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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

December 1, 2024

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In This Month's Edition:

- **Victory Center**
- **King Street Pedestrian Zone**
- **Budget Preview**
- **Student Enrollment Growth**
- **Election Results**
- **Flood Mitigation/RGGI**
- **Housing Master Plan**
- **Violent Crime**
- **Waterfront**
- **Better Bus Initiative**
- **Basic Income Pilot**
- **City Hall Renovation**
- **Alexandria West Small Area Plan**
- **Leaf Collection**



It does seem a little odd to send an "out-of-office" notification to almost 16,000 people, but here goes:

This is the last issue of "The Council Connection." My tenure as your Mayor concludes on December 31st and in the future you can contact me at justin@justin.net instead of my City email address.

In 2007, a few days after I announced my first candidacy for City Council, I used a train trip to create a file full of ideas that I wanted to bring to reality if I was fortunate enough to be elected to serve. For the better part of two

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decades, I have checked items off the list and added new items to the list.

While there are still things on the list that I would have liked to have accomplished, I will leave office in a few weeks content that together, residents of our City working in partnership with their government, have done a whole lot of good. Our City is better for the work that we have done together and I am excited to see what those who will follow me will accomplish next.

Thank you for giving me the privilege to serve this community.

On Sunday December 15th, we will gather together to celebrate what we have been able to accomplish, support some great Alexandria non-profit organizations (ALIVE and Carpenter's Shelter) and...make fun of me. [Please join us from 4 PM to 6 PM on the rooftop at 277 S. Washington Street.](#) All proceeds from the event will go to ALIVE and Carpenter's Shelter.

On Thursday the 5th, I am partnering with my friends at [Pacers Running at 1301 King Street](#), for my final "Running Town Hall." Grab your sneakers, your questions about the City and join us before 6:30 PM for a good run.

[Next weekend is one of the best weekends in our City, as the holidays come alive.](#) Saturday morning, the 53rd Annual Scottish Christmas Walk Parade, a partnership between The Campagna Center and Visit Alexandria will begin at 11 AM in the streets of Old Town.

Next Saturday night, beginning at 5:30 PM, find your spot along the waterfront to celebrate the 24th Annual Alexandria Holiday Boat Parade of Lights.

I will see you out there next weekend!

[Preparations are well under way to ring in 2025 with First Night Alexandria.](#) Tickets are available now to celebrate the New Year in Alexandria!

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

Initiatives and Updates



Victory Center Redevelopment

In 2005, the Army Material Command moved out of what was later dubbed **The Victory Center on Eisenhower Avenue** in the City's West End.

Little did we know at the time, but the departure would doom the Victory Center to nearly two decades of vacancy. This one vacant building today constitutes 20% of the vacant commercial real estate in our City.

After two decades of attempts by the current and previous owner to find a commercial tenant to occupy the space, **the City will be considering whether to offer a partial tax abatement in exchange for a conversion of the building to residential, the provision of new committed affordable units and space for community use.**

While the City's preference would clearly be a commercial use for this building, the state of the office market and the specifics of this building make this highly unlikely.

This month the Council **will consider a proposal that creates:**

- 378 committed affordable units, at 50%, 60%, 80% and 100% of Area Median Income, for 40 years.
- An additional 450 market-rate housing units on the existing parking lot
- Dedicated City space (2000 square feet) for community use
- New Open Space

In exchange, the City will provide a partial tax abatement on this new development value.

Nine years ago, in 2015, Judge Charles Lettow voided the lease issued by GSA for the TSA Headquarters at Victory Center. Since that decision, this is the closest the City has been to reuse of this site.

While this proposal is not perfect, it will help create new housing supply (including committed affordable units), remove a significant portion of unproductive commercial space and revitalize an important area of the City.

Let me know your thoughts.



King Street Pedestrian Zone

The weekend before Thanksgiving, the 200 block of King Street became a pedestrian-only zone, connecting with the 100 block and the unit block of King. The pedestrianization of our "Main Street" has expanded to another block.

In September, Councilman Chapman and myself proposed this expansion. It was endorsed recently by the Alexandria Traffic and Parking Board and approved unanimously by the City Council last month.

Over 18 years ago, the City spent a summer experimenting with a closure of King Street to vehicles on weekends. By giving the road space over to pedestrians, the City attempted to replicate numerous cities around the world who have created new vitality from asphalt.

Over 5 years ago, Councilman Chapman and I proposed that the City prepare a new recommendation for a pedestrian zone in the unit, 100-block and potentially 200-block of King Street in Old Town. We suggested that with a newly expanded Waterfront Park, new public art, active programming and adjacent businesses, it was the ideal time to bring back this idea.

Our staff brought recommendations to the Alexandria Waterfront Commission and the Alexandria Transportation Commission for feedback and review.

As we neared a decision, the pandemic began and changed everything. Once the Commonwealth lifted the stay-at-home order and dining outdoors became possible, the closure of King Street not only became desirable, but it became essential to the survival of our businesses. It was quickly advanced as a pilot program.

Three years ago, the City Council voted unanimously to make this closure permanent. With this decision made, we are working with the community to plan the permanent changes to this space.

Council extended the closure to the unit block of King Street, connecting the pedestrian zone to our expanded Waterfront Park.

The pedestrian zone on King Street became one of many adaptations the City implemented during COVID, including expanded outdoor dining, curbside loading zones, space for retail and recreation uses, and more.

I am excited to see this expansion advance to improve the vitality of our "main street." We are collecting feedback on the expansion pilot. [Let us know your thoughts!](#)



Budget Update

In three months our City Manager will present the [proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 \(July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026\)](#) and the [proposed Capital Improvement Program \(CIP\) for Fiscal Year 2026 through Fiscal Year 2035.](#)

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 upcoming budget will be proposed and adopted in an uncertain environment, with slower growth but sustained consumer spending. Potential changes to the region's economy as a result of the new Presidential Administration may negatively impact the City's budget bottom line.

[Last month, the City Manager presented his initial outlook for the upcoming budget to our annual Council retreat.](#)

In Virginia, the structure of municipal finance is heavily reliant on real estate taxes. Consequently, in Alexandria the real estate market, both residential and commercial, dictates our budgetary fate. After seeing the healthiest growth in our real estate tax base in over 15 years, the last two years have shown slowing. For 2025, we are expecting a continuation of that trend.

Real estate tax revenues are currently projected to grow by 1.5%, which would continue the anemic growth that has characterized much of the last decade and a half. After a pandemic-driven aberration with higher than expected vehicle prices, our staff is projecting that vehicle personal property tax revenues will continue growth at 6.5%.

Yet on the expenditure side of the ledger, we are seeing increases in costs across our balance sheet, driven by new costs for cash capital and debt service to support City and School capital investments, new investments to support student enrollment growth, the costs of regional and local transit services and the impacts of new collective bargaining agreements for our City employees.

With these revenue estimates and expenditure estimates, this brings us to a projected revenue shortfall of \$18.3 million, with the gap likely to grow further.

Given that our local budget must be balanced, that shortfall must be resolved with either spending reductions, tax increases or some combination of the two.

To formally commence that process, **the City Council adopted our annual budget guidance for the City Manager**. The adopted budget guidance asks that the City Manager present a budget that grows expenditures by only 2%.

This will be a challenging environment to adopt a budget within. With our residential taxpayers already paying more this year due to the appreciation in our residential tax base, increases in tax rates will be a challenging tool to use.

The City Manager's budget presentation is on February 25th.



School Enrollment

This year, 16,335 students started in the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). That constitutes an increase of 264 students from the previous year and the third year of increasing enrollment in the aftermath of the pandemic.

As we have returned to steady student enrollment growth, we have seen enrollment increases in 16 of the last 18 years. During that period, ACPS added 6,000 additional students, 60% growth during that period. While this is now the largest our school system has ever been, the last time we approached having this **many children attending our schools was over 50 years ago in the early 1970s.**

The enrollment growth post-pandemic remains uneven. This year, was the second-straight year where we saw a drop in elementary enrollment, dropping from 8,393 students in the 2022 - 2023 school year, to 8,295 students last year and 7,861 students this year. Yet, both middle and high school enrollment has increased in both years.

A decade ago, the City convened the Joint **Long Range Educational Facilities Work Group**. The group was given the essential charge to understand our recent increase in student enrollment, better project enrollment growth in the future, and to decide what to do about it.

One of the products of this joint effort was a new enrollment projection methodology. This methodology uses the birth rate and corresponding Kindergarten capture rate, the cohort survival rate and the impacts of new development to project student enrollment each year. This methodology has been very accurate in predicting how our student enrollment will grow over the past decade. This year, the formula projected enrollment of 16,346. almost exactly the enrollment of 16,335.

Last year's update of our enrollment projections showed that without the impact of planned development and growth, school enrollment is expected to peak in two years and then slowly decline. When the impact of planned development is included, the enrollment is projected to dip, but later return to pre-pandemic levels within a decade.

We have also worked to understand where the enrollment is coming from. The type and age of housing is a significant determinant of the student generation rates. **In June of last year, we updated the student generation rates, by development type.** This analysis showed some results that might be considered counterintuitive by some in our community:

- 73% of Alexandria's housing is over 30 years old
- 89% of students in the Alexandria City Public Schools live in housing that is over 30 years old
- Only 3% of ACPS students live in market-rate, multi-family housing that was built in the last 30 years
- A third of ACPS students live in low-rise apartments, with nearly all of that enrollment in apartments that are older than 30 years old

Six years ago, ACPS opened the first "net-new" school building in nearly two decades with the **opening of Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School on the West End.** Over five years ago, ACPS **opened the newly rebuilt Patrick Henry K-8 School.** Both of these new buildings added badly needed capacity in areas of the City with rapidly growing enrollment.

Five years ago, **the City Council unanimously approved land-use modifications to allow the old Patrick Henry Elementary School building to be temporarily used a "swing-space"** to facilitate a rebuild of Douglas MacArthur Elementary School. **In September of 2020, the City Council unanimously approved the rebuild of MacArthur.**

Last school year, **we opened the brand-new Douglas MacArthur Elementary School on Janney's Lane!**

This new 163,000 square foot building replaces the old 62,000 square foot building, accommodates 850 students and is the first **NetZero** public building in Alexandria.

A few months ago, **we officially opened the new Minnie Howard campus** of the Alexandria City High School. **You can watch the ribbon-cutting evening online.**

This new high school building is a 343,000 square feet facility and accommodates 1,600 students and community facilities, including a new indoor aquatic facility with regulation-length pool.

We are in the most significant era of new school construction in our City's history.

In July of 2021, **City Council approved a request from our School Board to provide funding to support the ACPS purchase of 1703 N. Beauregard Street to be swing space for future rebuilds as well as eventually a permanent school.** This building, an office building next to Ferdinand Day Elementary School, will provide an opportunity for another adaptive reuse of an under-utilized building.

In May, City Council unanimously approved a 10-year capital improvement program for the Alexandria City Public Schools including \$379 million over the next decade. This provides the funding for both new and renovated facilities, as well as non-capacity infrastructure investments.

This 10-year Capital Program includes rebuilds of:

- Cora Kelly Elementary School
- George Mason Elementary School

in September, the School Board accepted **a new Alternatives Analysis to determine the future of the K-8 model** that is currently in use at Patrick Henry and Jefferson-Houston schools. With some of our most significant capacity challenges at the middle school level, determining the future configuration of middle school will be critical to addressing our enrollment challenges.

The **Superintendent has now proposed her Capital Improvement Program covering Fiscal Year 2026 through 2035. The School Board is now working to consider this proposal before formalizing this request to the City Council.** Informed by the study of the K-8 model, this budget proposal suggests renovating Jefferson-Houston to create a new middle school in that building, and renovating Patrick Henry to create a new K-5 school in that building. Coupled with an on-going redistricting process, these renovations

are slated to bring all Alexandria schools to ideal capacity utilization, a long-awaited goal.

While capacity will remain the focus of the investments we must make in our school facilities, we have seen far too many examples of the dangers of systemic underinvestment in our school facilities. Returning our school facilities to a state of good repair while sustaining a preventative maintenance cycle must be a priority of our collective investment. There can be no excuse for poorly maintained learning environments for our children.

While the pandemic paused a decade and a half of enrollment growth, it can be assumed that we have returned to our growth trend. These long-term investments become critical to support the success of our students in the generations to come.



Election Results

Last month, **81,485 Alexandrians had their votes counted** in our November General Election. This was 82% of our active registered voters. We are fortunate to have orderly and well-administered elections thanks to our professional staff at our General Registrar's office and the many election officers around our community who serve the cause of democracy each Election Day.

As a result of the voters' decisions, my successor as Mayor will be my colleague Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins, and our next City Council will include my current colleagues Sarah Bagley, John Taylor Chapman, Canek Aguirre and Kirk McPike. They will be joined by two newcomers, both members of our School Board, Councilwoman-Elect Jacinta Greene and Councilman-Elect Abdel Elnoubi.

The new Mayor and City Council take office on New Year's Day. They will receive the oath of office the **next evening at the Northern Virginia Community College Alexandria Campus.**

The elections also selected the nine members of our Alexandria School Board. There will be 6 returning members, Michelle Rief, Tim Beaty, Ashley Simpson Baird, Kelly Booz, and Christopher Harris. They will be joined by 3 newcomers, Ryan Reyna, Alexander Scioscia and Abdulahi Abdalla.

I congratulate all of the winners and wish them well as they serve our wonderful community over the next three years.

Eight years ago, I noted in this newsletter that our President-Elect received the votes of about 18% of our

community. At that point, I wrote that despite that: "he will still be the President. Where he works for the betterment of the lives of our residents, we will work with the administration. Where he works against those same residents, we as a community should stand in opposition."

The same is true in 2024. While the President-Elect received the votes of less than 20% of our City this time around, he is still our President. We know that there are people in our community who are rightfully scared of the implications of his victory. But we must move forward as a City. We will advocate for our residents, protect the vulnerable and ensure that we give voice to our values during the next four years.



Flood Mitigation and RGGI

Two and a half years ago, the Commonwealth of Virginia joined 11 other states to become a member of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). **RGGI is a consortium of states that have agreed to create a "cap-and-invest" marketplace.** In the RGGI region, the states impose limits on CO₂ emissions for power plants, but allow the purchase and sale of credits. for these emissions.

The revenues from the sale of these "pollution allowances" are used in Virginia to fund projects around the Commonwealth to address flooding and storm surge and to support low-income residents seeking to make their homes more energy efficient.

Since the first auction in March 2021, Virginia has received \$452 million from this program. The flooding mitigation funds are awarded by the **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation through its Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund.**

Alexandria has sought funds in each of the four competitive rounds and we have been awarded funds each time.

- In the first round, the City was awarded \$115,200 to support **a stormwater capacity project along Commonwealth Avenue and Glebe Road.**
- In the second round, the City **was awarded \$3.2 million for waterfront flood mitigation work and \$516,000 for Arlandria flood mitigation projects.**
- In the third round, the City was **awarded \$764,000 to improve the capacity of storm sewer inlets around the City and \$1.2 million to replace a metal pipe culvert in Arlandria.**

- In the fourth, and most recent round, **the City was awarded \$525,000 to develop a new flood resiliency plan.**

In recent years in this newsletter I have provided updates on our overall flood resiliency efforts. Addressing this challenge requires immediate and sustained action in the following areas:

- Infrastructure Investment and Maintenance
- Financial and Technical Assistance to Residents
- Development Policy Reform

Our current budget includes a scheduled increase of our Stormwater Utility Fee, to further increase the resources available for investments in our storm sewer infrastructure. The new annual fee is \$90.75 for condos, \$136.12 for townhomes, \$324.10 for small single-family homes and \$541.25 for large single-family homes.

The Stormwater Utility Fee revenue, paid by all property owners in the City (including non-taxable properties), will allow for an acceleration of major capacity projects and "spot improvements," an increase in channel maintenance, new "state-of-good repair" investments, property owner grants and new staffing in support of these projects and the system.

The increases of the fee over the past four years have allowed the City to quadruple the planned investment in stormwater mitigation since 2020 and **support an accelerated 10-year program of infrastructure investment.**

While these funds will **address many smaller "spot improvement" projects,** this funding will allow the City to undertake 11 of the top priority storm sewer capacity projects over the next decade:

- **Commonwealth & Glebe: \$34 million**
- **Ashby & Glebe: \$16 million**
- **Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass: \$60 million**
- **Edison & Dale: \$13 million**
- **Dewitt Avenue: \$15 million**
- **East Mason Avenue: \$1 million**
- **Notabene & Old Dominion: \$4 million**
- **Mount Vernon, E. Glendale, E. Luray & E. Alexandria: \$10 million**
- **E. Monroe & Wayne: \$3 million**
- **Russell & W. Rosemont: \$6 million**
- **Russell & W. Rosemont (south): \$8 million**

The **Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Committee**, is a citizen group constituted to provide advice to Council and our staff as we execute this aggressive investment schedule. This

committee **receives regular reports on the progress of these important investments.**

Yet, we cannot do this alone. RGGI has been a critical funding source for the City's flood mitigation work, using a revenue derived from pollution to fund projects addressing the impacts of climate change. This is a vital resource for Alexandria.

Unfortunately, Governor Glenn Youngkin is attempting to withdraw Virginia from RGGI. In addition to being bad for our environment, removing the Commonwealth from RGGI will also remove a vital funding source for communities around the Commonwealth for addressing the impacts of flooding and severe weather.

Last month, **a judge ruled that the Governor's effort was illegal and that removal of Virginia from RGGI required action by the General Assembly.** This was litigation that was supported by the City of Alexandria through the submission of an amicus brief in concurrence with the plaintiff.

I am excited to see this court decision and I am hopeful the administration will abandon this reckless effort.



Housing Master Plan

In 2013, while adopting our **Housing Master Plan**, City Council had set an ambitious goal to create or preserve 2,000 affordable units by 2025. **We are on track to meet this goal.**

It is time to adopt new strategies and new goals as we work to improve the accessibility of housing in Alexandria.

We held two community events to kick-off an update of our Housing Master Plan. Our goal is to define a plan to meet Alexandria's housing needs through 2040.

We now **want your perspective as part of an anonymous survey** that will inform the planning process.

At the end of June, **Vice President Kamala Harris announced that the Biden-Harris Administration had awarded \$85 million of Federal resources to support local actions around the nation designed to lower housing costs and boost housing supply.**

The funds are awarded as part of **PRO Housing, Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing.** A few days later, leaders from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

(HUD) traveled to Alexandria's West End **to announce that Alexandria, along with several of our regional partners had been awarded a portion of this money** to support housing efforts convened by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC).

Last fall, **the City Council voted unanimously to seek these new resources to advance recommendations** from our **Fair Housing Plan** and Zoning for Housing efforts.

It has taken generations of cumulative, coordinated, and frequently bigoted policy approaches at the Federal, State and local government levels to create the broken status quo of American housing policy. It will take coordination of all three levels of government to create a coherent housing policy that ensures the availability of housing for residents in the future. This grant is an important step into a more positive future for housing policy around our region and our nation.

Last fall, the City Council approved **a series of policy proposals** designed to expand Alexandria's housing production, improve affordability and address past and current barriers to equitable housing access. **You can watch the full City Council discussion and votes beginning at the 2:45:00 point of the video.**

These actions were the culmination of a year of engagement with residents around our City. In an effort to be fully responsive to the input we have received, **our staff posted the specific input and their responses to the input on our website.**

We began this effort nearly two years ago, with great ambition and high-minded language. We ended up with a **modest package of reforms** that removed barriers to the creation of a diversity of housing types, informed by **deep analysis of infrastructure requirements** and **the history that has shaped housing access in Alexandria for generations.** I believe these reforms will move our community forward, improve accessibility and protect the quality of life we cherish.

Prior to our votes, our staff formally presented the specific proposals in a joint worksession with the Planning Commission. You can **watch the full joint work session, including our Planning Director's presentation online.**

The specific land-use proposals made by our staff address these areas:

- **Single-Family Zoning**
- Removal of Restrictive/Exclusionary barriers from the zoning code

- Bonus Height
- Expanded Transit-Oriented Growth
- Industrial Zones
- Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)
- **Inclusionary Zoning**
- Townhouse Zoning
- Property Conversions
- **Expansion of the Residential Multi-Family Zone (RMF)**

This effort was prompted by an urgent reality: Alexandria has become largely inaccessible to those of low and moderate incomes.

You can watch my comments at our kick-off event at the beginning of the year, and leading into presentations from Richard and Leah Rothstein, **the authors of the recently released book, "Just Action,"** a follow-up to Richard Rothstein's **seminal tome "The Color of Law."**

All of the sessions **were recorded and are viewable online**.

While this effort had a pair of motivations, a foundational acknowledgement is that for much of the 20th Century, **wide swaths of Alexandria housing was off-limits to Alexandrians that were not white**. That reality was enforced by a patchwork of ordinances, restrictive covenants, intimidation and lending practices that served to effectively segregate our City for generations. While de jure policies that explicitly enforced segregation **were made illegal long ago**, the legacy of these policies live on today. In fact, in recent years, **Alexandria has grown MORE segregated**. These realities are detailed in the **Draft Regional Fair Housing Plan** that I wrote about last year. This plan **was formally received by the City Council shortly thereafter**.

In September of 2019, the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) unanimously adopted new regional housing creation targets. This was the first-ever regional commitment to accelerate the development of housing supply as a means to address our affordability crisis.

These targets, while voluntary, commit the City to the creation of additional units, with most of those units committed to be affordable for low to middle income households. To ensure that this housing creation does not exacerbate existing transportation challenges, most of this new housing must be located near job centers and high-capacity transportation infrastructure.

In March of 2020, the City Council became the third jurisdiction in the region to endorse new housing

targets in conjunction with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG).

With the adoption of the COG housing targets, the City has committed to an additional 11,500 housing units, with 4,250 as committed affordable or workforce housing.

The housing non-profit HAND began an annual report to measure the work that each jurisdiction in the region is doing to achieve our commitments. HAND recently released the annual update of this measurement. **The HAND "Housing Indication Tool" report shows that Alexandria has made significant progress, with more work to do.**

The City cannot raise and spend enough money to make an appreciable impact on this problem. The City's power to determine how land is used, our land-use authority, provides a critical tool to spur the creation and preservation of both committed affordable housing as well as market-rate housing. Said another way: building additional housing supply, whether committed as affordable housing or market-rate housing, helps address our housing affordability challenges and reverse generational impacts.

The City will continue to seek creative partnerships, new land-use tools and innovative financing to preserve and create affordability in our City. Our Housing Master Plan update will lay the groundwork for the next phase of this important work. Please make your voice heard!



Violent Crime

Last month, **the Alexandria Police Department (APD) arrested two Fairfax County residents alleged to be responsible for a late September double-shooting** near Andrew Adkins, a public housing development near the Braddock Road Metro. Earlier last month, APD **arrested an individual alleged to be responsible for an attempted abduction and sexual battery** near the Holmes Run Dog Park. Both arrests were the result of information from the public and dogged investigatory work by the APD.

It is that work that has led to progress in easing a spike in crime Alexandria has seen in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Part 1 crime is the most serious crime (homicides, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft). **In 2023, the incidents of Part 1 crime in Alexandria increased nearly 34% from 2022.** This

increase was driven primarily by aggravated assaults, robberies, larcenies and auto theft.

The Alexandria Police Department recently created a new APD Crime Dashboard, which allows residents to track the incidents of crime by incident and location, showing trends for each.

Through the end of October, we have seen progress. Stolen autos, aggravated assault and robberies are all down. Burglaries are level with 2023 and larcenies are up from 2023.

Protecting the safety of our community is the most important obligation of local government. If our residents are not safe, nothing else matters.

Alexandria remains a safe community. While these trendlines are positive, any crime is unacceptable.

The underlying causes of the increases in violence (not just in Alexandria, but around the region and our nation) are so varied, that there is no single answer to this issue. However, the City has approached this uptick in violence using multiple approaches:

- Restoring Police Staffing/Reducing Attrition
- Expanding "upstream" investments (family supports, mental/behavioral health, housing, re-entry programs, etc) proven to reduce violence
- Expanding community policing
- Continue advocacy for new laws in Washington and Richmond to slow the flow of dangerous firearms into our community

In recent budget decisions, we have included new funding for investigatory capacity focused on those responsible for homicides, felony sex offenses and crimes driven by weapons. We have continued to see mental health and behavioral health incidents driving emergency response. The City's ACORP program, a co-response program pairing a sworn police officer with a mental health practitioner, has seen considerable success. The City Council chose to build on the success of this effort by expanding ACORP by adding two new ACORP pairs, for a total of 3.

The City has hired a series of large classes of new police officers entering the Academy. As those officers conclude their training, they help us make large progress on some of the staffing challenges the Police Department has experienced for the past few years.

Coupled with new investments in preventative (upstream) investments, we can continue to keep our community safe.

Last week, [Tarrick McGuire began his service as Alexandria's new Police Chief.](#) We welcome Chief McGuire from Texas and we thank Interim Chief Pedroso for his able leadership during the interim period.

[Later this month, our Independent Community Policing Review Board will be holding additional community engagement to discuss revisions to the ordinance creating the board.](#) These changes are designed to align to state law and ensure the function of this civilian oversight body. These changes will come before Council in January.

Our Police rely on information from the public. Please report anything that is out of the ordinary to 703-746-4444 or 911, as appropriate.



The Waterfront Continues to Transform

Our Potomac River waterfront is the reason Alexandria exists as a community, dating back to our founding 275 years ago. [The history of our waterfront is the history of Alexandria.](#) It is what has brought people and commerce to our community for generations.

Only a few years ago, [the future of our waterfront was the source of disagreement and vigorous debate.](#) Today, it is the source of vitality, excitement and a place for all of those in our community to gather. The transformation of what was primarily an industrial shoreline to this vibrant area of open space and commercial activity has been breathtaking. Yet, we are just getting started.

A decade ago, the City Council approved [Phase One of the Waterfront Landscape and Flood Mitigation Design.](#) This exciting design married the vision of the Olin Group and the input of hundreds of residents who participated in the planning efforts. It also received input from the [Art and History Report](#) to ensure our history is a key component of the future of our waterfront.

Along the Potomac River shoreline, the City is working to advance a significant project to address backflow of river outfalls, overtopping of our bulkheads and inundation of our storm sewers. The City formalized an interim agreement with [Skanska/JMT](#), a contract team, under the [Progressive Design-Build Model](#) that has been selected for this work.

The [recommendations from our contractor team were presented to the Waterfront Commission last month.](#) These findings are demonstrating the benefit of Progressive Design-Build, as their planning efforts have been to reduce cost and risk by eliminating

underground storage and by redesigning the pump station plan. They have proposed a more targeted plan to replace bulkheads along the shoreline.

The remaining major development site of the Waterfront Plan is Robinson Terminal North, located just south of Oronoco Bay Park. While development had been approved for the Robinson Terminal North site, the approval was quickly determined to not be feasible given market conditions. In recent years, the property has been used by Alexandria Renew to advance the [River Renew project](#). With River Renew concluding soon, the land owner of Robinson Terminal North is working to advance a new redevelopment vision.

In October, [Rooney Properties presented their new vision to our Urban Design Advisory Committee for redevelopment of this important waterfront site](#).

This plan includes significant new open space, as envisioned by the Waterfront Plan. [You can also watch a community meeting from earlier this year online](#). This redevelopment project is intended to come for final approvals by City Council early in 2025.

We are on the verge of realizing the vision for Alexandria's waterfront that so many shared. The economic vitality must be paired with flood resiliency to ensure our success.

Please [let me know your thoughts](#) on these concepts as we work to achieve the vision of a more vibrant and accessible waterfront for our City.



Better Bus Initiative

The Metro Bus route network serving Alexandria is changing. The Board of Directors of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA or "Metro") [just approved an entirely new bus route network for the region](#) reflecting a rethinking of the Metro Bus routes across the region. WMATA will now implement this new network in June of next year as they move forward on this attempt to provide more frequent, relevant and usable service.

For Alexandria, these changes are modest, as the City's DASH Transit Vision Study implemented many changes to both DASH and Metro Bus. [You can review all of the newly designed routes within Virginia](#).

At the beginning of September of 2021, Alexandria implemented a new route structure for Alexandria's DASH bus system. [Existing routes changed and new ways to get around our City were](#)

established. This was the most significant rethinking of our DASH route structure since 1984.

To coincide with the implementation of this new route structure, City Council unanimously approved my proposal for DASH to become the first transit system in the DC area to eliminate fares. Fare-free transit was estimated to 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 was dramatically reduced.

The City was awarded \$7.2 million in grant funding from the **Commonwealth's Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP)**, which supported the first few years of this program.

Earlier this year, the Board of Directors that governs DASH accepted the **second annual report covering the fare-free program.**

This report showed:

- Average daily ridership more than doubled (152%) from August 2021 to August 2023, with large increases during off-peak periods
- Fiscal Year 2023 saw 4.5 million boardings, DASH's most significant ridership year in its 40 year history
- Customer and employee feedback has been positive

Since the study, the progress has continued. In April, DASH has 488k boardings, the most significant month of ridership in the system's history.

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 was the City's effort to rethink our buses. At the end of 2019, **DASH approved this significant "re-imagination" of its route structure.**

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 was similar, designed to re-imagine our bus routes and ultimately increase ridership and route

efficiency.

Free or not, passengers will not ride a bus unless it is going where they want to go when they want to go there. Increased taxpayer subsidy and more relevant and frequent bus service has made DASH a better mobility tool for our residents. It has also [inspired other efforts around our region](#), as well as the WMATA Better Bus initiative.

This new network was an important step forward as we create a transit system that serves more of our community with more efficient and relevant service. So far, it looks like it's working. I am looking forward to WMATA replicating our success!



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ARISE

Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot

Last month, the City marked a year of ARISE, our guaranteed income pilot program. The City included 170 Alexandria residents who were randomly selected to participate in ARISE, our guaranteed income pilot program. [You can learn more about this pilot program on our site.](#)

Our goal, was to learn more about how we deliver poverty alleviation programs in the City. That learning can help us be more effective, intentional and efficient in the delivery of these services.

The City received 4,149 applications for participation in this program to select the 170 participants. We committed to detailed data collection for this effort. We are using a research partner to perform vigorous analysis of the results of this effort to learn everything we can about the design of poverty alleviation.

The criteria of the program required that the participants be Alexandria residents with a household income at or below 50% of the Area Median Income. Those selected represent the broad diversity of our community and are drawn from every area of our City.

The average household size is 2.8 people, with a median household income of \$21,400 and an average age of 43. Two-thirds of the recipients are women.

The [interim report has now been issued](#), accompanied [by a brief](#).

A little over 54 years ago, [the New York Times ran an article reviewing the concept of a guaranteed basic income and featuring a guaranteed income program that then-President Nixon had brought to Congress.](#)

The program was championed by Donald Rumsfeld, who was at that time Nixon's Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Rumsfeld was assisted in managing this program by Richard Cheney.

The concept was relatively simple: what if we cut out the bureaucracy of public assistance programs and instead provided a guaranteed monthly income to lower-income populations, without any strings attached? It was driven at that time by a belief that in addition to being costly, the bureaucracy that had been developed to administer our public safety net programs was reducing efficacy of the programs themselves.

Fast forward a few decades, **and there is now a network of municipal governments around the nation experimenting with the concept.**

As Alexandria has joined this effort, the City Council approved the allocation of \$3 million from a portion of the City's American Rescue Plan money to create this program.

Ultimately, the goal of the effort is to improve the economic stability of lower-income families.

I am hopeful that the City can also glean lessons from this experiment to better guide how we administer other programs designed to alleviate poverty in the future.



City Hall Renovation

We have hosted a few community meetings regarding the upcoming renovation of Alexandria's City Hall. You can **watch one of the meetings online.** You may also **review the slides from the presentation.** We have additional opportunities to **learn more and provide input later this month.**

We now have four design concepts for the future of Market Square and we want your perspective!

In 1871, the Alexandria City Hall was largely destroyed in a fire. A local architect, Adolph Cluss, designed the new building that remains in use today. **While the building has been renovated and added to at various points, it is showing its age.**

Renovation has been planned and has been deferred several times due to more significant capital priorities. **We are now working to advance renovation of our City Hall, beginning in 2026 and concluding in 2028.**

Please provide your feedback on the upcoming renovation as we plan the future of the seat of your

municipal government.**Alexandria West Small Area Plan**

Last month, the City Council unanimously approved **the Alexandria West Small Area Plan.**

For the past year, our community has been engaged in a comprehensive update of the Alexandria West Small Area Plan. This plan encompasses **a wide swath of our City, the entire northwest corner.**

You can watch the community meeting where our staff presented the draft plan.

It integrates two land-use plans from 1992 and 2012 and provides the ability for new growth in the corridor, while providing newly committed affordability as that growth occurs.

Over a quarter of the rental housing in the plan area today is market-rate affordable housing, a rapidly disappearing commodity in our City. This plan is designed to address the continued loss of that affordability with new committed affordable housing financed by new market-rate housing.

This plan area will require continued focus in the future to ensure that this strategy proves successful.

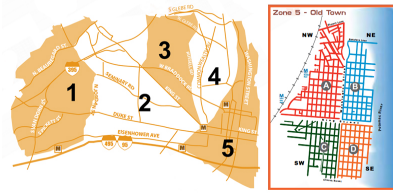
The City's Master Plan is made up of **18 Small Area Plans** and several Citywide sub-plans (Transportation, Housing, Open Space, etc). This is how the City meets **the obligations of state law to adopt and update a comprehensive plan.**

Over 23 years ago ago, the City Council adopted **"Plan for Planning,"** a vision for how the community could proactively work to get ahead of development pressures and ensure that our community's vision would shape transition in our neighborhoods.

Since that time, the City has been revising and modernizing these Small Area Plans, working intensely with different neighborhoods around the City to adopt a vision for the future of our community.

But no plan is worth the effort if the City will not implement what was planned. Over the past several years the City has worked to improve our efforts to implement plans and policy goals in a variety of areas. **To provide accountability for those efforts, the City publishes an annual report detailing the status of implementation of the most significant City planning initiatives.**

I am excited to see these neighborhood planning efforts moving forward, specifically the conclusion of the Alexandria West Plan!



Leaf Collection

Alexandria's annual leaf collection began in October and continues this month! Check online to learn your collection date.

Leaf vacuuming will proceed to each of the designated zones beginning on the scheduled dates. Each zone will take several days to complete.

Additionally, the City is making up to 15 leaf bags available for each residential household. The bags can be picked up at City Hall, the City's self-service shed at the corner of Roth and Business Center Drive or at Charles Houston, or Patrick Henry Recreation Centers.

These leaf bags can be placed out for collection on your regulation collection day.

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