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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

January 1, 2022

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A few hours ago, my second term as your Mayor began. While [my personal circumstances](#) are not what I imagined, I am excited to get to work with this new Council on the important issues facing our City.

On Monday evening, the new City Council will formally take our oaths of office (with me participating virtually) and get the pomp and circumstance out of the way. [While the ceremony has been moved, we invite you to join us virtually.](#)

Welcome back to my three returning colleagues: Councilwoman Amy Jackson (who will be formally elected Vice Mayor

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on Monday evening), Councilman Canek Aguirre and Councilman John Taylor Chapman.

We are also excited to welcome three strong newcomers: Councilwoman Sarah Bagley, Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins, and Councilman Kirk McPike.

This new City Council will continue our work in addressing COVID-19 and all of its impacts.

The theme of the last month has been the onset of the new variant and exponential increases in demand for COVID testing, prompted by community spread and travel.

There is news to prompt concern, but not panic, as the new variant impacts our City:

- We have seen an average of nearly 300 new cases per day over the last week, nearly 3 times our previous weekly peak a year ago.
- We have reached a positivity rate of over 20%. That is higher than we have seen since early in 2020.
- We tested over 11,500 Alexandrians in the week prior to Christmas, double our previous weekly high from a year ago and over 7% of the entire City population.
- The labs reported that on Christmas Eve, Alexandria was a little less than 9% of the Commonwealth's overall testing volume, with less than 2% of the Commonwealth's population
- Our hospitalizations have increased slightly in the last week, but remain near all-time lows.
- There has been no increase in the rate of deaths due to COVID.
- [Last week, unvaccinated Virginians were hospitalized at a rate 24.4 times that of fully vaccinated Virginians.](#)

The goal for our community remains the same: We must vaccinate and boost every eligible resident of our City to protect ourselves, our families, friends and coworkers. [Getting a booster is proven to improve outcomes.](#)

In September, we began administering COVID-19 vaccine boosters for eligible residents of our City. About a third of Alexandria's fully vaccinated residents have now received a booster dose.

If you are 16 or older and received the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna or the single dose of Johnson & Johnson you are eligible for a booster dose.

For more information or to sign-up for a booster dose, please head to our vaccine website.

In September, Governor Ralph Northam used part of his recurring pandemic updates to note that nearly 100% of Alexandrians aged 12 to 15 had been vaccinated, the highest such rate in the Commonwealth. It is in fact our youngest population, a population that has been eligible to be vaccinated for the shortest period of time, that is now the most vaccinated portion of our community. Alexandria's middle and high schoolers are leading the way!

They are now being joined by their younger brothers and sisters, as we were approved to begin vaccinating those aged 5 through 11. Already nearly 40% of Alexandria's residents aged 5 through 11 have been vaccinated in the last two months!

As of yesterday, 126,922 Alexandrians have received at least one vaccine dose, which is 82.5% of the eligible population of those 5 and older.

Of those, 109,337 Alexandrians are now fully vaccinated.

ANYONE who is aged 5 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.

For those who have already been vaccinated, you may now download your vaccination record from the Virginia Department of Health.

When the Delta variant took hold, the CDC issued new guidance recommending masks be worn in indoor spaces in communities where

transmission is substantial or high.
Alexandria remains in the "high" level of transmission at this time. All Alexandrians should wear a mask, preferably a **N95, KN95 or KF94** when they are inside, or with any crowd outside.

The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) are preparing to bring students back from Winter Break on Monday safely. Parents can register for free in-school testing, and there is new guidance for close contacts.

ACPS continues to publish school by school infection data on a weekly basis.

The City and the Alexandria City Public Schools have now implemented vaccine mandates for our respective staffs.

The ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund was 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 December's Town Hall online. Join us Thursday evening at 8PM for my December Town Hall.

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.

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

Initiatives and Updates

City Manager Jim Parajon

Six months ago, [the City Council formally launched a national search for our next City Manager](#). Last month that process concluded as the City Council [voted in a special meeting to hire Jim Parajon as our new City Manager](#).

[Check out the video introduction we published last month](#).

Jim will formally begin his leadership of our municipal government on January 18th, but he has already been hard at work meeting City employees and preparing to present his first budget next month.

Jim is currently a Deputy City Manager in the City of Arlington, Texas, where he is responsible for a range of City services, including the Fire Department, economic development, the libraries, an airport, a stadium, communication and asset management.

With a planning background, Jim honed his skills in the private sector and in municipal governments in both Raleigh and Cary, North Carolina. I am excited to welcome Jim and his family to our City and look forward to his leadership over the years to come.

In June [we learned that our City Manager, Mark Jinks, will be retiring at the end of the year](#). City Council has been focused for most of the past year on making the most important personnel decision in City government: selecting our Chief Executive Officer.

I am grateful for the extensive public input that assisted the City Council in making this selection. Your input was an integral part of the Council's decision.

New Bond Issuance

[On the last day of November, the City issued \\$164 million worth of bonds, at the lowest rate \(1.5%\) the](#)

City has ever received.

At the end of October, I joined our City Manager, our Finance Director and other members of our senior leadership team to make our annual presentation to the bond rating agencies.

In November, **S & P Global Ratings** and **Moody's Investor Services** both reaffirmed the City's bond ratings of AAA and Aaa respectively. **The confirmation of these ratings, in advance of the issuance of the bonds, allows the City to access the lowest possible borrowing costs, saving the taxpayers millions of dollars over the life of our bonds.** These bonds will be used to finance school capital investments and City capital projects, including the initial property acquisitions to support the new Inova Alexandria Hospital at Landmark Mall.

Much like individuals must have a credit check performed before acquiring a mortgage, a car loan, or a new credit card, the City must go before Standard & Poor's and Moody's to have the two organizations assess whether we are doing a good job managing the City's finances.

In May, **the Council adopted our 10 year Capital Improvement Program, covering fiscal years 2022 - 2031.** Over the 10 year period, the program calls for \$2.66 billion in capital investment throughout the City. Over 35% of this funding goes to City and School municipal facilities. Another quarter goes to transportation initiatives, including Metro.

Our capital budget is funded primarily through a mix of debt and current year funding also known as "cash capital." Relating this to your home mortgage, the cash capital is the down payment. We also pay interest each year on the debt that was issued in previous years.

In issuing the City's rating, Moody's cited Alexandria's "healthy financial position given strong operating trends and conservative budgeting practices and that the sizeable tax base will continue to grow and diversify."

Standard & Poor's similarly cited Alexandria's "Robust economic growth and management team that proactively manages the city's economy, finances, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks."

This is the first year that the rating agencies have focused on the ESG risks. The agencies cited the City's work managing these risks as a considerable positive, noting the City's work on climate change, flooding and equity.

Over the past few years, I have pushed for new policies to make the City's balance sheet even stronger. **Nearly**

six years ago, the Council unanimously adopted a new "cash capital" policy, which served to reduce debt levels and the risk of our borrowing.

A year ago, the Council approved amendments to our "Spendable Fund Balance," essentially expanding the amount of reserves we have available. This new policy was recommended by the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee, and it was specifically cited by the rating agencies in support of our ratings.

Alexandria is very conservative with our use of debt.

Arlington County limits its debt to 4% of its Fair Market Real Property Value. Both Fairfax and Prince William Counties limit their debt to 3%. Alexandria's self-imposed limit is 2.5%, and this budget year we achieved 1.5%.

The median for other similarly rated and sized jurisdictions is 2.42%.

In fact, in the Standard & Poor's analysis, they noted that the City was rated higher than the "sovereign" (the US Federal Government) because "we believe the City can maintain better credit characteristics than the U. S. in a stress scenario."

Debt is a tool that allows us to balance the costs of large capital investments across the generations of Alexandria taxpayers that will benefit from them and to pay for our investments from the returns we reap from them.

It is important for us to maintain the careful stewardship that will protect our taxpayers and our City's infrastructure long into the future.



New Council Assignments

In conjunction with our City Council service, members of the Council serve on a variety of Boards and Commissions. At the City Council installation meeting Monday evening, we will officially designate those assignments.

On the new Council, I have retained some of my current assignments and added a few new ones.

I will be continuing on the City's Health and Safety Coordinating Committee. Joining me on this committee will be to-be Vice Mayor Amy Jackson. This group consists of representatives from the City's public safety agencies, Code Administration, Alexandria City Public Schools, Health Department, Housing, and the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority. We

use this meeting to track and coordinate activities that work to improve and maintain the high quality of life that our residents expect.

I also remain on the City Council/School Board subcommittee. Joining this group on the new Council will be Councilman John Taylor Chapman, the School Board Chair and Vice Chair, as well as the Superintendent and City Manager. The subcommittee coordinates joint activities and projects and serves as the primary interface between City government and the Alexandria City Public Schools.

I will be retaining my spot on the [City's Commission on Information Technology](#). This group has now been re-purposed as a body focused on the City's broadband efforts. I will be joined on this group by to-be Vice Mayor Amy Jackson.

I will be a member of the City's new Audit and Finance Committee, This group provides the Council supervision of our annual financial audit as well as employee pension and compensation issues. I will be joined on this committee by Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins.

I'll be continuing my work on the [Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Advisory Group](#) as we conclude the process late this year of bringing a Metro station to Potomac Yard. Remaining with me on this group will be Councilman Canek Aguirre.

Both Councilman Chapman and I will remain on the ARHA Redevelopment Work Group. This group is focused on working with the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) to manage the orderly redevelopment of aging ARHA properties.

I will be joining a relatively new committee that was set up to manage the [Combined Sewer Outfall work](#) in cooperation with Alexandria Renew. On this committee I will be joined by to-be Vice Mayor Jackson.

I will also be remaining on the City's Legislative Committee, which oversees the development and implementation of the [City's Annual Legislative Package](#). On this committee I will be joined by Councilman Kirk McPike.

I will also remain on a new Landmark Community Development Authority Board of Directors along with 4 of my colleagues, to help steer part of the new property holdings on the Landmark Mall site.

Finally, on a regional basis, I will also be representing the City on two important bodies. I will be joining the [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments \(COG\) Board of Directors](#). The Board is the COG's governing body and primary policy entity.

Additionally, I will be representing the City on the **Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA)**. The NVTA is the regional entity that disburses approximately \$300 million annually across the region to projects designed to alleviate traffic congestion.

I am excited that the assignments I have taken on will provide me with the opportunity to best serve the residents of our City.



American Rescue Plan Update

Last summer, the City Council unanimously adopted Alexandria's plan to allocate the first tranche of \$29.8 million, from the City's allocation in the American Rescue Plan.

Last month the City Council **received our first update on the status of implementing each of these projects that have been funded.**

In March, 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.

After surveying the community, we received an enormous amount of ideas and concepts for how Alexandria could best deploy these resources to improve our City.

Alexandria's government will receive a total of \$59.4 million from the legislation, divided into two allotments, one that was received in May 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 \$34.8 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.

The Treasury Department released **an "Interim Final Rule," which ultimately provides detailed (151 pages!) guidance to localities as to how we can expend these dollars.**

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.

I believe we should continue to 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, the Commonwealth and many Federal programs 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.

In May, the Governor and the leadership of the State Senate and House of Delegates **announced shared priorities for the expenditure of \$4.3 billion that the Commonwealth will be receiving directly from this legislation.** The Governor called the General Assembly back into **a special session in the summer to enact these priorities.**

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.

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.

As we put COVID-19 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.



Torpedo Factory

The Torpedo Factory Arts Center is an iconic presence on the City's waterfront. Bringing a half million visitors into working artists galleries, the Factory is a economic development engine and unique arts resource for our community.

The City of Alexandria purchased the Factory from the United States Government in 1969. The Arts Center was opened in 1974 and has been a model for similar centers around country.

Yet for the past several years, the challenges of the Factory and the possible solutions to those challenges have been divisive.

In February of this year, the City Council endorsed an action plan for the future of the Torpedo Factory. In June, the City Council received **an update on the status of the engagement on that action plan.**

Our staff brought a few proposals for the future of the Torpedo Factory to stakeholders for input, and last month brought those proposals to the City Council. **You can review those proposals online.**

Last month, the City Council **unanimously endorsed a framework of principles for next steps for the Torpedo Factory that I proposed to my colleagues.**

These principles call for an entirely new structure to strategically manage the Torpedo Factory and the many new arts assets that the City is bringing to reality as part of the **Old Town North Arts District.**

You can watch Council's discussion **beginning at the 1:56:00 mark in the video from last month's Legislative Meeting.**

Alexandria is an arts destination, but that destination is broader than one building. I am excited that Council has now endorsed this vision to expand our commitment to arts real estate in our City, with the Torpedo Factory as a focal point of that expansion.

This discussion has gone on for a while. In 2009, the **City commissioned a study to review the Factory and the opportunities of the site.** The result of the study was a series of organizational changes to the Factory. **Those led to the creation of a non-profit Board** to run the operations and leverage private resources to support the Factory.

With the lease nearing conclusion a several years ago, the Torpedo Factory Arts Center Board **commissioned**

another study to look at the strategic options available to the City and the Factory.

This report recommended more changes to the governance, the management, and vision of the Factory.

Candidly, the future of the Torpedo Factory has been studied to death. We have used the divisiveness of this issue as an excuse to avoid making a decision on its future. Unfortunately, inaction is a decision in and of itself.

My focus is on deriving a structure for the operation of the Factory that:

- expands the vitality of the Factory
- improves its financial sustainability
- improves its diversity
- ensures the success of Alexandria's premier arts destination long into the future.

I am confident that working together we can achieve these goals.

It has now been five years since the City took steps to provide stability by assuming caretaker leadership for the Factory.

Since that time, the City provided leases to the existing artist tenants, and has been providing day to day management. I am pleased we are now making decisions and creating a sustainable structure for the governance of the Factory so that it can flourish in the future.

Ensuring the presence of a diversity of arts and artists in the Torpedo Factory Arts Center on our Waterfront is a priority of mine. I look forward to working with our community and various partners to bring this vision to reality.



Changes in Richmond

Just after World War 2, the political scientist **V. O. Key** described Virginia as a "museum of democracy," with all of the vestiges of a representative and responsive democracy, but without the representation and responsiveness. Several decades has brought considerable change to Richmond.

Two years ago, we were prepping for a switch of party control for the first time in 22 years in the House of Delegates and 8 years in the State Senate. The regular session of 2020 was extraordinary with significant legislation enacted, and it was just a prelude to an extended special session, which addressed legislation and budget decisions related to COVID and numerous reforms to Virginia's criminal justice system.

For the past two years we enjoyed an unprecedented level of influence for our City. Our delegation boasts BOTH Majority Leaders (Senator Saslaw leading the State Senate and Delegate Herring leading the House of Delegates) and a few committee chairs.

With the recent election results, things will change dramatically. With a new Governor and a flip in partisan control of the House of Delegates, the only legislation likely to make it to the Governor's desk for signature, will be changes that enjoy bipartisan support.

In a week and a half Virginia General Assembly returns to Richmond for the so-called "long-session." The General Assembly alternates between a 45 day session in odd number years and a 60 day session in even number years. Five days later, Governor-Elect Youngkin will take the oath of office as our 74th Governor.

The number one priority in Richmond will be the adoption of a new biennial budget for the Commonwealth. [Governor Northam proposed his outgoing budget last month, relying on one of the rosiest financial pictures for the Commonwealth in its history.](#)

In an attempt to seek common ground, [I provided a letter on behalf of Alexandria to the Governor-Elect laying out areas where I believe we can agree, work together and achieve good results for our shared constituents.](#)

Every year, the City Council adopts a Legislative Package for the upcoming General Assembly session. While the state government is certainly a significant financial supporter of the City's budget, Richmond also sets a legal environment that affects how we provide services to our residents.

Along with now former-Vice Mayor Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, I serve on the City's Legislative Committee, which recommends the Legislative Package each year to our colleagues.

[This year, we have again chosen to prepare a "Statement of Legislative Principles" and a "Statement of Legislative Priorities."](#) Given the breadth of legislation likely to be filed, and potentially enacted, we felt it more appropriate to weigh in on the broader themes that we wished to see addressed on behalf of the City in the upcoming session. We formally adopted this package last month.

Yet we do have specific asks within the legislative priorities, including:

- Funding and Authority For Infrastructure Investments

- Protecting and Expansion of Local Authority and Funding
- Projecting our most vulnerable residents
- Promoting Access, Equity and Equality
- Combating climate change and promoting clean energy

We have included a specific list of legislative asks to support our efforts to address inland flooding, including efforts to regulate the stormwater impacts of smaller infill development and ensure new state resources to support the necessary infrastructure investments. We have included requests for increased regulation of Dominion Virginia Power, funding for abandoned cemeteries, broadband investments and efforts to support building safety.

The City is now represented in the State Senate by [Senator Richard Saslaw](#), [Senator George Barker](#), and [Senator Adam Ebbin](#). In the House of Delegates, the City is represented by [Delegate Charniele Herring](#) and my outgoing colleague, [Elizabeth Bennett-Parker](#), will be joining our delegation in the House of Delegates.

Yet, even the composition of our delegation is facing dramatic change. With the collapse last year of the brand new Virginia Redistricting Commission, the Virginia Supreme Court was called upon to determine the new boundaries for Congressional, State Senate and House of Delegates districts. [After appointing two Special Masters, the Virginia Supreme Court unanimously approved new districts last week.](#)

Alexandria will continue to be in the [8th Congressional District](#), will be entirely represented in the [39th State Senate District](#) and will be represented by three members of the House of Delegates, those elected from the [3rd District](#), the [4th District](#), and the [5th District](#).

While it will change soon, [click here to determine who represents you today.](#)



DASH Ridership

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

Now that we have had some experience with these changes, we are now beginning to assess the impacts. So far:

- In October, DASH experienced 256,000 systemwide boardings. This was the highest single month since February of 2020.
- Total DASH ridership increased by 50% between August and October.
- Our October ridership represents about 72% of pre-pandemic ridership.
- West End ridership presently exceeds pre-pandemic volume.

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

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%.

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 the largest implementation was in September, the planning effort informed the service enhancements that were made to the AT-1 and the AT-9 last year.

This is 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.

Stream Restorations

Just over a decade ago, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) made a historic commitment to the health of the Chesapeake Bay. [With the establishment of the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load \(TMDL\), the EPA committed six states and the District of Columbia to significant reductions in pollutants across a 64,000 square-mile watershed.](#)

The establishment of this TMDL imposed a "pollution diet" on the entire watershed, committing to reductions of nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment from flowing into the Bay. To meet these ambitious goals, this TMDL was divided into smaller TMDLs for waterways and jurisdictions throughout the watershed.

Meeting this commitment to the future of the Bay requires extensive, collective action across the watershed. Alexandria is working to do its part.

The process has not always been smooth. Our neighbors in Fairfax County partnered with the Commonwealth to sue the EPA challenging the TMDL that was set for Accotink Creek. **The lawsuit was successful, disallowing an EPA attempt to regulate the volume of run-off, as opposed to specific pollutants.**

In order to meet the City's obligations under the Federal Clean Water Act and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, the City holds an MS4 Permit (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System). **The permit, issued by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, imposes a "pollution diet" on the City.** We are in the second 5-year permit cycle that will culminate in reaching our portion of the TMDL.

By 2023, we must meet 40% of the TMDL. By 2028, we must reach 100%.

The City is on track to meet our obligations to the Chesapeake Bay.

One of the most effective ways for the City to achieve these aggressive pollution reduction targets is to make improvements to City-owned properties. In urban areas like Alexandria, achieving these reductions can be challenging, given the limited amount of public land.

To ease the burden on Alexandria's taxpayers, the City has sought funding from the Commonwealth. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality administers the **Stormwater Local Assistance Fund** (SLAF), which provides matching grants to assist local governments in addressing these requirements.

The City recently completed two major stormwater projects, the **Lake Cook Stormwater Management Retrofit Project** and the **Ben Brenman Pond Stormwater Management Retrofit Project**.

The Lake Cook project, was the beneficiary of \$1.5 million of SLAF funding, and made significant improvements to better treat stormwater and enhance the natural resources at this location along Eisenhower Avenue.

The Ben Brenman Pond project, was the beneficiary of \$1.75 million of SLAF funding, and made improvements to better filter pollutants and upgrade landscaping at this location in Cameron Station.

The City has now received SLAF funding for three other projects. **The EPA has advanced stream restoration**

as a technique for the reduction of pollutants in the Bay. This technique involves repairing the human impacts on streams, with the goal of restoring these streams back to their natural states.

After an assessment helped prioritize and assess the pollutant reduction opportunities, the City selected three projects to be submitted to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Each was awarded SLAF funding by the state.

The Lucky Run Stream Restoration project received \$668,000 of SLAF funding and proposes to enhance the stream, re-introduce native plants, and improve the aesthetics of this area located in the shadow of Interstate 395 on the West End. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2017. **More information was presented to the community at a meeting in 2019.**

The Strawberry Run Stream Restoration project received \$800,000 of SLAF funding and proposes making natural stream restoration improvements in an area bounded by Fort Williams Parkway, Taft Avenue and Duke Street. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2018. **A public meeting was held in the fall to collect input on this project.**

The Taylor Run Stream Restoration has received \$2.55 million of SLAF funding and proposes restoring the natural stream-bed and repairing a threatened sanitary sewer connection in an area near the Chinquapin Recreation Center. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2018. **At the end of January, a community meeting was held to review changes and solicit community feedback.**

Together, these are very important environmental projects for our City.

At Taylor Run, in addition to protecting a sanitary sewer line running through the area, this project will result in 9% of our required Nitrogen reduction, 30% of our required Phosphorous reduction and 4% of our required sediment reduction.

At Lucky Run, this project will result in 9% of our required Nitrogen reduction, 26% of our required Phosphorous reduction and 57% of our required sediment reduction.

At Strawberry Run, this project will result in 10% of our required Nitrogen reduction, 34% of our required Phosphorous reduction and 14% of our required sediment reduction.

Yet the projects are controversial, with opposition from residents concerned about construction impacts, potential ecological impacts, accuracy of pollution reduction estimates, tree impacts, among other objections. While these types of projects are under way in hundreds of other communities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, similar controversy has erupted in other communities, including [Fairfax County](#) and [Arlington County](#).

In May of this year, [our staff provided an update on the City's Stream Restoration strategy](#). This was followed by a presentation by our Environmental Policy Commission, which has come out against stream restoration as a technique. [You can watch the full presentation and Council discussion beginning just after the 3:44:00 mark in the video](#).

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Council gave our staff direction to pause on the projects, do further measurements of all three, engage with the community and the Environmental Policy Commission on other alternatives and return to the City Council for further direction.

[The measurements are now complete and have been received by the City and our Environmental Policy Commission](#). These measurements show that the default formula provided by the Commonwealth's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to estimate pollutant reductions, over-estimates the pollutant reduction for these three projects, as expected. In the case of Taylor Run, our estimated pollutant reduction rate of \$15,000 per pound, will rise to \$50,000 per pound. For Lucky Run, it goes from \$7,000 per pound to \$72,000 and for Strawberry Run it goes from \$5,000 to \$20,000. If the City seeks to claim to obtain the same pollution credits, using this method, it will now cost more.

While the Commonwealth has reiterated its support for the default calculations, this finding requires further review. To help us chart the next step, the City has brought in the [Institute for Engagement & Negotiation \(IEN\) of the University of Virginia](#). IEN will serve as a neutral third-party to lead the definition of the path forward.

The City has important obligations to improve the quality of the water in the waterways of our region. These investments are intended to maintain our commitment to the future of the Chesapeake Bay and address human-caused damage in these natural areas.

We will continue to work to determine the best approach as we move forward.

Plastic Bag Tax Starts Today

During the 2020 Virginia General Assembly session, **Senator Adam Ebbin sponsored legislation that gave local governments to authority to enact a 5 cent tax on plastic bags.**

Today, in Alexandria, Arlington County and Fairfax County, that new tax goes into effect.

This legislation provided that local governments who imposed this form of taxation would be required to use the proceeds to fund environmental clean-up as well as the provision of reusable bags to lower-income residents.

Last month, **the City Council unanimously approved allocating \$30,000 of the revenues from this new tax to fund reusable bags for low-income households and communications effort around the new program.**

As proposed, the tax would only apply to grocery stores, convenience stores and drug stores.

I'm optimistic this effort will help reduce this harmful waste in our environment.

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