MEMORANDUM

DATE: OCTOBER 4, 2005

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: PROPOSED CHANGES TO FY 2007 BUDGET PROCESS BASED ON DEBRIEFINGS OF CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Based on very productive debriefing meetings held with individual City Council Members held from June to September on the FY 2006 budget process, I am proposing a variety of changes to the budget process to be used for FY 2007 beginning with City Council's fall budget retreat. These changes, which reflect the thoughts and suggestions from Council members, also take into consideration the effects of City Council's adoption of Resolution #2150. This resolution makes several major changes in the timing of the next budget and establishes a process for City Council to set targets for the City Manager's proposed budget for FY 2007 this coming fall. The attachment describes these changes in detail in the following outline form.

I. GOALS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL BUDGET RETREAT
II. CHANGES TO BUDGET DOCUMENTS
III. BUDGET WORK SESSIONS
IV. BUDGET MEMOS
V. BFAAC REPORT
VI. ADD - DELETE PROCESS
VII. SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

If you have any comments or questions about these proposed changes, please contact Bruce Johnson at 703-838-4780 or by e-mail. Based on your feedback, I'll let you know if City Council appears to have reached a consensus on these changes, or if we need to arrange for further discussions, either individually or possibly at the October retreat.

Attachment: An outline of Proposed Changes to the FY 2007 Budget Process

cc: Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager
    Michele Evans, Assistant City Manager
    Bruce Johnson, Director, Office of Management and Budget
AN OUTLINE OF PROPOSED CHANGES
TO THE FY 2007 BUDGET PROCESS
BASED ON DEBRIEFINGS OF CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

I. GOALS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL BUDGET RETREAT

A. BFAAC would be on the agenda for the retreat in order to review general BFAAC suggestions and views on the budget as documented in its prior reports to City Council, with special emphasis on the April 2005 report.

B. Staff would make a presentation on the number and potential cost of positions.

C. Part of the agenda at the Retreat would focus on progress to date toward strategic plan goals and specific objectives, tasks and activities.

D. Staff would clearly establish linkage between new programs/activities, which may be proposed, as well as achievement of strategic plan goals and specific objectives.

E. Sufficient time needs to be allowed for Council to hear, understand and question staff presentation of “baseline” and effects of possible target levels.

F. Council and staff would hold time available and schedule it as necessary for one-on-one follow-up sessions in the week immediately after the Retreat to answer individual questions before City Council establishes targets at first legislative meeting in November.

II. CHANGES TO BUDGET DOCUMENTS

A. New Budget Overview Document

1. City Council and the members of the public need a simpler, more readable presentation of the budget. A new overview document would provide what is now labeled as the City Manager’s message, the executive summary and supplemental information section following the City Manager’s message.

2. This document could be called the “Budget Overview.”

3. This document would include information on both the operating budget and CIP.
4. This document would be designed for consumption by the general public as a pull out, stand-alone section.

5. It would include some key graphical and tabular presentations that can quickly convey a sense of the magnitude, composition and trends in the operating and capital budgets.

6. Using the structure provided by Resolution 2150, this document would focus on the major choices provided to City Council in terms of additional spending above the target level established in November, and tax rate reductions, or other tax alternatives.

7. This document also would describe the “budget baseline” – the amount necessary to finance the continuation of existing policies and decisions of City Council, and compare that to the budget target level.

8. Such an overview document would be no longer than 50 pages including graphical and tabular presentations. It would be extensively duplicated and distributed and posted on the City’s website.

9. This Budget Overview would include specific references to more detailed budget material contained in the more detailed budget documents described in section C. and D. below.

B. Budget in Brief

1. We would continue to produce the “budget in brief” as well, a pocket-size budget document, but perhaps reduce the amount of material in it or redesigning it so that the type size could be enlarged.

2. We would distribute this pocket-size document at public meetings and gatherings during the budget season.

C. Proposed Operating Budget Document

1. We would publish a second, more comprehensive budget document, “the Operating Budget” that would have the more extensive detail required to meet the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) budget award criteria.

2. We would conduct a review this fall to eliminate material not required for the GFOA award or otherwise published or available to the public in other non-budget documents.

3. The Operating Budget document would probably include most of the material included in the detailed sections of the current operating budget.
4. We would include these materials only if they were otherwise unpublished or unavailable to the public from other non-budget documents.

5. We would shorten the departmental sections in this document to have less narrative describing normal activities of each department.

6. Staff would conduct a review to limit the use of performance measures in the budget to those that were meaningful and used or could be used by the Departments to manage their operations.

7. Staff would anticipate typical budget memo questions from the last two years and the information would be included in this document and/or in the budget overview document as appropriate.

8. Also, we would include key questions asked or information requested by City Council at the fall Retreat (or soon thereafter) in this document or the budget overview document as appropriate.

9. We would add a special section to focus on personnel cost drivers and issues, including the number of positions of various types (full time equivalent (FTE), full-time permanent, part-time, overhires, etc.) and the cost of salaries and benefits for personnel. The main message would be to convey an understanding of what it costs to maintain the current personnel under current compensation policies and procedures. We would pull key facts on personnel compensation into the Budget Overview document.

10. We would add another special section to focus on the financial and operational impact of stagnant or declining federal and state aid to the City. Key facts on intergovernmental assistance may be pulled up to the Budget Overview document.

D. Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Document

1. We would continue to publish the CIP document separately.

2. We would add a summary section on the “budget” year that would describe the proposed sources and uses of funds for that year alone.

3. We would add a summary section showing changes from the prior year approved CIP.

4. We would review the priority setting methods used to determine essential, very desirable, and desirable projects and revise them as appropriate, with a summary table describing the results of that prioritization process for easy review and decision-making by City Council and notice to the public.
5. The financing section of the document would focus on the projected compliance with the City’s debt policy guidelines and other factors considered by the bond rating agencies.

6. A special section would be added to summarize the potential effects on the operating budget of major capital projects. This section may be repeated in the Operating Budget.

E. Post Budget Documents

1. As we do now, after City Council approval all of the above, we would revise the budget documents to reflect the approved budget.

2. We would develop additional presentation slides for use by City Council members and City staff in public presentations to reflect the approved budget.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSIONS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Logistics

1. We would establish and communicate the schedule for budget work sessions to City Council earlier. We would have this schedule established by the end of December.

2. To lessen the demand on Council’s time, we propose that Council keep the number of non-budget work sessions scheduled during late February and March to a minimum (other than those scheduled immediately before Council’s Tuesday legislative sessions).

3. The schedule for work sessions in an election year needs to concentrate on February and March, with less in April.

4. Also, public hearings would be scheduled in March on the budget and the effective real property tax rate.

5. Work sessions held in City Hall would return to the Council Workroom, if possible, to provide a more intimate setting that promotes the exchange of information between staff and Council. However, Council Chambers may need to be used if public attendance is likely to exceed the Workroom’s capacity.

6. Three calendar days prior to the work session, staff would provide to City Council members and their aides any reading material, or references to pages in the budget documents, that would be discussed.
B. Format

1. Staff would assume that City Council members are familiar with the reading material and budget references provided in advance.

2. Opening oral presentations by staff would be much shorter, allowing considerably more time for discussion.

C. Topics

1. The focus of work sessions would be on decisions/issues needing resolution by City Council in the budget process. There would be no overviews of citywide or departmental programs that are not at issue in the budget. We would provide background or contextual materials in the reading materials if necessary.

2. The revenue and expenditure oral overviews presented at the first work session can be shortened significantly. Time would be provided to answer questions about the overall revenue and expenditure situation, however, based on material provided in advance to City Council. This creates time to discuss key policy/program areas of the budget.

3. Strategic choices/issues, as opposed to discussing minor, technical changes in the budget, would be the focus of work sessions. Information on minor changes can be provided in the budget document or budget memos.

4. Topics to be covered in depth would be determined through consultation with the Mayor.

D. Joint School Board and City Council Work Session

1. The same ground rules applied to other work sessions (see above) would be applied to this work session.

2. Based on questions provided by City Council members in advance, the Schools would provide both written answers and a copy of any presentation slides in advance to City Council members. However, time would be available at the meeting for oral discussion of those written answers.

3. The focus of the work session would be on strategic choices/issues. The monthly meetings between the School Board and City Council (Mayor/Vice Mayor and Chair/Vice Chair) would establish jointly four to six prearranged strategic choices/issues to discuss.
4. The time allotted to the School Board for an initial presentation would allow for significant further discussion between Council and the School Board.

5. This session would be held in late March.

IV. BUDGET MEMORANDA (MEMOS)

A. Limiting the Number

1. The number of budget memos needs to be greatly reduced. There is neither sufficient staff time to produce quality memoranda nor sufficient time for City Council to read them.

2. Staff and City Council would agree in advance that questions to be answered by Budget Memos need to be limited to those relevant to decisions needing to be made by City Council during the budget process.

3. These criteria would be short and simple, but descriptive of a more limited set of inquiries than those that have been made in the past two budget cycles.

4. If the question is not relevant to decisions needing to be made by City Council during the budget process, but it requires a response for other reasons, staff would answer it as part of the normal City Council request process through the Office of Citizen Assistance.

5. Council would give authority to staff to answer some of the budget questions informally with phone call or e-mail response to the individual requesting member without formalizing the answer as a budget memorandum. City Council members would indicate with their questions how they would like to receive the answer (phone-call, e-mail, or formal budget memo). City staff would determine if the information provided to one Council member also should be provided to all other members of Council.

6. Council members and staff would be expected to negotiate a mutually acceptable format for the response. If the Council member and City staff cannot agree on the format of the response, the Mayor would be asked to make a determination.

B. Timing

1. Council may ask budget questions as early as the fall budget Retreat. Staff may supply the answers in the budget documents themselves or nearly simultaneously with the presentation of the City Manager’s budget.
2. There would need to be a firmly imposed cut-off date(s) for questions to be received by staff so that a firm delivery date can be established at least one week before the preliminary add-delete session is scheduled.

C. Delivery and Distribution of Budget Memoranda

1. E-mail delivery would be provided to all Council members.

2. Staff would make an offer to tailor the particular distribution method of hard copies and the point of delivery (home, office or City Hall) for each City Council member to their own individual preferences.

3. The involvement of the Council members aides in the distribution and packaging of budget memos would be determined also on an individual basis according to Council member preferences.

V. BUDGET AND FISCAL AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BFAAC) REPORT

A. Schedule

1. As part of its target-setting procedure under Resolution 2150, City Council would provide guidance/suggestions to BFAAC either at the Retreat or no later than November on what subjects and topics they wish BFAAC to pursue in their report to City Council.

2. BFAAC would deliver its report to City Council approximately two and ½ weeks before the preliminary add-delete session (three and ½ weeks before budget adoption). BFAAC report and subsequent discussion would then become part of the record used during add-delete process by City Council.

3. We would schedule a work session with City Council for BFAAC to discuss its report to Council within one week after their report is delivered. The goal would be to have this work session at least two weeks before the preliminary add-delete session.

B. Logistics

1. BFAAC oral presentation would assume Council has read the material. Time for oral presentation would be very limited. The focus would be on discussion of material with Council (the same procedure as at City staff work sessions with Council).

2. Location of the work session with BFAAC would be in Council Workroom that promotes the exchange of information between BFAAC and Council.
VI. ADD - DELETE PROCESS

A. Advance Notice and Opportunity for Staff Comment

1. For an add-delete to be considered, a budget memorandum would need to be requested by the proposing member of Council at least eight business days before the preliminary add-delete session allowing staff time to comment on the proposed add-delete item.

2. This requirement would not apply to an item already described in the City Manager’s proposed budget, but listed as a possible addition to the budget that is above the target figure established by City Council.

3. Proposed Adds and Deletes would be circulated one week in advance of the preliminary add-delete sessions (with any explanatory materials provided by the proposing Council member and staff comments).

B. Schedule and Logistics

1. The preliminary add-delete session would be held at least one week before scheduled date for adoption of the budget.

2. Council members need to avoid scheduling out-of-town events during the weeks leading up to the add-delete session and budget adoption.

3. The session would be held in the Council Workroom to provide a more intimate setting that promotes better dialogue between staff and Council.
VII. SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

A. October 15, 2005  Fall Public Hearing
B. Saturday, October 29  Council Budget Retreat
C. Wednesday, November 9  Council Establishes Budget Target Levels
D. Tuesday, January 31, 2006  Schools Operating Budget Request Approved by School Board
E. Tuesday, February 14  City Manager Presents Proposed Operating Budget and CIP
F. Mid Feb. to mid March  Work Sessions with City Staff
G. Saturday, March 18  Effective Tax Rate Public Hearing
H. Late March  Budget Public Hearing
I. Late March  Joint School Board/City Council Meeting on Budget
J. Thursday, March 30  BFAAC Report Delivered to Council
K. Monday, April 3  BFAAC Work Session
L. Tuesday, April 4  Deadline for Budget Memo Requests Concerning Potential Add-Deletes
M. Monday, April 10  Distribution of Proposed Add-Deletes, Explanatory Materials and Staff Comments
N. Monday, April 17, 2006  Preliminary Add-Delete Work Session
O. Monday, April 24, 2006  Budget and Tax Rate Adoption by City Council
Changes in the Budget Process

Presented to Agenda Alexandria
September 26, 2005

Resolution 2150

- Adopted by City Council on May 2, 2005
- "Whereas"
  - 8 cent real estate tax rate reduction in CY 2005
  - Largest rate reduction in 17 years
  - Alexandria's rate among lowest in N. VA

Resolution 2150

- "Whereas"
  - Average residential property tax increase still 11.5% in CY 2005
  - Residential real estate taxes have borne an increasing share of the total tax burden

Resolution 2150

- Whereas
  - Council stated commitments to
    - Manage growth of expenditures
    - Meet needs of residents and businesses,
    - Maintain competitive compensation for employees
    - Improve effectiveness and efficiency of City government
    - Achieve vision and strategic plan goals and objectives

Resolution 2150

- Whereas
  - Budget deliberations reflect balancing of community needs with ability to fund those needs
  - More time needed for Council and the community deliberations
Resolution 2150

• Council directed the City Manager
  • To begin immediately working on the FY 2007 Operating Budget and FY 2007 – 2012 Capital Improvement Program
  • To present to Council at the fall Council Retreat a preliminary budget forecast and outlook

Resolution 2150

• Preliminary forecast and outlook for
  • Revenues
  • Expenditures needed to maintain current services and policies
  • Requests to fund additional City operating and capital needs
  • Federal and State grants
  • Costs to meet unfunded Federal and State mandates

Resolution 2150

• Schools requested to provide similar information to Council before the Retreat
• Public Hearing to be held on Oct. 15 before Retreat
• Council will adopt a budget resolution after the Retreat containing two expenditure targets
  • A target for City General Fund growth
  • A target for City funding for School operations

Resolution 2150

• Schools requested to approve a FY 2007 Operating Budget and CIP program by no later than January 31, 2006
• Schools requested to identify what would be funded at or below the target and what would be funded above the target

Resolution 2150

• The City Manager has been directed
  • To submit a Proposed Operating Budget and CIP by February 14, 2006
  • To not exceed the targets

Resolution 2150

• The City Manager also is directed
  • To identify what operating programs and activities and capital projects would be recommended if additional funding were provided above the target and/or
  • To identify what tax rate changes could be enacted with whatever additional revenues might be available above the expenditure target
Resolution 2150

- City Council shall consider these recommendations and endeavor to enact a budget
  - "that balances the needs of the community with the community's ability to afford meeting those needs"

Actions Currently Underway

- On June 2, 2005 City Manager directed City departments to
  - Undertake continuous improvement initiatives
  - Begin FY 2007 budget preparations

Actions Currently Underway

- Continuous Improvement Initiatives
  - City staff tasked to identify possible immediate and long-term improvements to City-wide administrative services
  - 140+ suggestions being reviewed

Actions Currently Underway

- Continuous Improvement Initiatives
  - Continuous improvement teams established for
    - Personnel classification, recruitment and selection
    - Personnel training
    - Purchasing
    - Facilities management
    - Fleet management

Actions Currently Underway

- Continuous Improvement Initiatives
  - Other actions to be examined in areas of
    - Budgeting
    - Accounting
    - Information Technology
    - Citizen Assistance
    - Miscellaneous

- Contractors engaged to conduct efficiency studies of
  - Fire Department
  - Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
  - Several contractors qualified for upcoming efficiency studies of other departments
Actions Currently Underway

- Continuous Improvement Initiative
- Contractor engaged to assist City in improving performance measurements
- Restructuring efforts underway to get the right people in the right jobs doing the right things
- Each department charged with identifying possible departmental process improvements yielding efficiencies and improved effectiveness

Actions Currently Underway

- FY 2007 Budget Preparations
- Identifying savings due to immediate process improvements within each department
- Identifying low priority programs
- Identifying potential discretionary supplemental requests
- Constructing inventory of existing fees and charges for services and identifying potential changes

Actions Currently Underway

- Estimating costs to maintain current services and policies
- Evaluating continuing need for previously allocated capital improvement program (CIP) funding
- Prioritizing planned CIP projects
- Developing possible adjustments to funding for planned CIP projects or addition of new CIP projects

Schedule of Major Budget Events

- Sat. 10/15/05 – Council Public Hearing on FY 2007 Budget
- Sat. 10/29/05 – Council Budget Retreat
- Thurs. 11/3/05 – Superintendent submits proposed CIP to School Board
- Weds. 11/9/05 – Council establishes budget targets
- Thurs. 12/1/05 – School Bd. Public hearing on proposed CIP

Schedule of Major Budget Events

- Thurs. 12/15/05 – Superintendent submits proposed Operating Budget to School Board
- Thurs. 1/5/06 – School Board approves proposed CIP
- Thurs. 1/14 – School Board public hearing on proposed Operating Budget
- Tues. 1/26/06 – School Board approves proposed Operating Budget

Schedule of Major Budget Events

- Tues. 2/14/06 – City Manager submits proposed Operating Budget and CIP to City Council
- Sat. 3/18/06 – Effective Tax Rate Public Hearing
- Late March – Council public hearing on budget
- Late March – Joint School Board/City Council Work Session on Budget
Schedule of Major Budget Events

- Mon. 4/17/06 – Council Preliminary Add/Delete Work Session
- Mon. 4/24/06 – Council Budget and Tax Rate Adoption

Conclusion

- Resolution 2150 makes fundamental changes by
  - Changing the timing of the budget process
  - Establishing targets in the fall for City and School budget submissions
- Intent is to provide
  - More time for public and Council consideration of the budget
  - More useful information on choices facing the community
  - More flexibility to make the best choices
RESOLUTION NO. 2150

WHEREAS, the City of Alexandria's Fiscal Year 2006 General Fund Budget, as approved by City Council on May 2, 2005, provided a reduction in the real estate tax rate by 8 cents from $0.995 to $0.915; and

WHEREAS, this tax rate reduction was the largest single real estate tax rate reduction in 17 years and maintains Alexandria's real estate tax rate as among the lowest in Northern Virginia; and

WHEREAS, in spite of this tax rate reduction, average real estate property taxes for the average residential property in Alexandria would increase 11.5 percent in 2005 due to rising real property assessments; and

WHEREAS, residential real estate taxes have borne an increasing share of the burden of paying for City and School services; and

WHEREAS, the City Council is committed to managing the growth of City General Fund operating and capital expenditures in order to help address the issue of increasing residential real estate taxes; and

WHEREAS, the City Council also is committed to continuing to perform fully its obligations, to continue to provide quality services and facilities for the residents and businesses of Alexandria, to maintain competitive compensation for City and School employees, to see continuous improvement in City government effectiveness and efficiency, and to achieve the vision and strategic goals and objectives outlined in the City Council’s adopted Strategic Plan; and

WHEREAS, Council's deliberations on the budget each and every year reflect a balancing of the needs of the community with the community’s ability to afford meeting those needs; and

WHEREAS, more time during the budget process is necessary for the City Council and the community to deliberate on the various issues raised given the budget's complexity and importance;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF ALEXANDRIA

1. That the City Manager shall begin immediately to plan and prepare the FY 2007 Operating Budget and FY 2007 - 2012 Capital Improvement Program and that such preparations shall include, but not be limited to, requests for City departments to identify efficiencies, low priority programs not crucial to achieving City Council strategic objectives, potential discretionary supplemental increases for FY 2007 crucial to achieving City Council’s strategic objectives, and potential City-wide process changes that would be beneficial to City operations and to the public.

2. That the City Manager shall present to City Council in time for the fall Council Retreat a preliminary forecast and outlook for (a) revenues (including the outlook for real estate assessments), (b) expenditures necessary to maintain appropriate services and policies (including in the City Manager’s forecast of cash capital and debt service costs related to the approved FY 2006 - 2011 Capital Improvement Program), (c) the outlook for additional requests for City operating needs in FY 2007 and capital needs in FY 2007 through FY 2012, (d) the outlook for Federal and State grants,
grants, and (e) the outlook for the costs of meeting unfunded Federal and State mandates, both current mandates and projected new mandates.

3. That the Alexandria City School System shall separately present to City Council, but in a format coordinated with the City Manager, its preliminary forecast and outlook for (a) expenditures necessary to maintain appropriate services and policies, (b) the outlook for additional requests for Schools operating in FY 2007 and capital needs through FY 2007 through FY 2012, (c) the outlook for Federal and State grants, and (d) the outlook for the costs of meeting unfunded Federal and State mandates, both current mandates and projected new mandates.

4. That as part of its fall Retreat, City Council will consider this information and any other relevant information available to it at that time from the efforts described above, including citizen input to be provided by a public hearing on the FY 2007 budget to be conducted prior to City Council’s fall Retreat.

5. That City Council shall, as a result of information available to it at the Retreat, direct that the City Manager prepare a budget resolution to be adopted by City Council to guide the preparation of the FY 2007 Operating Budget and FY 2007 to FY 2012 Capital Improvement Program and that such a resolution would contain (a) a target for City General Fund expenditure growth (including cash capital and debt service), (b) a target for a budget transfer to the Alexandria City Public Schools for operating expenses and capital expenditure needs in FY 2007 to FY 2012, and (c) a calculation of the estimated difference between FY 2007 preliminary forecast revenues and the expenditure targets to be established by City Council.

6. That City Council plans to adopt such a budget resolution during the month of November 2006.

7. That the Board of the Alexandria City School Schools is requested to approve a FY 2007 Operating Budget and FY 2007 to FY 2012 Capital Improvement Program by no later than January 31, 2006. Such budget shall seek not to exceed the Council approved budget targets for the Operating Budget transfer and Capital Improvement Program given to the Alexandria City Public Schools, and clearly identify what operating programs and activities and capital projects would be funded if additional funding were provided above that target.

8. That the City Manager shall submit a proposed FY 2007 Operating Budget and FY 2007 to FY 2012 Capital Improvement Program to the City Council no later than February 14, 2006, that does not exceed the target for General Fund expenditure growth established by City Council, and clearly identifies what operating programs and activities and capital projects would be recommended if additional funding were provided, and/or what tax rate changes could be enacted with whatever additional revenues might be available above the revenues needed to meet the expenditure target and still provide a structurally sound budget.

9. That City Council shall consider these recommendations and endeavor to enact a FY 2007 Operating Budget and FY 2007 to FY 2012 Capital Improvement Program that balances the needs of the community with the community’s ability to afford meeting those needs.
ADOPTED: May 2, 2005

WILLIAM D. EUILLE       MAYOR

ATTEST:

Jacqueline M. Henderson, CMC  City Clerk