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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 7, 2019
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Public Hearing and Consideration of the WasteSmart Plan, Alexandria's 20-Year Strategic Plan to Sustainably Recover Resources.

ISSUE: Consideration of the goals, targets and action items comprising the WasteSmart Strategic Plan.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council hold a public hearing and receive for adoption the proposed WasteSmart Strategic Plan ("Plan") (Attachment 1), a 20-year Plan of short-, medium- and long-term action items on Saturday, January 12.

BACKGROUND: Solid waste collection, disposal and recycling are some of the City's most important responsibilities and core services. The City has an existing Solid Waste Management Plan which is approved by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and establishes a framework for City services considered annually in the budget process. The City assesses an annual residential refuse fee (currently \$373 annually) which is paid by mostly single-family and townhome owners to 100% cover the costs of the collection and

disposal costs associated with weekly trash and recycling collection, yard waste/brush collection, household hazardous waste center operations and special collections including Spring Clean-Up and Leaf Collection. The fee is listed on real estate tax bills and paid semiannually. Trash and recycling collection from businesses and multifamily homes (which comprise more than 70% of the City's waste stream) is mostly collected by private haulers. The City's 20,200 residential customers give the City high marks for solid waste, recycling and yard waste collection services in the annual resident survey, with citizen satisfaction rates exceeding 80%.

In recent years, the global recycling market has experienced tremendous pressures due to a series of recycling policies implemented by China, the largest importer of scrap recyclable materials. To consider how Alexandria should adapt to these changed market conditions, staff in 2017 began an extensive public engagement process to understand and incorporate customers' needs, values and priorities. This input included numerous meetings with civic associations, face-to-face surveys at farmer's markets and external outreach to stakeholders across the residential, business and advocacy spectrums.

In July 2017, staff also retained an independent consultant to conduct a third-party evaluation of the City's current waste management programs and provide recommendations for future long-term management strategies. The memorandums were completed in July 2018 with a series of recommendations for the City to evaluate and are posted on the Plan website. While most future strategies have been incorporated into the WasteSmart Strategic Plan some - after weighing public and internal input as well as external considerations - were not.

The proposed WasteSmart Strategic Plan is built on a series of short-, medium-, and long-term action items. Many core action items that were identified as "hot topic areas" were developed during the Environmental Action Plan (EAP) planning process with the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) and are mirrored in the WasteSmart plan. A letter of endorsement from the EPC is also included (Attachment 2).

DISCUSSION: The nature of the solid waste industry is that it is ever evolving. Packaging materials change year-to-year impacting the material composition of the waste stream. It is also important to recognize that these waste materials are resources that can be recovered and act as commodities in the global and regional marketplace. As the global and regional processing facilities, technologies, and markets change over time, the City will also need to adapt and adjust programs.

Staff has worked collaboratively with many stakeholders as well as actively pursuing public input to produce this plan. Development of the WasteSmart Strategic Plan launched with a series of presentations to stakeholders at civic association meetings, EPC meetings, EAP public meetings, Eco-Café participation and a public Open House. Remote participation was also made possible through social media, eNews, Facebook Live, and online feedback forms. To further build awareness staff also submitted a letter to the editor at local newspapers. Finally, staff hosted two Employee Town Hall meetings to capture internal feedback, particularly around operations and logistics of future programs.

In the stakeholder engagement process, over 1,500 internal and external stakeholders were reached, gathering over 1,200 questions and comments about the plan as well as the included action items. The feedback heard most from the public was related to concerns over the recovery of glass in the recycling stream and confusion on what materials can or cannot be recycled. Staff also heard concerns both from the public and the EPC about greenhouse gas emissions related to solid waste activities. Many residents also asked for the feasibility of food waste composting collections curbside as well as identified cost efficiencies to be an important priority. Finally, there was great support from the public on the City providing additional programs and resources to help reduce and reuse materials.

KEY ACTION ITEMS: Staff aimed to incorporate the comments provided by the public, both online and in person. Below are three key short-term (FY 2019 to FY 2021) action items that address the feedback received:

1. Glass

- a. Install special containers for only glass at all recycling drop-off centers to improve the recyclability of glass and implement a glass recovery awareness campaign. (One container will be installed at each of the City's four recycling drop-off centers in FY 2019 using currently budgeted funding. An estimated \$40,000 (to be considered as part of the FY 2020 budget process) in the annual operating budget would allow for expansion.)
- b. Upon re-evaluating the state of the recycling market, develop a plan to expand glass drop-off centers and/or potentially eliminate glass from single stream recycling. (Evaluation to be undertaken by staff in FY 2021)

2. Reduce Contamination

- a. Launch a Recycle Right education campaign to reduce confusion on what materials go where and reduce contamination in the recycling stream. (Current funding levels include outreach and education. An estimated \$80,000 (to be considered as part of the FY 2020 budget process) in the annual operating budget would allow for significant enhancements to education and outreach programs to minimize contamination).

3. Route Optimization Study

- a. Perform a review of the current truck routing, mileage, staffing levels, homes served per route and tonnages of trash collected. The study will also aim to reduce and optimize solid waste vehicular traffic and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. (Effort to be completed in FY 2019 using currently budgeted funding).

Two significant mid- to long-term action items include:

1. Evaluate organics processing market readiness (both composting and anaerobic digestion) and feasibility of curbside organics collection.
2. Develop options and recommendations with savings projected to be available from the City's contracted tip fee at the Covanta Waste to Energy facility reducing to \$0 from 2025 to 2038 (approximately \$1.2 million per year).

FISCAL IMPACT: Some of the short-term action items are funded through currently budgeted resources, but additional operating money may be required to implement some items in the recommended timeframe. To implement all the action items identified for FY 2020, Council would need to consider an increase in the residential refuse fee of \$10 to support an additional \$200,000 for expanded glass recycling drop-off centers and expanded educational and outreach resources. Staff will evaluate options and include recommendations in the FY 2020 Operating Budget.

Adoption of the WasteSmart Plan is not a fiscal commitment to implement every recommended action. Like other City Council adopted master plans and long range plans, the Waste Smart Plan is aspirational with implementation decisions and actions, if additional fiscal resources are required, tied to the annual budget

process.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: WasteSmart Strategic Plan

Attachment 2: Letter of Endorsement from EPC

Attachment 3: Presentation

STAFF:

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