

EXHIBIT NO. 1

City of Alexandria, Virginia

15
3-27-01

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 16, 2001
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*
SUBJECT: RECEIPT OF THE FY 2000 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

ISSUE: City Council receipt of the FY 2000 Annual Report of the Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC).

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive the Annual Report, which covers the activities of the Economic Opportunities Commission from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000, and thank the Commission for their work on behalf of low-income residents of the City.

DISCUSSION: The Economic Opportunities Commission was established in 1966 to advise the Council on issues affecting low-income residents of the City. The 18-member body provides oversight for those programs and services of the Office of Community Services in the Department of Human Services that promote self-sufficiency and improve conditions of poverty. The attached FY 2000 Annual Report summarizes the work of the Commission during the last fiscal year. EOC activities during the year included: continuation of the Earned Income Tax Credit campaign with the Social Services Advisory Board, regular program briefings, work with the United Way Human Services Committee to assess the working poor in the community, coordination with community groups and other boards and commissions, advocacy for low-income and target populations, and successful support for state legislative and budget initiatives that promote the interests of low-income people.

During FY 2001, the EOC will continue to work with the Social Services Advisory Board on the Earned Income Tax Credit and income tax preparation projects, as well as legislative advocacy for a state earned income tax credit. The EOC also continues to work with the United Way on their joint study of Alexandria's working poor which is due to be completed in the spring.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENTS: Attachment I: FY 2000 EOC Annual Report

STAFF: Nelson Smith, Director, Office of Community Services, Department of Human Services
Jack Powers, Director of Community Programs
Meg O'Regan, Director of Human Services

ATTACHMENT I

1999-2000 ANNUAL REPORT OF

THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

PRESENTED TO ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL

MARCH 27, 2001



**MAYOR KERRY J. DONLEY
VICE MAYOR WILLIAM C. CLEVELAND
COUNCILWOMAN CLAIRE M. EBERWEIN
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM D. EUILLE
COUNCILWOMAN REDELLA S. PEPPER
COUNCILMAN DAVID G. SPECK
COUNCILWOMAN JOYCE WOODSON**

PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

Elected Officials

Mayor Kerry Donley - represented by Allen Lomax
Vice-Mayor William Cleveland - represented by Teri Hauser and Matthew Natale
Councilman William Euille - represented by Yvonne Cooper
Councilwoman Joyce Woodson - represented by Patti Miller
Senator Patricia Ticer - represented by Paul Smedberg and Angie Godfrey
Commonwealth's Attorney S. Randolph Sengel - represented by James Lay

Private Sector

Alexandria Chamber of Commerce - Vacant
National Business Alliance - Vacant
Alive! Inc. - Carrie Beyer and Jo-anne Barnard
The Campagna Center - Ann Corson
Landlord & Tenant Relations Board - Rich Sforza
(non-voting representation)

Target Population

Potomac West Strategy Area - Vacant
Strawberry Hill/West End - Gila Harris
Potomac East Strategy Area - Patrice Hall
Southwest Quadrant Rehab Area - Vacant
Head Start Parent's Policy Council - Tracy Roberson
Alexandria NAACP - Art Mosley
Alexandria Residents Council - Harold Napper

BACKGROUND

The Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) was created by City Council in 1966. The Commission's general charge is to: serve as an advocate for Alexandria's low-income residents, advise the City Council on programs for these residents, and provide guidance and oversight of the Office of Community Services (OCS) in the conduct of the programs designed to serve low-income and other special populations. The EOC is comprised of 18 members with one-third of its members consisting of elected officials or their representatives appointed by the City Council, one-third of its members consisting of representatives of the poor, and one-third of its members representing business, religious, welfare or other private sector groups and organizations.

The Economic Opportunities Commission and the Office of Community Services (OCS) comprises the Community Action Agency for Alexandria. Community Action goals are to promote self-sufficiency for low-income persons, alleviate conditions of poverty, improve the conditions under which low-income persons work and live, and ensure that low-income individuals have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

To help achieve these goals, OCS offers a wide range of programs and services for eligible low-income citizens, including: crisis intervention and emergency services through the Community Services Block Grant, comprehensive services for the homeless and prevention for the near homeless, seasonal energy assistance through the Virginia Energy Assistance Program, orientation services for recent immigrants and newcomers and services for ex-offenders through the Virginia Community Action Re-entry System or Virginia CARES. A profile on each of the programs is in an appendix to this report.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR 1999-2000

To fulfill its mission, the EOC undertook a variety of activities during fiscal year 2000 including: program oversight and guidance, monitoring legislative and budget issues affecting low-income people, advocacy for target populations, partnering with other community groups, and coordination with other City Boards and community organizations.

Program Oversight

The EOC continued to receive monthly briefings on OCS initiatives and other community based efforts to serve low-income people. The membership receives extensive background and outcome information on services to low-income residents. This initiative improves the membership's program and community knowledge in order to refine our ongoing needs assessment process. The Commission also extended invitations to community based providers coordinating service delivery with OCS. The Executive Director of Carpenter's Shelter participated in a session on the community effort to build on the service continuum for the homeless in the City.

During the year, the final stages of the Department of Human Services reorganization plan impacted on EOC's oversight responsibilities. In the summer of 1999 the cooling assistance

component of the Virginia Energy Assistance Program was transferred to the OCS Community Services Unit. The heating assistance component (Fuel Assistance) followed in the winter. An additional change transferred Project Discovery to a newly formed Youth Prevention Unit in the Division of Family Services. The EOC supported these changes to better align programs and staff based on the services provided to the public. The Commission will continue to support the efforts of Project Discovery and maintains a seat on the Project Discovery Advisory Board.

Monitoring of Legislative and Budgetary Issues

Throughout the fiscal year, the EOC monitored federal and state legislative initiatives and budget amendments with potential impact on the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and other Community Action programs. The Commission actively supported efforts by the state community action association, the Virginia Council Against Poverty, and the Virginia CARES statewide network to expand services. Both efforts realized small but significant successes. Additional state and federal resources were appropriated by the General Assembly to expand services to seven additional localities and to support emergency services in Alexandria. The Virginia CARES network received a share of \$200,000 new state dollars appropriated to pre- and post-incarceration services for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

Advocacy

An important role of the Commission is to take supportive positions on major issues affecting the low-income community. A primary way EOC fulfills this role is through the designated seats EOC members hold on the Human Rights Commission, the Early Childhood Commission, the *Alexandria Works!* Coalition, and the Fair Housing Testing Advisory Committee.

During FY 2000, the EOC researched and debated the “living wage campaign” and the proposed living wage ordinance for Alexandria. As part of the effort, a Commission member attended the City Council work session on the issue. A representative of the Northern Virginia Living Wage Campaign gave a presentation to the membership and the director of Human Services. The Commission unanimously supported development of an ordinance and provided supporting testimony at the City Council public hearing.

In addition, the Commission began to research low-income persons access to high technology - the “digital divide”. While a substantial gap exists for low-income people, there are a host of new public/private initiatives locally, throughout the region and the Commonwealth. The Commission intends to continue to follow this issue.

Coordination

The EOC and the Social Services Advisory Board (SSAB) sponsored a joint meeting with the District of Columbia based Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) to gain a better understanding of the organization’s Self-Sufficiency Standard and its possible application in Alexandria. WOW has developed a formula based on local housing, food, transportation and

other basic costs that sets a minimum level income a family needs to be financial independent of subsidy programs. The standard can be adapted to any family size and locality based on prevailing costs of basic necessities. EOC and SSAB will consider using the standard as a basis for state legislative initiatives geared to the cost of living in Northern Virginia.

Partnering

In the Fall of 1999, the EOC and Alexandria's United Way formed a partnership to study and assess the needs of the working poor in Alexandria. A working committee consisting of representatives from the Commission, the United Way, the Department of Human Services, and the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee was formed to research and complete the study. The committee employed a variety of data collection techniques to obtain the information: a survey of low-income City residents, focus groups with clients of the Carpenter's Shelter, Head Start, Substance Abuse Services and the Northern Virginia Urban League, and two focus groups with service providers in the community. It is expected that the study will be released in April 2001.

The EOC again joined with other City boards and commissions in a partnership with the Social Services Advisory Board to replicate the successful Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) campaign in Alexandria. The EITC is a refundable tax credit for low-income workers that reduces or eliminates federal tax liability and can increase disposable income. The goal of this campaign was to improve financial circumstances of low-income residents and families leaving the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program by encouraging use of the EITC. The Campaign consisted of recruiting and training volunteers, providing free tax filing assistance to Alexandria's low-income residents, and conducting outreach to these residents to make them aware of this service. Last year's campaign assisted 197 households that received an average tax return of about \$1,500.

FUTURE WORK OF THE EOC

During fiscal year 2001, the EOC expects to continue with many of the activities from the current year - program oversight through regular staff briefings, monitoring legislative and budget issues, advocacy, and partnerships with other community groups. The EOC also plans to develop strategies for disseminating the Working Poor Study, receiving comment and implementing recommendations that attain consensus. Further, the EOC expects to continue to research technology access and the so called "digital divide" and report on pertinent findings.

The EOC will continue its current initiative called "Partnerships for Progress." Under this initiative the EOC plans to partner with other boards, commissions, and community groups to identify ways to assist Alexandria's low-income citizens. One such effort will be to coordinate a meeting on affordable housing with the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee. The goal - to bring together representatives from other boards, commissions, and organizations to network and exchange ideas and concepts on affordable housing issues affecting the entire community.

PROFILE OF PROGRAMS IN THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Office of Community Services (OCS) provides a variety of programs, services and activities to promote self-sufficiency and improve the lives of Alexandria's low-income residents. For purposes of this discussion, these programs, services, and activities are grouped into four broad areas: crisis intervention, homeless services, education and ex-offender services. A profile of the OCS programs are shown below.

CRISIS INTERVENTION

The federal and State Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), supplemented by local general funds, supports intake services, crisis intervention, emergency assistance and community outreach efforts. Housing, shelter, food, fuel, medical, transportation and other emergency assistance is provided to eligible low-income residents of the City. State and local general funds are used in conjunction with financial assistance from local churches and charities to preserve existing housing for eligible families facing eviction due to short-term financial crises. In FY 2000, OCS crisis intervention programs assisted 4,623 individuals in 2,242 low-income households. The Community Services Unit raised \$143,990 from Alexandria's network of churches and non-profit agencies to meet emergency needs.

This component also manages the Virginia Energy Assistance Program and the seasonal Energy Share fuel fund program, sponsored and funded in part by Virginia Power, to preserve heating sources for low-income persons facing emergencies. The Energy Assistance Program includes a cooling program for low-income households at-risk for heat related health complications associated with the region's summer weather. Eligible households receive assistance toward the purchase of air conditioning units and/or electricity costs for cooling the home. In FY 2000, ninety families received assistance through the summer cooling component. During the winter of 1999-2000, the Energy Assistance Program helped 494 households heat their homes with an average benefit of \$254.

HOMELESS SERVICES

OCS coordinates DHS service delivery to the homeless. Strategies and programs include homeless prevention, eviction storage, transitional housing, case management, administration of operations at the Alexandria Community Shelter (ACS), and supportive services for shelter residents. The Homeless Intervention Program (HIP) provides long-term financial support in conjunction with housing counseling and case management for families facing eviction or foreclosure as a result of circumstance beyond their control. In FY 2000, the HIP program helped 171 families maintain their housing. Six month follow-up contact with HIP families found 69% were still in permanent housing.

During fiscal year 2000, 486 persons, including 71 families with 141 children were sheltered at ACS. Thirty-six percent of the households that left ACS went on to obtain stable housing. OCS continued its long-standing working relationship with Carpenter's Shelter. Staff from several City agencies, in addition to DHS, participate in a comprehensive case management partnership with shelter staff. Carpenter's Shelter receives financial support through the City's competitive Community Partnership Fund for Human Services for operating expenses. The City also provides federal and local financial support through the OCS budget for Carpenter's management of the emergency overnight winter shelter program.

HISPANIC ORIENTATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM (HOEP)

HOEP offers a broad range of services that provide a cultural orientation and English language instruction to recent immigrants. Community volunteers provide the English instruction and professionals from City agencies and non-profits present workshops on health issues, including HIV-AIDS, domestic violence, crime, the court system, landlord and tenant issues, job discrimination and banking. For participants eligible to apply for citizenship, a special series of workshops is also offered. The goal is to help immigrants move into the American mainstream and survive and prosper without relying on public assistance. In FY 2000, 470 persons participated in ESL classes and 125 orientation workshops presented. Another 25 persons attended the workshop series designed to help prepare for citizenship.

EX-OFFENDER SERVICES

The Virginia Community Action Re-Entry System (Virginia CARES) provides transitional services and counseling to ex-offenders returning to Alexandria from the state correctional system, and to their families. In FY 2000, 149 participants were enrolled in the program and a total of 365 received services. Basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing and transportation are addressed immediately. Long range goals concentrate on employment, self-sufficiency and non-recidivism. Primary funding for the program comes from a state grant. Follow-up contacts made one year after enrollment with FY 1999 participants found that only 8.6 percent were re-incarcerated on new felony charges in 2000.