



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of the Creation of Office of Climate Action and the Release of \$1.85 Million in FY 2023 Contingent Reserve Funding.

ISSUE: Consideration of the release of \$1.85 million in FY 2023 Contingent Reserve funding set aside for climate change initiatives for the creation of an Office of Climate Action (“Office”) to empower the community in reducing GHG emissions.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council release \$1.85 million in FY 2023 Contingent Reserve funding set aside for climate change initiatives for the creation of an “Office of Climate Action” within the City Manager’s Office.

BACKGROUND: The City of Alexandria has a long history of taking steps to ensure we do our part to fight the climate crisis. In 2011, the Alexandria City Council passed the City’s original Energy and Climate Change Action Plan (“ECCAP”) to promote actions towards reducing the Alexandria community’s operational greenhouse gas emissions, including the 96% of greenhouse gas emissions attributed to the Alexandria community’s residents, businesses, and visitors. Since that time, significant advancements in climate change science and solutions, identification and understanding of climate-induced vulnerabilities, the emergency of climate adaptation and resiliency practices, and climate action planning approaches has provided the City opportunity to meaningfully advance the Alexandria community’s efforts towards climate change action.

In July 2019, the City Council adopted the City’s Environmental Action Plan 2040 (“EAP2040”). The EAP2040 establishes a target of reducing community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by FY 2030 and 80 to 100 percent by FY 2050 (base year 2005) supported by significant contributions at the state and federal level. These targets support meeting the goal of increasing the City’s preparedness to respond to the impacts of climate change and environmental emergencies.

Later that year, in October 2019, the City Council adopted a resolution declaring climate emergency, recognizing that climate change poses a grave threat to everyone in Alexandria and around the world. The resolution expresses City Council's commitment to climate change action as it is likely to have a particular impact on the Alexandria community where adapting to climate change will be critical for an environmentally sustainable, economically prosperous, and equitable future.

Last year, the City launched the update of the City's ECCAP to identify specific actions available for the City to act on to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions according to the EAP2040's targets and goals and to understand and address the impacts of climate change on the Alexandria community.

The Alexandria City Council has further prioritized the City's climate action efforts in 2022, including:

- The identification of environmental justice as a guiding principle, a lens through which each City Council priority would be viewed.
- The approval of \$1.85 million in general fund contingency reserves for climate change initiatives.

On June 27, 2022 the Environmental Policy Commission ("EPC") sent a letter to the City Council and City Manager with a list of recommended projects/programs focused on reducing the community's GHG emissions (Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION: Given the City's prior efforts and the upcoming ECCAP update related to identifying specific actions to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, the City sees the formation of a centralized climate office within the City Manager's Office a timely milestone to (i) focus on implementation and (ii) leverage City resources in partnering with the community, broader industry, regional, state, federal and other organizations to reduce the community's GHG emissions, the major source of the City of Alexandria's ("City-wide") emissions. In this effort, the Office will use a City-wide approach and will empower and support all members of the community to participate, contribute, and take action. This approach aligns with the EPC's June 27, 2022 recommendations.

In recognition of this approach, the purpose and goals of the "Office of Climate Action" are outlined below:

Purpose: To continuously work towards aggressively reducing City-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that achieve our climate targets and resiliency strategies that protect the community from the impacts of climate change in a just and equitable manner.

Goals:

1. Continue using a systems approach to prioritize City-wide GHG reductions, as well as adaptation and resilience strategies that effectively leverage resources.
2. Engage and empower community participation, inclusion and support.
3. Advocate and mobilize action beyond the community that impacts the wellbeing of our community in the face of climate change-related emergencies.

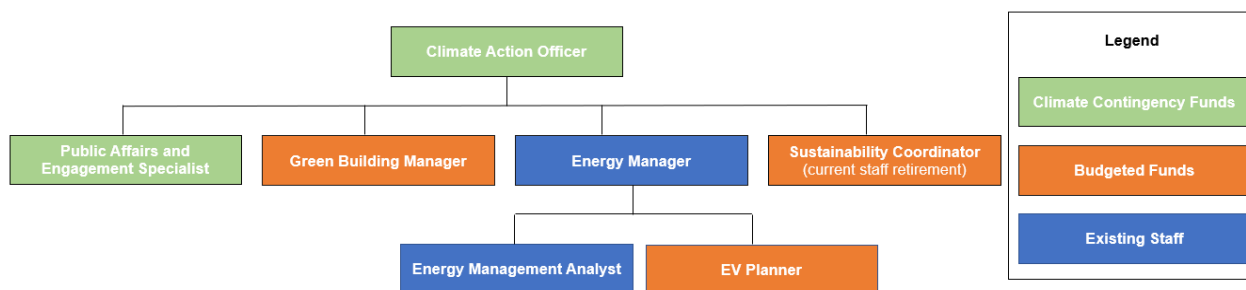
The Office of Climate Action will report to the City Manager through the Assistant City Manager, Julian Gonsalves. The Office of Climate Action will partner with Department of Transportation & Environmental Services ("T&ES"), Department of Planning and Zoning ("P&Z"), and other relevant City departments to support EPC, and other Boards and Commissions regarding climate change priorities.

Office of Climate Action composition:

The 7-member office will be composed of two new positions and five reallocated from the partnering departments.

- The Office of Climate Action needs a strong leader in the role of the Climate Action Officer to help establish and lead this critical effort. The Climate Action Officer will be the public face of Alexandria’s climate efforts, partnering with city departments, other governmental agencies, businesses, non-profits and residents, publicizing Alexandria’s successes to the rest of the world, and working with and learning from communities elsewhere to achieve common climate, sustainability, and energy objectives. The Climate Action Officer will lead and coach a diverse team overseeing work in a variety of areas, including but not limited to, energy efficiency, high performance buildings, renewable energy, climate change mitigation and reporting, electric mobility, business assistance, and community engagement.
- The City also acknowledges that undertaking community focused implementation, education and outreach programs requires an effective public affairs and engagement specialist. The City is committed to addressing this need.
- The City has also been making meaningfully strides to advance the Alexandria community’s efforts towards climate change action (Attachment 2) since the adoption of the City’s original ECCAP in 2011 and the adoption of EAP2040 in 2019. The Departments of Transportation & Environmental Services, General Services, and Planning & Zoning in particular have been leading GHG emission reduction actions through the work of existing staff and positions that have been added over the past few years - these positions will be moved to the Office of Climate Action.

The overall composition of the Office of Climate Action depicted below both recognizes the prior and ongoing efforts across City departments and aims to set up an implementation and partnership-oriented approach. The Office of Climate Action will work closely with other City departments in achieving EAP2040 and ECCAP commitments.



The work of climate action will feature across City government beyond the roles, positions and funding identified for the Office of Climate Action including other climate and resiliency related efforts.

Office of Climate Action programs:

\$1.5 million is available from the contingency fund to cover early and recurring programming costs (after accounting for staffing related recurring costs). The broad focus areas of the Office of Climate Action programs will fall under the categories identified below. These categories align with both the EPC provided list of recommended projects/programs (Attachment 1), and the joint recommendations from the EPC, the Planning Commission, and the Transportation Commission on February 2, 2022 (Attachment 3). Additional details for each focus area, including alignment with EPC recommendations, are provided in Attachment 4.

Focus Areas:

1. Incentives
2. Environmental Justice
3. Education, Capacity Building and Outreach
4. Disclosure, Monitoring and Recognition
5. Demonstration
6. Policies, Procedures and Advocacy

Given the current ECCAP update process, staff will adjust the priorities within each focus area as needed to align with the ECCAP recommendations. Furthermore, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act include substantial federal climate investments - the City will ensure to align spending priorities to leverage such investments as specific program guidelines and funding details are made available in the coming months. The City will seek regional partnerships to leverage and extend funding potential as much as possible (for e.g., Fairfax County have recently completed their evaluation of establishing a green bank, Loudoun County is evaluating the feasibility of establishing a Community Choice Aggregation program, Arlington County has a well-established Green Home Choice technical assistance program).

FISCAL IMPACT: The \$1.85 million in funding is included in the approved FY 2023 operating budget. Creation of the Office of Climate Action and associated implementation programs is expected to result in a one-time cost in the range of \$900,000 to \$1.15 million and recurring costs in the range of \$700,000 to \$950,000. This fiscal impact does not account for the benefits of addressing the impact of the climate crisis.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. EPC June 27, 2022 Letter to Council and City Manager on \$1.85 million
2. EAP 2040 Implementation Status
3. February 2, 2022 Joint Planning Commission, Environmental Policy Commission, Transportation Commission Letter to City Council
4. Office of Climate Action Focus Areas
5. Presentation

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