



ALX FORWARD

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

DECEMBER
2025

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TIP Strategies, Inc., is a privately held Austin-based firm providing consulting and advisory services to public and private sector clients. Established in 1995, the firm has spent 30 years partnering with communities, turning insights into strategies that shape tomorrow. Its core competencies are strategic planning for economic development, talent strategies, organizational development, resiliency planning, and equity initiatives.

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The following organizations provided input during the *ALX Forward* planning process and will be instrumental in supporting the framework's implementation.



Alexandria
Economic
Development
Partnership



Virginia
Economic
Development
Partnership



Alexandria City Public Schools



ALEXANDRIA | ARLINGTON REGION



Del Ray Business Association



West End Business Association



CONTENTS

1. Overview.....	1
Shaping Tomorrow Today	2
Setting Up for Success	3
Engaging the Community	4
Casting a Vision for Action	6
Moving ALX Forward.....	7
2. Catalytic Initiatives	8
Jump-Starting the Action Plan	9
Transformative Place-Based Investments	10
Targeted Business Development	12
Thriving Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	14
3. Action Plan.....	16
Goal 1. Place-Based Development.....	17
Goal 2. Business Retention and Recruitment.....	24
Goal 3. Entrepreneurship and Innovation	30
4. Project Approach.....	36
Community Engagement	37
Strategic Analysis	38
Survey Overview	43
SWOT Analysis	51
5. Implementation	52
Oversight and Decision Making.....	53
Resourcing.....	57
Evaluation and Tracking	57

1

OVERVIEW



Alexandria, Virginia, offers exceptional livability and access to DC and the rest of Northern Virginia, stretching west from the Potomac River. Photo by Dan Poyourow.

SHAPING TOMORROW TODAY

Alexandria, Virginia, (the City) is defined by its rich history, distinctive character, activated waterfront, and strong tourism sector. Situated along the Potomac River, just west of Washington, DC, Alexandria benefits from its proximity to federal government institutions and decision-makers that have a symbiotic relationship with the City's highly educated workforce, shaped by public sector workers, contractors, and associations. The local economy also thrives beyond the federal presence, with a successful small business community, vibrant neighborhoods such as Del Ray and West End, and emerging strengths in technology, healthcare, innovation, and creative industries. In a rapidly changing Capital region, Alexandria is known for its authentic sense of place.

As Alexandria looks toward the future, it faces both opportunity and uncertainty. The City has several catalyst development sites that can bring entertainment, recreation, employment, and industry opportunities to the community, leveraging existing assets such as the Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing, Northern Virginia Community College, Inova Hospital, and the City's five Metrorail stations. The potential for growth and change is counterbalanced by community concerns about maintaining the City's historic charm and ensuring that future growth is inclusive, sustainable, and fiscally sound. During the community engagement conducted as part of the *ALX Forward* planning process, stakeholders expressed a desire to preserve Alexandria's connection to history and welcoming spirit for future generations who may want to live, work, and visit the City.

The characteristics that have made the City a great place to live and work also present long-term challenges for people trying to establish a home base in Alexandria, especially those early in their careers. Housing has become increasingly unaffordable, and the City's general fund has become overly reliant on residential property tax revenues. While trends toward remote and hybrid work have increased the daytime population in many neighborhoods to the benefit of retailers and restaurants, they have also created excess office inventory, especially in Carlyle, leaving a limited number of available sites for commercial and industrial use to rebalance tax revenues. Recent changes in federal policy have also had an impact on the local office market, the workforce, and small businesses, reinforcing the need for a redoubled approach to diversifying Alexandria's industry mix and commercial tax base. While the full extent of these impacts remains to be seen, this framework will help to ensure the community is well-positioned for the future.



Virginia Tech and federal, state, and local leaders cut the ribbon to officially open Virginia Tech's Academic Building One in Potomac Yard. Photo by Dan Poyourow.

SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

Ensuring Alexandria's continued competitiveness was a driving factor in creating *ALX Forward*. The most recent coordinated economic development planning effort was a City-sponsored Economic Sustainability Summit in 2007. This highly successful event resulted in multiple recommendations for improvements to existing systems or new initiatives impacting tourism, real estate development, transit, business recruitment, and organizational functions within the City's economic development network. These recommendations have been implemented, and the City is poised to embark on a new chapter.

In 2025, the Alexandria City Council adopted four priorities to provide the basis for budget and policy decisions: advance housing opportunities, reduce community disparities, drive economic strength, and attract and retain top talent. This strategic planning initiative falls under the economic strength umbrella, which includes community indicators in real estate development, business, workforce, and the percent of the City's general revenue fund derived from residential real estate.

Difficult times create an opportunity to re-evaluate priorities and position the City for future success. The strategic framework that emerged from the *ALX Forward* planning process (shown in Figure 3, page 6) creates a path forward for economic development investments by outlining priorities, goals, strategies, actions and tactics as laid out in section 3. Action Plan (beginning on page 16). Within this framework, Alexandria's competitive position can be recast most effectively by concentrating on short-term, high-impact initiatives outlined under the plan's three goal areas. These catalytic initiatives are designed to transform Alexandria's strengths into unique offerings that will attract business investment to grow and diversify the tax base, while remaining true to the City's identity and values. These recommendations, which are summarized below in Figure 1 and described in greater detail in section 2. Catalytic Initiatives (beginning on page 8) are designed to stretch the City and to drive competitiveness in a rapidly evolving economic landscape.

Figure 1. Catalytic Initiatives by Goal Area

GOAL AREA	TRANSFORMATION	PRIORITIES
 PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENT	<p>Pursue bold, transformative investments in catalyst sites and underutilized assets to spur mixed-use development, enhance Alexandria's quality of place, and generate new revenue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accelerate catalyst site development. Leverage City-owned assets and resources. Streamline development and placemaking efforts. Focus on the experience economy.
 BUSINESS RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT	<p>Focus on retaining local businesses and attracting high-growth industries to diversify Alexandria's economy and create quality jobs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster a collaborative business environment. Position Alexandria as a premier business destination. Strengthen talent pipelines.
 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION	<p>Strengthen Alexandria's entrepreneurial ecosystem by expanding support for small businesses and fostering the growth of innovative, high-growth startups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Expand incubator and accelerator spaces. Foster entrepreneurial skills.

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The *ALX Forward* strategic framework resulted from a collaborative planning process facilitated by TIP Strategies (TIP), an Austin-based economic development strategic planning firm, guided by the City and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP), and informed by robust stakeholder engagement (see Figure 2, right) and quantitative analysis. This approach ensured a balance between professional expertise and community-driven input, resulting in a framework that is data-backed and aligned with the shared aspirations of Alexandria's vibrant community.

The community dialogue revealed several themes that appeared consistently across different formats, suggesting strong consensus around the following priorities and concerns.

- **Equitable Growth** achieved through strategic investment that benefits all parts of Alexandria, ensuring inclusive opportunities across the City.
- **Real Estate** investments focused on repurposing existing assets and creating dynamic, community-centered experiences that celebrate Alexandria's historic character and sense of place.
- **Business Retention and Attraction** efforts that support economic diversification as an integral approach to strengthening the local economy and sustaining long-term job growth.
- **Small Business Support** that improves access to critical resources, helping entrepreneurs thrive and expand locally.
- **Entrepreneurship and Commercialization** fostered by supporting locally grown innovation that generates national impact.
- **Workforce Development** initiatives that emphasize reskilling and resilience to prepare residents for emerging job opportunities and a rapidly evolving economy.
- **Creative Placemaking** approaches that celebrate Alexandria's identity through placekeeping efforts that elevate arts, culture, and community pride.
- **Community Engagement** as an ongoing tool to prioritize awareness and input, ensuring residents have a meaningful role in shaping economic strategies.
- **Resource Alignment** that promotes collaboration across organizations (city, state, and region) to maximize efficiency and impact.
- **Connectivity** initiatives to link catalyst sites with neighborhoods, enhance mobility and access, and foster cohesion citywide.

Figure 2. Stakeholder Engagement Overview



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

These themes were presented during the Economic Summit held on May 8, 2025, which marked a major milestone in the stakeholder engagement process. The City of Alexandria and AEDP hosted the summit at the Westin Alexandria, bringing together over 200 business leaders, policymakers, residents, and stakeholders to explore the City's economic future. The summit featured presentations, panel discussions, and interactive breakout sessions designed to facilitate open dialogue around Alexandria's economic trajectory while gathering community input on a proposed strategic framework to guide long-term development decision-making. Like the 2007 summit, the 2025 event successfully met its goals of engaging various stakeholder groups and collecting critical feedback for the next phase of the planning process.

A summary of the event, the [*Economic Summit Report*](#), was published separately. After the summit, the Alexandria community was invited to complete a post-summit survey that provided an additional opportunity to give feedback on the goals and broad strategies presented at the summit.

Running parallel to the community engagement process, TIP's research team conducted comprehensive quantitative research to better understand the City's competitive position and development potential. This analysis examined both current conditions and historical trends to identify themes that supplement community conversations. Integrating the quantitative analysis with community input revealed strong alignment between data findings and stakeholder perceptions. Not only does this alignment validate the research findings, but it also demonstrates that residents and leaders brought well-informed perspectives to the planning process.

The comprehensive data analysis was delivered as an interactive visualization tool that makes the data easier to understand and more accessible. Using [*Tableau Public*](#), residents can explore the quantitative findings in detail and understand the data underlying strategic recommendations. Key insights from this research are provided in section 4. Project Approach (beginning on page 36) and are integrated throughout the strategic framework to support specific initiatives and implementation approaches. Finally, combining data trends with stakeholder themes shaped TIP's analysis of the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Summarized in Figure 27 (page 51), the analysis guided strategic priority setting, ensured purposeful initiative development, and, ultimately, will foster community-supported implementation.



Port City Brewing Company is an example of Alexandria's diverse industry, and is one of the few local, independent breweries to hold a patent for its brewing methods. Photo courtesy of AEDP.

CASTING A VISION FOR ACTION

The summary framework shown in Figure 3 below reflects the priorities, values, and recommendations identified through extensive engagement with Alexandria's stakeholders and leadership and the results of the quantitative analysis.

The vision statement is central to the framework in that it informs the guiding principles and strategic recommendations across three goal areas. It establishes Alexandria as a forward-thinking community that balances economic prosperity with inclusive opportunity and livability. The vision encompasses several dimensions that demonstrate the community's priorities and aspirations related to resilience, competitiveness, future-readiness, and quality of life.

Functionally, it offers clear direction and inspiration while anchoring strategies in the desirable outcomes highlighted by elected officials, economic development organizations, residents, and community leaders. As a short- and long-term guidepost, the *ALX Forward* vision will enable City and AEDP leadership to align their efforts, inform decision-making, and ensure a systematic approach to managing growth that is still adaptable to changing circumstances.

Figure 3. Summary Framework



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

The framework's guiding principles communicate the values stakeholders identified as essential for evaluating ideas, strategies, and investments for Alexandria's future. These principles are the framework's north star, setting the course for the goals, strategies, and actions.

- **Equity.** Prioritize initiatives that equitably and inclusively create opportunities for all residents.
- **Resilience.** Position Alexandria to grow a more diverse and resilient tax base that is financially sustainable over the long term.
- **Authenticity.** Honor Alexandria's diverse culture, character, and history while embracing place-based development.
- **Accountability.** Follow a structured decision-making process and share regular progress updates.

Finally, the three goal areas organize related objectives and initiatives under major themes and desired outcomes. They provide the primary structure to break down and organize the vision into manageable, focused programs of work: place-based development, business retention and recruitment, and entrepreneurship and innovation. Some of the recommendations enhance, leverage, or encourage the continuation of current initiatives. Strategies and actions that recommend a new or expanded initiative are labeled as such.

MOVING ALX FORWARD

ALX Forward marks a bold step toward Alexandria's future. Rooted in collaboration and creative thinking, the plan will serve as a roadmap for the City to attain the vision expressed by its residents and leaders. Along with creating a path for shared progress, *ALX Forward* prioritizes transformation. Within the framework's three goal areas are initiatives that have the potential to spur development, generate revenue, and enhance quality of life for Alexandria's residents, businesses, and visitors. Making these catalytic investments will require not only boldness, but also accountability in decision making.

Like any plan, the impact of *ALX Forward* will be determined by how effectively the recommendations are implemented. The City and AEDP are already employing some of the plan's strategies. Through their roles as leaders, partners, and conveners, they should continue to seek opportunities to grow, leverage, and adapt existing efforts to a changing environment. Translating the vision, goals, strategies, and actions into reality will demand sustained, coordinated efforts across Alexandria's economic development partners. The quantitative resources, decision-making framework, and implementation matrix delivered as part of the *ALX Forward* planning process will position the City and AEDP to transform strategy into action.

2

CATALYTIC INITIATIVES



The new Alexandria Inova Hospital and Schar Cancer Center, under construction, catalyzed the redevelopment that will turn the former Landmark Mall into a vibrant, mixed-use town center in Alexandria's West End. Photo by Sam Kittner for AEDP.

JUMP-STARTING THE ACTION PLAN

The *ALX Forward* framework includes detailed goals, strategies, actions, and tactics that are pivotal to Alexandria's sustained economic success. It also includes three catalytic initiatives, a subset of section 3. Action Plan (beginning on page 16), that reflect short-term actions the City of Alexandria, AEDP, and local partners in economic development should prioritize over the next two to three years to enhance Alexandria's competitive position.

The following initiatives were selected based on their ability to generate revenue, drive Alexandria's competitiveness in a rapidly evolving economic landscape, and build on existing assets and opportunities:

- Unlock the potential of **transformative place-based investments** in real estate.
- Position Alexandria as the destination of choice for high-growth industries alongside a renewed focus on retaining existing companies through a **targeted business development** effort.
- Build a **thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem** with enhanced access to capital.

Along with a brief narrative, this section provides a summary of the action items and tactics that have been identified as having the potential to move the City forward on an accelerated track. Each summary indicates whether the action or tactic represents a new effort, which organization or department is responsible for leading them, and which entities may serve as collaborators. For City departments and offices, the associated boards and commissions would also play a role in implementation. Collaborators are indicated using the abbreviations show in Figure 4.

Because the catalytic initiatives are a subset of the Action Plan, they are included in the matrix (delivered separately) that will guide *ALX Forward*'s implementation. See page 57 for additional information on the matrix.

Figure 4. Abbreviations Used in this Section

In alphabetical order

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA	
CMO	City Manager's Office
CODE	Code Administration
FIN	Finance
GEN	General Services
ITS	Information Technology Services
OA&I	Office of Analytics & Innovation
OCCE	Office of Communications & Community Engagement
OHA	Office of Historic Alexandria
P&Z	Planning & Zoning
RPCA	Recreation, Parks, & Cultural Activities
T&ES	Transportation & Environment Services
WDC	Workforce Development Center
COLLABORATORS	
AARWC	Alexandria/Arlington Regional Workforce Council
ACPS	Alexandria City Public Schools
AEDP	Alexandria Economic Development Partnership
BA	Business Associations
CALX	Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
IDA	Alexandria Industrial Development Authority
MWCOG	Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
NOVAEDA	Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance
NVCC	Northern Virginia Community College
NVRC	Northern Virginia Regional Commission
VALX	Visit Alexandria
VEDP	Virginia Economic Development Partnership
VIPC	Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation
VT	Virginia Tech

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia.

Transformative Place-Based Investments

Pursue bold, transformative investments in catalyst sites and underutilized assets to spur mixed-use development, enhance Alexandria's quality of place, and generate new revenue.

Alexandria's current portfolio of available sites for development, redevelopment, and infill is a strategic and unique advantage that should be leveraged. The City should aggressively pursue development of its large-scale "catalyst sites," which include Potomac Yard, Old Town North, West End, Carlyle, and Eisenhower East. Attracting anchor investments to these sites has the potential to spur mixed-use development and deliver amenities that the community desires, such as retail, entertainment, arts, and culture. If done properly, these investments have the potential to transform and connect neighborhoods and commercial corridors and extend the "sense of place" across the City (not just Old Town), while generating significant new streams of revenue.

The City should not shy away from bold investments to maintain, create, or reimagine its neighborhoods, including infrastructure investments that may be required to make catalyst sites market- or investment-ready.

The City has already taken the initial step of funding a study of City-owned real estate assets. The City, along with its partners, should strategically deploy underutilized assets that it determines are not needed specifically for a public purpose, after determining what is the highest and best use of those properties. Alexandria's Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is a valuable tool that can be leveraged in this process.



I Love You, by Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt of R&R STUDIOS, was a public art installation, part of a rotating program located on the waterfront. Photo by Laura Hatcher Photography for Visit Alexandria.

Figure 5. Catalytic Initiative Summary: Transformative Place-Based Investments

Including lead organization and potential collaborators (see Figure 4, page 9, for abbreviations used)

INITIATIVE	LEAD	COLLABORATORS
Accelerate catalyst site development.		
• Continue to prioritize the promotion of Potomac Yard, Old Town North, West End, Carlyle, and Eisenhower East to attract prospects.	AEDP	VEDP, NOVAEDA
• NEW Launch a targeted catalyst marketing campaign and collaborate with developers to attract and secure anchor projects.	AEDP	P&Z, property developers, VALX, marketing firms
• Consider bold upfront investments (e.g., infrastructure improvements) and leverage tools (e.g., tax increment financing, tax abatements, and other incentives), based on the Decision Matrix criteria (see Figure 8, page 18), to ensure sites are development ready.	CMO	FIN, IDA, T&ES
Leverage City assets.		
• NEW Deploy underutilized assets using a strategic approach that considers highest and best use to inform trade-offs.	CMO	GEN
• Leverage tools and partnerships, such as the Industrial Development Authority, to finance and fast-track priority projects, reducing costs and accelerating delivery.	CMO	P&Z, CODE, AEDP, IDA
• Invest in place-based initiatives—such as arts and cultural districts or creative hubs—that celebrate neighborhoods and honor cultural identity to drive foot traffic, attract local/visitor spending, and boost resident pride while adding amenities and growing the tax base.	CMO	P&Z, VALX, BA, RPCA, OHA, AEDP
Streamline development and placemaking efforts.		
• Update and upgrade project review procedures and standards via One Start to create a single, transparent, and faster path from application to approval.	P&Z	CODE, T&ES
• EXPAND Increase engagement with developers and stakeholders to co-design process improvements that reduce friction, de-risk projects, and catalyze investment.	P&Z	Real estate community, AEDP
• EXPAND Allocate resources to focus on coordinated neighborhood-specific placemaking efforts for alignment and accelerating activation (e.g., explore business improvement districts, tourism improvement districts, matching funds, and staffing for technical support).	CMO	P&Z, VALX, AEDP
• Ensure economic development priorities continue to be included in small area plans and corridor studies. Examples include encouraging desired uses that contribute to non-residential tax revenue (e.g., entertainment, arts and culture, neighborhood-serving retail, and business incubators).	P&Z	AEDP
Focus on the experience economy.		
• NEW Target and attract new uses that enhance Alexandria's arts, culture, entertainment, and sports assets (e.g., esports, youth and sporting tournaments, theaters and performance venues, meetings, special events and convention center space, and wellness spas).	AEDP	VALX, RPCA and its partners, OHA

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Targeted Business Development

Focus on retaining local businesses and attracting high-growth industries to diversify Alexandria's economy and create quality jobs.

Alexandria has experienced a more than 20 percent decrease in jobs since 2007. Starting with the Great Recession, this trend was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and now by federal impacts. A renewed emphasis on business retention, while also attracting growth-oriented industries and firms, will be critical to Alexandria's future resilience and prosperity.

In terms of business attraction and retention, the City should focus its efforts on recruiting high-growth industries to Alexandria to diversify the economy and create high-paying jobs. Attraction efforts should center on key target sectors (Emerging & Advanced Technology, Cybersecurity & Defense, Professional Services, and Health Sciences) along with new verticals, such as entertainment and sports tourism, that will draw people into the City while meeting demand for greater local amenities cited during the community engagement phase of this project.

To be successful in attracting and retaining businesses in this highly competitive environment, the City will need to employ an intentional, multifaceted approach. The use of targeted incentives aligned with the guidance in the Decision Matrix and leveraging partners such as the City's Industrial Development Authority as a deal-closing tool are essential components. Auditing City processes and policies (e.g., zoning and permitting) to ensure competitiveness and making changes as needed will be pivotal to maintaining a business-friendly environment. Investing in marketing resources to clearly communicate the City's attractiveness as a place to invest and grow, including developing a world-class website, launching digital campaigns, and highlighting local business success stories, represents a key piece of the transformation.



Sikich, a global company specializing in technology-enabled professional services, hosts its regional headquarters in Alexandria. Photo courtesy of AEDP.

Figure 6. Catalytic Initiative Summary: Targeted Business Development

Including lead organization and potential collaborators (see Figure 4, page 9, for abbreviations used)

INITIATIVE	LEAD	COLLABORATORS
Foster a collaborative business environment.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EXPAND Streamline the City's business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts with AEDP as the lead and establish a cross-partner BRE network to coordinate outreach, increase retention and expansion successes, and deliver value-added services. 	AEDP	VEDP, NOVAEDA, CALX, BA, FIN, VALX, WDC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEW Develop a BRE toolkit and start-up guide with partner agencies such as City departments, business chambers and associations, and workforce partners that would serve both new and existing businesses. 	AEDP	FIN, CODE, P&Z, RPCA, WDC, VALX
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage the results from the City's Disparity Study to ensure that all businesses have a fair opportunity to participate in City of Alexandria procurement. 	CMO	FIN, CALX, BA, VALX
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEW Develop an annual BRE strategy and joint visitation schedule to prioritize outreach, track results, and resolve issues. 	AEDP	VEDP, NOVAEDA, CALX, BA, VALX, WDC, FIN, OA&I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEW Conduct a competitiveness scan of the City's business processes (i.e., zoning, permitting, tax rates) and policies; introduce changes as needed to ensure the City maintains a business-friendly environment. 	CMO	FIN, P&Z, CODE, ITS, T&ES, OA&I
Position Alexandria as a premier business destination.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEW Audit all economic development partner websites to present a consistent value proposition for the City and to strengthen brand recognition. 	AEDP	OCCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen Alexandria's digital presence to drive qualified leads and conversions in target industries, including collaboration with Visit Alexandria to boost sports and entertainment tourism leads. 	AEDP	VALX, OCCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showcase business success stories and leverage Virginia Tech's presence to attract investment from innovative industries. 	AEDP	VT, OCCE
Strengthen talent pipelines.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with employers and K-20 institutions to create industry-aligned programs and expand internships and apprenticeships that lead to local hiring. 	WDC	ACPS, local schools, VT, NVCC, AARWC, trades and labor associations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEW Circulate BRE insights to guide workforce and training providers in aligning their offerings (career tracks, credential programs) with employer demand and closing skill gaps in high-demand fields. 	AEDP	WDC, ACPS, local schools, VT, NVCC, AARWC, trades and labor associations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EXPAND Leverage data, partnerships, and training pathways to expand career pathways that include upskilling and reskilling programs that reduce barriers to workforce participation and improve access to quality jobs while retaining local talent. 	WDC	OA&I, ACPS, local schools, VT, NVCC, AARWC, trades and labor associations

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Thriving Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Strengthen Alexandria's entrepreneurial ecosystem by expanding support for small businesses and fostering the growth of innovative, high-growth startups.

While Alexandria is widely recognized for its history and proximity to federal institutions, the City is known regionally for its small businesses, particularly brick-and-mortar establishments, and its emerging entrepreneurial scene. With a highly educated workforce—most residents age 25 years and over hold a bachelor's degree—and a strong presence of technical professionals, the City already has the human capital needed to support new ventures. Its connection to major research and policy institutions, such as the US Patent and Trademark Office and the National Science Foundation, along with access to Washington, DC, strengthens its potential as an innovation hub while offering an appealing quality of life. Recent projects, including the Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing and the Inova Schar Cancer Institute's future campus, further enhance Alexandria's research and innovation landscape, while shifts in the federal workforce have introduced a pool of skilled professionals open to new opportunities.

The vision for growth in the Entrepreneurship and Innovation goal area is for the City to maintain and expand support services for Alexandria's small business community to include targeted resources for innovative/high growth entrepreneurs. To achieve this vision and fully harness its potential, Alexandria must address current gaps in its entrepreneurial ecosystem, particularly its limited experience with high-growth, technology-based startups. Creating an innovation system that can cultivate these businesses, which typically target external markets; require significant capital investment; and rely on proprietary ideas, processes, or products, was viewed as a priority by stakeholders engaged during the *ALX Forward* planning process.

Building this ecosystem will require connecting entrepreneurs with resources such as funding networks, regulatory guidance, and support for scaling businesses. The City's strategic path forward centers on fostering collaboration among students, researchers, and entrepreneurs; expanding access to investment; and leveraging local institutions and assets. By doing so, Alexandria can cultivate a resilient, prosperous, and diverse economy and establish itself as a dynamic hub for innovation and startup growth.



Student working at Virginia Tech's Academic Building One on the first day of classes. Photo courtesy of Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing.

Figure 7. Catalytic Initiative Summary: Thriving Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
 Including lead organization and potential collaborators (see Figure 4, page 9, for abbreviations used)

INITIATIVE	LEAD	COLLABORATORS
Build the entrepreneurship ecosystem.		
• NEW Allocate resources for an entrepreneur concierge approach to reduce time-to-launch, improve 1:1 navigation, and increase warm handoffs.	CMO	VIPC, VT
Expand incubator and accelerator spaces.		
• NEW Utilize recently approved City of Alexandria funding for an accelerator or incubator space to better understand the profile of potential users and better define needed support services.	AEDP	VIPC, VT, Alexandria coworking spaces
• NEW Establish incentives and partnerships (university anchors, corporate sponsors, landlord MOUs) to provide in-demand shared services and resources for high-growth companies, including innovation space.	CMO/ AEDP	VIPC, VT, real estate developers
Foster entrepreneurial skills.		
• NEW Convene representatives from K-20 (e.g., ACPS and higher education institutions) via an entrepreneurial learning consortium to align curriculum offerings with needed skillsets and enable work-based learning.	AEDP/ WDC	ACPS, local schools, VT, NVCC
• NEW Host student entrepreneurship events and competitions (e.g., business plan or pitch competitions and hackathons) to grow the pipeline, form new teams, and increase follow-on funding exposure.	AEDP/ WDC	ACPS, local schools, VT, NVCC
• NEW Conduct a strategic assessment of establishing a Fed2Founder Accelerator to support the conversion of federal talent into startups and spinouts.	AEDP/ WDC	VT, NVCC, AARWC, MWCOG, NOVAEDA

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; TIP Strategies, Inc.

3

ACTION PLAN



The Potomac Yard Metro Station and the growth in that neighborhood illustrate the successes since the last economic summit. Photo by Sam Kittner.

Goal 1. Place-Based Development

Invest in dynamic, inclusive, and authentic places that reflect Alexandria's character and contribute to a diversified tax base.

Alexandria's neighborhoods, corridors, and commercial districts are more than physical spaces—they communicate the City's identity, preserve its history, and provide the basis for economic growth. Each part of the City has its own character, story, and amenities that are inextricably connected to one another and to the whole of the community. The City is known as a family-friendly community of distinct neighborhoods that offers big-city amenities with a small-town feel. Over time, however, Alexandria has become less accessible to a wide variety of people. Housing has become unattainable for many, and most residents rent their homes. Affordability challenges extend to the commercial market as well. Average retail and industrial

rental rates in Alexandria exceed those in the metropolitan statistical area (MSA),¹ an issue compounded by low construction rates. As Alexandria continues to evolve, it must ensure that its built environment conserves what makes it a great place to live, work, and visit, while at the same time providing opportunities for future development.

Effectively leveraging real estate opportunities requires a commitment to maximizing large-scale opportunities in locations such as Old Town North, Eisenhower East, the West End, and Potomac Yard. It also involves fully realizing the potential of existing assets such as historic buildings, infill opportunities, the waterfront, commercial corridors, and pedestrian-friendly streets. Future development should contribute to, and diversify, the local tax base, while also representing the surrounding community and being adaptable to a changing environment. During stakeholder engagement, participants often expressed interest in development that includes performing arts venues and meeting spaces that serve residents and attract visitors, recreational facilities that capitalize on the youth sports market, and child-friendly amenities that provide alternatives for families. In addition, participants wanted to see more support for entrepreneurship and economic growth through spaces that foster innovation. Currently, hospitality and tourism, performance arts, local entertainment, and entrepreneurship are not considered competitive advantages in Alexandria's economy, though they hold strong potential for growth. Unlocking that potential will require an intentional approach to real estate investment, supporting infrastructure, land use policy, and placemaking.

The City's real estate opportunities also help ensure Alexandria continues to be a premier destination for regional and national visitors. The City is frequently ranked by national publications as a top place to live and visit. Small businesses in Old Town are a regional draw, and many visitors include the area as a daytime stop in their itinerary during a larger trip to Washington, DC. There is also potential for future tourism initiatives to highlight the amenities in other parts of the City, such as the vibrant restaurant scene in West End or the eclectic shops and events in Del Ray. The strategic framework seeks to address these gaps and further elevate Alexandria's status as a tourism destination.

The recommendations in this section concentrate on shaping development and tourism that not only attract investment, but also reinforce the values of equity, authenticity, and resiliency—ensuring that growth is sustainable over the long-term for the people, businesses, and visitors of Alexandria.

HOW TO READ THE ACTION PLAN	
1.1	Strategy to achieve the goal
1.1.1	Action item to accomplish strategy
1.1.1.A	Tactic for implementing actions (includes both current and potential tactics)
NEW	Activity not currently being performed
EXPAND	May require additional resources
	<i>Indicators at the strategy level apply to associated tactics. Items not flagged are assumed to continue at current levels.</i>

¹ According to CoStar, the average retail rent per square foot (SF) in Alexandria in 2024 was \$34.42/year NNN, exceeding the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria MSA average of \$29.54. Corresponding rents for industrial were \$15.75/SF in Alexandria and \$13.14/SF for the MSA.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

1.1. Accelerate catalyst site development. Prioritize bold, transformative real estate projects that contribute to revenue generation and enhance quality of place throughout the City.

1.1.1. Use the revised Decision Matrix shown in Figure 8 to identify when the City of Alexandria will invest in catalyst sites, and make elements of the matrix readily available online for potential developers, site selectors, business owners, and community members to view. (See section 5. Implementation for additional information.)

Figure 8. Economic Development Investment Decision Matrix: Factors and Key Terms

Factors evaluated on a scale where 1= negative impact, 2 = neutral, 3= positive impact, with score ranging from 5 to 15

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION
Quantifiable Impact	Projects must show measurable financial benefits and economic development outcomes. Focus on high-quality job creation, estimated follow-on development for catalyst potential, and projected revenue growth.
Strategic Alignment	Prioritize projects aligning with the <i>ALX Forward</i> framework, as well as the City's target industries and tax base diversification objective.
Necessity of Public Funds and Leveraged Investment	Public funds are justified only if the project wouldn't proceed, would not be feasible, or would be lost to another location, "but for" City investment. Projects need secure sponsor and partner commitments to qualify for incentives.
Protect the City's Credit Rating	Prioritize projects that boost future debt capacity via tax revenue and do not jeopardize the City's AAA credit rating.
Community Benefit	Incentivized projects must invest in community benefits that align with City Council priorities and values.
KEY TERM	DEFINITION
High-Quality Jobs	High-quality jobs provide living wages, comprehensive benefits, safe and predictable work conditions, and clear, equitable paths to advancement.
Target Industries	Emerging and Advanced Technologies, Cybersecurity and Defense, Entertainment and Tourism, Professional Services, Nonprofits and Associations, and the emerging sectors of healthcare and innovation.
Strategic Goals	Place-Based Development, Business Retention and Recruitment, and Entrepreneurship and Innovation.
Community Benefits Examples	Affordable Housing and Anti-Displacement; High-Quality Jobs; Wages and Training; Small Business and Inclusive Procurement; Community Facilities and Social Infrastructure; Mobility and Access; Digital Equity; and Community Wealth Building.

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

1.1.2. Develop a process for ongoing engagement around economic development, real estate, and future opportunities that contribute to Alexandria's competitive positioning.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

1.1.2.A. Host an annual "State of the City" event that highlights recent accomplishments and developments, shares current market conditions and emerging trends, identifies future priorities and opportunities, and provides an opportunity for community engagement and feedback.

- 1.1.2.B. Leverage existing opportunities (e.g., City Council meetings and events) for ongoing engagement on economic development.
- 1.1.2.C. **NEW** Coordinate peer city tours with City or AEDP staff and key business or community leaders to focus on building relationships; increasing collaboration; and learning from one another's best practices, successful initiatives, and specific projects.
- 1.1.2.D. **NEW** Facilitate quarterly forums devoted to timely topics in economic and real estate development. These forums are an opportunity to share information and receive public feedback.
- 1.1.2.E. **EXPAND** Increase community outreach and attendance for "Meet the Project" events where attendees have an opportunity to learn about a specific development project or major initiative and meet relevant staff or contractors.
- 1.1.2.F. **EXPAND** Incorporate pop-up community outreach in places where people gather (e.g., festivals, recreation centers, and libraries) and consider working with community-based project ambassadors to further outreach efforts.

- 1.1.3. Continue to promote preferred development locations such as Carlyle and Eisenhower East, Old Town North, West End, and the Potomac Yard through targeted investments and incentives.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 1.1.3.A. Continue to prioritize the promotion of Potomac Yard, Old Town North, West End, Carlyle, and Eisenhower East to attract prospects.
- 1.1.3.B. **NEW** Launch a targeted catalyst marketing campaign and collaborate with developers to attract and secure anchor projects.
- 1.1.3.C. Consider bold upfront investments (e.g., infrastructure improvements) and leverage tools (e.g., tax increment financing, tax abatements, and other incentives), based on the Decision Matrix criteria (see Figure 8, page 18), to ensure sites are development ready.
- 1.1.3.D. **NEW** Expand the site and building search tool and use it to create a public-private investment guidebook to market high-priority development sites. The playbook would be shared with potential developers and would contain information on relevant incentive programs, existing infrastructure needs, zoning constraints, potential barriers to development, and intended outcomes.
- 1.1.3.E. Continue to promote and utilize local, state, and federal incentives and financing tools.
- 1.1.3.F. Link small business and entrepreneurial ecosystem goals to the redevelopment vision for each site.

- 1.2. **Leverage City assets.** Continue to facilitate investments and partnerships designed to strengthen place-based initiatives that honor Alexandria's diverse neighborhoods, cultural identity, and heritage while addressing community needs for a gathering place.

- 1.2.1. Leverage City assets, resources, and partnerships for place-based investments in underutilized areas of the City.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 1.2.1.A. **NEW** Deploy underutilized assets using a strategic approach that considers highest and best use to inform trade-offs.

- 1.2.1.B. Leverage tools and partnerships, such as the Industrial Development Authority, to finance and fast-track priority projects, reducing costs and accelerating delivery.
- 1.2.1.C. Invest in place-based initiatives—such as arts and cultural districts or creative hubs—that celebrate neighborhoods and honor cultural identity to drive foot traffic, attract local/visitor spending, and boost resident pride while adding amenities and growing the tax base.
- 1.2.1.D. **NEW** Launch a Neighborhood Partner Program modeled after the City's Community Matching Fund, extending potential project areas beyond City-owned property.
- 1.2.1.E. **EXPAND** Provide matching grants and technical support to community groups for projects that enhance a neighborhood's sense of place. Possible projects include public art installations, enhanced wayfinding with location-specific signage, or pop-up events.
- 1.2.1.F. Prioritize neighborhoods located in the census tracts identified as low economic opportunity and those experiencing rapid development pressures.
- 1.2.2. Support inclusive and cultural heritage tourism, by building on existing efforts from Visit Alexandria and the Office of Historic Alexandria.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 1.2.2.A. Partner with Visit Alexandria and local cultural and historical organizations to elevate the narratives, places, and significant events of Black, immigrant, and indigenous history.
- 1.2.2.B. Build on existing assets, such as the Alexandria Heritage Trail and the African American Heritage Trails, highlighting Alexandria's neighborhoods, culture, and history.
- 1.2.2.C. Create interpretive elements highlighting Alexandria's neighborhoods, culture, and history.
- 1.2.3. Continue expanding the City's arts and culture infrastructure by building on existing efforts from the City of Alexandria's Office of the Arts.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 1.2.3.A. **EXPAND** Activate vacant storefronts with interim uses, such as maker spaces, pop-up retail/galleries, and artist-in-residence programs.
- 1.2.3.B. **NEW** Expedite activation through design standards or a playbook of pre-approved designs for permitting applicants to follow.
- 1.2.3.C. Encourage investment in cultural venues and creative placemaking in catalyst real estate development sites and along commercial corridors.
- 1.2.3.D. Continue to require an art installation (e.g., murals, mosaics, and historic storytelling) in large-scale new developments.
- 1.2.3.E. Include culturally significant, but non-landmarked, buildings in development, planning, tourism, arts, and culture initiatives.

- 1.3. **Streamline development and placemaking efforts.** Ensure that land use policies are supportive of sustainable and innovative approaches to development by building on existing efforts from the City of Alexandria Planning and Zoning Department.

- 1.3.1. Update and upgrade project review procedures and standards via One Start to create a single, transparent, and faster path from application to approval.
- 1.3.2. **EXPAND** Increase engagement with developers and stakeholders to co-design process improvements that reduce friction, de-risk projects, and catalyze investment.

- 1.3.3. **EXPAND** Allocate resources to coordinated, neighborhood-specific placemaking efforts designed to improve alignment and accelerate activation (e.g., explore business improvement districts, tourism improvement districts, matching funds, and staffing for technical support).
- 1.3.4. Continue to build on Alexandria's success in adaptive reuse, to include office-to-residential conversions. During after-action reviews with project teams, identify any obstacles or barriers to the process and discuss potential solutions for future projects.
- 1.3.5. Ensure economic development priorities continue to be included in small area plans and corridor studies. Examples include encouraging desired uses that contribute to non-residential tax revenue (e.g., entertainment, arts and culture, neighborhood-serving retail, and business incubators).

1.4. **Focus on the experience economy.** Position the City as a destination of choice for local, regional, and national visitors by building up the City's experience economy.

- 1.4.1. **NEW** Include experiential retail, entertainment, and youth sports facility developers in a dedicated catalyst marketing campaign.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 1.4.1.A. Partner with site selectors to promote priority development sites and highlight the potential success of a particular use, as measured by the numbers of potential users or visitors, youth sports events and participation rates, and visitation rates to nearby attractions.
- 1.4.1.B. Consider a design competition to generate interest, visibility, and creative solutions for complex or hard-to-build sites.

1.4.2. Expand destination development beyond Old Town in coordination with Visit Alexandria.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 1.4.2.A. Maintain Alexandria's national reputation as a top place to visit, and continue to highlight the City's destinations, small businesses, and history.
- 1.4.2.B. **EXPAND** Build on planned efforts to promote the experiences and assets in neighborhoods such as West End, Del Ray, and Arlandria-Chirilagua.
- 1.4.2.C. **EXPAND** Create wayfinding and storytelling that links districts throughout Alexandria, encouraging visitors to explore beyond Old Town and the Waterfront.
- 1.4.2.D. **EXPAND** Integrate experiential retail, entertainment, and youth sports developments into tourism marketing materials.
- 1.4.2.E. Build physical connections between districts and neighborhoods that promote walking and biking such as trails, sidewalks, and bike lanes.

1.4.3. Enhance infrastructure that supports the tourism economy and adds value to the community.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 1.4.3.A. Encourage the development of additional hotel and convention/meeting space in Alexandria by promoting sites and meeting with hoteliers to identify barriers to market entry.
- 1.4.3.B. Target and attract new uses that enhance Alexandria's arts, culture, entertainment, and sports assets (e.g., esports, youth and sporting tournaments, theaters and performance venues, meetings, special events and convention center space, and wellness spas).
- 1.4.3.C. Build on multimodal transportation options that link tourist destinations throughout the City.

EpicCentral | Grand Prairie, Texas

EpicCentral is a 172-acre entertainment district in Grand Prairie, just southwest of Dallas, Texas. The development is owned by the City of Grand Prairie, who partnered with a developer to build out the site. EpicCentral is a community hub featuring hotels, a convention center, nightly water show, restaurants, an award-winning waterpark—Epic Waters was named one of the top three indoor waterparks in the nation in the 2025 *USA Today* 10BEST Readers' Choice Awards—and recreation facilities for people of all ages and abilities. Revenue from the water park is also used to subsidize admission fees for the town's residents, increasing accessibility for community members. EpicCentral is funded by a combination of tax increment financing (TIF) and a sales tax revenue bond (funded by a 0.25 percent local option sales tax). The development attracted 1.4 million visitors from January through April 2025 (up from 1.2 million visitors during the same period in 2024), 30 percent of whom are Grand Prairie residents, with the other 70 percent residing outside the city. The dual-branded Homewood Suites by Hilton Grand Prairie and Hilton Garden Inn Grand Prairie at EpicCentral hotel averages 85-90 percent occupancy. In addition to attracting new retail, restaurant, hotel development, and major attractions such as Topgolf Grand Prairie and IKEA (all of which bring significant visitor spending into the city), the development has created a new large-scale recreation and entertainment center for residents.

Source(s): [EpicCentral](#) and [Visit Grand Prairie](#) websites.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Figure 9 includes two sets of performance measures: community indicators that measure citywide trends to inform decision making and metrics designed to communicate the outcomes of the actions, programs, or initiatives implemented.

Figure 9. Sample Performance Measures for Place-Based Development (Goal 1)

COMMUNITY INDICATORS
Real Estate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amount of capital investment from real estate development/redevelopment projects assisted by the City Annual retail sales tax Median sales price and median rent for existing residential units Number of new hotel rooms added Number of new residential units added to the market Occupancy levels and average rates for existing hotels Share of property tax revenues by commercial and residential development Tax revenue from new development projects Total new retail/restaurant, industrial, and office space added Vacancy and median rental rates for existing retail/restaurant, industrial, and office space
Socio-Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeownership rates Housing affordability, including share of cost-burdened households spending more than 30% of income on rent or mortgage payments Median household income Share of population in poverty

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

Tourism

- Annual economic impact of tourism-based activity on the local economy
- Annual hotel tax revenues
- Number of visitors to arts and culture, entertainment, and performance events or venues
- Number of events, including festivals, concerts, and sports tournaments

METRICS (with link to related strategy)

• Number of community engagement events and number of participants	Strategy 1.1
• Number of marketing touchpoints (e.g., web, social media, and print media)	Strategy 1.1
• Average engagement rate for posts and content across social media platforms	Strategy 1.1
• Number of peer city visits	Strategy 1.1
• Investment by the City of Alexandria in placemaking projects	Strategy 1.1, 1.2
• Investment by public-private partnerships (citywide, and on publicly owned properties)	Strategy 1.1, 1.2
• Estimated return on investment (ROI) for real estate projects	Strategy 1.1, 1.2
• Number of new building permits	Strategy 1.3
• Development projects application review time	Strategy 1.3
• Total number of hotel rooms added and hotel occupancy rates	Strategy 1.4

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Goal 2. Business Retention and Recruitment

Support local businesses, attract new companies, and diversify the economy to create an array of high-quality employment opportunities.

For many Alexandrians, the business community is as much a part of the City's identity as its historic charm. Its proximity to major economic hubs, highly educated workforce, robust transportation infrastructure, and location in a business-friendly state make the City attractive to industry, entrepreneurs, and mission-driven organizations seeking access to the nation's capital. Alexandria's strategic location and high quality of life are noteworthy strengths in a globally competitive landscape, especially as companies seek places that offer a talent pipeline, cultural richness, and logistical advantages.

Yet the City faces pressing economic realities that must be addressed with intention and creativity. Alexandria has experienced a more than 20 percent decrease in jobs since 2007. The City has a limited supply of commercial real estate, particularly light industrial space, alongside high office vacancy rates and an over-reliance on residential property taxes. Stalling population growth, the outmigration of young professionals, and general uncertainty regarding the federal government point to an increased need for a more strategic approach to business growth. A renewed emphasis on retaining and supporting homegrown businesses, while also attracting growth-oriented industries and firms, will be critical to ensuring Alexandria remains economically resilient and future-oriented.

Moving forward, Alexandria has opportunities to reshape its commercial landscape and grow its business base. Strategic reuse of vacant office space; catalytic redevelopment projects; and recent projects, such as Virginia Tech's Institute for Advanced Computing, provide fertile ground for business recruitment and industry attraction efforts. At the same time, targeted support for existing businesses and investments in workforce reskilling can help strengthen the local economy from within. With a shared vision and a commitment to collaboration, Alexandria can move toward economic vitality despite the challenges it faces.

The following recommendations are aimed at strengthening Alexandria's existing business community and attracting new businesses that align with the City's target industries (see Figure 11, page 25), workforce capabilities, and long-term vision. The recommendations in this section are meant to broaden and diversify the City's economic base by leveraging current strengths, reinforcing the pursuit of existing target industries, and exploring new areas for growth.

Figure 10. Local and Traded Cluster Characteristics

TRADED CLUSTERS	LOCAL CLUSTERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve outside markets. • Free to choose where they locate. • Concentrated in a few regions with specific advantage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily serve local markets. • Present in virtually every market. • Location not dependent on competitive advantage.
WHY IT MATTERS	
<p>Increasing the ratio of traded-to-local clusters is a common strategy for enhancing economic prosperity. Traded clusters are emphasized by economic developers because they include industries and firms that typically produce goods and services for customers beyond the local region. These traded activities are thus more likely to produce externally generated revenues, which can, in turn, filter back to the local economy. As an example, a dentist office might serve local customers exclusively, while a manufacturing plant, an Inc. 5000 company, a data center, or a hotel would typically serve paying customers beyond the local area. The ability of traded clusters to serve larger markets also presents greater opportunity for employment growth, whereas a dentist office might face more finite geographic limits to expansion.</p>	

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

Figure 11. Target Industry Overview

EMERGING AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY 	<p>Description. A growing ecosystem of AI, quantum computing, and data analytics companies leveraging the City's proximity to federal agencies, defense contractors, and world-class research institutions to serve both government and commercial markets.</p> <p>Assets. Alexandria benefits from the talent pipelines and knowledge coming out of nearby universities (including Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing and George Mason University), historically direct access to federal research funding and Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants, quality office spaces with reliable telecommunications networks, and government contracting opportunities.</p> <p>Opportunities. Federal agencies' increasing demand for AI, machine learning, and data analytics solutions creates substantial market opportunities for local tech companies to capture contracts in next-generation defense technologies and federal modernization efforts.</p>
CYBERSECURITY AND DEFENSE 	<p>Description. Established defense contractors and emerging cybersecurity firms that provide comprehensive security solutions to federal agencies, defense contractors, and critical infrastructure operators benefitting from Alexandria's concentration of cybersecurity and defense sector talent and its proximity to the Pentagon and other national security organizations.</p> <p>Assets. Along with direct access to federal agencies and a significant pool of cleared security professionals and veterans, Alexandria also presents the opportunity to benefit from locally hosted cybersecurity conferences, a network of training facilities, and the ability to establish and maintain relationships with government contracting officers.</p> <p>Opportunities. Rising cyber threats create expanding demand for sophisticated security solutions including zero-trust architecture implementation, cloud security, threat intelligence, and emerging technologies across federal agencies and critical infrastructure operators.</p>
ENTERTAINMENT AND TOURISM 	<p>Description. Alexandria's rich colonial and Civil War history, vibrant waterfront location, and cultural attractions create a year-round destination, supported by its National Historic Landmark District designation, which attracts millions of visitors annually.</p> <p>Assets. The City features Old Town Alexandria's cobblestone streets; the Torpedo Factory Art Center; scenic Potomac River waterfront venues; excellent Metro accessibility to Washington, DC, and Reagan National Airport; Potomac Yard; and robust hospitality infrastructure, including boutique hotels and diverse dining options.</p> <p>Opportunities. Growing interest in historical, experiential, and sports tourism creates opportunities for innovative tour companies and immersive experiences, while waterfront redevelopment projects and digital applications offer potential for new entertainment venues, convention/meeting space, and enhanced visitor experiences.</p>
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES 	<p>Description. Specialized management consulting, legal services, accounting, and advisory services tailored to the complex regulatory environment needs of government agencies, defense contractors, nonprofits, and commercial enterprises throughout the National Capital Region create a critical support system for the region.</p> <p>Assets. Alexandria's location provides advantages for organizations requiring sophisticated professional services support, backed by a highly educated workforce with expertise in government contracting and federal procurement processes, an abundance of office facilities and proximity to major clients.</p> <p>Opportunities. Continued government outsourcing, growing regulatory compliance complexity, expanding government contracting options emphasizing small business participation, and digital transformation initiatives create ongoing opportunities for specialized consulting and advisory service providers.</p>
NONPROFITS AND ASSOCIATIONS 	<p>Description. National and international nonprofits, advocacy organizations, trade associations, charitable foundations, and research institutes benefit from proximity to federal policymakers, congressional staff, and global decision-makers while addressing diverse social, economic, and policy challenges.</p> <p>Assets. The City's location provides unparalleled access to federal policymakers and regulatory agencies while offering cost-effective office space compared to Washington, DC; excellent Metro accessibility; and a strong network of professional service providers specializing in nonprofit governance and compliance.</p> <p>Opportunities. Growing emphasis on public-private partnerships, increasing demand from international organizations seeking US headquarters with government access, expanding corporate social responsibility programs, and enhanced digital fundraising capabilities create opportunities for expanded reach and community impact.</p>

Source(s): Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, TIP Strategies, Inc.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

2.1. Foster a collaborative business environment. Support and grow Alexandria's businesses of all sizes.

2.1.1. Cultivate a collaborative framework to assess and support Alexandria's existing businesses while fostering a business climate that supports growth and innovation.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

2.1.1.A. **EXPAND** Streamline the City's business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts with AEDP as the lead and establish a cross-partner BRE network to coordinate outreach, increase retention and expansion successes, and deliver value-added services.

2.1.1.B. **NEW** Develop a BRE toolkit and start-up guide with partner agencies such as City departments, business chambers and associations, and workforce partners that would serve both new and existing businesses.

2.1.1.C. Leverage the results from the City's Disparity Study to ensure that all businesses have a fair opportunity to participate in City of Alexandria procurement.

2.1.1.D. **NEW** Develop an annual BRE strategy and joint business visitation schedule to prioritize outreach, track results, and resolve issues.

2.1.1.E. Hold regular coordination meetings with partners to align touchpoints, share intel, and deliver a seamless business experience.

2.1.1.F. **NEW** Conduct a competitiveness scan of the City's business processes (i.e., zoning, permitting, tax rates) and policies; introduce changes as needed to ensure the City maintains a business-friendly environment.

2.1.1.G. **NEW** Publish joint annual BRE impact reports or dashboards showing outreach metrics, business feedback, and outcomes-related economic impact.

2.1.2. Continue to deliver responsive business support services that meet the needs of Alexandria businesses (see strategy 2.2 for where to target support).

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

2.1.2.A. **NEW** Conduct a regular business survey to identify current employer needs.

2.1.2.B. Leverage business intelligence gathered from business surveys, visits, and partners to pinpoint gaps in support and to monitor improvements.

2.1.2.C. **NEW** Launch and promote a centralized business portal or hub with resources, programs, and points of contact. It should serve as a single online access point for businesses to find services, request assistance, and connect with the appropriate support agencies (see strategy 3.1).

2.1.2.D. **EXPAND** Extend the existing concierge approach to mid-sized and large businesses to simplify access, align outreach, and showcase services across departments and partner organizations.

2.1.2.E. Ensure continued support and training for small businesses in local and federal procurement practices, bid preparation, and compliance support.

2.1.3. Maintain and expand funding and investment opportunities.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

2.1.3.A. **EXPAND** Continue to expand and offer City-backed grant programs, especially for businesses located in the census tracts identified as low economic opportunity.

2.1.3.B. **NEW** Establish a business expansion or economic growth fund to incentivize firms that do not qualify for startup funding or incentives directed toward large employers. The fund would provide grants or loans to for-profit entities within the target industries for the purpose of undertaking activities that encourage and support economic growth, job creation, or other stated goals such as adaptive reuse of vacant office space.

2.2. **Position Alexandria as a premier business destination.** Direct these efforts toward diversifying the City's economy by recruiting businesses that align with Alexandria's target industries, workforce skills, assets, and economic vision.

2.2.1. Position Alexandria as the premier office destination, second headquarters, or satellite location for mission-driven, professional service, and tech-oriented firms.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

2.2.1.A. **NEW** Audit all economic development partner websites to present a consistent value proposition for the City and to strengthen brand recognition.

2.2.1.B. Establish regular coordination to maintain current, aligned messaging focused on business growth and talent strategies.

2.2.1.C. Strengthen Alexandria's digital presence to drive qualified leads and conversions in target industries, including collaboration with Visit Alexandria to boost sports and entertainment tourism.

2.2.1.D. Compile and feature business success stories and workforce profiles that incorporate executive perspectives and testimonials that appeal to and attract strategic targets.

2.2.2. **NEW** Reduce barriers for businesses.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

2.2.2.A. Incentivize and educate landlords on the joint benefits of creating move-in ready suites for small and mid-sized firms.

2.2.2.B. Work with property managers and local vendors to offer relocation incentives that could include reduced costs for IT setup, signage, or employee perks.

2.2.2.C. Spotlight attraction successes by featuring newly relocated businesses in promotional materials.

2.2.3. Leverage momentum from the Virginia Tech Center for Advanced Computing and findings from the Innovation District Feasibility Study to attract technology businesses and high-growth startups.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

2.2.3.A. Foster innovation networks by encouraging formal partnerships between universities, research institutions, government, economic developers, and industry leaders.

- 2.2.3.B. Use regular economic development convenings such as summits, “state of” events, economic briefings, and roundtables to facilitate collaboration among industry and workforce development partners.
- 2.2.3.C. Identify shared goals across partners and meet to coordinate initiatives, programs, and resources.
- 2.2.3.D. Continue to facilitate development or conversion of space (e.g., wet labs, flex space, accelerators, and shared R&D spaces) that allow for physical proximity of critical players.
- 2.2.3.E. Showcase business success stories and leverage Virginia Tech’s presence to attract investment from innovative industries.

2.3. Strengthen talent pipelines. Ensure the availability of talent needed for existing and emerging industries through closer collaboration with industry and local universities, leveraging greater coordination between AEDP and workforce development organizations.

- 2.3.1. Partner with employers and K–20 institutions to create industry-aligned programs and expand internships and apprenticeships that lead to local hiring.
- 2.3.2. **NEW** Circulate BRE insights to guide workforce and training providers in aligning their offerings (career tracks, credential programs) with employer demand and closing skill gaps in high-demand fields.
- 2.3.3. Retain local K-12 and postsecondary students by increasing career awareness, preparation, and pathways for local business and industry.
- 2.3.4. **EXPAND** Leverage data, partnerships, and training pathways to expand career pathways that include upskilling and reskilling programs that reduce barriers to workforce participation and improve access to quality jobs while retaining local talent.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 2.3.4.A. Partner with workforce boards, schools, unions, HR professionals, and impacted workers to inventory skills of displaced federal workers.
- 2.3.4.B. Determine transferable competencies and engage employers to identify gaps and better understand reskilling needs.
- 2.3.4.C. Collaborate with training providers and employers to identify short-term credentialing program options (6–12 weeks) that lead to placement in in-demand jobs.
- 2.3.4.D. Collaborate with regional partners to offer high-caliber career fairs or hiring events specifically for displaced public sector workers and contractors.
- 2.3.4.E. Increase awareness of local, state, and regional workforce development resources as well as in-demand career pathways.
- 2.3.4.F. Deliver resources and wraparound support to help vulnerable populations, including but not limited to low-income workers, immigrants, and caretakers, secure and maintain employment.

PATHS For Texas Initiative

PATHS For Texas is a workforce development model that addresses training gaps through cross-sector partnerships and an innovative financing structure that combines public, private, and philanthropic resources, including support from the Walmart Foundation, for a funding pool of more than \$5 million. Designed to serve individuals excluded from traditional federal programs due to income thresholds, employment status, or industry focus, the program targets high-demand occupations in sectors that are essential for regional economic vitality. PATHS facilitates partnerships among workforce boards, employers, educational institutions, and community organizations, creating an integrated approach to training effectiveness. According to 2024 data, PATHS participants reported increased employment rates and earnings. For example, participants who earned certifications through the program experienced salary increases of up to 50 percent within 2.5 years of certification, creating a direct impact on the financial stability of participants and the local economy.

Source(s): [*Pursuit of Advanced Training in High-Demand Skills \(PATHS\) For Texas: Demonstrating the Success of PATHS For Texas and the Need for Public-Private-Philanthropic Workforce Training Programs*](#), Greater Dallas Workforce Board, 2025.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Figure 12 includes two sets of performance measures: community indicators that measure citywide trends to inform decision-making and metrics designed to communicate the outcomes of the actions, programs, or initiatives implemented.

Figure 12. Sample Performance Measures for Business Recruitment and Retention (Goal 2)

COMMUNITY INDICATORS	
Employment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unemployment rate Job creation/growth rate Labor force participation rate Average wage levels 	
Business Activity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business formation rate Business retention rate Foreign direct investment attracted Revenue growth of local businesses 	
Fiscal Health	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in commercial property tax and sales tax revenue Tax base growth/diversification 	
METRICS (with link to related strategy)	
Number of business calls or visits conducted	Strategy 2.1
Number of general business assistance requests	Strategy 2.1
Ratings of the business climate in the community	Strategy 2.2
Incentives awarded (number and/or value)	Strategy 2.2
Number of trainings and certifications awarded	Strategy 2.3

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Goal 3. Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Facilitate a thriving ecosystem that supports local entrepreneurs, fosters innovation, and provides pathways for startups to succeed.

Alexandria is known for its history, tradition, and easy access to federal offices, characteristics not necessarily associated with entrepreneurship and innovation. However, the City is well-positioned to become a hub where new ideas, approaches, and startups emerge. Close to several universities and colleges, the City has a highly educated population—nearly two thirds of residents over the age of 25 hold a bachelor's degree. It is also home to many workers in technical occupations who commute to areas outside of Alexandria for work. These characteristics suggest that the workforce needed to support innovation is already in the community and might flourish with a more resourced entrepreneurship ecosystem. The City's legacy as a headquarters for the US Patent and Trademark Office and the National Science Foundation, as well as convenient access to Washington, DC, allows firms to be close to decision-makers while also taking advantage of Alexandria's high quality of life.

Several recent developments have created momentum for the entrepreneurial ecosystem and for this emerging competitive advantage. The recently announced Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing will provide an opportunity for faculty, students, and leaders in business to engage in cutting-edge research and technology development. Once completed, the Inova Schar Cancer Institute in the West End will be the site of leading healthcare research. The pool of potential entrepreneurs is also growing. Reductions in the federal workforce have placed a population of highly trained, purpose-driven professionals in the marketplace who may be open to transferring their skills and experience to entrepreneurial ventures in the private sector.

Harnessing the benefits of a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem to create a more diverse, resilient, and prosperous economy will require addressing gaps in the current ecosystem. Alexandria does not yet have a strong tradition of cultivating high-growth, technology-based startups. These businesses often focus on external markets, are capital intensive, and include proprietary ideas, processes, or products. Participants in the stakeholder engagement process prioritized creating an innovation ecosystem that connects entrepreneurs and small tech firms with resources and support, including access to funding and investment networks and help navigating permitting and licensing requirements. Initiatives tailored to second stage (or later) companies—those that have moved beyond the startup or seed phase and are focused on scaling the business, acquiring customers, and fulfilling orders—are often the most effective at boosting economic growth and job creation.

Figure 13. Comparing Traits of High-Growth Startups and Small Businesses

CHARACTERISTICS	ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPANIES	SMALL BUSINESSES
Market focus	Serve external markets (traded clusters)	Serve local markets (local clusters)
Capital needs	Capital intensive	Low capitalization
Role of intellectual property (IP)	Highly IP dependent	Little or no proprietary information
Expectations for growth	High growth	Modest growth

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

The recommendations in this section create a path for Alexandria to grow an innovation ecosystem that attracts and retains workers while supporting startups and the entrepreneurs behind them. This multifaceted approach will require building deeper connections between students and entrepreneurial pathways, expanding access to resources and funding, capitalizing on local assets and institutions, and carving out a niche for Alexandria as a hub for companies seeking an innovative environment with exceptional quality of life.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

3.1. **EXPAND** **Build the entrepreneurship ecosystem.** Cultivate an innovation ecosystem that connects entrepreneurs with resources and support, including enhanced access to capital.

3.1.1. **NEW** Develop, market, and maintain a webpage that acts as a one-stop hub for entrepreneurial resources in Alexandria.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.1.1.A. Develop a roadmap for potential founders that aligns resources (e.g., technical assistance providers, funders, and real estate resources) with stages of business development.

3.1.1.B. Create a calendar of entrepreneurship-centered events such networking opportunities, professional development, and pitch competitions.

3.1.1.C. Ensure that website content is available in multiple languages and is ADA-compliant and mobile-friendly.

3.1.2. **NEW** Act as a convener for the local entrepreneurship ecosystem.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.1.2.A. Allocate resources for an entrepreneur concierge approach to reduce time-to-launch, improve 1:1 navigation, and increase warm handoffs.

3.1.2.B. Engage or host leaders in the entrepreneurship space (e.g., college and university programs, business incubators, funders, technical assistance providers, and founders) on an annual basis to create alignment and assess areas of success and gaps in the ecosystem.

3.1.2.C. Continue to hold quarterly educational events or programming tailored to the needs of all businesses including but not limited to new businesses and small-, women-, minority-, and immigrant-owned businesses that provide a pathway to entrepreneurship.

3.1.2.D. Host entrepreneurial networking events specifically for college students and young professionals as a joint collaboration between AEDP and the Alexandria Workforce Development Center (WDC).

3.1.2.E. Work with partners to hold an entrepreneur boot camp that helps early-stage entrepreneurs quickly understand if their ideas are viable, learn how to plug into the ecosystem if so, and determine next steps.

3.1.3. **NEW** Work with regional partners in ongoing efforts to establish resources for entrepreneurs, including contributing to the creation of a regional accelerator or incubator.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.1.3.A. Position Alexandria as a hub for the regional response to changing federal employment by proactively contacting partners and developing entrepreneurial pathways for displaced workers.

3.1.3.B. Ensure events and resources are cross-posted on organizational websites in the region.

The Hub at the Arcade | Dayton, Ohio

The Hub at the Arcade (the Hub) is a partnership between the University of Dayton, the Entrepreneurs' Center (EC), and PNC Bank. The Arcade, a collection of historic buildings in Dayton, is home to a mix of uses, including the Ohio Small Business Development Center, makerspaces, coworking space, private offices, meeting spaces, and event rentals. Entrepreneurs have access to mentorship, networking, and investment opportunities through the EC, which has generated more than \$1 billion in economic impact since its 1998 launch. The University of Dayton participates in the Hub by hosting on-site classes for students in business, engineering, and entrepreneurship. This location allows students to connect with on-site business owners, mentorship, and networking events.

Source(s): [The Hub at the Arcade](#) website.

3.2. Expand incubator and accelerator spaces. Encourage the creation of incubator and accelerator spaces to foster innovation and spur economic activity; continue to explore the feasibility of an innovation district in Potomac Yard

3.2.1. **NEW** Utilize recently approved City of Alexandria funding for an accelerator or incubator space to better understand the profile of potential users and better define needed support services.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 3.2.1.A.** Establish a local incentive or public-private partnership program to support new incubator or accelerator spaces.
- 3.2.1.B.** Leverage access to high-priority sites, fiber/broadband infrastructure, and tax incentives.
- 3.2.1.C.** Target sectors that are aligned with Alexandria's competitive position in advanced technology, cybersecurity and defense, life sciences, and entertainment and tourism.

3.2.2. **NEW** Identify potential sites for incubator and accelerator development and market them to potential tenants.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 3.2.2.A.** Focus on areas that are strategically located near resources such as the Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing, transit stops, and underutilized commercial buildings.
- 3.2.2.B.** Continue to include potential incubator or accelerator sites in small area plans with flexible guidance that would allow for multiple types of infrastructure needs, uses, and building types.
- 3.2.3.** **NEW** Establish incentives and partnerships (university anchors, corporate sponsors, landlord MOUs) to provide in-demand shared services and resources for high-growth companies, including innovation space.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

- 3.2.3.A.** Prioritize underutilized buildings or sites in areas targeted for future development.
- 3.2.3.B.** Attract tenants by promoting the program's benefits, including flexible leasing structures, low-cost rent, and the ability to facilitate connections with Alexandria's entrepreneurship ecosystem.

3.3. Foster entrepreneurial skills. Encourage the development of entrepreneurial skills in students and the existing workforce via greater collaboration between AEDP, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), and WDC.

3.3.1. Integrate entrepreneurship into career and technical education (CTE) pathways.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.3.1.A. **NEW** Convene representatives from K–20 (e.g., ACPS and higher education institutions) via an entrepreneurial learning consortium to align curriculum offerings with needed skillsets and enable work-based learning.

3.3.1.B. **NEW** Connect students with local resources in entrepreneurship through site visits to higher education campuses, incubators, and accelerators.

3.3.1.C. **NEW** Host student entrepreneurship events and competitions (e.g., business plan or pitch competitions and hackathons) to grow the pipeline, form new teams, and increase follow-on funding exposure.

3.3.1.D. Facilitate mentorship and internship opportunities for students.

3.3.2. Create additional pathways for adult entrepreneurship through upskilling and reskilling workforce development opportunities, with an immediate focus on helping federal workers find other career paths. Easily transferrable skillsets include experience in advanced technology, cybersecurity, AI, and digital marketing or e-commerce.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.3.2.A. Work with existing workforce development partners to create, support, and promote training that helps adult workers transfer existing skillsets to entrepreneurial pursuits. Easily transferrable skillsets include experience in advanced technology, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and digital marketing or e-commerce.

3.3.2.B. **NEW** Conduct a strategic assessment of establishing a Fed2Founder Accelerator to support the conversion of federal talent into startups and spinouts.

3.3.2.C. Prioritize outreach to populations in transition, such as federal workers, veterans, gig workers, parents re-entering the workforce, returning citizens, and existing small business owners looking to scale up.

3.3.3. **NEW** Expand access to capital for potential entrepreneurs.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.3.3.A. Create connections between entrepreneurs and technical assistance focused on readiness for capital such as credit counseling, grant-writing workshops, and practice pitch competitions.

3.3.3.B. Convene established venture capital funders, angel investors, and high-net-worth individuals to identify opportunities to expand the availability of capital in Alexandria.

3.3.3.C. Identify and eliminate barriers to access to capital for all businesses including but not limited to new businesses and small-, women-, minority-, and immigrant-owned businesses.

3.4. **NEW** Celebrate and publicize Alexandria's entrepreneurial successes, raising the City's profile as an innovation destination.

3.4.1. Launch an "ALX Innovates" campaign to highlight local entrepreneurial successes and the economic impact of these high-growth ventures.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.4.1.A. Feature founders in social media posts, blogs, websites, and marketing campaigns for business development or tourism.

3.4.1.B. Promote success stories in funding, industry, and founder networks.

3.4.1.C. Highlight how Alexandria's location and competitive advantages were central to the startup's success, and create connections with local industry, businesses, or neighborhoods.

3.4.2. Create an "Alexandria Entrepreneurship Week" to highlight this emerging sector.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.4.2.A. Host showcase events such as educational seminars, panels, reverse pitch competitions, and invite-only networking opportunities that celebrate local companies, founders, and success stories to build awareness of Alexandria's efforts in entrepreneurship.

3.4.2.B. Encourage partners to promote the designated week and individual events through social media and traditional media.

3.4.2.C. Assemble a packet of materials, including social media graphics and basic messaging, to assist in promotion.

3.4.3. Leverage success stories to better position Alexandria as a landing spot for emerging high-growth firms from larger metros and established firms looking for satellite offices with proximity to the federal government.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL TACTICS

3.4.3.A. Focus on businesses that align with Alexandria's target industries.

3.4.3.B. Market Alexandria's assets to high-growth firms that align with targeted industries using resources such as the Inc. 5000 list. Related activities include creating a crosswalk between the Inc. 5000 company list, target industries, and location-specific information to identify priority companies for marketing efforts. Once identified, create a prospectus specifically for these firms as part of the marketing campaign.

Cal Poly Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship | San Luis Obispo County, California

Since its founding in 2010, the California Polytechnic State University Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) has forged a robust startup and innovation ecosystem on campus and across San Luis Obispo County. Anchored by the downtown SLO HotHouse, CIE's coworking, incubation, and acceleration programs operate alongside the CIE Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to support entrepreneurs from ideation to growth. The no-cost services provided by the SBDC, including confidential consulting, strategic planning, access to capital, and technical assistance, have helped launch businesses, create jobs, and attract investment. The HotHouse also offers flexible coworking, private offices, and meeting spaces, serving as a collaborative hub for students, faculty, community entrepreneurs, and investors. On campus, the Innovation Sandbox gives students hands-on access to tools such as 3D printers, laser cutters, and VR gear, enabling ideation, rapid prototyping, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Together, these components form a layered innovation pipeline—early-stage creativity in the Sandbox, structured mentoring and incubation via CIE and the SBDC, and community and coworking support at the HotHouse—positioning Cal Poly as a launchpad for startups and regional economic growth.

Source(s): [Cal Poly Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#) website.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Figure 14 includes two sets of performance measures: community indicators that measure citywide trends to inform decision making and metrics designed to communicate the outcomes of the actions, programs, or initiatives implemented.

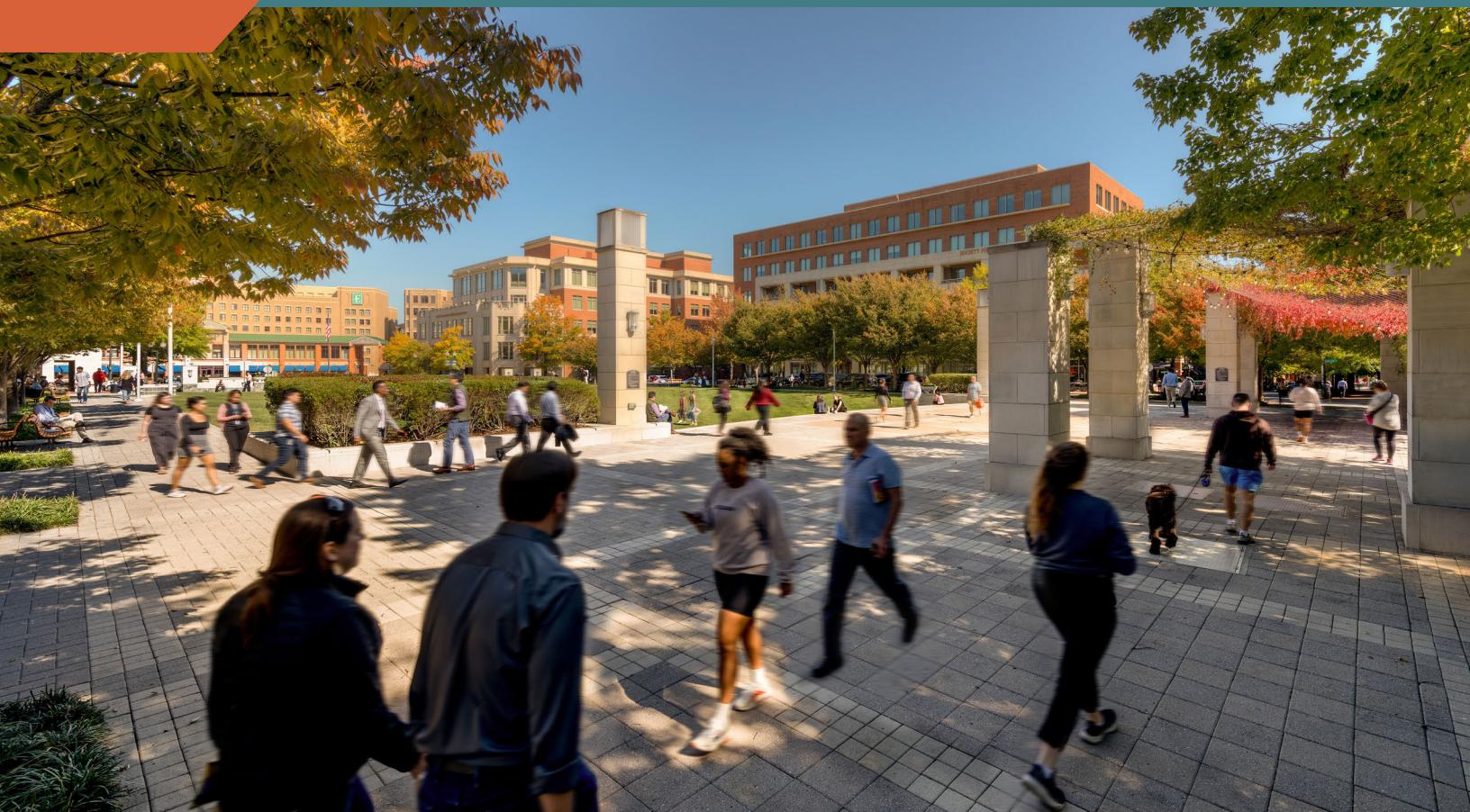
Figure 14. Sample Performance Measures for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (Goal 3)

COMMUNITY INDICATORS	
• Amount of investment in high-growth enterprises, including funding from small business innovation research (SBIR), small business technology transfer (STTR), and private equity	
METRICS (with link to related strategy)	
• Availability of startup capital by total number of financial providers and amount of capital provided	Strategy 3.1
• Educational attainment levels of residents age 25+	Strategy 3.1
• Enrolled college and university students overall, and in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs	Strategy 3.2
• Growth in incubator or accelerator space (by SF, or by number of entities)	Strategy 3.2
• New business formation rates	Strategy 3.3
• New patents/intellectual property registered	Strategy 3.3
• Number of Inc. 5000 firms headquartered in Alexandria	Strategy 3.4
• Number of K-12 students in CTE programs	Strategy 3.4
• Number of people employed in targeted entrepreneurial occupation groups such as life, physical, and social science, or computer and mathematical	Strategy 3.4

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; TIP Strategies, Inc.

4

PROJECT APPROACH



Carlyle is the City's primary office market, home to three federal agencies and prominent private companies and contractors. Photo by Sam Kittner for AEDP.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engaging the community was a critical component of the planning process, providing valuable local context, while helping to build community buy-in and support inclusive economic growth. Perceptions gathered from stakeholders helped develop strategies that are responsive to community needs rather than external assumptions about what those needs might be. Through conversations with residents and leaders, TIP gained a better understanding of local market dynamics, specific neighborhood conditions, and institutional relationships that rarely appear in datasets. Beyond information gathering, inclusive engagement instills ownership in outcomes and garners the support needed for sustainable implementation. Broad engagement also helps ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach historically underrepresented groups and identifies barriers that might otherwise perpetuate existing inequities.

Beginning in late 2024 and accelerating in spring 2025, TIP facilitated intensive community outreach designed to capture a broad range of viewpoints through roundtable discussions, one-on-one interviews, and community listening sessions. These sessions were supplemented with two online surveys that captured additional input, allowed for greater reach, and garnered more detailed feedback on specific topics. This approach maximized both participation rates and the depth of input collected (illustrated in Figure 2, page 4). Overall, the effort achieved remarkable community participation, reaching more than 850 touchpoints across various types of engagement activities. Participants included business owners, employers, workers, residents, nonprofit leaders, education representatives, real estate professionals, and government officials, creating a comprehensive cross-section of community stakeholders.

Ongoing, meaningful community involvement will be critical to *ALX Forward*'s implementation. The City of Alexandria and AEDP are already employing most of the following strategies and should continue to seek opportunities to leverage existing efforts.

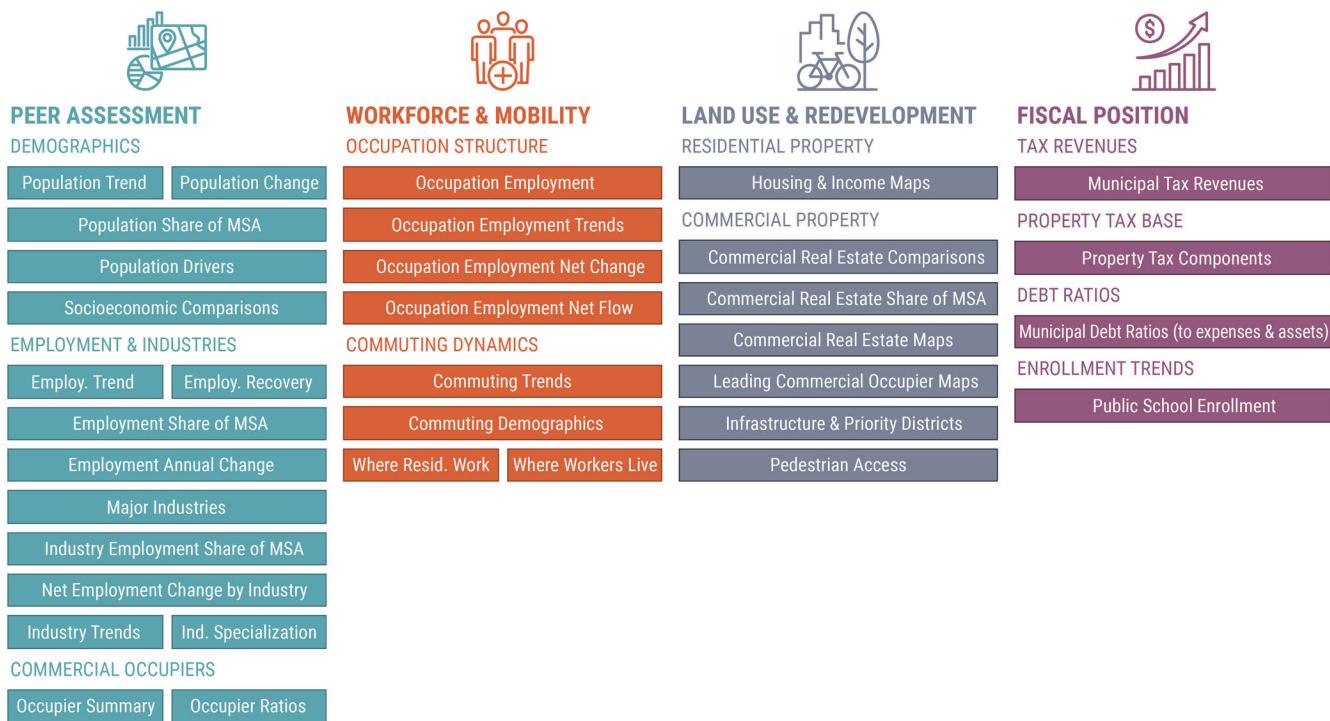
- **Public Workshops and Town Halls.** Open forums for residents and stakeholders to participate in long-term visioning as well as learn about and provide input on large initiatives and projects. Some economic development projects may have a period of confidentiality; in these cases, public involvement should happen at the earliest stage feasible.
- **Online Platforms and Surveys.** Digital tools to reach broader demographics, enabling participation outside of in-person meetings.
- **Neighborhood Partnerships.** Collaboration with local organizations, business associations, and community leaders to represent a broad range of voices and facilitate grassroots engagement.
- **Advisory Committees.** Inclusion of industry, nonprofit, and community representatives in advisory roles to provide ongoing feedback.
- **Regular Communications.** Periodic updates through public events, newsletters, social media, and City websites to keep the public informed and engaged.

Outreach activities should be inclusive, accessible, transparent, and closely aligned with the implementation approach discussed in the final section of the document.

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

TIP conducted a strategic analysis of Alexandria, Virginia's competitive position, with comparisons to the Washington–Arlington–Alexandria MSA (Washington, DC, MSA), Virginia, and the US, as well as a selection of peer communities. Initial data collection began in November 2024 during TIP's discovery phase and the analytical work continued into the engagement's final phase. In addition to an analysis of the City's demographic and population trends and a profile of its employment by industry and occupation, TIP prepared an analysis of Alexandria's residential and commercial properties and tenants, as well as its fiscal position. These analyses serve to illustrate the City's competitive economic position relative to its peers. An in-depth, interactive data visualization, *City of Alexandria, Virginia: Current Conditions* (the menu of which is shown in Figure 15), was delivered separately to the City of Alexandria and AEDP.

Figure 15. Menu of the Interactive Deliverable



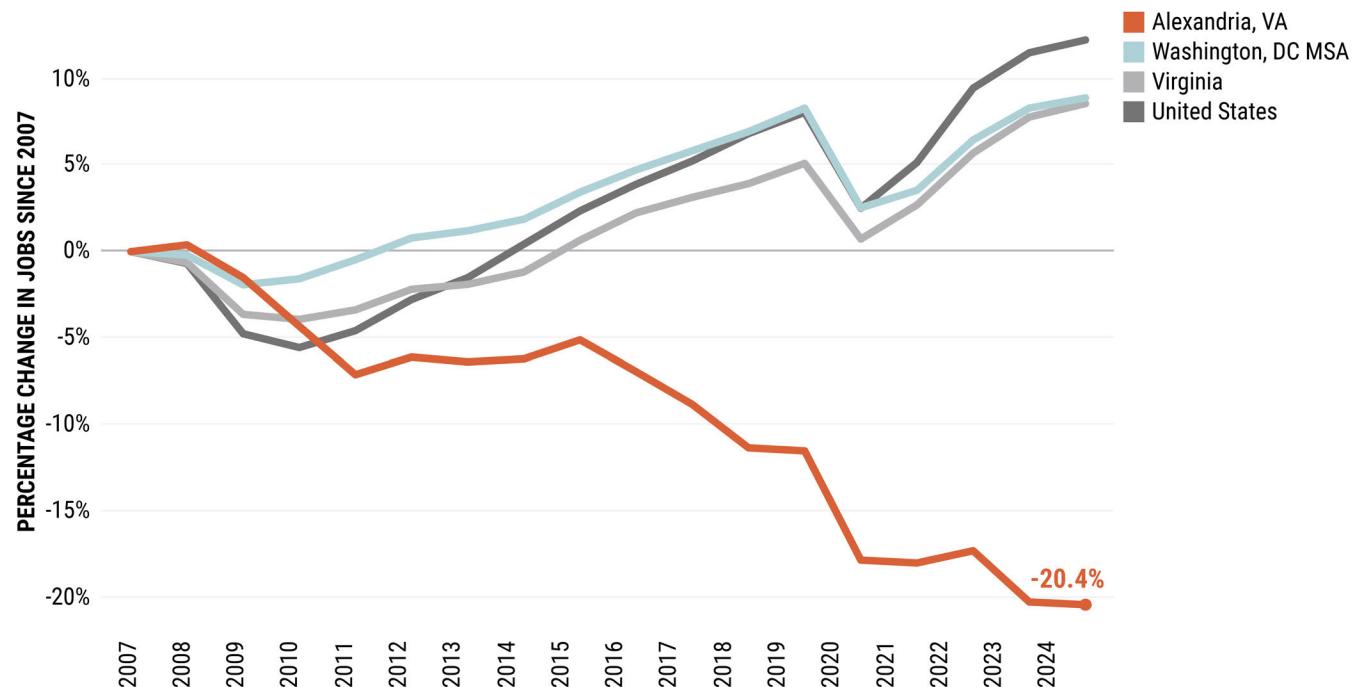
Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

Alexandria's job market took a hit in the Great Recession and has never fully recovered.

Following a peak of more than 115,000 in the mid-2000s, the number of jobs in Alexandria has steadily declined over time, with around 90,700 jobs in the City as of 2024. Alexandria has experienced a more than 20 percent decrease in jobs since 2007, the largest relative loss among its peer communities (Figure 16). Increased competition from neighboring communities has shrunk Alexandria's share of jobs in the Washington, DC, MSA, going from 3.5 percent in the late 2000s, to 2.5 percent in 2024. At the industry sector level, the City's largest source of growth since 2001 has been in the Healthcare sector, demonstrating a 35.4 percent increase in jobs. This significantly lags the growth demonstrated by this sector at the MSA, state, and US levels, with the latter (the smallest of these) growing by 60.7 percent. Two of the City's largest traded industry clusters are Business Services (12.2 percent of jobs in the City) and Education & Knowledge Creation (5.6 percent). These clusters serve outside markets and represent specific advantages to the Alexandria region. Both have seen a net loss of jobs since 2001, demonstrating decreases of more than 13 and 20 percent, respectively. The Federal Government (civilian) cluster is the City's second largest by employment, making up 10.1 percent of all jobs. Though it has seen net growth since 2001, this cluster has declined sharply in recent years, losing nearly 4,700 jobs from 2021 through the end of 2024. Additionally, the location quotient of this cluster has dropped from 10.12 to 7.05 over the same period (indicating that this cluster's share of all jobs in Alexandria is over seven times larger than its share of all jobs nationwide). This downward trend will likely continue amidst significant and unpredictable fluctuations in the federal workforce and office locations over the coming years. While the location quotient of the Local Hospitality Establishments sector has continued to climb since 2020 (representing restaurants and other local-serving hospitality activities), the concentration of jobs in the traded Hospitality & Tourism cluster (largely representing hotels and motels) has failed to reach pre-pandemic levels. The Performing Arts cluster has exhibited a similar post-pandemic trend, while the Local Entertainment & Media cluster has seen a significant drop in concentration within the past two years.

Figure 16. Total Employment Recovery

Alexandria, Virginia, and comparison areas since the Great Recession

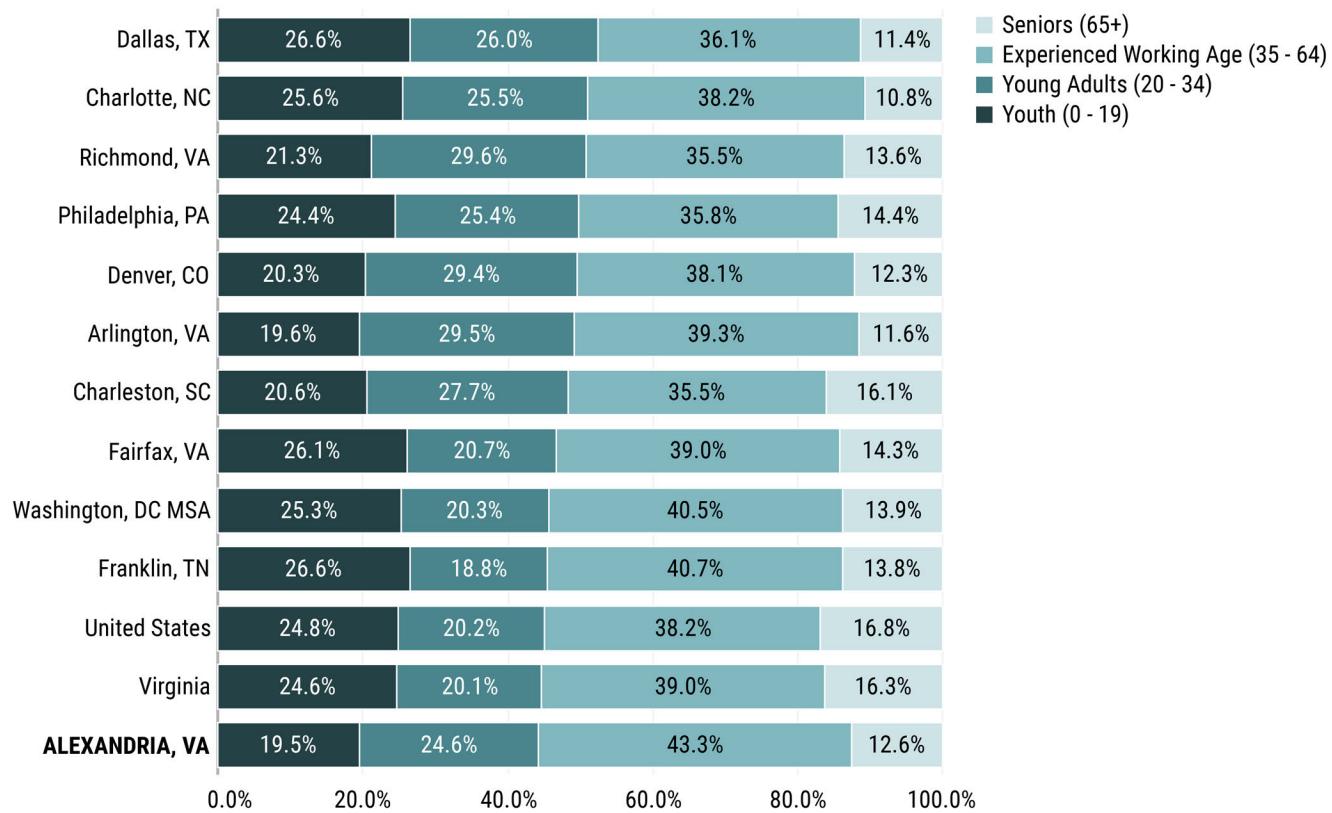


Source(s): US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Lightcast 2025.1—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed (Lightcast 2025.1); TIP Strategies, Inc.

Meanwhile, the City's population (and school enrollment) surged ahead for another decade.

The population of Alexandria has grown by nearly 40 percent since 1990, a figure almost identical to the rate of growth for Virginia. Though it has added nearly 44,000 residents in this period, Alexandria's population growth began to stall in the late 2010s and has continued to struggle into the early 2020s. City of Alexandria public school enrollment mirrors this growth, with rapid gains from 2007–2020 cooling over the past several years. Domestic migration, rarely a source of growth for the City over the previous three decades, has become its largest driver of outmigration, resulting in Alexandria seeing net population loss in four of the last six years. With nearly 56 percent of residents over the age of 35, Alexandria's population is older than those of its peer communities. Its population of experienced working-age adults (ages 35–64) is larger than that of any peer, at over 43 percent. It is a relatively highly educated community, where nearly two-thirds of residents over the age of 25 hold a bachelor's degree, and it has one of the most active labor forces among its peers. Though it has a high median household income compared to the US, this figure falls below several of Alexandria's peers, including the Washington, DC, MSA. Additionally, the local median home value (\$696,800) is significantly more expensive than that of the MSA (\$553,000), contributing to the City's relatively low housing affordability.

Figure 17. Age Distribution, 2023



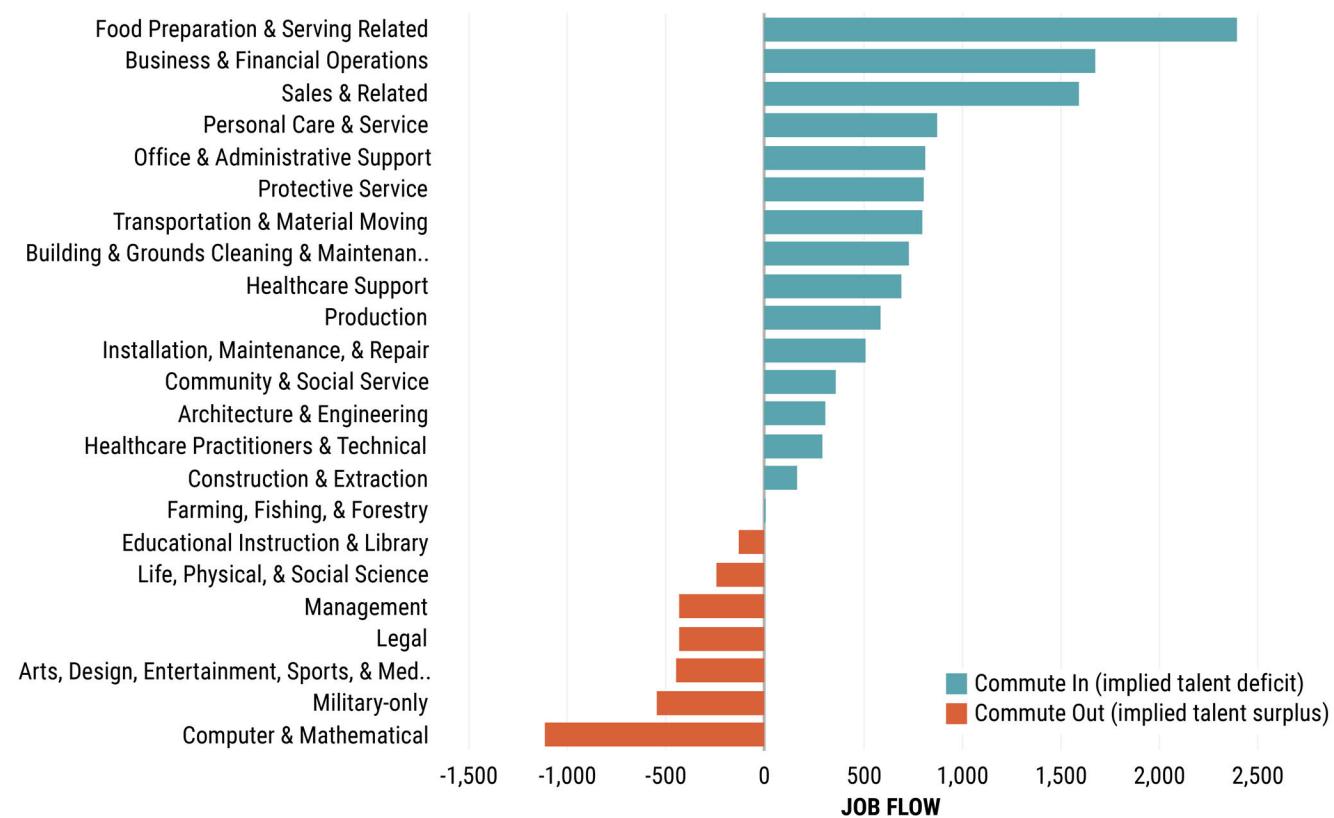
Source(s): 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Falling employment and a growing number of workers have tipped commuting patterns.

As recently as 2010, Alexandria was a net importer of labor across every occupation group, meaning the City had more jobs than residents working in that group. By 2024, the pattern had reversed for roughly one-third of occupation groups (7 out of 23), meaning the number of resident workers in these groups exceeded the number of jobs available in the City (Figure 18). These outward-commuting occupations include some of Alexandria's largest, like Management and Computer & Mathematical (which represent 8.0 and 5.8 percent of all jobs in the City, respectively), as well as Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports & Media (2.4 percent of all jobs). Broadly, there is a surplus of workers in typically higher-wage, white-collar occupations, reflecting the declining number of these jobs within the City. This causes residents to commute elsewhere. This situation echoes Alexandria's demographic profile: the community is highly educated, with a median household income that is significantly higher than that of the state and US. Alexandria's place-based commuting patterns reinforce this finding. Though the City is a net importer of labor, the net flow of inward commuters has halved from 2010 (26,443) to 2022 (12,688). Largely outward commuting industries include Information; Education; and Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services, with a higher share of Alexandria residents working in Washington, DC (26.5 percent) than within Alexandria itself (15.3 percent).

Figure 18. Talent Gaps by Occupation Group

Difference between jobs and employed residents in Alexandria, Virginia, in 2024



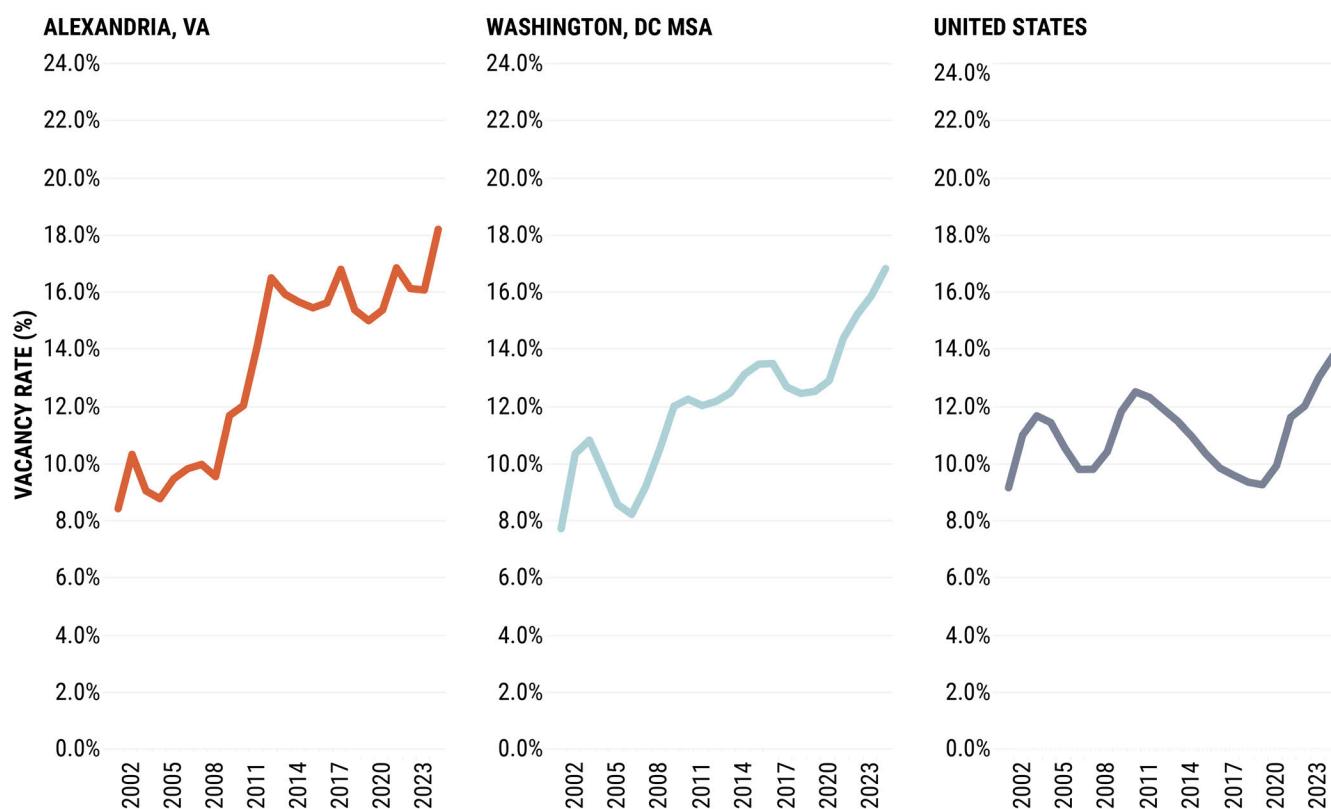
Source(s): BLS; Lightcast 2025.1; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): This metric represents the difference in each occupation group between the number of jobs in Alexandria, Virginia, and the number of employed residents. A positive number indicates Alexandria is effectively a net importer of workers for that occupation group (i.e., there are more jobs available than there are residents in the group). A negative number indicates Alexandria is effectively a net exporter of workers for that group.

A decline in office-using employment sectors correlates with office market vacancies.

On average, commercial real estate rent is higher in the Washington, DC, MSA than the nation. Alexandria's average rents for industrial and retail properties well exceed the MSA-wide figures, and though the local office rate (\$34.55/SF/year) falls below the MSA-wide rate (\$39.28/SF/year), it remains well above the national figure (\$28.50/SF/year). This typically high local rent is despite vacancy rates for office and retail properties that have increased over recent years. Though retail vacancy rates have recovered following a multi-year spike beginning in the late 2010s, Alexandria's office vacancy rates have continued to climb, exceeding the MSA-wide rate (Figure 19). Additionally, Alexandria has seen limited local construction in several commercial property types. The City has had multiple years of no completions in both office and retail properties since 2000, while its industrial inventory has remained virtually unchanged over this period. Both attracting new companies to the area and creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem require a stock of affordable commercial real estate, something that could be supported by existing vacant properties. Reinvestment in districts like the Landmark/Van Dorn Corridor and North Potomac Yard represent opportunities for the City to leverage its existing real estate for creative placemaking. This can also represent opportunities to diversify the City's tax base, reducing the tax burden placed on residential properties, which makes up approximately 60 percent of the City's property tax base. Including commercial multifamily properties raises this figure to more than 80 percent.²

Figure 19. Office Vacancy Rates



Source(s): CoStar Group; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): All data are estimated by CoStar. All US-level data are as of year-end 2024, while all other data are as of early December 2024.

²City of Alexandria, Virginia. [Consideration of the Calendar Year 2025 Real Property Assessments](#). February 5, 2025 (on Council agenda February 11, 2025).

SURVEY OVERVIEW

As part of the strategic planning process, and preparation for and subsequent evaluation of the Alexandria Economic Summit held on May 8, 2025, TIP conducted two online stakeholder surveys.

PRE-SUMMIT SURVEY

The first survey, the *2025 Economic Summit Pre-Event Survey*, was open for three weeks during the spring of 2025 and drew 376 respondents. The survey instrument contained basic questions about respondent location and demographics. The remainder of the survey included 11 questions focused on respondents' perceptions of and vision for the City of Alexandria. All responses were confidential. Complete question-by-question survey results were delivered to the City of Alexandria and AEDP in an interactive data visualization using Tableau Public. Findings from this survey were used to guide the content of the Economic Summit and the creation of the strategic framework.

Among respondents that provided demographic information, the vast majority (85.9 percent) were located in an Alexandria ZIP Code. Many (42.3 percent) both live and work in Alexandria, while 28.7 percent commute elsewhere. Respondents aged 55 to 64 (81 of 376 respondents) were the most dominant age group, while ages 45 to 54 (62 respondents) and 65 to 74 (55 respondents) were similarly overrepresented compared to the City's population. Most respondents were female (58.0 percent). The survey was not designed to be a scientific sample, though the pool of respondents was large enough and stratified enough to provide convincing strategic feedback. As a result, the survey yielded valuable input from the Alexandria community.

City Character

Respondents strongly associated Alexandria with its historic architecture and small-town feel. Among top word associations for the City were "historic" (18 percent of all responses), "Old Town" (5.8 percent), and "charming" (5.8 percent; Figure 20, page 44), while "community-centric" was one of the most selected words associated with Alexandria's economy (10.5 percent). Tourism and recreation was strongly identified as the City's greatest relative strength (4.2 out of 5.0), followed by other areas contributing to a sense of vibrant, distinct community, like quality of life (3.8), arts and culture support (3.8), and diversity (3.5). As such a strong part of the local identity, respondents consequently noted a fear of losing this charm through overdevelopment. "Loss of City identity" tied as the second most common future growth concern for Alexandria (6.8 percent), as residents noted the potential challenges of overdevelopment—like increased traffic and declining education quality as schools reach capacity. To protect the City's character, respondents prioritized built-environment efforts that can fit into Alexandria's current aesthetic; "adaptive reuse of existing buildings" (13.2 percent) and "mixed-use development" (9.4 percent) scored as two of the three most selected action areas to prioritize.

Figure 20. When I Think of Alexandria...

Q1. What word or phrase do you most associate with Alexandria?



Source(s): Survey results compiled by TIP Strategies, Inc.

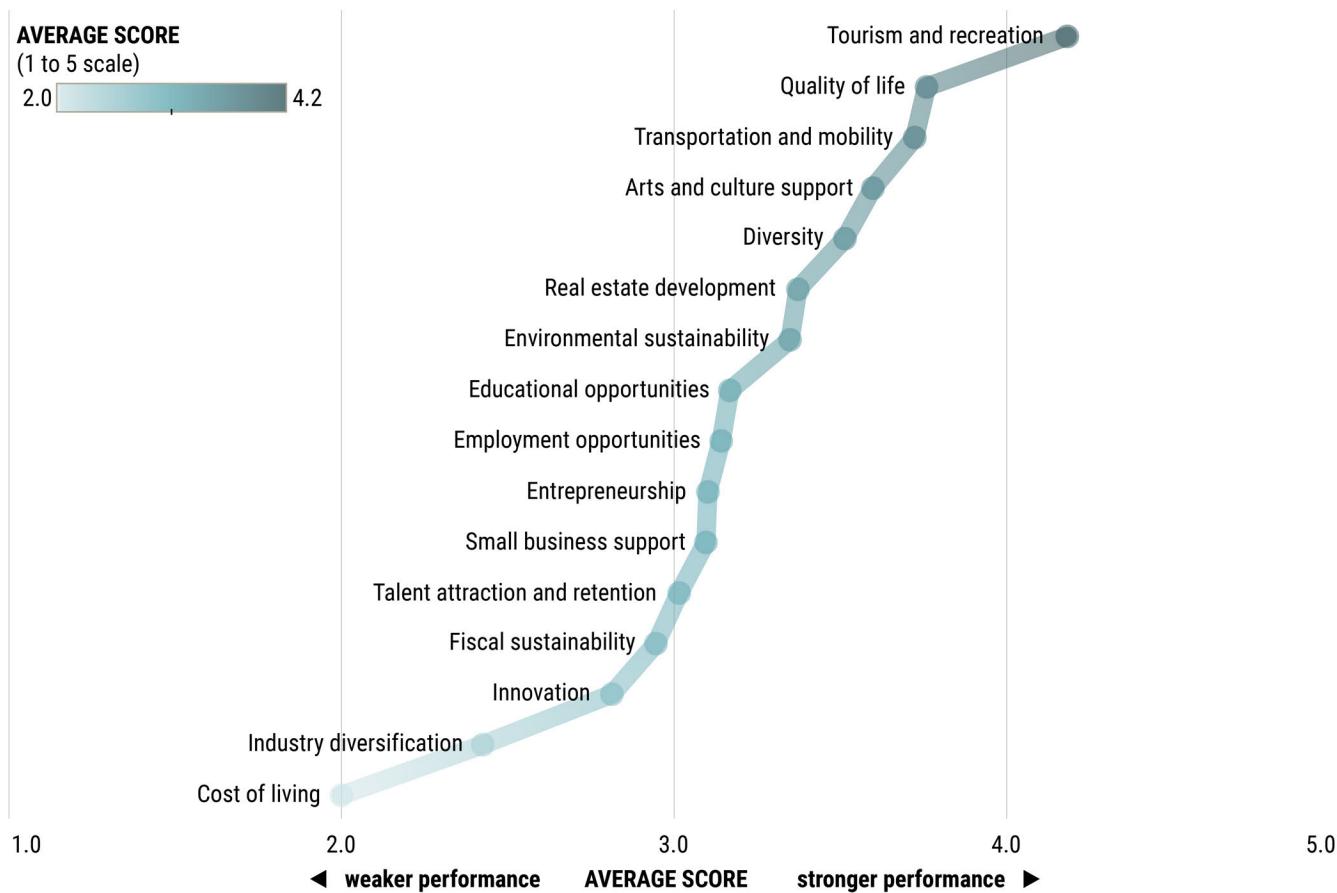
Note(s): Of the 376 respondents, 344 answered this question. Larger fonts indicate higher frequency of responses. Open-ended responses were grouped into categories of comparable sentiments.

Affordability Challenges

While words like “wealth” (8.2 percent) and “prosperous” (5.7 percent) were commonly associated with Alexandria’s economy, cost of living stood out as a significant concern. By a wide margin, respondents identified cost of living as Alexandria’s lowest regional strength (2.0; Figure 21, page 45). Affordability emerged as a consistent theme throughout the survey, with “cost of living” identified as respondents’ most common future growth concern (14.6 percent), and its biggest obstacle to future development (12 percent). Many respondents pointed out that a heavy tax burden is placed on residents, with high property taxes contributing to a challenging cost of living. “Residential tax relief” was a commonly foreseen benefit of future economic growth (10 percent), as the City attracts new businesses and diversifies its tax base. High housing costs were specifically identified as a major contributing factor to the City’s high cost of living, as respondents noted both a need to provide workforce housing at an affordable price while also being careful not to overbuild residential units and contribute to overcrowding.

Figure 21. Regional Strengths

Q5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how is the Alexandria economy performing in each of these areas?



Source(s): Survey results compiled by TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Of the 376 respondents, 372 answered this question. The scale indicates the average score, with 5 being the highest possible and 1 being the lowest possible. Responses of "N/A or Unsure" are not captured by the average score for this question.

Business Diversification

Many described the Alexandria economy with "growing/growth" (6.5 percent), while similar numbers characterized it as "stagnant" (6.2 percent). Industry diversification was identified as the second lowest regional strength (2.5 out of 5.0), with recent federal layoffs highlighting concerns about what respondents see as a city with low economic diversity. Respondents see future economic growth as having the potential to provide a broader tax base (16.1 percent), relieving the tax burden on residents and providing greater funding for municipal services and quality of life amenities (Figure 22, page 46). Ahead of "affordable," "diversified" (7.9 percent) sits as the second most selected vision word for Alexandria's economy in the next 10 years. Respondents prioritized business attraction, retention, and expansion as a means for industry diversification and the creation of new, quality jobs. Though the City's small business support and entrepreneurship scored as just above average regional strengths (both 3.1 out of 5.0), respondents cited support for entrepreneurs as an area of concern for the City's growth, noting high upfront costs and the difficulty of obtaining commercial space.

Figure 22. Future Growth Benefit

Q8. What do you see as potential benefits from future economic growth and development?



Source(s): Survey results compiled by TIP Strategies, Inc.

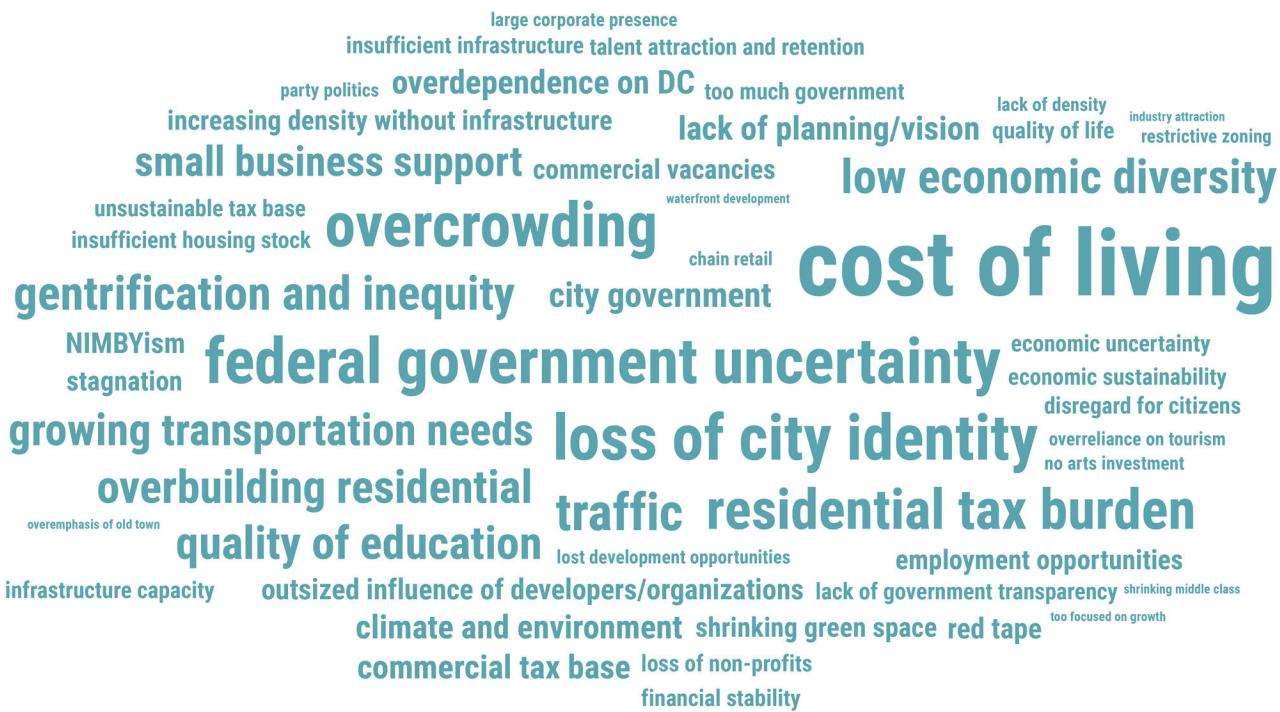
Note(s): Of the 376 respondents, 299 answered this question. Larger fonts indicate higher frequency of responses. Open-ended responses were grouped into categories of comparable sentiments.

Political Uncertainties

Alexandria's economy is strongly tied to that of Washington, DC. As federal budget cuts and layoffs affect local workers, whether they commute to Washington or are employed by agencies headquartered locally, respondents expressed concern over these restructurings and their fallout. "Uncertain" was a top word associated with the local economy (10.5 percent), and specific unease over "federal government uncertainty" was a common future growth concern (6.8 percent; Figure 23, page 47) and a perceived obstacle to the City's future economic growth (8 percent). In addition to providing a broader tax base, the future industry diversification that respondents indicated a need for also represents a way to address what some described as an overdependence on DC and to provide more local economic stability. Broadly, politics were a common theme among respondents' identified challenges or obstacles to local growth. Some pointed to NIMBYism and an aversion to change, others identified the "red tape" of slow-moving regulatory processes or restrictive zoning regulations, while others perceived a lack of planning or vision for local economic growth.

Figure 23. Growth Concerns

Q7. What are your biggest concerns about Alexandria's future growth and development?



Source(s): Survey results compiled by TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Of the 376 respondents, 355 answered this question. Larger fonts indicate higher frequency of responses. Open-ended responses were grouped into categories of comparable sentiments.

POST-SUMMIT SURVEY

The second survey, the *2025 Economic Summit Post-Event Survey*, was open for three weeks during May and June of 2025, and drew 154 respondents. The survey instrument contained basic questions about respondent location and demographics. The remainder of the survey included 14 questions with the purpose of receiving feedback on summit content, gaining an additional layer of feedback from people unable to participate in the summit, and providing an opportunity to collect thoughts from event participants. All responses were confidential. Complete question-by-question survey results were delivered to the City of Alexandria and AEDP in an interactive data visualization using Tableau Public. Findings from this survey were used to refine and finalize the strategic framework. A summary of the event, the [*Economic Summit Report*](#), was provided to the City and the AEDP under separate cover.

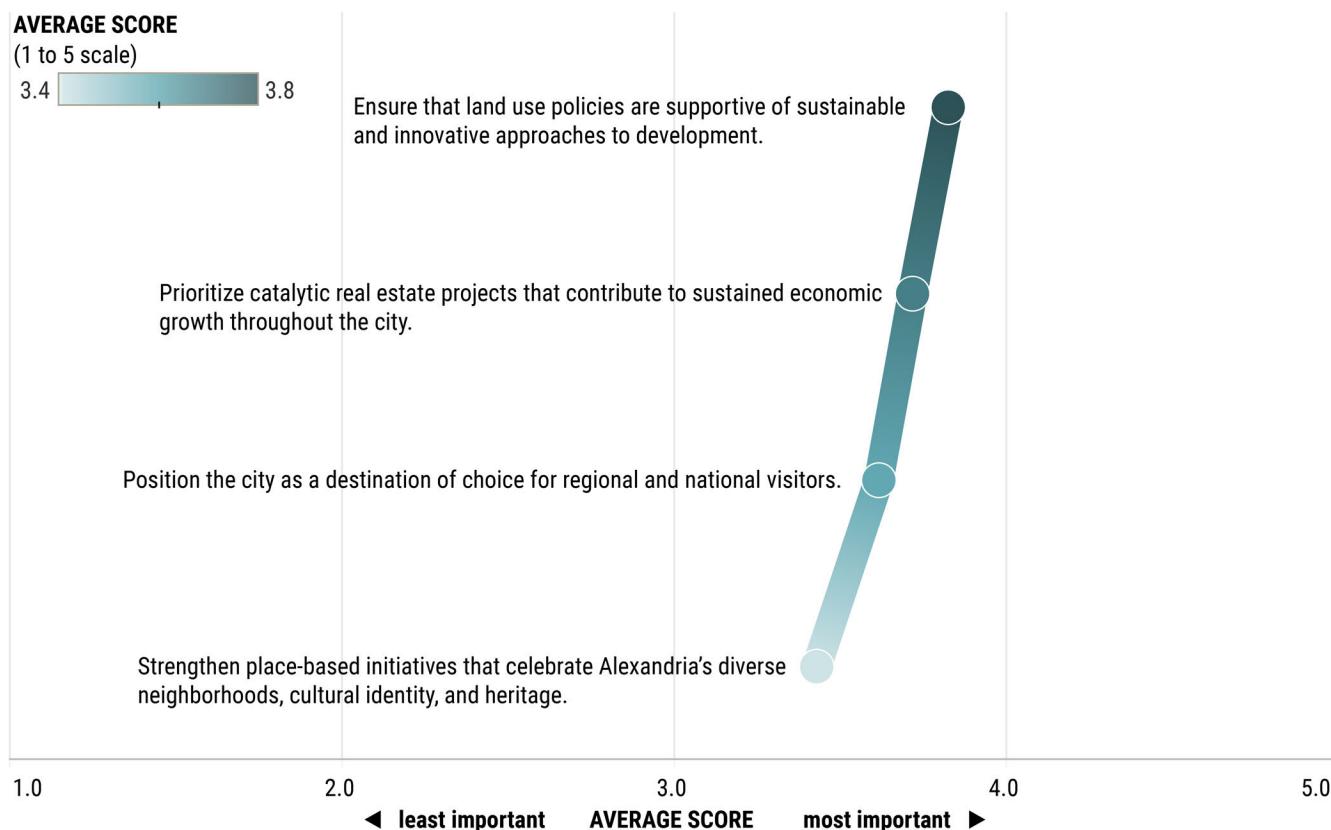
More than one third (34.4 percent) of respondents attended the Economic Summit. Among respondents that provided demographic information, the vast majority (95.6 percent) were located in an Alexandria ZIP Code. Most (50.4 percent) both live and work in Alexandria, while one quarter (24.8 percent) commute elsewhere. Many respondents (99 of 154 respondents) described themselves as Alexandria homeowners. Respondents aged 65 to 74 (35 respondents) were the most dominant age group, while ages 55 to 64 (31 respondents) were similarly overrepresented compared to the City's population. The survey was not designed to be a scientific sample, though the pool of respondents was large enough and stratified enough to provide convincing strategic feedback. As a result, the survey yielded valuable input from the Alexandria community.

Place-Based Development

Ensuring land use policies that support sustainable and innovative development (3.8 out of 5.0) and prioritizing catalytic real estate projects (3.7) stood as the two most important place-based development strategies, according to respondents. This was followed by the City's positioning itself as a destination of choice for visitors (3.6; Figure 24). Among future large-scale real estate projects, uses related to the City's quality of life and attractiveness as a destination were rated among the most preferred, including arts or cultural use (3.9), retail (3.5), and entertainment (3.5). Several destinations related to performing arts were frequently identified as under-represented in Alexandria today, including a performing arts center (12.6 percent), theater and performance venues (11.3 percent), and a music venue (10.1 percent). Other uses like food hall (10.3 percent) and indoor sports facilities (10.3 percent) enjoyed similar recognition. Residential development, which saw both support and opposition in open-ended responses, scored in the lower half of preferred projects (3.3). Additionally, open-ended responses emphasized protecting the City's green space and avoiding overdevelopment.

Figure 24. Goal 1—Place-Based Development

Q5. Please prioritize the place-based development strategies according to how important you believe them to be for Alexandria's future economic growth.



Source(s): Survey results compiled by TIP Strategies, Inc.

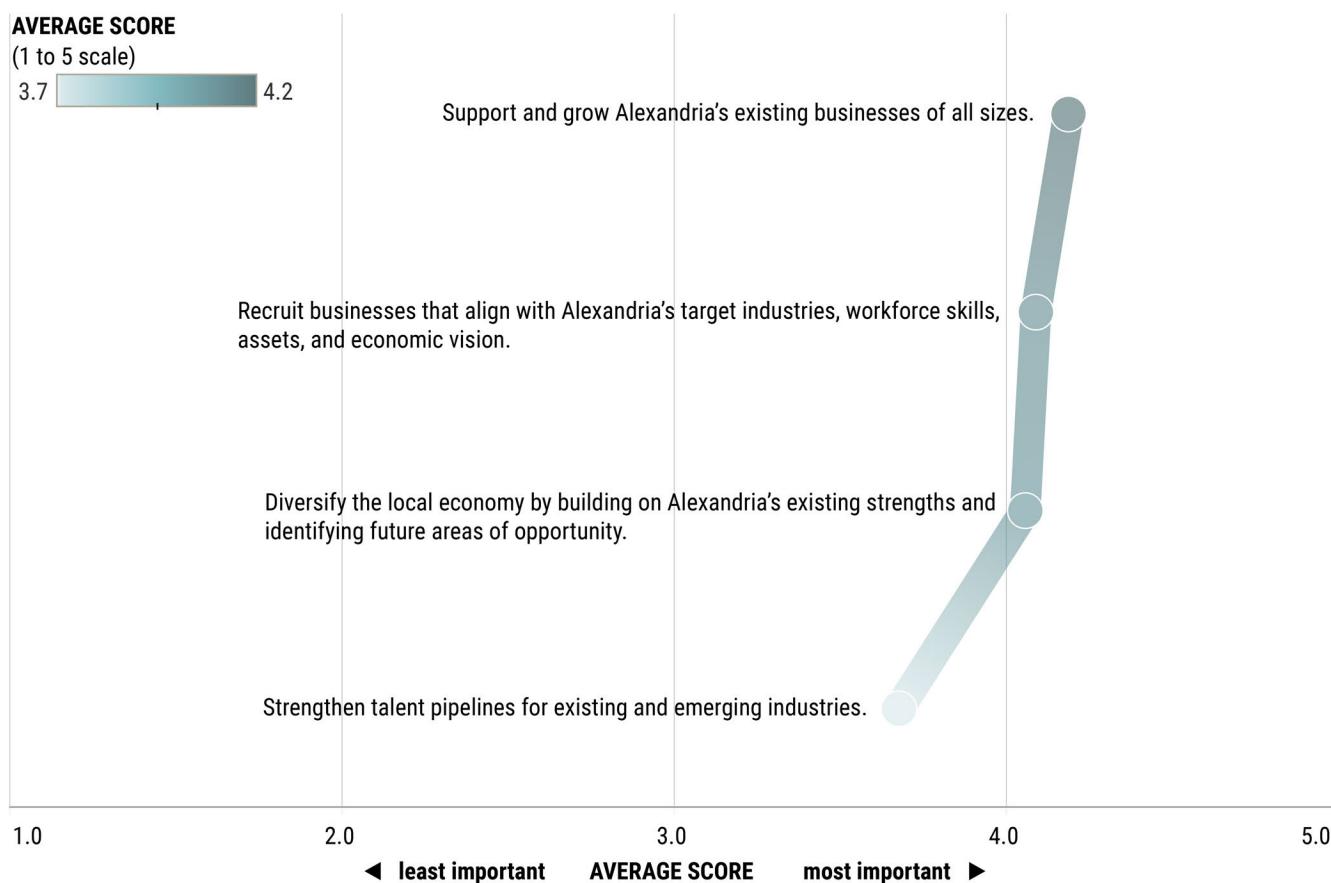
Note(s): Of the 154 respondents, 143 answered this question. The scale indicates the average score, with 5 being the highest possible and 1 being the lowest possible. Responses of "N/A or Unsure" are not captured by the average score for this question.

Business Retention and Recruitment

Three of Alexandria's business retention and recruitment strategies received similarly high ratings from respondents; supporting existing businesses (4.2 out of 5.0), recruiting target industry businesses (4.1), and diversifying the local economy (4.1) stood notably above strengthening talent pipelines (3.7; Figure 25). Support for tech and innovation characterized thoughts on business recruitment, with research- or innovation-focused businesses (11.9 percent), tech firms and startups (8.9 percent), and green businesses and clean energy (8.4 percent) identified as among the most needed job types in Alexandria. Childcare providers (9.3 percent) were also frequently cited as a need. Respondents placed a high value on supporting startups and locally owned businesses (4.1) and emphasized that the City should prioritize target industries that can increase local tax revenue (4.0), diversify the local economy (4.0), and provide quality jobs (3.9). Infrastructure improvements stood out as the most impactful way for the City to competitively attract and retain businesses (4.0), while other tools around improving regulatory processes—regulatory flexibility (3.6), permit and fee abatement (3.4), and tax abatements and adjustments (3.1)—were also rated as highly effective.

Figure 25. Goal 2—Business Retention and Recruitment

Q8. Please prioritize the business retention and recruitment strategies according to how important you believe them to be for Alexandria's future economic growth.



Source(s): Survey results compiled by TIP Strategies, Inc.

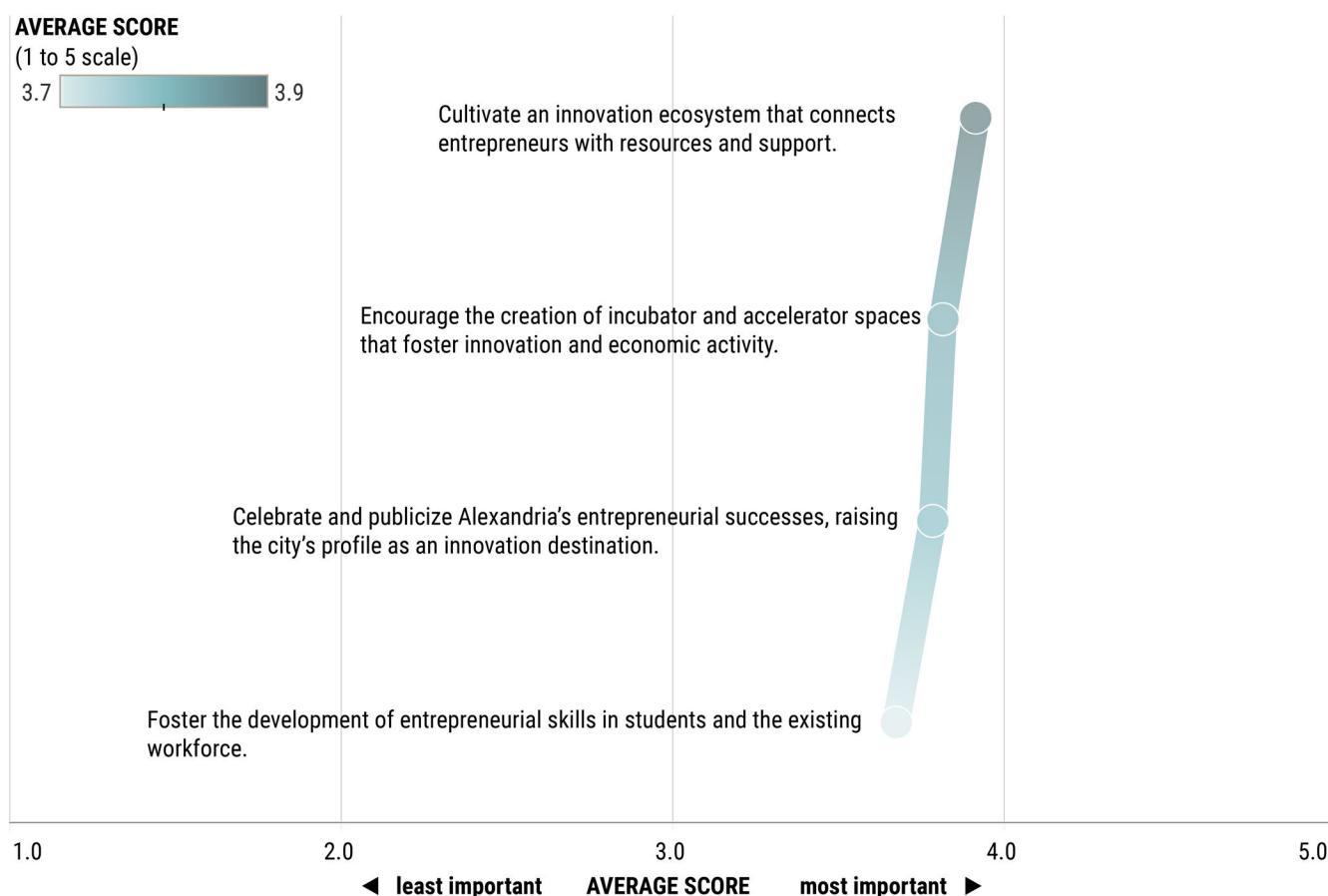
Note(s): Of the 154 respondents, 131 answered this question. The scale indicates the average score, with 5 being the highest possible and 1 being the lowest possible. Responses of "N/A or Unsure" are not captured by the average score for this question.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Cultivating an innovation ecosystem to connect entrepreneurs with resources and support rated as this goal area's highest-priority strategy (3.9 out of 5.0; Figure 26). Respondents indicated a need for the City to connect its entrepreneurs to funding or investment networks (4.1) and to provide guidance through the permitting and licensing process (4.0). Other preferred types of support were logistical, like providing childcare or other family-friendly amenities (3.8) and affordable workspaces (3.7) to local entrepreneurs. Encouraging the creation of incubator and accelerator spaces was also rated as a significant strategy (3.8) for establishing Alexandria as a hub for entrepreneurship and innovation. Responses suggested support for the creation of partnerships between local and regional innovation networks (3.8) and organizing industry-specific roundtables (3.5). These strategies, while increasing the opportunities for networking and promotion available to local businesses, represent a way to continue to raise the City's profile as an innovation destination.

Figure 26. Goal 3—Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Q 12. Please prioritize the entrepreneurship and innovation strategies according to how important you believe them to be for Alexandria's future economic growth.



Source(s): Survey results compiled by TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Of the 154 respondents, 127 answered this question. The scale indicates the average score, with 5 being the highest possible and 1 being the lowest possible. Responses of "N/A or Unsure" are not captured by the average score for this question.

SWOT ANALYSIS

During the initial phase of the project, the consulting team gathered qualitative input from stakeholders in Alexandria concerning local economic development issues. In addition, TIP conducted quantitative data analyses to understand Alexandria's competitive position within the region and nation. The results of these efforts informed the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, summarized in Figure 27.

The four components of a SWOT analysis can be defined as follows.

- **Strengths:** Assets and resources that can be built on to grow, strengthen, and diversify the local/regional economy.
- **Weaknesses:** Liabilities and barriers to economic development that could limit economic growth potential.
- **Opportunities:** Competitive advantages and positive trends that hold significant potential for the attraction of new businesses, investments, and skilled workers.
- **Threats:** Unfavorable factors and trends (often external) that could negatively affect the local/regional economy.

Figure 27. Summary of SWOT Analysis for Alexandria, Virginia

 Strengths	 Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality of life • Sense of community • Proximity to DC and other regional economic hubs • Transportation infrastructure • Waterfront • Historic appeal and charm • Strong tourism sector • Small business community • Distinctive neighborhoods • Highly educated workforce • Presence of and proximity to quality higher ed institutions • Leader in office conversions • AAA credit rating • Virginia rated a top state for business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of light industrial sites • Limited commercial real estate availability • Over-reliance on residential in real estate tax revenues • High office vacancy rates • High cost of housing • Constrained road networks • Population growth slowing, some challenges retaining young professionals • Workforce for skilled trades • Underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystem
 Opportunities	 Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office space reuse • Expand tourism/entertainment assets • Catalyst real estate redevelopment sites • Regional collaboration, action, and impact • Increase connectivity between neighborhoods • Grow local entrepreneurship ecosystem and culture • Reskill federal workforce • Northern Virginia Community College • Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing administrations • Impact of federal funding and workforce cuts • Loss of federal and federal adjacent workers • Tariffs • Contracting office market • Reduced consumer spending • Decreasing population • Brain drain

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

5

IMPLEMENTATION



Alexandria is home to five Metro Stations, offering seamless connectivity to the rest of the region. Photo by Sam Kittner for AEDP.

OVERSIGHT AND DECISION MAKING

The impact and effectiveness of *ALX Forward* will depend heavily on the approach to carrying out the recommended strategies, actions, and tactics. The considerations outlined here lay the groundwork for evaluating progress and advancing the plan's implementation over time. As part of the framework's preparation, TIP reviewed Alexandria's economic development investment decision-making process, which is illustrated in this section. Drawing on the firm's extensive national portfolio, TIP has found that best practices in this area emphasize key factors such as strategic alignment, transparency, community impact, economic development outcomes (including job creation, catalyst potential, and revenue growth), and the use of public funds and leveraged investment. Alexandria's decision-making process is consistent with these standards, strengthening its competitiveness and demonstrating credibility to investors.

ALX FORWARD OVERSIGHT STRUCTURE

The proposed oversight structure for *ALX Forward* brings together City leadership, community voices, and private-sector partners to ensure effective and inclusive implementation. Drawing on successful examples from other cities, this hybrid governance approach combines formal oversight with active public engagement, helping Alexandria build trust, track progress transparently, and adapt to evolving needs.

Rooted in collaboration, the proposed structure promotes City Council priorities through shared ownership among City departments, AEDP, external stakeholders, partner organizations, and residents, while preserving the City and AEDP's ability to lead with agility. It reflects emerging best practices in local government that emphasize joint accountability, open communication, and stakeholder alignment. Many cities are finding success with "hybrid and collaborative governance" models that balance internal leadership with structured stakeholder participation, maintaining accountability and coordination without requiring a formal oversight body.

The three components of the proposed structure are outlined in Figure 28 (page 54): leadership and accountability, stakeholder engagement, and oversight tools. Taken together, this model positions the City of Alexandria to advance strategic goals for inclusive growth and public trust through open communication and shared accountability. It ensures regular progress reviews and keeps stakeholders central to decision-making. Coupled with the new evaluation framework suggested as part of the *ALX Forward* planning process—a decision matrix (shown in Figure 8, page 18) that integrates community priorities and best practices in economic development—the City will be well-positioned to make investments that reflect the concerns and aspirations of its residents.

KEY BENEFITS OF PROPOSED STRUCTURE

- Clear leadership and accountability while enabling agility and innovation.
- Data-driven, community-informed decisions with transparent reporting.
- Routine progress checks and stakeholder involvement at every step.
- Reflects best practices from Alexandria's Economic Summit and national peer organizations.

Figure 28. Components of Proposed *ALX Forward* Oversight Structure

COMPONENT	DETAILS
LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY	City of Alexandria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The City Council sets economic priorities and reviews progress annually. City Manager and designees act as liaisons for strategic planning and implementation with robust oversight and community engagement.
	AEDP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AEDP's public-private Board reviews and approves strategy, annual work plans, and metrics. AEDP's CEO oversees daily operations, reports to the Board and liaises with the City Manager, and collaborates with City on <i>ALX Forward</i> implementation
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	Strategic Initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual "ALX Forward" report and recurring community forums (e.g., "State of Economy") for feedback and opportunity identification.
	Strategic Implementation Digital Platform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "ALX Forward" hub for reporting ongoing progress, introducing new initiatives, and receiving public feedback. Quarterly summaries shared publicly for data transparency.
	Partners Roundtable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular staff meetings with department leads, workforce, and external partners to monitor milestones and co-develop solutions.
OVERSIGHT TOOLS	Implementation Matrix <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking tools (accessible to AEDP, the City, and public stakeholders) to monitor milestones, challenges, and lessons learned from initiatives.
	Decision Matrix <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review strategies for equity, sustainability, alignment, and other factor priorities before adoption.

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

DECISION MAKING

The Economic Development Investment Decision Matrix helps Alexandria align public spending with City values and strategies, ensuring transparency and accountability. Using this tool, City Council can approve investments, while ensuring transparency, adaptability, and fairness through regular review and public involvement. The Decision Matrix and the associated review process streamlines Alexandria's public investment in economic development, focusing on clarity, consistency, and community outcomes.

Projects are rated on the following five factors, described in Figure 8 (page 18).

- Quantifiable Impact (QI)**—economic returns, job creation, investment, tax revenue.
- Strategic Alignment (SA)**—support for target industries, city goals, and a diverse tax base.
- Necessity of Public Funds (PF)**—crucial public investment, leveraging private funds.
- Protect City's Credit Rating (CC)**—effects on AAA rating and fiscal stability.
- Community Benefit (CB)**—tangible gains like affordable housing, workforce development, and place-based enhancements.

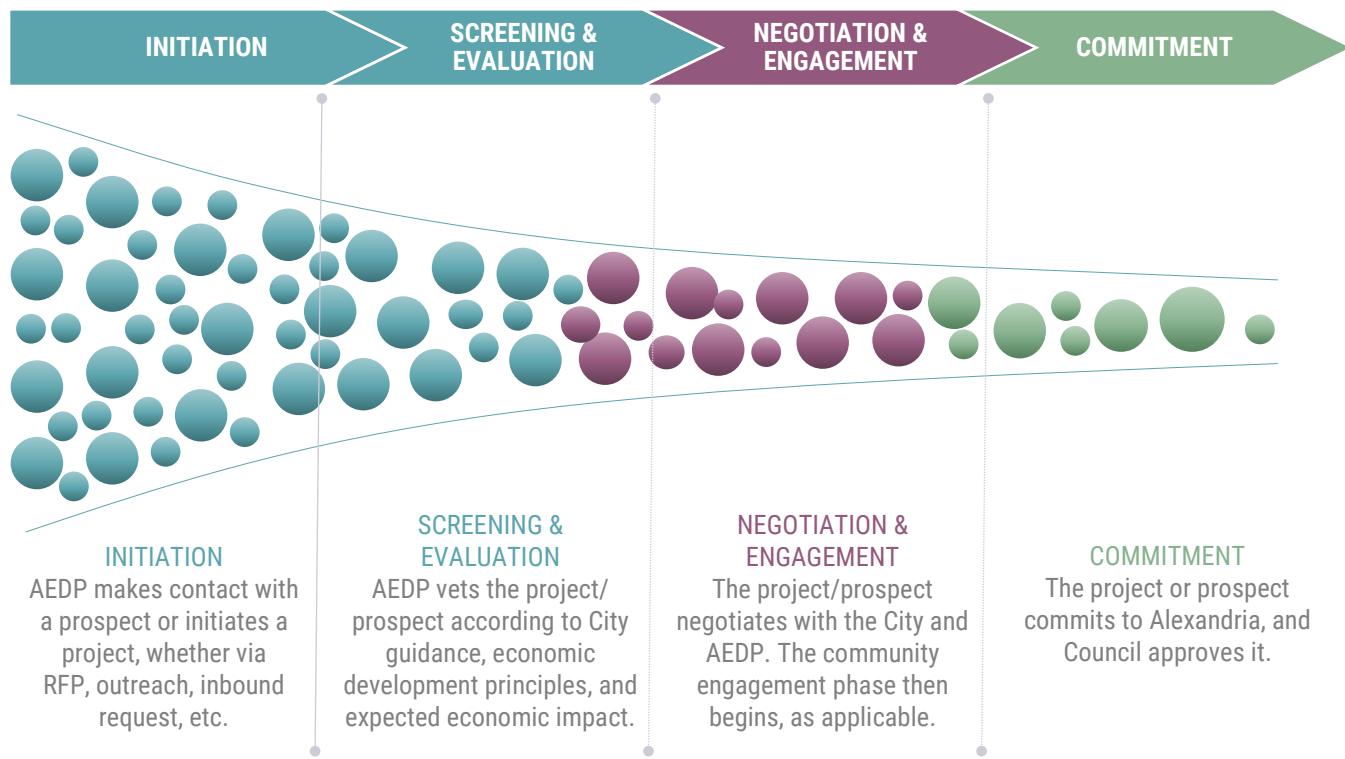
Figure 29 (page 55) outlines the roles and engagement factors by stakeholder underpinning a staged decision process for economic development public investment in Alexandria.

Figure 29. Stakeholder Roles and Engagement Factors

STAKEHOLDER	DECISION MATRIX ROLE	ALIGNMENT WITH ENGAGEMENT FACTORS
City of Alexandria	Policy direction, fiscal approval, credit protection, final incentive decisions	QI SA PF CC CB
AEDP (Economic Development)	Project vetting, due diligence, impact analysis, target industry support, incentive negotiation, stakeholder convening	QI SA PF CC CB
Residents	Public input, advocate for community benefits, transparency, and inclusive prosperity, attend hearings, advise on priorities	QI SA PF CC CB
Developers/Investors	Project proposals, feasibility and impact (job creation and industry), provide capital, respond to requirements/incentives	QI SA PF CC CB

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

Making decisions about public investment across a range of options and projects is not a one-size-fits all process. However, there is value in capturing the broad outlines of the approach. Figure 30 illustrates how economic development prospects move through the process. At the outset of the funnel—the initiation stage—the City and AEDP engage with hundreds of leads and prospects. Many of these opportunities fall out of consideration for reasons related to the project itself. Those that remain are subjected to screening by City and AEDP staff to ensure they align with established priorities and meet due diligence standards. This evaluation process further narrows the funnel to a handful of viable projects that are presented to City Council for consideration. While AEDP and City staff play a primary role in the first half of the funnel, City Council and the community are engaged in the latter half. During this part of the process, City Council provides input and sets parameters to guide the negotiations and additional public input is sought, where applicable.

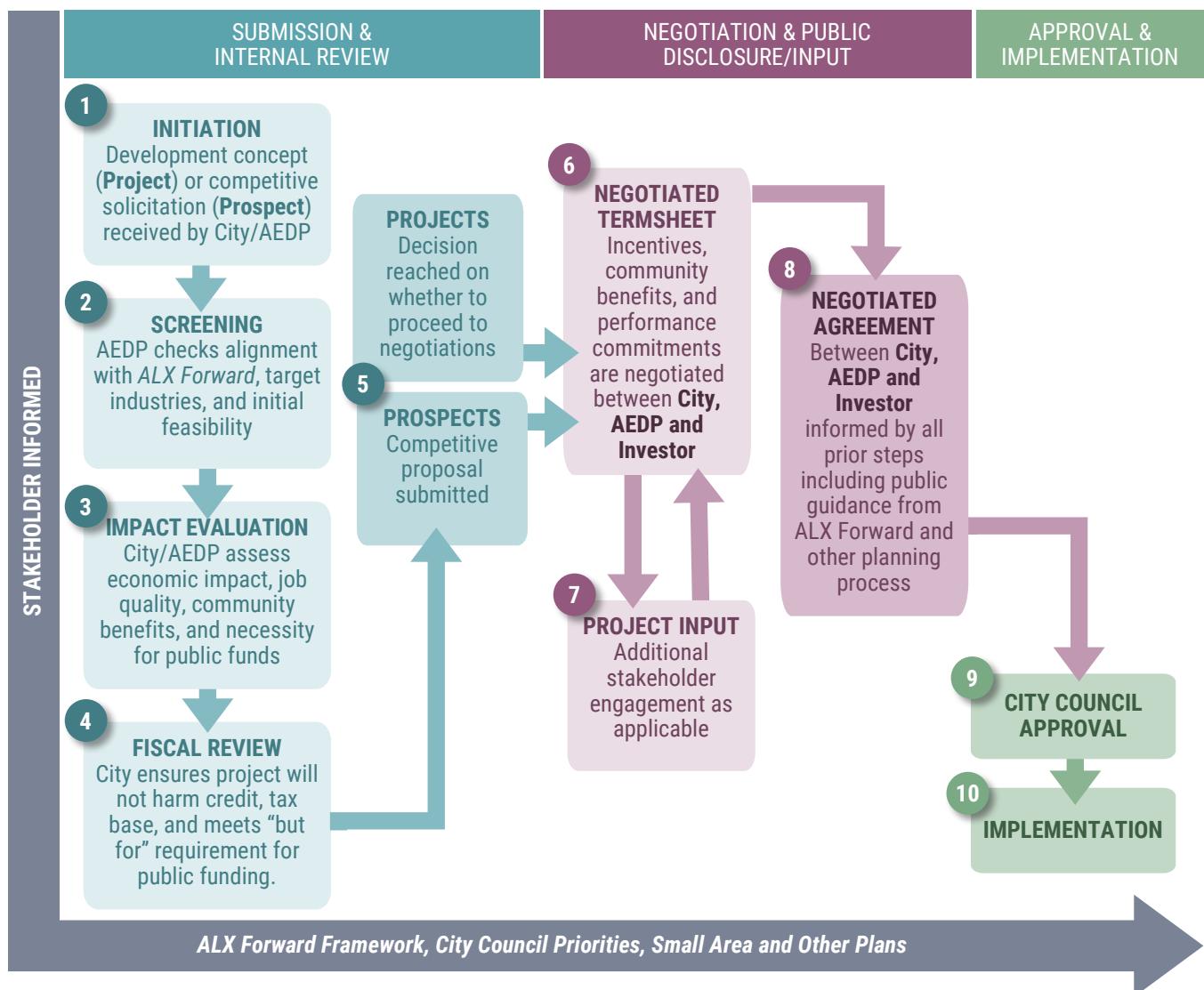
Figure 30. Economic Development Funnel

Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; AEDP, TIP Strategies, Inc.

Figure 31 provides a closer look at the process for moving from potential projects and prospects to approval and implementation. These opportunities enter the funnel (1) from a variety of sources including unsolicited proposals; leads generated from proactive outreach by AEDP; and referrals by community members, Council members, and partner organizations. Staff vetting is a multi-step process which starts by screening the project against prior plans and City Council priorities (2). The impact evaluation (3) considers factors such as the feasibility and viability of the project and the reputation of the proposer. During the fiscal review (4), staff use tools to calculate revenue, cost, job creation, and community benefits. Based on this extensive screen process, a decision is reached on moving forward (5).

The entire process is anchored by community and stakeholder participation gathered over the course of multiple priority-setting initiatives and planning efforts, including preparation of the *ALX Forward* framework. During the negotiation phase (6 through 8), City Council is briefed and consulted, and community members are brought into the process as needed. The end result of this rigorous approach is a negotiated agreement with a qualified prospect or project that is presented to Council for approval (9) and implementation (10).

Figure 31. Staged Decision-Making Process Using the Economic Development Investment Decision Matrix



Source(s): City of Alexandria, Virginia; TIP Strategies, Inc.

RESOURCING

The City is currently dedicating resources to and reporting on a number of the strategies, programs, and initiatives outlined in the Action Plan. Where a new or expanded effort is recommended, however, additional resourcing will be required. Whether this additional capacity will be needed in the form of human resources (through the addition of staff or the use of independent contractors), or additional funding will vary. Broadly speaking, options for expanding fiscal capacity can include seeking new tax authority, issuing bonds, applying for state and federal grants, identifying philanthropic funding sources, and exploring potential partnerships.

EVALUATION AND TRACKING

Evaluation, tracking, and reporting requires significant time, effort and resources, which must be considered in the context of tracking efforts that may be underway associated with other City Council priorities and parallel monitoring initiatives. TIP's customized implementation matrix (delivered separately), along with a robust set of performance measures that can be tailored to reflect local priorities, will allow the City to track progress and communicate achievements to partners and stakeholders.

A transparent and flexible approach to evaluation is essential for tracking progress and ensuring accountability. Each goal area includes a menu of community indicators and metrics the City of Alexandria and AEDP can choose from to measure progress on implementation. Community indicators can be used to track citywide trends and influence future decision making, while metrics measure programmatic or project-specific actions and outcomes. These performance metrics should be evaluated against comparable measures in the national and regional context, and segmented by characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, income, or geography to better understand macro and micro trends. By leveraging existing mechanisms for progress evaluation and reporting, the City can strategically focus on the most impactful indicators and metrics to minimize duplication, reduce data overload, and streamline reporting efforts.

As a first step toward implementation, three workshops were conducted at the end of the planning process to begin operationalizing key strategies and to engage lead and supporting partners in defining roles, timelines, and outcomes for the near-term catalytic initiatives. These sessions helped transition the framework from planning to execution and informed the development of the implementation matrix that accompanies this strategic action plan.

The implementation matrix that accompanies this strategic economic framework serves as a dynamic tool designed to provide the structure and adaptability needed to support successful implementation. Delivered in an editable Excel format, the matrix offers a mechanism for periodic review and adjustment based on changing conditions and lessons learned. The Excel file outlines recommended actions, identifies responsible lead organizations, highlights key supporting partners, and includes clear status indicators and target timelines. This structure promotes accountability by clearly designating the entity responsible for each task, reducing ambiguity and fostering a shared sense of ownership of the framework.

The matrix is designed to be flexible and interactive, making it easy to update as progress is made, challenges arise, or new opportunities emerge. The matrix also facilitates tracking and reporting by consolidating all relevant implementation data into a single location and in a user-friendly format. When used as intended, this tool will allow the City to readily visualize what has been completed, what is in progress, and where there may be delays or resource gaps—allowing for timely interventions and realignment when needed.

The timelines, progress indicators, and outcome-oriented metrics included in the matrix also support a culture of transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. It enables regular performance reviews, summarized progress reporting to leadership and the public, and informed decision-making rooted in real-time data. By embedding mechanisms for ongoing feedback and periodic review, the City can ensure the framework remains responsive to changing economic conditions, community needs, and policy shifts.

Ultimately, the implementation matrix is meant to transform strategy into action. By establishing clear criteria and aligning resources around measurable outcomes, it becomes an essential tool for ensuring *ALX Forward* is not only executed effectively but also remains adaptive, comprehensive, and relevant over time.

Figure 32. Sample Implementation Matrix

	CATALYTIC INITIATIVE (*)	LEAD ORGANIZATION	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	TIMELINE FOR INITIATING ACTION					STATUS	FREQUENCY	PRIORITY	REQUIRED RESOURCES	KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS / NOTES
				ONGOING	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEARS 3-4	YEAR 5+					
GOAL 1. PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENT Invest in dynamic, inclusive, and authentic places that reflect Alexandria's character and contribute to a diversified tax base.													
1.1. Accelerate catalyst site development. Prioritize bold, transformative real estate projects that contribute to revenue generation and enhance quality of place throughout the City.					■	■	■	■					
1.1.1. Use the revised decision matrix to identify when the City of Alexandria will invest in catalyst sites, and make elements of the matrix readily available online for potential developers, site selectors, business owners, and community members to view.													
1.1.2. Develop a process for ongoing engagement around economic development, real estate, and future opportunities that contribute to Alexandria's competitive positioning.													
<i>Current and Potential Tactics</i>													
1.1.2.A. Host an annual "State of the City" event that highlights recent accomplishments and developments, shares current market conditions and emerging trends, identifies future priorities and opportunities, and provides an opportunity for community engagement and feedback.													
1.1.2.B. Leverage existing opportunities (e.g., City Council meetings and events) for ongoing engagement on economic development.													
1.1.2.C. NEW. Coordinate peer city tours with Council, City or AEDP staff and key business or community leaders to focus on building relationships, increasing collaboration, and learning from one another's best practices, successful initiatives, and specific projects.													
1.1.2.D. NEW. Facilitate quarterly forums devoted to timely topics in economic and real estate development. These forums are an opportunity to share information and receive public feedback.													
1.1.2.E. EXPAND. Increase community outreach and attendance for "Meet the Project" events where attendees have an opportunity to learn about a specific development project or major initiative and meet relevant staff or contractors.													
1.1.2.F. EXPAND. Incorporate pop-up community outreach in places where people gather (e.g., festivals, recreation centers, and libraries) and consider working with community-based project ambassadors to further outreach efforts.													
1.1.3. Continue to promote preferred development locations such as Carlyle and Eisenhower East, Old Town North, West End, and the Potomac Yard through targeted investments and incentives.													
<i>Current and Potential Tactics</i>													
1.1.3.A. Continue to prioritize the promotion of Potomac Yard, Old Town North, West End, Carlyle, and Eisenhower East to attract prospects.	*												
1.1.3.B. NEW. Launch a targeted catalyst marketing campaign and collaborate with developers to attract and secure anchor projects.	*												
1.1.3.C. Consider bold upfront investments (e.g., infrastructure improvements) and leverage tools (e.g., tax increment financing, tax abatements, and other incentives), based on the Decision Matrix criteria (see Figure 8, page 18), to ensure sites are development ready.	*												

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.



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