

Date: October 10, 2024

From: Kishla Askins

To: Commissioners, City of Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)

Subject: Recommendations for FY 2025 Strategic Goals

Executive Summary

Following the EPC annual retreat held on April 27, 2024, this memo outlines the discussion and proposed focus areas for FY 2025. The themes from the approved minutes included EPC's role, our ability to influence & strategic engagement. These themes informed recommended next steps in establishing strategic goals that will align EPC's efforts. Key recommendations include:

- Collaborating with the Office of Climate Action (OCA) on updates to the Environmental Action Plan (EAP) and expanding the Green Business Recognition program.
- Advocating for the approval and implementation of the updated Green Building Policy through City Council and public support.
- Assigning EPC members to specific Small Area Plans based on expertise.
- Developing clear metrics to track progress on key environmental initiatives.
- Enhancing communication and outreach through social media and collaboration with other commissions.
- Fostering partnerships with other localities and commissions to align goals and efforts.
- Establishing an EPC Strategic Subcommittee to oversee the long-term implementation of goals and objectives.

Review of Minutes and Recommendations

1. Office of Climate Action (OCA) Collaboration

- The OCA is planning to update the EAP in FY26. EPC should collaborate with OCA to ensure alignment with our long-term objectives.
- **Recommendation:** Expand the Green Business Recognition program to lawn, garden, and landscaping businesses. Include a proposal to update the EAP in the FY26 budget letter, with an emphasis on integrating metrics from the Eco-City Clean Air Plan (ECCAP) to measure the effectiveness of climate initiatives.

2. Green Building Policy and Transportation for FY25

- The updated Green Building Policy is a top priority. Ensuring sustainable practices in new constructions is critical for Alexandria's environmental goals.
- **Action Plan:**
 - Advocate for City Council approval through organized support at meetings, petitions, and public outreach campaigns.
 - Draft a formal letter of endorsement from EPC and mobilize support from the public.

3. Advocacy and Support Strategies

- To ensure expertise is leveraged effectively, EPC members should be assigned to Small Area Plans and other disciplines based on their professional knowledge.
- **Recommendation:** Assign members to specific projects, ensuring EPC input is well-informed and targeted.

4. Resource Allocation and Expert Engagement

- **Resource Alignment:** Develop a calendar that aligns EPC's actions with relevant budget, legislative, and land development cycles to maximize impact.
- **Expert Consultation:** Schedule meetings with experts during budget planning (e.g., early Fall for legislative advocacy, late October/early November for budget letters).
- **Action Step:** Identify key experts and schedule briefings with them well in advance of important city decision dates.

5. Communication Strategy and Outreach

- To strengthen public engagement, EPC should develop a clear and targeted communication plan in collaboration with other commissions.
- **Recommendation:**
 - Work with city staff to develop a calendar for social media campaigns and other outreach efforts around critical EPC initiatives.
 - Use multiple platforms (e.g., social media, newsletters, community events) to reach a broader audience and garner public support.
 - Ensure consistent messaging with citywide environmental efforts, using EPC-approved messaging.

6. Partnership Development and Collaboration

- Strengthening relationships with other commissions and nearby localities is essential to building a unified regional approach to environmental sustainability.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Identify priority commissions, cities, and counties to collaborate with (e.g., Arlington County, Fairfax County) and schedule joint meetings.
 - Develop shared environmental goals and collaborate on projects that benefit multiple jurisdictions.

7. Long-Range Planning, Goal Setting, Implementation, and Monitoring

- EPC must ensure that goals for FY25 and beyond are aligned with broader city planning efforts and are measurable.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Establish an EPC Strategic Subcommittee to lead the development and implementation of long-term goals.
 - Develop and approve clear metrics to evaluate the success of each goal, including tracking greenhouse gas reductions, energy efficiency benchmarks in new constructions, and the number of green businesses certified.
 - **Communication Plan:** Create a strategy to communicate long-term goals to City Council, the public, and partner organizations.
 - **Action Step:** Ensure the subcommittee reports back regularly, with quarterly check-ins to track progress.

Challenges and Solutions

1. Calendar Alignment
2. Volunteer Engagement

Draft Implementation Steps for FY25

1. **Establish the EPC Strategic Subcommittee**
 - Assign leads for each focus area and begin drafting goals and timelines.
 - Hold regular meetings to build consensus around priorities and initiatives for FY25 to present to the full commission.
2. **Develop *Draft* Goals and Objectives**
 - Four draft goals with example SMART objectives:
 1. **Develop Strategic Environmental Priorities:** Identify and prioritize key focus areas for the EPC, including green building initiatives, sustainable transportation, and enhanced advisory roles.
 1. Example: By (date), the EPC will identify and rank its top three focus areas (green building, transportation, and advisory roles) and develop action plans for each by (date).
 2. **Foster Collaboration and Partnerships:** Strengthen partnerships with the Office of Climate Action, other city commissions, and regional entities to promote cohesive and effective environmental policies.
 1. Example: By (date), the EPC will establish at least three formal partnerships with the Office of Climate Action, city commissions, and regional bodies, and collaborate on two joint initiatives.
 3. **Enhance Community Engagement and Communication:** Support communication efforts through an environmental policy lens that engages with the public, increase awareness, and garner support for environmental initiatives.
 4. **Leverage Data and Accountability:** Develop measurable goals and performance indicators to track the progress of EPC initiatives.
 1. Example: By (date), the EPC will establish five performance indicators for its initiatives and produce quarterly progress reports starting in (quarter?) to track and assess the success of these initiatives.
3. **Consensus-Building Meetings**
 - Brief commissioners on draft recommendations for FY25 with the goal of reaching consensus-driven priorities and goals.
4. **Align Commissioners with Expertise Areas**
 - Once priorities are finalized, assign commissioners to support specific areas based on their expertise (e.g., transportation, green building, public engagement). The EPC already has some of this alignment. This effort would formalize and expand the footprint.
5. **Regular Monitoring and Check-Ins**

- Establish quarterly check-ins to track progress on each goal and objective, adjusting as needed.

6. Long-Term Planning and Calendar Development

- Create a detailed calendar that includes EPC's priorities and key city council, legislative, and budget dates. Ensure alignment with broader city planning efforts.