

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

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## MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 3, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: BUDGET AND FISCAL AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BFAAC)

SUBJECT: AD HOC JOINT CITY-SCHOOLS INVESTMENT TASK FORCE INITIAL REPORT

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BFAAC appreciates this opportunity to offer comments on the initial report of the Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Investment Task Force (Task Force). Recognizing that additional recommendations are due in early January, comments will be brief and limited to the broader aspects of the report.

**General Observations:** The Task Force clearly devoted significant effort to its task, carefully researching the projects on its docket and overall operations of the City. Members should also be recognized for providing candid opinions where appropriate, but recommending further study or “political” decisions on matters determined outside their purview. City and ACPS staff and elected officials also should be commended for helping the Task Force accomplish its goals within the tight timeframe, and for being completely open to its inquiries and opinions.

**Joint Facilities Capital Improvement Plan (FCIP)** – BFAAC supports the concept of a joint City/Schools FCIP focused on deliverables. While leaving response to the Task Forces’ proposed schedule to City and ACPS staff, BFAAC generally recommends a schedule synchronized with funding availability. While a long term FCIP is naturally a “living” plan that must accommodate uncontrollable changes in circumstances, allocations should be immune to discretionary changes to maximize certainty for project planning.

The Task Force also has noted support for separating the timelines for the operating budget and CIP, which BFAAC has recommended City and ACPS staff consider.

**Best Value Approach** – The Task Force emphasized an approach based on need, readiness and value to the City. This supports the City Manager’s adoption of “priority based budgeting,” which BFAAC believes will enhance our City’s budget management.

**Master Planning** – BFAAC supports a formalized joint planning process that evaluates the City’s growth potential and the impact of that growth on City services including schools, transportation, and health/safety.

At the same time, BFAAC supports the Task Force’s recommendation to implement a Joint Master Plan identifying all current facilities and properties, so that our assets can be evaluated on their ability to support “capabilities” identified by City and ACPS. Gap analysis performed after this inventory will illuminate future priorities – whether they be items in the current CIP but not recommended by the Task Force, or other needs that become apparent. BFAAC also supports the concept of budgeting funds for property acquisition for defined future projects, which would be identified after creation of the master plan. This also provides a basis for development of a long term revenue target, which BFAAC has recommended.

**Education/School Capacity** – BFAAC encourages Council to work with ACPS and the School Board to address education from a city-wide perspective. The Task Force suggested that while all agree increased capacity is needed, further discussion is required to optimize delivery, particularly with regard to Pre-K and High School. Questions including centralized locations vs multiple locations/formats, and role of partners impact all City residents, not just those with school age children. Council leadership in the discussion can facilitate broad community involvement in the solution.

Alexandria’s Strategic Plan sets numeric goals for increased access to Pre-K education and for increasing the on-time High School graduation rate. A strong public school system also supports other pillars of the Strategic Plan including Inclusive City, Vibrant Neighborhoods, and Strong Economy.

**Ongoing Joint Planning** – BFAAC supports the Task Force recommendation for a formalized joint planning process focused on capability of delivering programs or services. BFAAC restates our recommendation that the Task Force reconvene after one year to assess progress. While City and ACPS staff will be largely responsible for implementing adopted recommendations, BFAAC would also welcome the opportunity to monitor implementation and ongoing progress as a regular agenda item at our monthly meetings, and provide any feedback Council requires going forward.

BFAAC looks forward to further opinions from the Task Force on alternative funding and delivery methods; partnerships; and process improvements.

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