



April 3, 2025

RE: EPC Letter in Support of the City Hall/Market Square Net Zero Renovation, Including Geothermal

Dear Mayor Gaskins, Vice Mayor Bagley, and Members of City Council,

Over the past few months, the Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) has learned and discussed much about the Net Zero City Hall/Market Square renovation plans, including the “expanded excavation” garage replacement. This letter serves to summarize our consensus in support of this effort.

While it is clear that base repairs to the city hall structure and parking garage are needed at minimum to address the impacts of deferred maintenance, the incremental investments to future-proof the property via expanded excavation of the parking garage with geothermal, installation of as many on-site solar panels as possible, inclusion of a green roof, designing all-electric fossil-fuel-free HVAC, and other proposed environmental improvements will add significantly to the facility’s life, provide a long-term financial benefit, show that the city is serious about meeting its environmental and sustainability goals, and be a benchmark of an exemplary project to set the tone for future public and private developments across the City to follow.

We feel it is particularly important to emphasize how the “expanded excavation” design option will promote a more resilient and sustainable future for City Hall. The installation of the geothermal HVAC system, coupled with power from the onsite solar panels (and offsite renewable electricity) will be a significant factor to achieve the goal of a net zero energy facility. The resulting energy independence will improve the property’s resilience, and will help manage the uncertain cost of power from the utility grid. Though the cost of the expanded excavation option is more than the other options being considered, it has long-term benefits that help offset the added cost. It has an extended useful life, better utility cost savings over that lifetime, a better return on investment (ROI), reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and de-risks utility costs by offering a stable energy supply.

Inclusion of various envelope improvements and high-performance systems, stormwater management, a green roof and onsite use of reclaimed water will result in a more sustainable and resilient property. It will also result in a healthier facility, with improved indoor air quality and improved environmental comfort for staff and visitors. The Market Square renovations to include more natural plantings, shading, and water features, support the City’s efforts to mitigate physical climate risks: flooding and extreme heat. Further, this net zero renovation design enables the City to pursue a LEED Platinum certification and to comply with the City’s Green Building Policy. The focus on renewable energy, water conservation and other environmental issues will help the City make progress on meeting many of the sustainability goals specified in the Environmental Action Plan 2040 and the Energy and Climate Change Action Plan. It would also serve as an important example of



the City “walking the talk” – we cannot expect the private sector to take climate action if we are not willing to make that investment ourselves.

In summary, the EPC consensus is in support of City Council fully funding the City Hall Net Zero renovation project, including selecting the Expanded Excavation option for the garage replacement. As Add/Drop approaches, we urge Council to prioritize the long-term value of this renovation option over a short-sighted (lower budget) alternative. We appreciate this opportunity to comment and will be happy to provide any additional information you may require.

Sincerely,  
Marta Schantz  
Chair  
Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission