



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** JUNE 17, 2015

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of the FY 2016 Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program.

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**ISSUE:** What planning work priorities should be established for FY 2016?

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approve the proposed Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program for FY 2016.

**BACKGROUND:** The Planning Commission on January 6, 2015 and the City Council on January 27, 2015 and February 24, 2015 provided preliminary input on the Draft FY 2016 Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program. Based on this input, staff revised the work program to accelerate the Old Town North Small Area Plan so that the public process would begin in September 2015 rather than December 2015.

The staff memorandum on the Long Range Planning Work Program stated that the availability of outside (landowner or developer) provided funding for this planning effort would likely be a major factor in making the decision to take on this planning effort in FY 2016. The outcome of staff's discussions with landowners/developers follows.

Additionally, staff agreed to work with the Environmental Policy Commission to develop a work program with the goal of accelerating work on some key issues. In addition, there was enthusiasm for having the Old Town North Small Area Plan explore pilot environmental initiatives, particularly related to energy, since NRG had previously indicated a strong interest in that regard.

**DISCUSSION:**

The two outstanding issues from February are the work programs for Old Town North and the Green Building Policy.

### *Old Town North*

The main issues for the Old Town North plan are: the extent of the participation of NRG and how to coordinate the several development proposals that are in various stages of readiness with the overall planning effort.

In previous meetings, NRG had indicated that they would be ready to participate fully in the planning process once it began. Staff confirmed that again just prior to the worksessions on the Long Range Planning Work Program in January and February. However, in meetings within the last month, NRG's position now is that they cannot participate fully in the planning process until lease/ownership issues with PEPCO are resolved. NRG leases the site from PEPCO and the lease has 85 years remaining. NRG noted PEPCO is currently focusing primarily on the process of being merged with/acquired by Illinois-based Exelon Corporation and the timetable for resolving the ownership issue is unknown. Staff continues to discuss NRG's participation in the planning effort with them. At this point, however, NRG has stated that they can only commit to supplying site constraint data and to "participate in the SAP process as the holder of a long term ground lease interest and as any stakeholder in the area while they continue to resolve threshold issues."

NRG has expressed a desire to showcase cutting edge energy concepts in this location and staff is discussing the extent to which NRG can lend its technical expertise on alternative energy issues to the Old Town North planning effort.

Staff is not recommending any delay in the Old Town North plan to conform to NRG's timeline. Redevelopment pressure is great in the Old Town North area, there are a number of projects that are ready (or soon will be ready) to move through the redevelopment process, and we need an updated plan to look at these proposals comprehensively.

Instead, staff is developing a process that will coordinate consideration of redevelopment proposals with the Small Area Plan process, leveraging the information gathered in the planning process with the information that will be generated by the development review process.

When the City Council directed staff to work on the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan rather than the Old Town North Plan, the Council also directed staff to continue to process rezoning requests in Old Town North, rather than making them wait for the Plan. Now that the City is starting the Old Town North planning process, staff recommends that rezoning requests received between now and the conclusion of the Old Town North Plan be processed along with, and in coordination with, the planning process, so that there is limited, if any, impact on the timing of these project reviews. These rezoning requests are expected to include the ABC/Giant site, ARHA properties within Old Town North, and the WMATA Bus Barn, for which development guidelines have already been developed through a public process last year.

Redevelopment proposals that do not require a rezoning or a plan amendment will proceed at their own pace, although coordination with the small area planning process will occur at every stage of their review.

The concept for an Old Town North planning process is to prepare a vision and framework plan ready to go to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval/endorsement in December 2015. This would be a concept developed by the community, landowners, and other stakeholders in the fall, and would include the community's vision for the area, amenities they desire, as well as potential land uses, densities and heights for the redevelopment parcels.

At that point in the process, the proposed development would be untested and we would not yet have cost

estimates for amenities and other public facilities. However, each of the three redevelopment projects that will be under way would ordinarily need to conduct transportation and other studies; the results of those studies will be used to test the redevelopment envelope, identify transportation improvements, etc. After that, a modified plan would be prepared, through a public process, and go through the normal hearing process prior to adoption.

### *Green Building Policy*

During the Council's discussion of the Work Program in February, Council Members expressed an interest in learning how Alexandria's Green Building Policy compares to those in surrounding jurisdictions. A summary comparison is attached at the end of this memorandum.

Alexandria continues to be a leader in many ways. For example, in Alexandria, all development greater than 3,000 s.f. is expected to comply; in DC, the threshold is 50,000 s.f.; in Montgomery County, the threshold is 10,000 s.f. In terms of certification level, Alexandria expects residential development to achieve LEED Certified or equivalent and expects non-residential development to achieve LEED Silver or equivalent. No local jurisdiction has a higher expectation, although Arlington provides density bonuses for LEED Gold or Platinum buildings.

Since the February Council discussion of the Long Range Planning Work Program, staff met with the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) to review options for a green building work program. EPC members discussed the various options including their relative importance and urgency. Based on that discussion, staff has developed a concept for the work program that would address some immediate needs as well as lay the groundwork for a comprehensive update to the Green Building Policy in FY 2018.

In advance of the City's Green Building Policy update which is scheduled for FY 2018, City staff will work with the Environmental Policy Commission and other relevant stakeholders to conduct a multi-phase research effort that will inform the policy update and provide guidance on its content. The following research items are proposed over the next three years (subject to annual re-review in the context of the Planning Work Program). These phases reflect areas of importance identified by the City's Environmental Policy Commission.

July 2015 to January 2016 - LEED Equivalency: The current Green Building Policy permits use of rating systems that are "equivalent" to LEED and more applicants are choosing "equivalent" rating systems. As additional rating systems expand in use throughout the construction industry, it is important to understand these systems to ensure that the rating system criteria are at the same level as LEED. Staff would work with EPC (coordinated with the development community and public) to catalogue and analyze green building rating system requirements for equivalency to LEED. The final output would be an evaluation matrix and standard conditions to be used for development projects proposing non-LEED certification.

January 2016 to January 2017 - Energy/Old Town North: The EPC identified a number of energy-related issues to explore; staff proposes to conduct research on these issues in 2016. This timeframe coincides with the schedule of the Old Town North small area plan; NRG has indicated an interest in exploring cutting edge energy initiatives on their site and possibly the plan area. Staff will also explore with EPC the potential to conduct voluntary energy audits of new buildings to help inform the energy component of the green building policy. The idea is to focus on post-occupancy energy usage for green buildings to provide insights into best practices and areas of improvement which can be used to create energy profiles for different building types.

Energy is not the only environmental issue to be addressed in Old Town North; stormwater is also among the important issues that will be included in the planning effort. The aim is that what is learned in Old Town North on the environmental front will be applied in the subsequent Green Building Policy update. It is likely that the

Old Town North schedule will involve exploration of broad themes, including environmental issues, in the Fall of 2015 with the opportunity to explore specific environmental initiatives beginning in early 2016.

The City is working towards expanding the scope of the Green Building Policy to include elements other than buildings. During this phase, staff will explore opportunities where the City can further its sustainability goals through infrastructure decisions. The currently funded Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project for Green Infrastructure in Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Areas will be used as an example. This project provides funding from both the sanitary sewer and storm sewer funds for study, design and construction of at least two Green Infrastructure demonstration projects in the combined sewer area. Green Infrastructure projects will include “green alleys”. This Green Infrastructure initiative may inform the Old Town North Plan.

January 2017 to January 2018 - Prioritization: As the City’s Green Building Policy continues to evolve, prioritization of green building elements in conjunction with the current rating systems can produce a larger impact on the overall sustainability goals. During this phase, staff will work with the EPC to prioritize green building elements such as energy efficiency, water use, etc. by building type. In addition to the priority list, the final output of this phase will include policy recommendations (and possibly incentives) that can be incorporated in the FY2018 Green Building Policy update.

In parallel with these three phases, the EPC will continue to evaluate the current Green Building Policy through both a regional and international lens. The EPC will build on the regional Green Building Policy comparison work (attached at the end of the memo) to include interviews with neighboring jurisdictions to gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies and effectiveness of their policies. The EPC will work with staff to develop the criteria for the comparison. Information gained from these comparisons, both regional and beyond, will help inform the FY 2018 Green Building Policy update.

### *Plan Implementation Work/Special Projects*

Since the City Council considered the Work Program in February, two projects have been added to the list of Plan Implementation/Special Projects:

1. Carlyle Vitality Initiative: The Carlyle Vitality Initiative, led by an interdepartmental/interagency team designated by the City Manager, is an effort to enhance neighborhood vitality and quality of life for Carlyle residents, employees, and visitors, as well as to improve Carlyle’s competitiveness in the regional office market. Neighborhood vitality has been identified by office-based employers as a key factor in choosing where to rent office space. The effort focuses on implementing physical and programming enhancements to the Carlyle neighborhood in order to activate the public realm.
2. Civic Engagement: Civic Engagement implementation has been and will be an interdepartmental effort, led by the Department of Planning and Zoning, to integrate the recommendations of the 2012-13 What's Next Alexandria initiative into the City’s public decision-making processes by following the communications and engagement principles and framework established in the Council adopted [What's Next Alexandria Handbook for Civic Engagement](#)

<[http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/special/CivicEngagement/web\\_boxes/WNA%](http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/special/CivicEngagement/web_boxes/WNA%20FY2016%20Long%20Range%20Planning%20Work%20Program%20Final%20Draft%2020150218.pdf)

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The adopted FY 2016 budget does not contain separate funding for the Old Town North Small Area Plan. Separate funding would be for outside technical assistance, typically studies of the impacts of proposed development on the transportation network and other public facilities, market studies, and some other specific studies. In recent plans (Eisenhower West, Oakville Triangle, North Potomac Yard), landowners and/or developers voluntarily provided funding for those studies or conducted them with oversight by City staff. The same process was anticipated for Old Town North and staff is pursuing that approach, although the NRG potential delay will pose a challenge.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. January 21, 2015 Memo to City Council from Mark B. Jinks, Acting City Manager, on Consideration of the Draft FY 2016 Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program
2. February 18, 2015 Memo to City Council from Mark B. Jinks, Acting City Manager, on Consideration of the Draft FY 2016 Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program
3. Bar Chart: Draft Revised FY 2016 Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program (arranged chronologically)
4. Bar Chart: Draft Revised FY 2016 Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program (arranged by program areas)
5. Transportation and Environmental Services Memo to City Council, dated October 22, 2014, on Citywide Parking Work Plan
6. Descriptions of the FY 2016 Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program Projects

**STAFF:**

Emily Baker, Acting Deputy City Manager  
Karl Moritz, Director Planning and Zoning  
Yon Lambert, Director Transportation and Environmental Services  
James Spengler, Director Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities  
Jeremy McPike, Director General Services  
Gregg Fields, Acting Director Department of Code Administration  
Helen McIlvaine, Acting Director Office of Housing  
Lance Mallamo, Director Office of Historic Alexandria  
Stephanie Landrum, President/CEO Alexandria Economic Development Partnership  
Patricia Washington, President/CEO Visit Alexandria  
Roy Priest, Chief Executive Officer Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority  
Susan Eddy, Deputy Director Planning and Zoning