

2023

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

INTRO- DUCTION

For over a century the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce has proudly represented business interests in the City of Alexandria. We've used our collective voice to advocate for transportation, development and streamlining regulations so our business community can grow and thrive.

Now as we optimistically turn the corner from the pandemic we are reminded that the way we work and engage with consumers is vastly different than before.

As we move forward, we need a commitment to nimble government, capable of responding to rapidly shifting forces that impact the livelihood of Alexandria and the Commonwealth. The Chamber believes it is well positioned to articulate the experiences of our diverse businesses in order to inform our policymakers and when appropriate, challenge our leaders to seek innovative solutions to move Alexandria forward.

We are proud to present our 2023 Legislative Agenda, which is a call to action for our community, elected leaders, and the Chamber to meet the challenges and opportunities of this moment with innovation, creativity, and thoughtful engagement.

Section 01:

THE CHAMBER'S COMMITMENT TO ECONOMIC

RECOVERY AND STABILITY

The last few years have created unprecedented economic challenges for Alexandria residents, businesses, non-profits, and educational institutions. As we continue to deal with and recover from the pandemic and face new economic uncertainties the collective community will need to work together to employ creative short and long term strategies to ensure our business community prospers and Alexandria remains a highly desirable place to work and live.

Recognizing that the pandemic did not hit all businesses and industries in the same way, we encourage continued flexibility and responsiveness at all levels of government to ensure the needs of our diverse business community are being met.

As national economic conditions play out Alexandria must rely on flexibility and creative responses in order to successfully manage its future.

Change has come to every aspect of how we do business from building usage to staffing to employee needs. It is this change that drives our approach to supporting the business community. The Alexandria Chamber of Commerce is committed to championing flexibility and creativity to support a thriving business community in our City.

Section 02:

ATTRACT AND SUSTAIN BUSINESSES

To position Alexandria as the place to do business in the region. This can be achieved by increasing collaboration amongst stakeholders and putting in place the right framework that attracts businesses and enables them to grow and thrive in Alexandria.

I. Business and Economic Growth

» Continue Investments in the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership's (AEDP) Business Development Program

- › Support AEDP's efforts to attract and retain businesses in target sub-industries by maintaining funding for Business Development staffing and resources.

» Talent Attraction

- › Support the on-time completion of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, the adjacent Metro facility, and the university's efforts to build partnerships with organizations and businesses in Alexandria. Northern Virginia Community College, George Mason University and others are also working to build the talent pipeline and should be given as much support as possible.

» Workforce Development

- › Continue local and state-level investments in workforce development initiatives to help workers acquire the skills needed to fill 21st century

jobs. This includes maintaining funding for programs offered by the Workforce Development Center and advocating to the General Assembly for continued funding for initiatives such as the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, Virginia Jobs Investment Program, and the G3 community college grant program.

» **Office Market**

- › Business-Ready Sites – encourage the development of Class-A office buildings at metro accessible sites and within key commercial corridors to provide businesses high-quality places to work in strategic locations.
- › Encourage and support policies that allow the City to quickly respond to the evolving office market to facilitate attraction, retention, and expansion of businesses that may be seeking new, alternative uses of office space.

» **Alexandria: A Partner in Innovation**

- › Enable business attraction by encouraging the City to partner with businesses that want to test and pilot new technologies and innovation in Alexandria by leveraging city resources, expertise, and infrastructure.

II. Minority Business Support

- › Encourage the City to get the Minority Business Incubation program (contained in the FY23 Budget) up and running.
- › Ensure diverse representation, broadly defined, on City Boards/Commissions and similar advisory groups by actively seeking out, in partnership with the Chamber, new and diverse voices when filling slots on Boards/Commissions and similar advisory groups.
- › Collaborate with regional partners on the Greater Washington Partnership's Blueprint for Inclusive Growth. Areas of focus include:
 - Education
 - Workforce
 - Access to Capital
 - Affordable Housing
 - Infrastructure
 - Health Equity

III. Livability

- › Broadband/Smart City Technology
 - We encourage policies that:
 - Ensure high speed broadband access is available to all Alexandrians regardless of socioeconomic status. We particularly support innovative partnerships with the business community.
 - Ensure the complete construction of the Municipal Fiber Network.
 - Engage in dialogue with the business community on how to best utilize private partnerships associated with the Network.

- Ensure smart city technologies can be utilized by the City to enhance public services, public safety, solve modern challenges, and reduce cost.

FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION:

- › We support policies that:
 - Streamline and standardize permitting to accelerate investment and deployment in wireless and wireline networks.
 - Ensure new programs are technology neutral – supporting both wireless and wireline.

IV. Housing

- › The Chamber supports efforts to increase the supply of housing at all income levels, including making housing attainable for Alexandria's critical workforce. Unreasonable land-use and zoning restrictions can drive up the cost of housing. The Chamber supports efforts by the city to increase efficiency in the residential development process through zoning reforms and reducing regulatory barriers for the development and preservation of housing.
- › Maintain programs to provide financial support for residents who need short-term rental assistance to remain in housing they can afford while ensuring that housing providers can also meet their obligations.

V. Childcare/Education

- › Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) – The last few years highlighted the need for a safe, high performing school system as necessary to attracting and sustaining businesses in the City. Yet enrollment has declined since 2019 and according to the 2021-2022 ACPS Equity Climate Survey 58% of students say they do not feel safe at school. These issues must be urgently addressed in order to ensure Alexandria is a desirable location to start and grow a business and a place where workers can safely, affordably and successfully raise and educate their families. This intersection of taxpaying businesses that serve the community and education safety and performance warrant that the School Board and City Council involve the business community as a major stakeholder in public education priorities. The Chamber stands ready to help.

FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION:

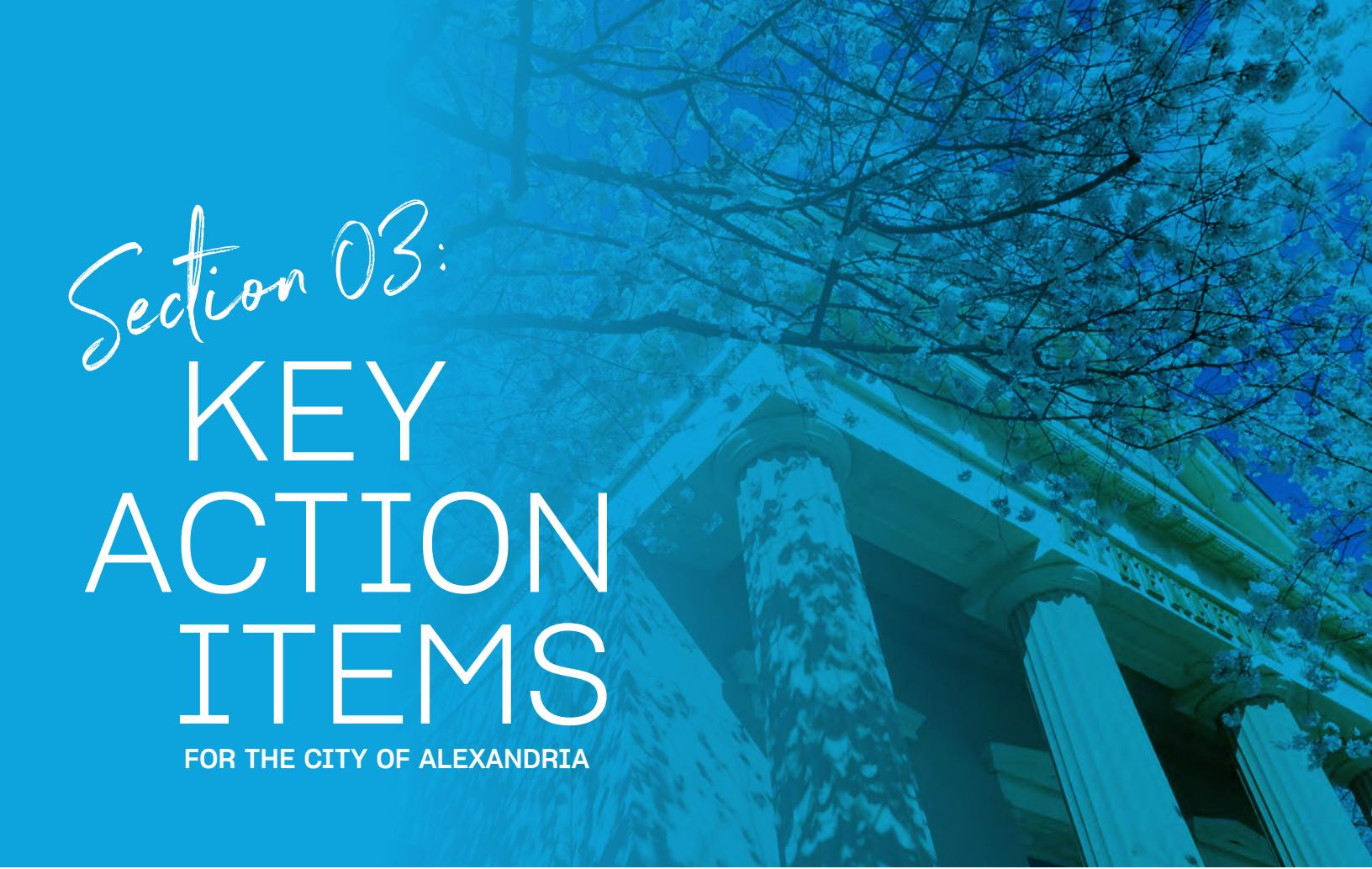
- › The Chamber recommends the State:
 - Provide resources to support early care and education as it relates to workforce participation.
 - Ensure adequate funding to attract and retain childcare professionals. This is essential for working families who must continue to balance hybrid work environments.

VI. Transportation

- › The Chamber supports multi-modal solutions that reduce congestion, improve quality of life, and help the city reach its sustainability goals. Specific items include:
 - Continuation of the fare free DASH bus network and electrification of the bus fleet.

FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION

- › The Chamber advocates for:
 - Continued funding to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) with revenue sources that fairly augment local tax dollars.
 - Full dedicated funding from the Commonwealth to Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), to address the critical needs of the system, strengthen reliability, and help Metro regain ridership lost due to the COVID 19 pandemic, without the continued diversion of NVTA funds.
 - Collaborating with Maryland, Washington D.C., and the Federal government to prepare for the region's transportation infrastructure needs in 2040 and beyond including, expanding the 495 Express Lanes Southern Extension across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.



Section 03: KEY ACTION ITEMS

FOR THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

The Chamber offers the following checklist of detailed action items for the City in order to foster a thriving business climate. The Chamber remains ready to partner with the City to enact these policies.

I. Business Resources/Business Friendliness

- Thoroughly evaluate temporary changes to zoning and related requirements precipitated by COVID-19 to determine if they have positively contributed to the business environment and should become permanent throughout the City.
- Ensure all permitting requests are completed in an expeditious manner and that clear guidance is given on what and how to obtain approval and that City departments have adequate staffing to meet the demand from the business community.
- Review policies and processes to determine if there are undue barriers and obstacles to starting a business in Alexandria.
- Continue to simplify zoning requirements to permit more businesses to operate by-right or through an administrative Special Use Permit (SUP) process.
- Update navigation of the City's website to streamline information for businesses seeking information.

- Ensure that Developers (and others seeking to do business in the City) fully understand what will be expected of them prior to being docketed for Council consideration.

II. Minority Business Outreach

- Get the Minority Business Incubation program (contained in the FY23 Budget) up and running.

III. Invest in Workforce Training and Continuing Education Resources

- Maintain funding for programs offered by the Workforce Development Center.
- Support the on-time completion of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus and adjacent Metro facility.

IV. Broadband and Smart City Technology

- Ensure high speed broadband access is available to all Alexandrians regardless of socioeconomic status through innovative partnerships with the business community.
- Complete construction of the Municipal Fiber Network and engage in dialogue with the business community on how to best utilize private partnerships associated with the Network.
- Research smart city technologies that can be utilized by the City to enhance public services, public safety, solve modern challenges, and reduce cost. Alexandria should be a leader in utilizing smart city technology.
- Work with wireless providers to streamline and expedite the permitting process for the installation of small wireless antennas.

V. Education

- Strengthen mechanisms for open and frequent communication between the school board and the business community to foster collaboration and accountability. Recommendations:
 - Establish and sustain a meaningful opportunity for the business community to participate in the joint City Council/School Board meetings.
 - Dedicate at least one seat to a representative from the business community on the interview panel for the new Superintendent.
- For the School Board, Interim and new Superintendent:** Prioritize safety concerns and take action to achieve the outcome of all Alexandria students feeling safe in their school environment.

VI. Transportation

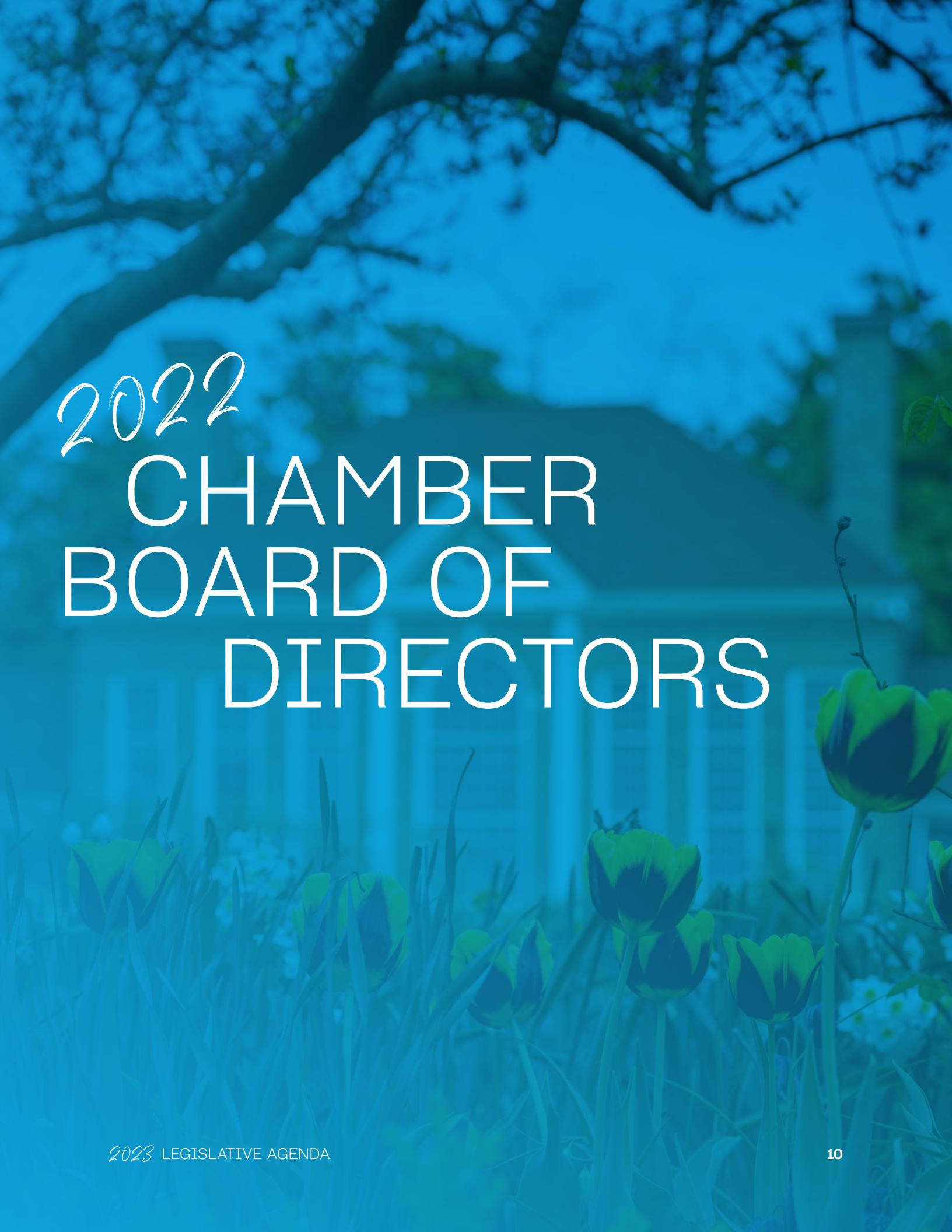
- Support transportation projects that will increase the City's connectivity from East to West and North to South. Projects include: Potomac Yard Metro Station, Corridor C Transitway, Duke Street in Motion, Eisenhower Avenue access points.

Section 03: KEY ACTION ITEMS FOR THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

- Adopt specific policies and initiatives to ensure that vulnerable communities, such as low-income households and persons with disabilities, benefit from and are not burdened by transportation investments.
- Seek solutions to rush hour gridlock on City roads, including re-examining traffic flow, considering the effect (if any) of closing selected streets to through traffic, limiting use of turn lanes, resetting the timing of traffic lights, and increasing connectivity.

VII. Housing Affordability

- Increase efficiency in the residential development process through zoning reforms and reducing regulatory barriers for the development and preservation of housing.



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