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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson*

February 1, 2021

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## In This Month's Edition:

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February traditionally marks the beginning of the busiest time of the City Council calendar. With the presentation of the City Manager's budget later this month, the Council begins our 2.5 month budget process, which occurs concurrently with our remaining docket of land-use decisions and other legislative matters.

The City remains in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, but with real hope for the first time for an end to this horrific experience:

- If you qualify for vaccination in either [Phase 1A](#), [Phase 1B](#) or

[Report Potholes](#)

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[Phase 1C, you can register now online to be vaccinated.](#)

- In December the City began administering COVID-19 vaccines. [As of yesterday 11,659 Alexandrians have received at least one dose and 1,249 Alexandrians are fully vaccinated.](#)
- The City was in the first group of jurisdictions in Virginia allowed to enter Phase 1B. The City currently has a waiting list of over 30,000 Alexandrians signed up for vaccination.
- Unfortunately, we expect to receive only 2,000 doses a week for the next month.
- In October, our COVID-19 case volume began increasing considerably. It remains high, but is slowly dropping again.
- Last month, [Alexandria launched a new COVID-19 testing initiative, with free kiosks available daily at 3 locations.](#)
- Over the weekend we had our 108,000th COVID test performed in the City and January marked the highest testing volume yet.
- Hospitalizations in Northern Virginia increased considerably after the holidays and matched all-time highs. They are now decreasing again.
- Our hospital capacity has remained stable.
- Our 7-day testing positivity rate peaked last month, reaching our highest point (13.3%) in over 6 months at the beginning of January after reaching our lowest point ever in October (3.3%). As of yesterday we are now at 7.7%.
- The [Governor announced that new restrictions to stem the spread of the virus in our community, including an expanded mask requirement, reductions in gatherings and modified stay-at-home order, would be extended until the end of February.](#)
- [In August the Commonwealth released the free COVIDWISE exposure notification app for iOS and Android devices. Download it today!](#)
- [Our Health Department recently provided some insight into the](#)

**commonly reported potential exposure sources for COVID-19 transmission.**

**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 Thursday the 4th 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



## Flood Plan Advances

On Saturday February 20th, the City Council will accept public testimony and then take final action on [an ordinance to double our Stormwater Utility Fee](#). This increase will cost a condo owner an additional \$39 annually, a townhouse owner an additional \$58, a small single-family homeowner an additional \$140 and a large single-family homeowner an additional \$233.

The Council voted last month 6-1 to introduce the ordinance and voted unanimously to create a new community advisory committee to provide guidance to the City Council on the execution of a new, far more aggressive stormwater infrastructure plan. [You can watch the Council's discussion from last month online.](#)

The Stormwater Utility Fee, paid by all property owners in the City, would be increased to 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.

This increase will bring in an additional \$8.5 million annually and [support a newly accelerated 10-year program of investments](#). 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

Over the last several months, the City Council has worked to accelerate efforts to address chronic flooding issues, this time due to more frequent and more intense rain events. These storms are causing our residents and businesses to suffer significant financial loss due to damage from flooding and sanitary sewer backflow.

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

In November, the City Council [received the initial output from our recently-formed interdepartmental team](#) working to address these challenges. You can [watch the full worksession online](#).

In June of 2018, [property owners in Alexandria paid a Stormwater Utility Fee for the first time ever](#). The creation of this fee was driven by the need for additional revenue to comply with [the City's MS4 Permit. The permit reflects Alexandria's obligations to reduce pollutants contained in storm run-off which makes its way to the Chesapeake Bay and other waterways](#).

The fee applies to all properties (regardless of their taxable status). For commercial properties, it is assessed based on the impervious surfaces on the property. For residential properties, there are four tiers (apartment, townhome, small single-family home and large single-family home). [There is a credit system in place to encourage actions that assist the City's storm sewers](#). Essentially the fee is structured to be a user fee for the City's stormwater handling.

[The current stormwater utility fee is projected to bring in \\$8.4 million this year \(which grows to over \\$11 million when that revenue is borrowed against\), and \\$200 million over the decade \(assuming modest, regular increases\)](#).

While important, these efforts are insufficient to address the capacity issues that remain throughout the City and will not protect the City from the impacts of this flooding in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

For over 3 decades, [Alexandria has designed and planned for our storm sewer system to withstand a "10-year" storm event](#). Said another way, a storm that is expected to have a 10% chance of happening every year, is the designed capacity of our system.

For Alexandria, a 10-year storm event constitutes one that will drop 2.28 inches of rain over a 60-minute period or 4.81 inches over a 24-hour period. This is a capacity that is at, and in many cases above, that of neighboring jurisdictions.

Yet, now three times in the past 18 months, we have had rain events that far exceeded this capacity. This is not sustainable.

Alexandria spends a significant amount of money on infrastructure designed to manage water. [In April, the](#)

**City Council approved a \$2.1 billion, ten-year Capital Improvement Program.** Of that, over \$150 million is to address stormwater and sanitary sewer infrastructure. **Alexandria Renew Enterprises**, the City's sewer authority, **plans another \$593 million of capital investments over the next decade**, primarily the RiverRenew project to remediate the Combined Sewer (sanitary and stormwater) system that serves Old Town.

Together, nearly \$750 million is planned for water investments. This spending dwarfs planned investments in schools, transportation and other major priorities. Only a decade ago, **planned investments in water infrastructure were less than a quarter of this total**, but addressing these challenges will require a sustained increase in that investment level of a long period of time.

The investments required in our Sanitary Sewer system are funded by maintenance fees paid by existing customers (on the Alexandria Renew Enterprises bills) and by connection fees paid by developers.

**In 2016, the City conducted a comprehensive Storm Sewer Capacity Analysis.** This exhaustive study looked at each of the City's eight watersheds (Backlick Run, Cameron Run, Four Mile Run, Holmes Run, Hooff's Run, Holmes Run, Potomac River, Strawberry Run and Taylor Run) and identified problem areas where current capacity does not meet our 10-year storm design standard.

The study identified 90 separate deficiencies in the system, and estimated \$61 million of construction costs required to address those deficiencies (construction costs are approximately half of expected budget costs). Over half of these deficiencies are concentrated in the Hooff's Run and Four Mile Run watersheds. The reports of flooding from our residents during these most recent events align closely to these deficiencies. It is that study that has informed the list of priority capacity projects listed earlier.

From the maintenance perspective, it is also clear that we have work to do. The City is currently undertaking a \$2 million effort to clear approximately 7,000 feet of the Hooff's Run Culvert. This 70+ year old urban culvert is designed to be "self-cleaning." After the July 2019 flooding event, the City commissioned a firm to do a **robotic assessment of the condition of the culvert**. That assessment showed an average of 5% obstruction across the culvert and some areas of 15-20% obstruction. The clearing of the culvert commenced last year and is expected to take several months. It does not appear to have been done before, certainly not in recent memory.

We will also work to expand efforts to assist homeowners in making their properties more resilient. The City has long had a program in place to fund the installation of Sewer Backflow Prevention devices. These devices help prevent sanitary sewer backflow from entering homes during severe rain events.

In addition to maintaining this program, the City will explore the creation of grant programs to assist property owners in making improvements. Recently enacted state law allows the City to provide real estate tax abatement for certain flood improvements. Implementation of these and other programs to assist property owners will be explored.

For development, whether large-scale, mixed-use development or a small residential addition, Alexandria's stringent stormwater requirements stipulate that conditions after development to be the same and oftentimes better than they were. As a consequence, the flooding we have experienced in the City is typically in established neighborhoods, areas of our City where we have not seen new development (aside from infill) in decades. Yet, there may be options to further strengthen these existing requirements. We have sought additional authority from the General Assembly for these expanded requirements.

A climate-resilient City requires investments and potentially new policies to ensure that residents of our City do not suffer devastating damage with such frequency.

Putting in place the infrastructure that can support a changing climate will be a significant undertaking for our community. It will involve a large commitment of new resources and possibly private property impacts.

Yet it is my belief that this work requires greater urgency to protect the residents impacted in our City.

## Budget Preview

In two weeks the City Manager will present 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.

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

The budget adopted last spring, at the beginning of the pandemic, **reflected a loss of an estimated \$92 million of revenues** divided between the previous Fiscal Year 2020 and the current Fiscal Year 2021.

While the revenue loss did not end up being as severe as feared, the precipitous loss of tax revenue is now anticipated to last much longer. When the pandemic hit last year, we had the "benefit" of having already completed real estate property assessments for calendar year 2020. Given the vast majority of our City revenues are based on residential and commercial real estate taxes, the broad impact if the pandemic had not yet hit the City's budget.

The upcoming budget will not have that luxury.

While the residential real estate market in Alexandria has remained strong, even in the pandemic, the commercial real estate market has taken a body blow. Residential real estate in Alexandria was projected to grow by 3.6%, which is a healthy rate of growth, not unlike growth in recent years. On the commercial side, our valuations are expected to drop by 4.69%, the largest drop in decades. Later this week, estimates will become actual assessments, as our annual assessment report will be released to the public.

In the fall, the City Manager projected overall revenue growth of 0.2%, which would be the most anemic revenue growth since the Great Recession. That would provide an estimated \$1.7 million of new revenue for the upcoming year. Current projected expenditure increases are \$42.8 million of additional spending, which would create a \$41.1 million shortfall.

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.** Given the considerable uncertainty, the adopted guidance asks the City Manager to propose his budget with a "bookends" approach, showing a budget that resolves the budget gap without tax increases (all reductions), a budget that resolves the budget gap



without service reductions (all tax increases) and a budget that includes a mix of the two options.

It is generally my preference that the City Manager propose a budget without a tax rate increase included, allowing the City Council to make that decision during the budget process. This year, a majority of the Council wished to provide the City Manager with the flexibility to include a rate increase if necessary. That preference was reflected in the adopted budget guidance.

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, I believe we should again work to avoid a rate increase while protecting the core services our residents depend on.

The City Manager's budget presentation is on February 16th.

## Landmark Mall to Redevelop

Days before Christmas, [the City joined with a few partners, some familiar and some new, to announce the future of the Landmark Mall site.](#) The new development plan will move [Inova Alexandria Hospital](#) from its home for [the past 58 years](#) on Seminary Road to a new modern facility on the site of Landmark Mall.

The site, one of the largest sites inside the Beltway awaiting redevelopment, will see a billion dollars of new investment, including a new Level II trauma center, medical office buildings, residential, retail, parks, a new fire station replacing [Fire Station 208](#), new committed affordable housing and a new transit hub anchoring the City's new bus rapid transit network, DASH and Metrobus.

This will not only revitalize a site that many had given up on, but will also provide a catalyst for redevelopment and enhancement throughout the West End of our City.

Last month, two virtual community meetings were held to provide information to the community and solicit feedback on this proposed redevelopment initiative.

The first community meeting related specifically to the development of the Landmark Mall site. [You can watch the full meeting online.](#)

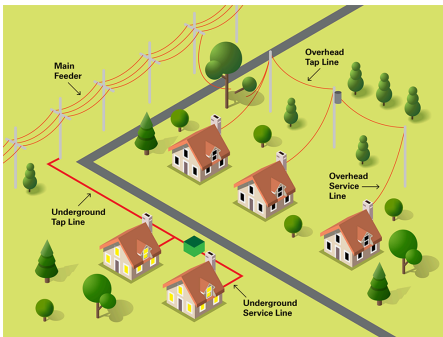
The second meeting related to the land-use changes requested on the existing Inova Alexandria Hospital site on Seminary Road. [You can watch this meeting online as well.](#)

Despite over two decades of decline, it is not a mystery why we had been unable to spur redevelopment on this site in the past. It is a complicated site, with a complicated ownership structure requiring significant infrastructure investment.

Conquering those obstacles requires a unique partnership and financial arrangement. A local firm, [Foulger-Pratt](#) is leading a joint venture in partnership with [Howard Hughes Corporation](#), the current owner of the mall site, and [Seritage Growth Properties](#), the owner of the Sears site. They were able to bring [Inova Health System](#) into the arrangement to anchor this redevelopment.

The City will finance some of the infrastructure improvements required on the site and we will purchase the future hospital site to lease back to Inova. Inova's proceeds from selling their existing site on Seminary Road is financing their expenses related to the move.

While no one should be convinced until they see bulldozers knocking down the existing mall site, we have finally assembled a partnership, financing and a plan to revitalize this site. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but I believe we can be cautiously optimistic that it is finally coming together with this exciting partnership.



## Reliable Electricity

We rely on electricity. Our residents and businesses need electricity supply that is stable and predictable.

Unfortunately, in the past year our residents and businesses have not received the type of service that we expect from Dominion Virginia Power.

During the last calendar year, our residents and businesses experienced large-scale power outages on April 13<sup>th</sup>, May 10<sup>th</sup>, June 16<sup>th</sup>, June 17<sup>th</sup>, July 7<sup>th</sup>, July 20<sup>th</sup>, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, August 8<sup>th</sup>, October 12<sup>th</sup>, October 17<sup>th</sup>, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, November 1<sup>st</sup>, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, November 19<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup>. That is unacceptable.

**Last month, I wrote to the CEO of Dominion Energy expressing concerns on behalf of Alexandria's residents and businesses.** In the letter, I requested:

1. A multi-year infrastructure investment plan to improve reliability of electricity service for the City of Alexandria, including appropriate exercise of all available authority under the **Grid Transformation and Security Act** to accelerate implementation

2. Improved transparency for customers relating to reliability data and recovery performance
3. An enhanced Service Level commitment for customer requests (street light repairs, property construction/renovation, municipal projects, etc)

The City has a long history of working with Dominion Virginia Power to improve reliability and it will be important to extend that partnership again.

Since 1971, [the City Code has required that all new utility construction generally be placed underground](#). Yet, for a City whose history stretches back more than 200 years prior to that point, it leaves quite a bit of overhead utilities remaining around our community.

In fiscal year 1992, the City began an effort to conduct under-grounding of utilities in Old Town. This effort provided for cost-sharing with Dominion Virginia Power, with the City installing the conduit and repairing the road and Dominion addressing the remainder of the project.

Year after year, costs escalated for this work. During the FY 2008 budget process, the Council made the decision to shift all of the dollars for this project to other projects effectively shutting it down. At the time, estimates for the cost to complete the project, ranged from \$64 million to \$100 million, roughly \$1 million for each block.

Today, underground efforts will typically occur in one of three scenarios: When redevelopment occurs in an area with overground utilities, the City will obligate the developer to underground the utilities. When the City is conducting some sort of public work in the vicinity, the City can include under-grounding of adjacent utilities as part of that effort. Finally, Dominion itself does undertake limited strategic undergrounding efforts around the City.

Our residents and businesses expect reliable electricity. We will continue to work with Dominion to make that reality.



## New Campaign

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

[Last month, 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.

## COVID Recovery Plan

There will be a point, probably not tomorrow, probably not next month, but eventually COVID will be in our rear-view mirror for good. The vaccines are here and we have reached the "beginning of the end."

We also know that when COVID is past us, the dramatic impacts of COVID on our community will not be past us. So while we continue a "whole of government" response to end this public health crisis, we must also plan for the recovery.

With that goal in mind, the **Council accepted our "Coordinated Community COVID-19 Post-COVID Recovery Plan."** This plan will frame the City's approach to:

- Economic Stability, Security and Mobility
- Access to Medical/Behavioral Health Care and Disability Services
- Basic Necessities
- Transportation

These recovery initiatives will shape various efforts proposed for funding in the City Manager's proposed budget later this month.

We have had success in the past year creating partnerships to address the needs of vulnerable populations in our City. We will need that very same collaboration and partnership as we work to recover as a community.

## Racial Equity

Last month, the City Council **unanimously adopted a new resolution on racial and social equity, recommitting the City to advance "ALL Alexandria."**

The past year has been an introspective one for our nation, our Commonwealth and our City, as we have worked to reconcile 400 years of racial subjugation.

Alexandria is a diverse, progressive City. We celebrate our diversity and we are proud to be a community where we have made great progress in escaping some of the worst events in our history.

Yet, in Alexandria today, we know that:

- Educational attainment can be predicted by the race of the student
- **Race can be a reliable predictor for health, particularly with chronic illnesses**
- **Our neighborhoods remain stubbornly segregated by race**

- Wealth attainment is deeply divided by race
- Experiences in the criminal justice system widely vary along racial lines

So while we can be gratified at the progress we have made as community, we must not be complacent in the face of the work left to do.

Last summer, a murder by a law-enforcement officer a thousand miles away turned our attention again to the injustices that remain in our community. **These were my thoughts at that time as to how we move forward as a City.**

In adopting **this resolution**, the Council directed specific actions and processes to be implemented immediately, but also instructed **our Racial & Social Equity Officer** to engage with the community and prepare a Racial & Social Equity Plan for subsequent approval by the City Council.

To inform that process, **I provided my colleagues with a memo proposing several initiatives that I hope will be part of that discussion.**

Equity is not a singular achievement, but a process over time. Alexandria's work continues and I am gratified that the City Council is focused on making more progress in this area.

## **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.** A pilot program to implement these alternative response techniques will be coming to Council for approval later this month.

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 City Council received a revised proposal, reflecting more alternatives for consideration](#). By a vote of 4-3, the City Council voted to endorse a specific model of an investigatory review board and proceed with the community input process. This recommendation will return to the City Council in March for final adoption.

I was in the minority on this vote, as I do not believe the Council should endorse a specific model prior to engaging community input and I have concerns about implementation of a model which completely removes the Police Department from the investigation of these types of incidents.

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](#). This estimate will be a discussion for the upcoming budget process.

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.



## Heritage At Old Town

Tomorrow night, the Planning Commission will be considering the first development under the approved **South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy**, the redevelopment of Heritage at Old Town. If the Planning Commission makes a recommendation, this project will come to City Council at our Public Hearing on Saturday February 20th.

**You can sign-up to speak at the Planning Commission hearing tomorrow beginning at 7 PM online.**

**The initial phase of this project is the construction of three multi-family buildings on Blocks 1, 2 and 4 of the plan area .**

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 likely means 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 similar 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.

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.

## Accessory Dwelling Units

A year ago, **I wrote an op/ed in the Alexandria Gazette opposing proposed state legislation** that would impose zoning policy changes on communities around the Commonwealth as a method to address affordability challenges. While the legislation was well-meaning I was fearful it would exacerbate other challenges faced by our community and remove local authority over land-use policy.

**One of the pieces of proposed legislation would have required the City to allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) by right.**

While the legislation failed, earlier last year the City kicked-off its **study of Accessory Dwelling Units**. That study concluded and last month the City Council voted 6-1 **to approve a modified version of the the Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance that was recommended by our Planning Commission.**



An accessory dwelling unit, affectionately known as a "granny flat" or "in-law suite" for its inter-generational living attributes, is an independent living unit attached or contained within an existing primary residence.

The staff proposal largely replicates existing restrictions for the construction of sheds and garages to govern the construction of these stand-alone living units.

The ordinance approved by the Council included additional setback requirements, required owner-occupancy at construction and limited use as a short-term rental.

Accessory dwelling units were originally identified in the [City's Housing Master Plan in 2013](#) as a strategy to allow inter-generational living, provide supportive housing for disabled adults and support market-based housing creation. At our most recent Housing Summit, an Alexandria architect gave an interesting presentation on his effort to bring an ADU to his property nearby. [You can watch the video online.](#)

Accessory dwelling units are a modest approach to addressing some of our housing challenges. I am pleased to see this tool enacted.

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