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Statement of John Stephenson

President, Alexandria Taxpayers United

City Council Public Hearing

February 25, 2012

Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor, and Members of the City Council. My name is John Stephenson, I'm a resident of Old Town, and I'm the President of Alexandria Taxpayers United, a non-profit, non-partisan organization of Alexandria citizens who are concerned about high taxes and overspending in the city. I am honored to appear before you today at this hearing to provide some brief remarks about the city's 2013 budget.

Alexandria Taxpayers United is generally pleased with the budget recommendation that the city manager has proposed. Too often nowadays, cities in our region are using a variety of budget gimmicks and tax increases to cover the cost of their bloated governments. But here in Alexandria, the city manager correctly recognizes that the costs of government continue to grow. The city manager's budget attempts to tackle these costs through savings and creativity without turning to burdensome tax rate increases on Alexandria's homeowners and small businesses.

Among the positive changes in this budget is the focus on core services like public safety and education, and less emphasis on promotional and beautification projects. Additionally, the budget would repair and maintain existing transportation infrastructure before building costly new projects. The city manager is also correct to eliminate empty, unnecessary positions on city staff and streamline programs such as the senior taxi program. In particular, Alexandria Taxpayers United is pleased to see that the city manager took a page from the playbook of the private sector, and an increasing number of state and local governments, by requiring employee contributions towards their healthcare.

My organization recognizes that this proposal is not the end of the story. As the city manager points out, many tough decisions remain to be decided to balance the 2012 budget. Although the economy is improving, we are not out of the dark woods yet. My organization hopes that you will continue to build on what the city manager has proposed by finding more savings and avoiding burdensome tax increases in the final budget. Alexandria Taxpayers United believes that additional savings are possible through techniques such as priority-based budgeting, greater transparency, and more use of technology to reduce costs and find efficiencies in programs. As the recent debate on the waterfront plan and the e-government award demonstrate, the city council can make tough decisions and think creatively about what government should do and how to do it.

Alexandria Taxpayers United hopes that you will continue your exemplary performance thus far and stands ready to assist you in any way possible. Thank you.