

City of Alexandria, Virginia

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2-26-02

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 15, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: RECEIPT OF THE FY 2001 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

ISSUE: City Council receipt of the FY 2001 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, 2000 to June 30, 2001, 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 Annual Report summarizes the work of the Commission during the FY 2001. EOC highlights during the year included: the June 2001 release of the report, "Living from Paycheck to Paycheck: A Look at Alexandria's Working Poor," prepared in conjunction with the Alexandria United Way; continued support of the Earned Income Tax Credit campaign and tax assistance program with the Social Services Advisory Board; regular program briefings; collaboration with community groups and other boards and commissions; advocacy for low-income and target populations; and support for state legislative and budget initiatives that promote the interests of low-income people.

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

2001-2001 ANNUAL REPORT OF

THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

PRESENTED TO ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL

FEBRUARY 26, 2002



**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 Matthew Natale
Councilman William Euille - represented by Yvonne Cooper and David Jannarone
Councilwoman Joyce Woodson - represented by Patti Miller
Senator Patricia Ticer - represented by 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. - 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 - Vacant
Alexandria NAACP - Art Mosley
Alexandria Residents Council - Harold Napper

BACKGROUND

The Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) was created by City Council in 1966. In general, EOC's mission 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 variety 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, and services for ex-offenders through the Virginia Community Action Re-entry System or Virginia CARES program. A profile on each of the programs is in an appendix to this report.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR 2000-2001

To fulfill its mission, the EOC undertook a variety of activities during the course of 2000-2001 (FY 2001) including: program oversight and guidance, providing support to children of low income families, monitoring legislative and budget issues affecting low-income people, advocacy for target populations, coordination with other community organizations and partnering with other community groups. A major highlight during the year was the release of the study completed through a partnership of the EOC and Alexandria's United Way entitled, "*Living from Paycheck to Paycheck: A Look at Alexandria's Working Poor*".

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 knowledge base, allowing EOC to better assess whether the needs of target populations are being met by existing services and/or where gaps exist that warrant new attention. The Commission welcomed community based providers coordinating service delivery with OCS to share their insight at monthly meetings. The Executive Director of Community

Lodging's Inc., met with EOC to discuss transitional housing and the unmet need in this area. The Department of Human Services Multicultural Services Coordinator shared plans for the City's Multicultural Services Initiative and suggested ways for EOC to increase diversity in the membership. The United Way also took part in this discussion to share the perspective from the *1999 Needs Assessment of the Hispanic Community in Alexandria*.

Supporting Low-Income Families

During FY 2001, EOC initiated a new project to provide support for low-income families. Specifically, the membership conducted a fund-raising project with the goal of sponsoring five low-income children's tuition and fees for a week away at camp during summer 2001. Working in conjunction with the DHS Volunteer Coordinator and the Fund for Alexandria's Child, the Commission raised \$900 and sent six children (one more than the goal) to the Alexandria Police Youth Camp, complete with all the necessary clothing and supplies. The children chosen for sponsorship were identified from the OCS caseload.

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. EOC joined with the Social Services Advisory Board (SSAB) in proposing three items included in the City's legislative package for the 2001 General Assembly session: 1) creation of a refundable Virginia Earned Income Tax Credit (VEITC), 2) an extension from one to two years of transitional assistance (child day care and medical assistance) for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients leaving the welfare roles, and 3) increasing the income eligibility guidelines to 200% of the poverty level for subsidized child day care in the Northern Virginia region. The Commission also actively supported efforts by the state community action association, the Virginia Council Against Poverty, and the Virginia CARES statewide network to continue service expansions funded by the General Assembly in 2000. Although the budget amendments were unsuccessful, the Community Action and Virginia CARES Networks did receive level funding for FY 2002.

Advocacy and Coordination

An important role of the Commission is to take supportive positions on major issues affecting the low-income community. One way EOC fulfills this role is through the designated seats on the Human Rights Commission, the Early Childhood Development Commission, the *Alexandria Works!* Coalition, and the Fair Housing Testing Advisory Committee. EOC also participated in the City's Affordable Housing Summit in May 2001 to advocate for low-income persons and participated in two forums conducted by WMATA's Regional Bus Service Needs Study in October 2000 and June 2001. The Commission chairman holds a leadership position on the Alexandria United Way Human Service Committee. The EOC membership continued to follow the work of the Youth Policy Commission.

Partnerships

In the Fall of 1999, the EOC and Alexandria's United Way formed a partnership to assess the state of the working poor in Alexandria. The 18 month effort culminated in the June 2001 release of the study, "*Living From Paycheck to Paycheck: A look at Alexandria's Working Poor*". 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 focused on two primary objectives: 1) to identify the gap between the federal poverty level and the actual income level necessary for self-sufficiency, and 2) to identify barriers that individuals and families face in closing this gap. The committee also determined to propose recommendations to reduce or overcome the barriers identified through the study.

Between February and May 2000, data for the study were collected from a survey of 251 lower income working Alexandrians and through focus groups with residents of Carpenter's Shelter, Head Start families, Substance Abuse Services consumers and clients of the Northern Virginia Urban League. Two focus groups were also held with public and private service providers working with low-income residents of the City. The study contains ten recommendations--from establishing state refundable tax credits for low-income wage earners to expanding and enhancing services to move low-income individuals and families toward self-sufficiency. The report is available on the Alexandria United Way web site: www.uwnca.org.

In FY 2001, the EOC again joined in a partnership with the Social Services Advisory Board and other City boards and commissions 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 the campaign is 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 outreach to low-income taxpayers and recruitment of trained volunteers providing free tax filing assistance to Alexandria's low-income residents. The 2001 campaign assisted 129 families, including 18 at the Essex House on Alexandria's west end.

The EOC also coordinated a series of Affordable Housing Exchange forums with Alexandria's Affordable Housing Advisory Committee. The first two forums were held in January and April 2001, to follow the ongoing work of the City's Affordable Housing Task Force. The meetings brought together representatives from a variety of City Boards and Commissions to network, exchange ideas, concepts and identify shared concerns and potential collaborations to address the problem of affordable housing.

FUTURE WORK OF THE EOC

During fiscal year 2002, the EOC expects to continue with many of the activities from the current year--program oversight through regular monthly briefings, monitoring legislative and budget

issues, advocacy, and partnerships with other community groups. The goal of the collaborative efforts is to identify ways to assist Alexandria's low-income citizens. The work plan includes: continuing the discussion on affordable housing and implementation of the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations, promoting the Earned Income Tax Credit in conjunction with the Division of Social Services and the Social Services Advisory Board, and continuing fund-raising efforts to support special projects for low-income families in conjunction with the DHS Volunteers Services Program.

A major focus of the EOC will be evaluating feedback from the working poor study, "*Living from Paycheck to Paycheck*" and advocating for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report. In addition, the EOC will explore the possibility of a partnership to develop an Individual Development Account project in the community to help low-income families save and develop assets to meet future goals of higher education, home ownership or starting a small business.

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 three areas: crisis intervention, homeless services, and ex-offender services. During the prior year, the Hispanic Orientation and Education Program (HOEP) was moved within the Division of Community Programs to the newly created DHS Multi-cultural Services Initiative. Profiles 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 short-term financial crises. In FY 2001, OCS crisis intervention programs assisted 3,700 individuals in 1,940 low-income households. The Community Services Unit raised \$140,500 from Alexandria's network of churches and non-profit agencies to meet emergency needs.

Emergency assistance has taken on new and broader role in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Thousands of workers in the region have felt the impact of reduced business travel, tourism and consumer uncertainty through lay-offs and reduced work schedules. The community has been quick to respond the need. Since October, Community Services has referred families to organizations like The Salvation Army and Catholic Charities who provide financial assistance to secondary victims of the attacks to meet basic needs. In January a new group of Alexandria non-profits began providing emergency assistance funded through grants awarded by the United Way of the National Capital Area. The City has also received several generous donations for the Alexandria Support Fund, established last September to help families who have exhausted other public and private assistance or whose full needs are not met by the existing programs.

The Community Services component also manages the Virginia Energy Assistance Program and the Energy Share program. Energy Share is a fuel fund program sponsored and funded in part by Virginia Power. Energy Share is used to preserve heating sources for low-income persons facing emergencies that cannot be met by the state program. The Energy Assistance Program includes a cooling assistance component 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. Last summer 168 families, up from 90 in FY 2000, received assistance through the summer cooling component. During the winter of 2000-2001, the Energy Assistance Program

helped 437 households heat their homes. Due to the unusually high price of home energy during the winter of FY 2001, Virginia received an emergency allocation from the federal government that increased household benefits an average of 45%.

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 circumstances beyond their control. In FY 2001, the HIP program helped 149 families maintain their housing. Six month follow-up contact with HIP families found 68% were still in permanent housing.

During fiscal year 2001, 392 persons, including 53 families with 101 children were sheltered at ACS. The number sheltered represented a decrease of 20% over the prior year in large part resulting from longer length of stay as families and individuals struggled to locate affordable permanent housing in an extremely tight market. Forty-four percent of the households that left ACS during FY 2001 moved on to 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.

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 2001, 77 new participants were enrolled in the program and a total of 218 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 2000 participants found that only 3.5%* were re-incarcerated on new felony charges in 2001.

*This outcome measure does not include participants arrested for parole violations.

cc rec'd. PF 2/26/02 #14



City of Alexandria, Virginia



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

January 21, 2003

The Honorable Mayor and
Members of City Council

Last spring during presentation of the Economic Opportunities Commission Annual Report, Councilman Speck inquired about vacancies listed on the Commission roster attached to the Report. There were three vacant positions in the target population and two in the "private sector". The staff and I briefed the Council on the tripartite composition of Community Action Boards as specified by federal and state enabling legislation. Category I consists of locally elected public officials. Category II consists of representatives of the target population. Category III consists of members of business, industry, labor, religious, social service, education or other groups.

The discussion that followed focused on the difficulties of identifying service consumers to serve on the Board. We also discussed whether individuals representing groups and organizations was the best method to fill the "private sector" category. Council recommended the Commission explore use of citizen-at-large positions to fill out the private sector Category.

As a result of Council's recommendation, we reviewed the language of the federal and state legislation upon which the City ordinance is modeled. After review, we think it is best to leave the categories unchanged. Any change to our local ordinance to accommodate "private citizens" risks our compliance with state and federal law. Federal and state legislation each clearly state that Category III members must be representatives of groups or organizations as described above and certified by the Commission. Unlike other local boards, a unique aspect of our Commission is that only Category I representatives (elected officials) are appointed by City Council.

The Commission is proactive in recruiting potentially new members and when we find interested citizens we make every effort to identify or create an organizational connection that meets the letter and spirit of the Community Action Act. In April, the Commission established a recruitment committee to initiate renewed efforts to fill the vacancies. Since our discussion with Council, we brought on board three new members. Unfortunately, we also suffered two recent resignations due to the individuals' personal situations. The Commission currently has two vacancies in each of Category II and III and one in Category I. Citizen's Assistance has advertised two of the vacancies without success to date. We have also asked the Alexandria Volunteer Bureau to post openings in their newsletter and have reached out to the City's Multicultural Services Coordinator for assistance. Staff and the membership committee continue to contact organizations with similar goals to the Commission. We hope to report additional successes with our next Annual Report.

Sincerely,

Allen Lomax
Allen Lomax, Chairman

cc: Philip Sunderland, City Manager

