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**Statement of John Stephenson  
President  
Alexandria Taxpayers United  
At the Public Hearing of the Alexandria City Council  
December 18, 2010**

Mayor Euille, Vice Mayor Donley, and Members of the City Council, my name is John Stephenson. I am a resident of Old Town and President of Alexandria Taxpayers United (ATU), a non-partisan, non-profit all-volunteer organization founded to educate the people and elected officials of Alexandria about the merits of low taxes, less spending, and fiscal responsibility. I am honored to appear before you today to offer these comments about recent actions by the city council.

In the spirit of the holidays, I am here to give thanks by commending you for your recent decision to publish online detailed information about the city's contracts for services. Contracts now account for about 10 percent of the city's budget and include service agreements for everything from consulting to printing parking tickets. At a time when the city's budget is tight and the economy weak, it is only prudent that Alexandria taxpayers know where their money is going so that they can help you in deciding what should be the city's spending priorities.

More transparency can yield substantial savings that the city can use to fund critical services without the need for burdensome tax increases or draconian cuts. For example, within a year of posting agencies' budgets online, Texas identified \$8.5 million in savings. Even for a city, the savings can add up. To paraphrase an old saying, "A thousand here, a thousand there, and pretty soon you're talking about real money."

Posting contract information online can also save time and money normally used to fulfill public records requests. Additionally, transparency in contracting improves efficiency and competitive bidding by allowing vendors to evaluate whether they can offer services at lower prices, such as through volume discounts.

ATU hopes that you will continue to make information about Alexandria city contracts available and easily accessible to the public in future budget cycles. Additionally, it is our hope that you will consider expanding the scope of the database to new areas such as the Alexandria City Public Schools.

This past June, the City Council adopted a new Strategic Plan that articulated the goals, objectives and initiatives for Alexandria. Goal 1 is that Alexandria has "a strong, diverse, and growing local economy." To ensure that Alexandria meets this goal in these times of great uncertainty, it is more important than ever for the city to keep its budget manageable so that the city can continue to afford to provide critical services. Transparency is helpful in this endeavor. ATU is willing to assist you as well. I appreciate the opportunity to offer these comments. Thank you for listening and Happy Holidays.