

2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

INTRODUCTION

For well over a century the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce has been a leading voice for business interests in the City of Alexandria.

Over the years, we've successfully advocated for an immeasurable number of issues directly impacting the business community such as the completion of Potomac Yard Metro Station, redevelopment of Landmark Mall, support for the Waterfront Small Area Plan, balancing the tax base, and streamlining small business regulations. We're proud of the role we've played in Alexandria's evolution from port city to world class destination and innovation center.

And while we're used to changing tides, no tide has ushered in more change more quickly than the global COVID-19 pandemic. Everything has altered in some way – the way we work, the way we shop, the way we consume information and the way we interact with other people.

And now as the dust begins to settle we are beginning to better understand this new world order.

We know that for a community, a city, a region to be successful there has to be economic development. Economic development is spurred by business and business thrives when there is vitality.

And in the last few years we have learned that vitality comes when a location is safe for businesses to operate, when it is innovative and creative in attracting people to visit and when it is affordable for people to live and work.

While Alexandria has risen with the changing tide better than most, there is still much to do in order to ensure the City's short and long term success. 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 suited to articulate the experiences of our diverse businesses to inform our policymakers and when appropriate, challenge our leaders to seek the innovative solutions that will move Alexandria forward.

It is within this framework that we proudly present our 2024 Legislative Agenda which highlights our broad policy goals coupled with a detailed checklist of key action items to move Alexandria to the next level.

In the pages that follow, we renew our commitment to our community to meet the moment with innovation, creativity, and thoughtful engagement.

Section 01:

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES

In order to retain and attract businesses to our City and ensure that established businesses grow and thrive here, the Chamber:



Small Business Support

Encourages the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP), as it reorganizes and expands small business services, to look for ways in which the Chamber can be a partner, help with, and amplify efforts.



Office Market

Recognizes that many office building owners are under increasing pressure from rising vacancy rates, reduced “in office” work by employees as well as a more challenging financing environment. Declining office and retail rental income, increasing concessions and lower occupancy rates will put significant downward pressure on building valuations, assessments and ultimately real estate tax proceeds for the City. We will support creative solutions to assist office landlords in repositioning their buildings where feasible. We encourage the City to begin planning now for an era wherein we will have fewer real estate tax dollars to fund essential city services.



Talent Attraction

Supports the City’s priority of engaging companies in emerging, high-growth industries for relocation to Alexandria that result in new jobs and investment in the City.



Workforce Development

Supports the continued 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. It also includes working with our own schools to see how we may assist in growing and sustaining the future worker base for the City.

ASKS THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO:

Advocate for continued funding for initiatives such as the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, Virginia Jobs Investment Program, and the G3 community college grant program.



Business Resources/Business Friendliness

Supports policies and systems that reduce any undue burden on businesses looking to locate or grow in the City such as:

- › Ensuring businesses are aware of all the resources available to them through multi-channel communications, including the Chamber.
- › Evaluating the APEX Permitting and Land Use system to ensure it is as user-friendly and time efficient as possible.
- › Continuing to employ the out of the box thinking and flexibility used during the pandemic.



Crime

Believes safe neighborhoods are critical to economic vitality and encourages all stakeholders to work together to understand current crime statistics and learn measures they can implement to keep themselves, their business, their employees, and their customers safe.



Transformative Development Projects

Continues to encourage the on time completion of previously announced major catalyst projects (such as Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, Landmark and the former Potomac River Generating Station site) and recognize that there are other opportunities throughout the City (Torpedo Factory).



Childcare

Understands that available and affordable childcare is essential to a strong workforce and

- › Supports efforts to address the childcare resource gap and in particular to look at the current permit structure related to the co-location of daycare with businesses to remove any undue barriers that stand in the way of this vital need.

- › Supports making investments in early education and childcare as these supports reduce the stressors that parents experience as they engage in workforce participation. Research has validated that access to these services where parents live and/or work are critically important. Recent investments (e.g., Mixed Delivery grant program, enhanced subsidy rates) are important to maintain so that communities like Alexandria can have access to childcare and preschool services while parents work.

ASKS THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO:

- › Support efforts to address the childcare resource gap and in particular to look at legislative solutions to facilitate the co-location of daycare with businesses to remove any undue barriers that stand in the way of this vital need.
- › Support funding that covers the true cost of quality care year over year.
- › Provide resources to support early care and education as it relates to workforce participation.
- › Ensure adequate funding to attract and retain childcare professionals through the maintenance of the Recognize B5 Program. This is essential for working families who must continue to balance hybrid work environments.

ASKS THE YOUNGKIN ADMINISTRATION TO:

Consider the childcare needs during the administration's consolidation of workforce programs under a single agency.



Minority Business Support

Supports the City's ongoing efforts to assist our diverse small businesses and encourages the creation of a Minority Business Commission to advise the City on how best to allocate available resources and engage as many businesses as possible.

- › The Chamber also encourages the City to get the restructured grant program up and running with clear metrics and criteria.
- › The Chamber supports the City's goal of streamlining internal business certification processes to remove barriers and facilitate business development.



Section 02: LIVABILITY

In order to ensure Alexandria is a desirable location to live, work and play the Chamber:



Housing

Supports efforts to increase the supply of housing at all income levels, including making housing attainable for Alexandria's critical workforce. Maintaining a range of housing options and price points in the City of Alexandria helps provide opportunity for Alexandria's workforce, across income levels, to live closer to their place of employment and to participate fully in our community. Additionally, 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.
- › Encourages the City and its stakeholders/partners to develop and to adhere to a streamlined and consistent vocabulary in discussing housing. Maintaining clear and easy to understand definitions of "affordable housing" and "workforce housing" will help the general population to understand housing proposals more easily.
- › Looks forward to participating in the continued conversations around the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's Regional Fair Housing Plan and Alexandria's Housing for All initiative.



Transportation

Supports multi-modal solutions that reduce congestion, improve quality of life, and help the city reach its sustainability goals.

- › Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) funding – the Chamber believes in the vital importance of a safe and reliable Metro system for our region. The Chamber understands the complicated nature of the current funding gap and encourages regional cooperation in finding a solution that allows WMATA to reliably deliver essential regional transit service, controls unprecedented and unsustainable cost growth, better matches WMATA service with existing demand, and provides new, dedicated funding that is linked to data-driven accountability and operational improvements. The Chamber is concerned that a \$750+ million per year bailout without operational improvements will put an untenable burden on jurisdictions and taxpayers as well as lead to additional funding shortfalls in just a few short years. We also believe that the Federal Government and its workforce play a major role in the long term viability of this system and has an obligation to contribute funding commensurate with federal workforce usage. The Chamber believes that through regional cooperation we can ensure that WMATA has the reforms and sustainable funding necessary to provide a world class transit service that is worthy of Northern Virginia and the DC region for the next decade and beyond.
- › The Chamber is in support of the priorities of the Washington Region Transportation Coalition, specifically:
 - Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) Funding - we strongly support the full restoration of Northern Virginia Transportation Authority funding diverted in 2018 using statewide or regional dedicated funding sources. After the 2020 General Assembly Session, there remains a \$38.5 million per year shortfall.
 - 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.
- › At the Federal Level, the Chamber opposes any change to the High Density (slot) and perimeter rules at Reagan National Airport (DCA).
- › The Chamber understands the importance of efficiently connecting the City from east to west and north to south and so as City Council considers updates to one of our main thoroughfares (Duke Street) we encourage them to engage in meaningful dialogue about options with the businesses located along that corridor.



Education

Understands that high quality schools impact choices that families and businesses make to reside and operate a business in Alexandria. Students succeed in school when they feel supported at home, at school and in their community. Additionally, the Chamber:

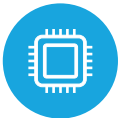
- › Supports a robust K-12 education system that prepares students for work or higher education with strong critical thinking skills and sufficient math, technology and reading skills.
- › Believes that fully funding schools, at the local level, helps to ensure that both personnel and facility related needs are addressed.
- › Will continue to strengthen its partnership with Alexandria City Public Schools to leverage opportunities to expose students to varied work and career opportunities.
- › Is committed to serving as an active partner as priorities are set by City Council and the School Board as they work together to address the educational needs of students.

ASKS THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO:

Prioritize funding for public education so that local school districts can attract and retain educators who are prepared and capable of supporting student success.

ASKS THE STATE TO:

Consider the standards of quality recommendations from the Board of Education which calls for appropriate funding to address support services (e.g., counselors, social workers) in schools.




Technology

Believes that the use of emerging technologies related to smart cities can position the City to be a leader of systems that lower costs, improve services, and drive innovation. The backbone of utilizing these technologies will be a high speed broadband fiber and wireless network available to all Alexandrians regardless of socioeconomic status.

- › We particularly support innovative partnerships with the business community. Additionally, the Chamber asks the City to:
 - Engage in dialogue with the business community on how to best utilize private partnerships associated with fiber and wireless broadband networks.
 - Ensure smart city technologies can be utilized by the City to enhance public services, public safety, solve modern challenges, and reduce cost.
 - Recruit technology focused companies to locate in Alexandria.

ASKS THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO:

Support policies that streamline and standardize permitting to accelerate investment and deployment in wireless and wireline networks.



Section 03: KEY ACTION ITEMS

FOR THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

The Chamber offers the following checklist of detailed action items for the City. The Chamber remains ready to partner with the City to enact these policies.

Business Resources/Business Friendliness

- ❑ Activate Public Space - capitalize on local assets and provide opportunities for small businesses and Neighborhood Business Associations to help activate public spaces for the benefit of the entire community.
 - › Review the cost of permits to beautify space and attract customers and consider waiving permit fees for Neighborhood Business Associations.
- ❑ Ensure all permitting requests are completed in an expeditious manner and that clear guidance is given on how to obtain approval.
- ❑ Continue to simplify zoning requirements to permit more businesses to operate by-right or through an administrative Special Use Permit (SUP) process.
- ❑ Evaluate the manner in which business resources and information are disseminated to those seeking to start a business or make changes to an existing business in the City.
 - › Engage the business community on ways to make the City's website more user friendly.
- ❑ Use the Chamber to assist in making sure the business community is aware of the services/help offered by City Staff, Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

and Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP).

- ❑ Ensure that the APEX Permitting and Land Use system is as user friendly and time efficient as possible.
 - Use the Chamber as a conduit to help facilitate listening sessions with business owners to understand where any problem areas may be occurring.
- ❑ Fill any open key City positions as quickly as possible to ensure continuity of service.
- ❑ Provide an opportunity for businesses to be educated on current crime statistics and measures they can implement to keep themselves, their business, their employees and their customers safe.

Invest in Workforce Training and Continuing Education Resources

- ❑ Continue investment in the City's Workforce Development Center.
- ❑ Leverage the Chamber's membership to inform the City on key needs associated with hiring and retention of employees.
- ❑ Ensure job training programs are tailored to businesses' needs.
 - Special attention should be paid to industries such as construction services, healthcare.

Childcare

- ❑ Look at the current permit structure related to the co-location of daycare with businesses to remove any undue barriers that stand in the way of this vital need.

Technology

- ❑ Ensure high speed fiber and wireless broadband access is available to all Alexandrians regardless of socioeconomic status through innovative partnerships with the business community.
- ❑ Research smart city technologies that can be utilized by the City to enhance public services, improve public safety communication, 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 wireless antennas infrastructure.

Transportation

- ❑ Support transportation projects that will increase the City's connectivity from East to West and North to South.
 - As City Council considers updates to one of our main thoroughfares (Duke Street) we encourage them to engage in meaningful dialogue about options with the businesses located along that corridor.
- ❑ 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.

Housing

- Develop and adhere to a streamlined and consistent vocabulary in discussing housing. Maintaining clear and easy to understand definitions of “affordable housing” and “workforce housing” will help the general population to understand housing proposals more easily.
- Engage the business community in the continued conversations around Alexandria’s Housing for All initiative.

Ensure diverse representation, broadly defined, on City Boards/Commissions and similar advisory groups.

- Actively seek out, in partnership with the Chamber, new and diverse voices when filling slots on Boards/Commissions and similar advisory groups.
- Ensure that the business community is appropriately represented on City Boards, Commissions, and similar Advisory Groups.
- Recognize that virtual meetings (necessitated by COVID-19) allowed for stronger and more diverse participation across the board and should be incorporated in some capacity moving forward.

FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Chamber offers the following checklist of action items for the General Assembly.

Workforce Development

- Continue funding for initiatives such as the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, Virginia Jobs Investment Program, and the G3 community college grant program.

Childcare

- Support efforts to address the childcare resource gap and in particular to look at legislative solutions to facilitate the co-location of daycare with businesses to remove any undue barriers that stand in the way of this vital need.
- Support funding that covers the true cost of quality childcare year over year.
- Provide resources to support early care and education as it relates to workforce participation.
- Ensure adequate funding to attract and retain childcare professionals through the maintenance of the Recognize B5 Program. This is essential for working families who must continue to balance hybrid work environments.

Education

- Prioritize funding for public education so that local school districts can attract and retain educators who are prepared and capable of supporting student success.

Technology

- Streamline and standardize permitting to accelerate investment and deployment in wireless and wireline networks.
- Support funding mechanisms that allow for the expansion of technology in smart city applications.

FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The Chamber offers the following checklist of action items for the Federal Government.

Transportation

- The Chamber believes that the Federal Government and its workforce play a major role in the long term viability of the WMATA system and has an obligation to contribute funding commensurate with federal workforce usage.
- The Chamber opposes any change to the High Density (slot) and perimeter rules at Reagan National Airport (DCA).

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