


City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** FEBRUARY 3, 2011

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

**SUBJECT:** DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALEXANDRIA QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATOR MODEL

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of a model to benchmark and measure progress towards community goals and objectives as outlined in the City's Strategic Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council receive this report on the development of the Alexandria Quality of Life Indicator effort.

**DISCUSSION:** The City Council adopted Strategic Plan directs staff to develop appropriate performance indicators for each of the strategic goal areas and to initiate a process for the regular reporting of information concerning the progress of our community towards its strategic goals and objectives. To implement this direction, staff has been examining various measurement models that can be used to assess the social, economic, and environmental conditions of our community.

In the Fall of 2010, staff convened a meeting with representatives of City departments and others to identify and discuss the variety of measurement/indicator efforts either already underway or being considered in the City. Staff also met with key leaders of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria and representatives from Virginia Tech University's Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP) to discuss their collaborative work of the last 18 months to develop a functioning model that measures the general health and broader quality of life condition of Alexandria's citizens.

As a result of these discussions, it became apparent that there are multiple measurement/indicator efforts underway within the community. A cursory assessment indicated at least seven different groups or organizations actively engaged in some form of benchmarking or measurement of a community "condition" including the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, the Environmental Policy Commission, ACPS, the Alexandria Police Department, the Alexandria Fire Department, ACT for Alexandria and others. These initiatives vary but to date, the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria's measurement effort is most well developed.

To improve coordination, reduce duplication of effort, and promote cohesion in the development and use of a measurement models that can be used to gauge progress towards accomplishing the City's strategic goals, staff began discussions with representatives from three organizations whose focus is broadly oriented towards the community as a whole. Representatives from ACT for Alexandria, the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, and Virginia Tech met with City staff to discuss the formation of a partnership to focus efforts on the development of a community indicator system.

As an initial exercise, this working group has developed and agreed to the following "principles" for the development of a community indicator system:

- The community indicator model should be comprehensive and should span all of the goal areas identified by the City's strategic plan with the exception of Goal 5 which addresses internal operations of the City. Indicators related to education, not specifically included in the City's strategic goals, should be developed.
- The work product of issue specific measurement efforts currently underway (ie. public safety) should be incorporated as appropriate into the larger community indicator framework;
- The community indicator model used by the City should not be "owned" by the City. Instead, the model should be developed and managed in a partnership that involves the City and community organizations with a common interest in understanding and addressing community "condition";
- The specific indicators used to measure the quality of our community should be developed with and supported by the community at large;
- The gathering, analysis and reporting of data should be accomplished in an environment free of the biases, preferences, and pressures of those who have responsibility for direct service delivery.

Guided by these operating principles, and partnering with the organizations noted above positions us to develop and implement a comprehensive indicator system for our community.

During the February 8, legislative meeting of City Council, representatives of the organizations noted and City staff will provide a brief overview of the Quality of Life Indicator effort and answer any questions you may have.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Staff estimates an annual fiscal impact of approximately \$50,000-\$75,000 for data collection, analysis and reporting. Some portion of these funds will be requested of the City as part of the FY 2012 budget discussion, however, there is also an expectation that community organizations will provide direct funding support.

**STAFF:**

Tom Gates, Assistant City Manager



The City of Alexandria embraces the belief that health is more than merely the absence of disease. A healthy community provides all of its members with the opportunities and support for achieving and maintaining physical, mental and spiritual wellness. We believe that a healthy Alexandria is:

An **Alexandria where** building a sense of community and helping one another -- especially in meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and affordable housing -- is a priority for each individual.

An **Alexandria that** celebrates racial, ethnic, and gender diversity and supports people of all ages and abilities.

An **Alexandria where** all residents, regardless of their ability to pay, can access quality health care that focuses on prevention, treatment, and wellness.

A walkable **Alexandria where** everyone has access to transportation options, trails, parks, open space, and recreation opportunities.

An **Alexandria where** people are safe in their homes and walking in their neighborhoods, unafraid of crime, violence, and domestic abuse.

An **Alexandria where** safeguarding emotional and mental health is a priority and there is adequate provision of mental health services.

An **Alexandria where** its residents support and are engaged in efforts to prevent the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and where treatment for substance use problems is readily available.

An **Alexandria where** all residents can access safe and healthy foods and are able to practice healthy eating habits.

An **Alexandria where** our houses, streets, neighborhoods, and parks are clean and well-kept, free of garbage, environmental hazards, and pests so that everyone can fully enjoy our beautiful city.

An **Alexandria where** meaningful employment opportunities are available for all, since health is linked to financial stability.

