ensuring that all members of our community have access to justice and democracy, are afforded equal protection under the law, and the work is being done to acknowledge and address the core issues of inequity and inequality in our community and our Commonwealth.

The City supports legislation limiting qualified immunity protections for law enforcement officers who commit intentional or reckless acts of excessive use of force.

The City of Alexandria is proud of the more than 300 sworn officers who work to maintain a safe and secure environment for our residents, merchants and visitors. The diverse group of law enforcement officers who serve and protect our community are carefully vetted, highly trained and technically skilled, a credit to their profession and an asset to Alexandria. We stand in support of these men and women of character and honor who are dedicated to our community and the people they serve.

However, the City also stands firmly against anything that shields an officer from being held legally accountable should they intentionally or recklessly use excessive force. The City supports legislation limiting qualified immunity protections for law enforcement officers who commit intentional or reckless acts of excessive use of force in the performance of their duties.

The City supports legislation to replace the word “handicapped” in Virginia Code with the word “disabled.”

The words we choose to describe or represent people in our communities have meaning. Over time, the Virginia Code has been changed to remove imprecise, outdated or simply offensive words used to describe or represent those the Code is intended to serve and protect.

The City supports legislation to replace the words “handicapped” and “handicap” in the Virginia Code with “disabled” and “disability.” Not only will this simple change reflect the individuality, equality and dignity of people living with disabilities, it will help improve how people living with disabilities are represented in mandatory signage in public spaces and influence how they are talked about in elected bodies, the media and in everyday conversations.

The City supports legislation to ensure access to voting for all Virginia citizens.

The City believes that voting is a fundamental right of our democracy and must be protected. In recent years, Virginia has made historic progress in ensuring access to the voting booth and making it easier for Virginia citizens to exercise their right to vote, but there are always more opportunities for progress.

The City supports legislation to establish an automatic, streamlined process in Code for the restoration of voting rights for felons who have made restitution, rather than relying on the good will of each governor to implement such a process by executive order.

Combatting Climate Change, Promoting Clean Energy

During the 2020 session, the General Assembly passed numerous measures to combat climate change, promote clean energy, and advance environmental justice initiatives in Virginia. These efforts make Virginia the most environmentally progressive state in the South and help advance the changes necessary for Alexandria to meet the ambitious goals laid out in the City’s Environmental Action Plan 2040. However, there is always more work to be done to mitigate our contribution toward climate change through new approaches to reducing the City and Commonwealth’s impact on the environment.

The City supports legislation or executive actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation by improving fuel economy standards, accelerating the deployment of electric vehicles, and helping create a robust and equitable Transportation Climate Initiative for Virginia to join.

The City supports legislation that will further advance our efforts to combat climate change and promote clean energy, including:

- Legislation to support the electrification of school bus fleets by pursuing strategies led by local governments rather than those offered and controlled by the utilities;
- Legislation to adopt Advanced Clean Cars Program Standards and require vehicle manufacturers to sell more electric vehicles in Virginia;

- Legislation to reform the process of updating the Virginia Energy Conservation Code, increase overall efficiency of residential and commercial buildings and accelerate the adoption of electric equipment and appliances for these applications;
- Legislation to complete a plan by 2021 on how to incentivize the creation of a market for individuals or businesses to sell renewable energy certificates (RECs) to localities or utilities created by the purchase of rooftop solar systems.

The City also supports Virginia's decision to join the regional Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) and specifically asks the Commonwealth to:

- Direct 50% of the funds generated from the TCI to foster advance equity and environmental justice in overburdened and underserved populations, to account for the long-term under-investment in and pollution burden borne by these communities;
- Support a regional emissions cap that requires at least a 30% reduction in carbon pollution between 2022 and 2032;
- Commit to developing and implementing state-level complementary policies that encourage smart growth land use planning and transit-oriented development; reduce vehicle miles traveled; and provide emissions reduction mandates for ports, freight and local delivery trucks, and vehicle operations near vulnerable and overburdened populations.