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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

April 1, 2021

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Spring is typically the most intense part of the City Council calendar as we undertake the normal business of the City while working to adopt our budget. This year, while more virtual than most, is no exception.

The City remains in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, but with real hope that we have reached the beginning of the end of this horrific experience:

- In December, the City began administering COVID-19 vaccines. [As of yesterday 57,549 doses have been administered to Alexandrians and 21,170 Alexandrians are fully](#)

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[vaccinated \(nearly 16% of our 16+ population\).](#)

- [ANY resident of Virginia can now register for vaccination!](#) The Commonwealth launched a new statewide registration system and ALL residents are encouraged to sign-up. You may also verify or modify your registration if you had previously signed-up.
- The City is vaccinating residents in [Phase 1A](#) and [Phase 1B](#). You can [review how our Health Department is prioritizing within the Phase 1B category as well as our progress working through the individual categories.](#)
- By next Monday, ALL residents who are eligible in 1A or 1B and had registered prior to Tuesday, will be contacted to be scheduled for vaccination.
- The City was in the first group of jurisdictions in Virginia allowed to enter Phase 1B. [With enormous demand in Northern Virginia, some jurisdictions around the Commonwealth have entered Phase 1C, but it will likely take Alexandria another 1-3 weeks to proceed to the next phase.](#)
- [Inova has opened a new high capacity-vaccination center in Alexandria at Victory Center.](#) This will be used to supplement our City's vaccination capacity as supply continues to increase.
- A month ago, the City was receiving 3,000 doses (1st & 2nd doses) from the state. This week we are receiving over 11,000 doses and we expect another substantial increase next week.
- [We continue to release information regarding the demographics of those who have received the vaccine in Alexandria so far.](#) Our Health Department has implemented several efforts to ensure equity in access to the vaccine.
- The City [has received \\$1.7 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) to support our vaccination efforts.](#)
- [Alexandria has continued a free COVID-19 testing initiative, with](#)

kiosks available daily at 3 locations.

- **This week we surpassed 136,000 COVID tests performed in the City.**
- **Hospitalizations in Northern Virginia increased considerably after the holidays and matched all-time highs. They have dropped and are remaining low.**
- **Our hospital capacity has remained stable.**
- **Our 7-day testing positivity rate peaked three months ago, reaching our highest point (13.3%) in over 6 months at the beginning of January. Last month, we reached our lowest point ever. As of yesterday we are now at 4.0%.**
- **The Governor last month announced that some more COVID restrictions will be eased effective today.**
- **In August the Commonwealth released the free COVIDWISE exposure notification app for iOS and Android devices. Download it today!**

The ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund has now re-branded as the Alexandria Resilience Fund, which is distributing money into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created. Please join me in supporting this fundraising effort.

The latest updates will continue to be posted regularly on the City's Coronavirus website.

The Virginia Department of Health posts data daily online regarding positive tests, hospitalizations and deaths.

The Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association is posting daily updates regarding hospital capacity and capabilities.

I continue my monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings on the first Thursday of each month.

You can watch last month's Town Hall online and please join me at this link on tonight at 8 PM to watch and participate live.

Volunteers are needed throughout our community. [Please refer to Volunteer Alexandria for opportunities to give back to those in need.](#)

We are still actively recruiting volunteers to [join our Alexandria Medical Reserve Corps](#). Medical Reserve Corps volunteers, both with and without medical training, have been critical to our efforts throughout this pandemic.

We recently launched our "Adopt-A-Hand Sanitizer" partnership program. [We are looking for private partners to host hand sanitizers throughout our community.](#)

[Contact me anytime.](#) Let me know how I can help.

Initiatives and Updates



Putting Federal Funds To Work

Last month, President Biden [signed the American Rescue Plan into law](#). This sprawling and comprehensive piece of legislation provides significant resources to Alexandria's residents, our businesses, our schools and our local government.

[Alexandria's government will receive \\$59.4 million from the legislation, divided into two allotments, one to be received next month and the other to be received in May of 2022.](#) All funds must be spent by December 31, 2024.

Beyond what the City will receive, the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) will receive \$35.4 million from this legislation. This is in addition to the \$15 million ACPS received from the Federal legislation that was enacted before the end of last year.

The American Rescue Plan included three criteria for how the local government funds may be used:

- To respond to the public health emergency with respect to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality
- For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue of such

metropolitan city, nonentitlement unit of government or county due to such emergency

- To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

It is now up to the Department of Treasury to provide more specific guidelines for local governments. While we have already commenced planning, that rule-making activity will ultimately shape how we expend these funds.

This is a "once in a generation" infusion of money for Alexandria's City government and our school system. We must ensure that we not only spend every penny that the Federal government has provided to our community, but we also must use these resources wisely and to the long-term benefit of our community.

Prior to the enactment of the legislation, the City Manager recommended a framework similar to how the City utilized previous COVID relief funding, I have pushed for us to broaden our thinking. **I believe we should use this money to create sustainable structures that will not only help us recover, but benefit the City for decades to come.** Furthermore, given the substantial resources that ACPS will be receiving, I believe that Alexandria's expenditure of these combined resources should be closely coordinated to ensure the maximum benefit for our community.

Last month, **the City Council reviewed a new framework for the expenditure of these funds.** There will be community engagement over the next few months with Council adopting the final plan for Fiscal Year 2022 in July.

While we continue our focus on the resources that will be directly appropriated to our local government, we must also commit resources to ensuring that each of our residents and our businesses avail themselves of portions of the legislation that might benefit them. The Rescue Plan is a large piece of legislation and our government can assist our residents and businesses in navigating its complexity.

Additionally, **the House of Representatives is bringing back what used to be known as "earmarks" and will now be called "Community Funding Requests."** Later this month, Council will be discussing input we will provide Congressman Beyer's office on the types of project priorities the City will suggest.

In May of last year, the City received our **first tranche of Federal CARES Act money. We have put that money to good use in benefiting the residents and businesses in need in our City.**

In June, as we were on track to fully expend the \$13.9 million that the City received, **I wrote to urge the quick release of the second tranche of funding.** At the end of July, **the Governor announced the allocation of that money** to address the significant need that remained.

From the beginning of this crisis, it has been clear that the two levels of government, local and state, who are required to balance our budgets annually, could not address the immense financial need that has been created. Only the Federal Government could provide a sufficient amount of money to address some of these challenges.

While jurisdictions around the country have faced real criticism for frivolous expenditure of these scarce funds, the City committed early in this crisis to ensure that we effectively used these funds to assist our residents and businesses who have suffered during this crisis and that we leave no dollar on the table. I believe we did just that.

As we concluded the year and the original deadline for the expenditure of funds, the City used the entirety of the \$27.8 million we received:

- \$8.9 million was utilized for the City's COVID-19 response (City staffing, PPE, public health investments, etc)
- \$4.1 million was utilized to address food insecurity in our City
- \$6.5 million was utilized for emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention efforts
- \$5.5 million was utilized for grants to small businesses
- \$2 million was utilized to provide resources to non-profits addressing need in our City
- \$800,000 was utilized to provide childcare to families in need

While we have expended significant amounts of money to address this crisis, the largest financial impact on the City has been the loss of revenue. The CARES Act funds were not allowed to replace the revenue that the City lost, but it did help us support the residents and businesses who are suffering during this time.

While there is new hope that COVID-19 may soon be behind us, the hardship faced by our residents and businesses will continue for a while to come. The City will continue to find ways to provide the support required. I am hopeful we will take this opportunity to use these resources to wisely shape our future.

Budget Process



In February, the City Manager presented **his proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2022 (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022) and his proposed Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2022 through Fiscal Year 2031**. This began City Council's annual budget process, which will culminate in the adoption of the budget on May 5th.

You **can watch the City Manager's presentation of the budget to the public, which was recorded shortly after the presentation to the City Council**.

Last month, the City Council held our public hearing on the proposed budget. While March's hearing was to accept public testimony on the entire budget, later this month, on Saturday April 17th, the City Council will have a Public Hearing on the proposed real estate tax rate.

The most important decision the City Council makes each year is the adoption of the annual operating budget and capital improvement program. The operating budget generally funds the on-going costs of government (primarily personnel), while the capital budget funds one-time expenditures that provide the community with an asset (new schools, new roads, new playing fields, transit buses, etc).

The budget is being considered and adopted against the backdrop of an extraordinary set of constraints and uncertainty. **In November, the City Manager presented his initial outlook for the upcoming budget at our annual Council retreat**.

From 2002 until 2009 the City was enjoying the run-up in the residential real estate market. Our General Fund budget increased by an average of 6.5% per year. The work force in City Government grew from 2,229 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to 2,660 FTEs during that period.

In Fiscal Year 2010, a little over a decade ago, the bottom fell out as the Great Recession took hold. The City adopted its first negative budget in at least 40 years, reducing spending from Fiscal Year 2009 to 2010 by over 2%. From 2010 to 2020, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 3.2% per year. The budget that Council adopted last year, at the beginning of the COVID crisis, shrunk spending 1.6% from the previous year.

The work force in City Government is now 2,674 FTEs, essentially what it was over a decade ago. That's in spite of the fact that our population has grown significantly during that period of time.

Sustaining an average budget growth of 3% per year with 4% annual student enrollment growth, employee

healthcare costs increasing far above rates of inflation, long-deferred infrastructure needs, ever-escalating funding challenges from Metro and a hyper-competitive market for municipal employees is impossible. Layering in the challenges caused by the ongoing pandemic and the hill becomes even steeper.

It was in this context that the City Manager prepared and presented his budget. The City Manager's proposed operating budget is \$767.7 million. This represents a 1.9% increase in spending versus the current approved budget.

In preparing this budget, we experienced some good budgetary news, in an otherwise challenging year:

- Residential real estate values increased at a higher rate than we expected
- Our City staff identified \$11.8 million of expenditure reductions, including leaving 38 positions vacant
- Our Employee health insurance and retirement contributions remained steady or declined
- Student enrollment within our schools is down for the first time in a decade and a half, largely driven by the pandemic
- The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has proposed a budget that does not assume more resources from local governments

Given these factors, the City Manager was able to propose the first reduction in the real estate tax rate in 15 years, bringing the rate from \$1.13 to \$1.11.

With the impacts of average assessment increases included, this means the average single-family homeowner would pay \$283 more in 2021 than in 2020. The average condo owner would pay \$228 more in 2021 versus 2020.

Shortly after the presentation of the budget, state law requires that the City Council adopt a ceiling for the real estate tax rate that might be considered during the budget process. Once that rate is "advertised," the Council cannot adopt a rate that is higher, but may go lower. **While I wished to advertise the City Manager's proposed rate of \$1.11, the majority of the City Council voted to advertise the current rate of \$1.13.** This means that while the real estate tax rate may decrease this year, as the City Manager has proposed, it cannot increase. This does mean that 2021 will be the fifth straight year without a real estate tax rate increase in Alexandria.

In addition, the City Manager has proposed no increase in the annual Residential Refuse Fee of \$460, which covers the costs of trash, recycling and yard waste

collection (among other services). This fee is paid only by the 20,647 homeowners who receive City trash collection.

The stormwater utility fee will be doubling ([as addressed in last month's newsletter](#)) to address stormwater management and Chesapeake Bay clean-up mandates. This fee is paid by all property owners, including non-taxable properties. The new annual fee will be \$78.40 for condos, \$117.60 for townhomes, \$280 for small single-family homes and \$467.60 for large single-family homes.

The City Manager has again prioritized our schools, with 35% of all new revenue proposed to go to our schools, and [full funding of the School Board's approved operating budget request](#).

This was not the year for large increases in the operating budget, but the City Manager has proposed some new operating budget investments in:

- Early Childhood Education
- Community Policing
- Language Access
- Employee Compensation
- Higher Education for Alexandria Students
- Police/Behavioral Health Co-Response
- Yard Waste Services

Within the proposed Capital Improvement Program, the City Manager proposed funding for:

- The largest-ever ACPS capital budget (\$551 million), including funding for rebuilds of:
 - Minnie Howard campus of T. C. Williams High School,
 - Douglas MacArthur Elementary School (already funded last year)
 - George Mason Elementary School
 - Cora Kelly Elementary School
 - Construction of an additional 600-student school
- A renovation of City Hall
- Replacement of two fire stations
- Affordable housing development
- Implementation of Waterfront Flood Mitigation Plans
- Landmark Mall Redevelopment
- Holmes Run Trail Restoration
- Municipal Fiber Deployment
- A full DASH bus replacement funding plan
- WMATA (Metro) Capital Contribution
- Construction of the West End Transitway and Duke Street Transitway
- A road paving plan that maintains a state of good repair
- Stormwater and sanitary sewer infrastructure
- Investments in Recreation Infrastructure and Open Space

- Critical Information Technology systems

In addition the budget documents linked above, **all questions asked by members of Council during the process are posted, along with answers, online for the public to review.** Any request to change the proposed budget must be initiated with a budget question, so it is a good window into the thoughts of your elected representatives.

There is no more important process than the adoption of our annual budget. The budget is a reflection of the values of our community and I look forward to working with our residents and my colleagues to craft a budget that is reflective of those collective values.

Let me know your thoughts!

Rethinking the Bus

Prior to COVID, on an average weekday, about 14,500 people board Metrorail at one of our four stations (Braddock Road, King Street, Eisenhower Avenue and Van Dorn Street). It is certainly an important part of transportation in our City.

Yet our four Metrorail stations (soon to be five) serve only a small portion of our 15.5 square miles. On an average weekday, almost 24,000 people board a bus, either **DASH** or Metrobus.

The tool our City has used for decades to serve the transit needs of most of our neighborhoods has been the bus.

The Alexandria Transit Vision Plan is the City's effort to rethink our buses. At the end of 2019, **DASH approved the most significant "re-imagination" of its route structure in its history.**

The route structure approved has a short-term vision and a longer-term 2030 vision. This restructuring is designed to:

- Increase the number of Alexandrians near frequent transit (a bus or train arriving every 15 minutes or better) from 27% to 79%.
- Increase the number of jobs in Alexandria near frequent transit from 40% to 75%.
- Increase the number of jobs accessible by transit (within 45 minutes) to Alexandrians by 18%.
- Increase the number of residents in poverty near frequent transit from 29% to 89%.
- Increase the number of seniors near frequent transit from 23% to 74%.

This new route structure will be introduced in September of this year. **To coincide with the implementation of this new route structure, I will be proposing that we use this opportunity to make DASH free for all riders.** Free transit will expand ridership by an estimated 23%, bring riders back to transit following the pandemic, help achieve the City's environmental goals and **disproportionately benefit our lower-income residents.** With ridership depressed due to the pandemic, the initial cost to implement this change is dramatically reduced. The City Council will ultimately determine the future of this proposal as we work to finalize our budget this month.

Earlier last year, DASH celebrated 35 years of serving Alexandria. What started with 17 buses and served less than a million passengers, today serves over 4 million passengers with 85 buses. While new routes have been added, and existing routes tweaked at times, the basic construct of DASH's route network has largely been unchanged.

Communities around our nation have done the difficult work of rethinking their bus route networks to improve frequency of service, reduce route duplication, and ultimately serve more riders. **Houston's overnight route network transformation helped spur growth in ridership at a time when transit ridership was dropping elsewhere.**

Our effort is similar, designed to re-imagine our bus routes and ultimately increase ridership and route efficiency.

To provide a factual basis for this effort, **a "Transit Choices Report" was developed.** This report is a compendium of data on our existing transit network, designed to support this significant undertaking.

Throughout the two-year process, DASH incorporated public input to shape the final recommendations. Changes were made to accommodate concerns voiced about changes proposed to the existing AT-3, AT-4 and AT-2 routes.

While implementation is not planned until September, the planning effort informed the service enhancements that were made to the AT-1 and the AT-9.

This is an important step forward as we create a transit system that serves more of our community with more efficient service.

Policing in Alexandria

At various points over the years, **I have written in this newsletter attempting to relate the national**

[conversation on policing to our experiences in Alexandria.](#)

While the national discussion is instructive, Alexandria must engage in this reform conversation using the facts and experiences of our residents with the public safety personnel that serve our community. So far, the City Council has been focused in two areas:

- Refining Civilian Oversight
- Reducing the Burden on Police (alternative response techniques)

Before the end of last year, the City Council received the **[initial feedback from our staff on Council efforts to explore alternative response techniques, focused on efforts to use non-police response for quality-of-life complaints, homelessness, behavioral health crisis, intoxication and beyond.](#)**

In February, the City Council unanimously approved the creation of **[the Alexandria Crisis Intervention Co-Responding Pilot Program.](#)** This new program will pair a dedicated behavioral health clinician with a trained behavioral health police officer to respond to calls for service regarding residents in need of behavioral health crisis intervention. This new program will provide residents in crisis with more specialized services to ensure safety of the individual in crisis and the community.

In September, **[the Council received an initial proposal for alternatives to improve civilian oversight.](#)** While I was comfortable bringing this proposal to the public for feedback, my colleagues wished to see further alternatives. You **[can watch the discussion of Council on this matter online.](#)**

Last month, **[the Council held a Special Meeting specifically to review a new draft ordinance for the creation of an Independent Community Policing Review Board, make amendments and advertise the ordinance for public comment.](#)**

The ordinance unanimously introduced by the Council will now be docketed on Saturday April 17th at our public hearing beginning at 9:30 AM. Public testimony is accepted that day and Council is expected to take final action on the proposal.

We have a highly skilled and diverse police force serving Alexandria. The department is taking steps to improve the diversity of the workforce in future recruiting efforts. We are fortunate to have a skilled and professional Sheriff's Department with a sworn workforce that represents our community's diversity.

Our officers participate in training aimed at de-escalation of volatile situations. We outfit our police officers with non-lethal force options to assist in the de-escalation of these incidents. Our officers have been trained in crisis intervention and the proper ways to address civil disobedience.

We have officers that participate in [training designed to address implicit bias in policing](#).

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, our [Police Department](#) and our [Sheriff's Department](#) provided summaries of use of force guidelines, procedures and practices for public review and comment.

In November, [our staff brought to the Council a study on the costs for implementing a body-worn camera program for the City's public safety agencies](#). The proposed budget [includes a comprehensive proposal for such a program, but it is not funded at this time](#).

The City has also worked to improve the transparency of data related to policing in Alexandria.

In 2017, [the City released a first of its kind external study and analysis of five years of Alexandria Police traffic citation data](#). Conducted by the [Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University](#), this effort looked at over 91,000 citations issued from 2011 - 2015.

In February of 2018, the City Council [adopted this procedure as policy to ensure that this type of accountability and analysis remains a practice in the future](#).

Since that time, the analysis has been conducted annually, with the [2019 data released last year](#). With [the adoption of new legislation during the most recent General Assembly session](#), our Police Department will work to modify data collection and reporting to comply with new mandates.

The goal of this analysis and review was to identify possible areas of biased policing. While the study authors provide significant detail as to the challenges of bench-marking this type of data, the result of the study should prompt further analysis and conversation.

To ensure that the conversation does not end here, [our Police Chief Michael Brown has appointed a Community Advisory Team to advise the Police Department on these issues](#).

Yet we can never declare "victory," Every day, these efforts must continue as we work to provide a level of

transparency that increases public confidence in the great work done by the men and women who serve and protect our community every day.

Alexandria's Next Election

In three weeks, [Alexandria Democrats can begin voting to choose their nominees for statewide, state and local offices.](#)

[Alexandria Republicans have chosen a local canvass and a state convention to select their nominees.](#)

This November, Alexandria voters will elect a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, members of the Virginia House of Delegates, Alexandria Mayor, Alexandria Sheriff, Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney, all six members of the Alexandria City Council and all 9 members of the Alexandria City School Board.

On Tuesday June 8th, all City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM for the Democratic Primary.

The June 8th Primary will be used to select the Democratic nominees for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Alexandria Mayor, Alexandria City Council and the member of the Virginia House of Delegates representing the 45th District (the eastern end of Alexandria).

Last year, Virginia introduced "no-excuse" early voting, so voters have three choices to vote in the June primary:

1. [You can request a ballot by mail online now.](#)
Ballots will be mailed beginning on April 23rd.
2. You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office, beginning on April 23rd, Monday - Friday from 8 AM until 5 PM.
3. You can vote in person [at your precinct](#) on the Primary Day of June 8th.

I'll see you at the polls!



New Affordable Housing

In February, [the City Council unanimously approved the redevelopment of the Heritage at Old Town.](#) The approval of this project redeveloped 140 aging affordable housing units, renewed their affordability protection for 40 years and created an additional 55 new affordable housing units. This effort will be subsidized by the creation of 555 market-rate units on the site.

This was the first development under the approved [South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy](#) and it demonstrated that the City could create and preserve 195 affordable housing units without spending a single taxpayer dollar. As the City continues to employ an "all of the above" approach to addressing affordability in our community, this project provides an important example of how we might use our land-use authority to create affordability, in this case "deep" affordability, supporting residents who earn as little as 40% of our area median income.

The approval of this project ensures a place in our City for long-time residents of our community as well as important members of our workforce.

The basic premise of the adopted plan is to use additional density on the site, in partnership with private landowners, to prevent the loss and provide for the replacement of the existing affordable housing.

Across the plan area, along Route 1, there are 319 affordable housing units that are for various reasons at risk. For 215 of the units, they are under [Project Based Voucher agreements](#) that are on the verge of expiring or have expired. For the remaining 104 units, they are market-rate affordable units that currently accept [Housing Choice Vouchers](#) and could be redeveloped at any time. For this phase of redevelopment 244 of those units will be redeveloped.

Inaction would have meant the loss of these affordable units over time. In an attempt to devise proactive measures to maintain the affordability of the housing, the City applied for and received grant funding from the [Virginia Housing Development Authority \(VHDA\)](#) to launch the planning process that ultimately led to the adoption of our strategy.

While creating new affordable housing is especially challenging for our City, the preservation of affordable housing units that are ending their designated affordability periods, particularly those that are privately owned, presents unique constraints.

In approving the strategy for preservation of the affordable housing in this area, the City created a new zoning tool, entitled the ["Residential Multi-Family" zone](#). This new zone allows for an increase of density up to a 3.0 [FAR \(Floor Area Ratio\)](#), if a third of the new density is designated as committed affordable housing.

Using taxpayer dollars to preserve this housing would have required in excess of \$38 million of taxpayer dollars, available land and competitive Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). Instead, the housing is privately-financed and will increase net tax revenue to the City.

As privately-owned, affordable housing becomes threatened in the future, the City's approach to this particular project will provide a road-map for what works and what will not work in the future.

Potomac Yard Metro

About a year from now, the new Metro Rail station at Potomac Yard will open.

[For a quarter of a century, the City has been working to bring an inline Metro Rail station to Potomac Yard. Just before the end of 2019, we broke ground and formally began construction of that station.](#)

[You can watch my remarks at the groundbreaking, as well as other remarks from those who participated, including the Governor, in the video the City has posted from the event.](#)

[You can review an update of construction activities, including photos on the City's website.](#)

On the front page of the [Final Environmental Impact Statement](#) for the Potomac Yard Metro Station are the seals of four entities: Federal Transit Administration, Department of the Interior, WMATA and the City of Alexandria. Later in the report there is additional input from the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the National Capital Planning Commission.

The breadth of the entities involved clearly demonstrates the complexity of the project. This project is deeply complex and has been challenging to bring to reality for decades.

[The Potomac Yard Metro project will facilitate the creation of up to 26,000 new jobs and will bring up to \\$2 billion of new tax revenue to the City \(over 30 years\). It removes thousands of vehicles from one of the most crowded corridors in our City. It promotes the creation of the kind of walkable community our City has long desired in Potomac Yard.](#)

In 2008, along with then-Councilman Rob Krupicka, I proposed a new start to efforts to bring Metro to Potomac Yard. [We included language in the City's Transportation Master Plan](#) explicitly calling for a new station at Potomac Yard. We also tied the construction and funding of Metro to the development occurring in the Yard.

The result is [a funding plan for Potomac Yard Metro](#) that not only leverages the development activity in Potomac Yard, but also does so without requiring the contributions of General Fund taxpayers.

The total project budget is \$370 million:

- \$200 million is being derived from tax revenues generated in Potomac Yard
- \$70 million is regional transportation revenues provided by the [Northern Virginia Transportation Authority](#)
- \$50 million is [financing from the Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Bank \(VTIB\)](#)
- \$30 million was provided by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation to support the new southwest entrance
- \$20 million was provided as part of Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) to support the new southwest entrance

The largest environmental, [economic development](#), and transportation initiative in our City's history is being accomplished using [one of the most innovative funding mechanisms used anywhere in the country](#).

I am excited to see this project come to reality.

School Reopening

Last month, [hybrid students began returning to Alexandria City Public Schools \(ACPS\) buildings](#). This was welcome progress in efforts to bring our students back to in-person education across the City.

[On March 16th, students who had selected hybrid learning returned to classrooms for two days a week](#). Over 4,000 students are now in classrooms part-time.

ACPS has indicated that they will announce plans after Spring Break to accommodate those families who are fully virtually but now wish to switch to hybrid learning. Additionally, they are exploring a third day of in-person learning for those students requiring Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL) supports. [With new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, reduced distancing requirements will now facilitate the return of additional students](#).

We still have considerable work ahead as we must create the public health conditions and meet the physical plant requirements to support a safe return to classrooms, 5-days a week, for ALL students, educators and support staff alike. Failure is not an option. We

must return all those students who wish to return full-time in the fall and work to provide supports this summer to address the gaps our students have experienced.

The City's Health Department has worked closely for months with ACPS to support a safe return to classrooms. **Alexandria was the first jurisdiction in the Commonwealth to begin vaccinating our teachers. Governor Ralph Northam came to Alexandria to witness the first vaccination.** We will continue to push to explore existing City facilities that may be repurposed to support the return to in-person learning, either in the spring, summer or in the fall if necessary. The City will ensure that our schools have the financial resources that they need to bring students back safely. **I cannot envision a higher priority.**

In a season of many tragedies and loss, the loss of a considerable amount of education for our children has been particularly frustrating. Children should be in school learning. Watching some students miss the traditional senior year of high school and others miss the beginning of Kindergarten is a loss that can never be replaced.

For our students and families, our schools serve many important functions beyond educational instruction. They provide child-care, food and nutrition services, health care services, transportation and more. The pandemic has forced a disaggregation of how we provide school. Filling the gaps has required difficult choices and partnerships with various public agencies, non-profits and private providers.

There is no question that policymakers influencing school decisions want to see our students back in school. As a parent of two ACPS students myself, I share that desire. **The health benefits of students being in school together are considerable.**

The work of supporting our families is not solely the work of ACPS. The City government, our non-profit partners and our community will need to collaborate to provide the critical services our students and their families require during this time. The City has committed additional resources to our schools, identified facilities and staffing support. Those efforts will continue as long as they are necessary.

While the conditions are clearly sub-optimal, we owe it to our students to support every student during this extraordinary time in their lives and get them back in school buildings as soon and as safely as possible.

Collective Bargaining Returns

Just over 44 years ago, **the Virginia Supreme Court invalidated the collective bargaining rights of public sector employees in Virginia**. At that time, 19 Virginia jurisdictions, including the City of Alexandria had some form of collective bargaining with public sector employees.

Under **legislation adopted by the Virginia General Assembly last year**, localities in Virginia can again allow their employees to collectively bargain on the conditions of their employment.

Last month, the City Council held a special meeting to consider **a complicated ordinance that would make Alexandria the first jurisdiction in Virginia to bring back collective bargaining**.

This ordinance is now docketed for public hearing and final passage on Saturday April 17th, at our hearing beginning at 9:30 AM. Members of the public are welcome to sign-up to speak and provide input as Council works to finalize this ordinance.

The right to **collectively bargain is a core human right enshrined in the United National Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.

As we return to this process, I look forward to a constructive relationship with the organizations that our public-sector employees may select to represent them.

Mobility Plan

Getting around is central to our daily lives, even in the midst of a pandemic. The ability to get to places of work, education, worship and play shapes housing decisions for most of our residents. Your local government expends a significant amount of **your tax dollars** and civic energy working to improve your ability to get to those places that you want to go.

I chair the Planning and Programming Committee of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA). In the fall, **our committee received a sobering presentation showing the impacts of the pandemic on transit ridership, road usage and non-vehicular transportation (walking and biking)**. While it showed that our world will come back to normal, it will clearly be a while.

But we cannot use the pandemic as an excuse to cease progress in improving mobility in our City in the short-term and beyond. Over 12 years ago, the City brought together a group of residents **who developed our first comprehensive Transportation Master Plan**. This plan was the first time the City approved a transit-oriented vision for our future, designed to ease the

impacts of congestion and provide alternatives to our residents beyond the single-occupancy vehicle.

That plan has led to new transit initiatives, new bike and pedestrian efforts and improvements to the road network throughout our City. Yet we have learned a lot in over a decade and it is time to update this plan.

Led by a group of Alexandria residents, we are working to update this plan for the future. Yesterday, **our staff released the draft plan for review by the public**, focusing on:

- Transit
- Smart Mobility
- Streets
- Supporting Travel Options
- Curb Space and Parking
- Pedestrian & Biking

Once you have reviewed this draft plan, **we would like your input. The deadline for input in this phase is April 30th.**

Community input is important as we work to ensure mobility in our community in the future.



New Campaign

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

In January, I did announce that I will be running for re-election as Mayor this year.

If you have not been receiving my campaign updates and you wish to receive information on this new campaign, **please drop my campaign a line** and we'll get you on the list for the campaign.

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