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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

July 1, 2020

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As we grapple with two simultaneous crises, the milestones of "normal" life continue.

Last week, the City recognized the retirement of a legal trailblazer for our community . Judge Nolan Dawkins concluded a quarter century of service on Alexandria's bench, culminating with 13 years of service on Alexandria's Circuit Court.

Our community is in debt to Judge Dawkins and his family, for his lifetime of faithful service to our City.

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We also [recognize the loss of Engin Artemel](#) . Engin served as the City's Planning Director during a pivotal time in our history. His vision has shaped the modern Alexandria we see today, especially our publicly-accessible waterfront.

Engin's vision and ideas will be missed in our community.

Three months ago, when I wrote you, 44 of our neighbors had tested positive for COVID-19. Two months ago, 754 had tested positive. A month ago, 1,974 Alexandrians had tested positive. As of yesterday, 2,325 have tested positive for this virus since this pandemic first reached Alexandria.

Sadly, 57 have lost their lives.

To the families of those who have been lost, you are in our thoughts during this time. I am hopeful that the support of our community for you can be felt during this isolating moment.

Yet, we have made progress:

- COVID-19 testing has become widely available, with Alexandria having one of the highest testing rates in the Commonwealth and our region.
- Our hospitalization rates have remained low.
- Our hospital capacity has remained stable.
- Our testing positivity rate continues to trend downwards reaching just over 5% ([the WHO recommended criteria](#))
- There are only [5 states with a lower infection growth rate than Virginia's](#)
- We will be launching new testing initiatives over the next few weeks to continue to identify new infections and ensure treatment for those infected

In April, [the Governor released his "Forward Virginia" blueprint](#) , which lays out an approach to the easing of the current public health restrictions and details efforts to increase testing capacity and protective equipment.

Today, the entire Commonwealth entered Phase 3 .

Yet, we are still not out of the woods. The City has seen one of the higher infection rates and significant community spread. The only way we ensure that the sacrifice that has been made by our residents and businesses was not in vain is to keep it up. That means continued social distancing, masks, frequent hand washing, staying home when ill and avoiding crowds.

Please continue to support the ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund , which is distributing money into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created.

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 .

Since the beginning of April, I have been doing a weekly Virtual Living Room Town Hall sessions to answer questions from the public regarding the City's on-going response. You can view the sessions from June online:

June 3rd Living Room Town Hall

June 11th Living Room Town Hall

June 18th Living Room Town Hall

June 25th Living Room Town Hall

Starting this month, I will move to monthly town halls on the first Thursday of each month.

Please join me at this link this Thursday evening 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.

If you have any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that you can donate, please submit information online .

In March, my colleagues and I worked to propose a list of emergency actions to support our residents, our businesses and our municipal finances. These proposed actions are now either in place or in progress. Some are detailed below.

The entire City Council thanks our community for pulling together during this crisis .

Contact me anytime . Let me know how I can help.

Initiatives and Updates



Putting CARES Act Money To Work

Less than two months ago, the City received our **first tranche** of **Federal CARES Act** money. **We have now put that money to good use in benefiting the residents and businesses in need in our City** .

By the end of this month, we will have fully expended the \$13.9 million that the City received. **We are optimistic and hopeful** that the Governor will move quickly to allocate the second tranche of money to address the significant need that remains.

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.

In late March, **the President signed the CARES Act** which provides \$2 trillion to assist residents, businesses and government. With this legislation and the prospect of further legislation ahead, my focus has been to ensure that we leave no dollar on the table.

Our City government has worked to assist residents and businesses to access the various funds that have been made available for their benefit. The legislation also

created a \$150 billion fund to assist state and local governments. Virginia will receive \$3.3 billion of these funds. Jurisdictions with a population of 500,000 or more go directly to the Federal government and the remainder is distributed by the applicable state government. The remaining portion of these funds is where the City's allocation is drawn from.

The United States Department of Treasury **provided guidance detailing how the funds can be used.**

While the City and other jurisdictions urged maximum flexibility from the Federal Government, the money the City received is limited to:

- 1) Expenditures incurred as a result of the pandemic response.
- 2) Expenditures cannot already be in the City's budget (must be new spending)
- 3) The money must be utilized by the end of 2020

In May, I wrote to the Secretary of Finance advocating that the allocation of these funds be on a per capita basis. Ultimately, that is how the administration chose to distribute the first tranche.

The City has already spent approximately \$7 million in expenses that we believe will be eligible for these funds. During this month, we will fully obligate the remainder of the funds to be allocated in these priority areas:

- Public health staffing and capabilities
- Food assistance
- Residential rent assistance
- Small business assistance

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

I am still optimistic that Federal policymakers will arrive on an approach that addresses the significant lost revenue that the City and other jurisdictions around our nation have experienced.

In May, the House of Representatives enacted "The Heroes Act." This legislation included a substantial local government assistance component. **For Alexandria, this legislation would provide \$81.9 million to replace revenue that has been lost due to COVID-19 public health restrictions** . While not fully replacing the \$92 million that the City currently estimates we will have lost between the last fiscal year and the new fiscal

year, this allocation would go a long way to easing the burden on our local taxpayers and services.

At this point, this legislation does not seem likely to pass the Senate. I'm hopeful that legislation with the support of both houses and the President will soon be enacted to support local governments during this time.

Virginia Tech Innovation Campus

A year and a half ago, in conjunction with the announcement of Amazon placing a portion of its new "HQ2" in the Crystal City section of Arlington County, Governor Northam announced that part of the Commonwealth's incentive package will include state funds to [support the creation of a new Virginia Tech "Innovation Campus" in Alexandria](#) .

An idea that was once just a few bullets on a slide, is now becoming reality as the future economic engine for Potomac Yard.

At the end of June, the [City Council approved the land-use plans for the seven buildings that will comprise the Virginia Tech campus](#) and the first phase of development adjacent to the campus. This is an important milestone that allows the beginning of construction activity once final site plans and permits are received.

Several virtual meetings have been held over the past few months. You can [watch the meetings online](#).

Next month, Dr. Lance Collins, currently the Dean of Engineering at Cornell University, will begin work as the leader of the new Innovation Campus. Dr. Collins has led Cornell's College of Engineering for the past decade and was instrumental in building [Cornell Tech on Roosevelt Island](#) in New York City.

Last week, [the Alexandria City Public Schools announced a new STEM-focused partnership with Virginia Tech](#) . This will enhance science offerings in Elementary, Middle and High School and improve professional development for ACPS's educators.

While the Innovation Campus was originally announced to be in Oakville Triangle, Virginia Tech decided that a property in North Potomac Yard (where the movie theater

currently is) made more sense given their future growth plans. In June of last year, **the leaders of Virginia Tech were back in Alexandria to announce the new location they had selected the property for their future "Innovation Campus."**

Integral to the Commonwealth's attraction of Amazon was access to the talent Amazon will require to grow. The creation of a **new \$1 billion graduate campus will provide a pipeline of talent for our entire region** .

In doing so, this new investment in our City will spur new job creation, catalyze redevelopment in Potomac Yard, Oakville Triangle and beyond, as well as open up new educational partnerships for our schools and non-profit organizations.

Last year, **I wrote in this newsletter about our partnership with Arlington to ensure that the benefits of these new investments accrue to all in our communities** . As this campus begins to take shape, our work continues.

School Reopening

In March, **Alexandria's public school buildings closed their doors shortly before the Governor closed all schools in the Commonwealth** .

This decision, while sad and unfortunate for our students, was a necessity brought about by the public health crisis that has been facing our community since that time.

The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) immediately made the transition to virtual learning. Students, educators, support staff and parents have spent the past few months making the best out of a bad situation. I stand in awe of the educators in our school system who have worked tirelessly to continue educational progress under difficult conditions.

While the decision to close schools was a difficult one, it was rather binary. Once it was clear school buildings could not remain safely open, they were closed.

The decisions surrounding the reopening of schools in the fall are much more difficult, nuanced and complex. **The first building**

block of that decision-making process is the guidelines, entitled "Recover. Redesign. Restart," issued last month by the Virginia Department of Education . This 136 page document details how local school divisions in the Commonwealth should undertake a fall reopening.

There is no question that policymakers influencing school decisions want to see our students back in school. As a parent of two ACPS students myself, I share that desire. **The health benefits of students being in school together are considerable** . Yet, I also recognize that the public health challenge we are facing is quite real, exacerbates existing inequality, and requires engagement with all stakeholders prior to committing to a particular reopening approach.

Last Friday, **the Superintendent presented to the School Board a framework for approaching these important decisions** .

Over the next few weeks, ACPS will engage with all stakeholders to get input on the variants of school reopening, ranging from a "normal" in-person opening to a fully-virtual opening, and a hybrid approach.

The School Board **will be looking for your input** as they grapple with the various options.

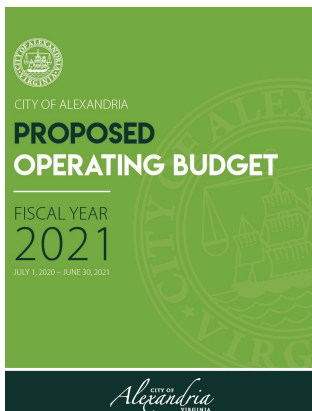
Next month, ACPS will settle on an approach to move forward.

Taxpayer Receipt

I have now been a part of adopting ten City budgets as a member of the Council. Each year, I try to find new ways to engage residents in the process, and increase transparency and understanding of budget priorities and trade-offs.

A few years ago, I worked with the staff in our City's Office of Management and Budget to create a new **Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator** .

Modeled after the **Federal Taxpayer Receipt** , this website will take the assessed value of your home and detail how much of your real estate tax is going to the various programs and services of City government.



We entered Fiscal Year 2021 this morning. Accordingly, we have updated the receipt to reflect the newly enacted budget. Give it a try and [let me know](#) how you like it!



New Space To Serve The Public

Many times in this newsletter, I have written about the City's ongoing efforts to address the miserable condition of many of our municipal facilities. A component of those efforts has been working to identify areas of potential consolidation among our City facilities.

[The City is now considering the purchase of 4850 Mark Center Drive to consolidate several City agencies currently located in 8 different facilities around the City.](#)

The Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) is one of the City's largest departments with over 600 full time equivalent employees, and a budget of over \$100 million. The department provides the critical safety net services that so many of our residents rely on at various points in their lives.

DCHS, together with the City's Health Department occupy 210,000 square feet of space in 8 different facilities around the City. Most of the space is inadequate, aged, and not proximate to the residents its serves. Over half of DCHS clients are on the West End, yet two of our largest offices are in the East End of the City.

As a result the City explored options to consolidate. Those efforts concluded at the end of 2018 with the City choosing **[to consolidate DCHS and the Alexandria Heath Department at 4850 Mark Center Drive](#)** . This building is currently occupied by the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA). **[IDA is preparing to move to a new location in Potomac Yard](#)** . Given the timetable of the intended move, the location will not become available until 2022.

This new location will enable full consolidation of these two departments and improve service delivery for the residents served by these important services.

While the City and IDA negotiated a 15 year lease, it included several points where the

City could exercise the ability to purchase the building, which could save the City millions more in avoided lease payments.

The purchase option would cost the City \$58.7 million. The negotiated lease is for 15 years (with an annual escalation), with the first year rent totaling a little over \$7 million. The purchase option will save the taxpayers of the City over \$18 million over the next 15 years.

The Planning Commission considered last month whether such a purchase would be consistent with the City's Master Plan. Later this month the Council will consider whether to proceed with the purchase.

Ultimately the consolidation will avoid greater costs, improve the effectiveness of services delivered and make those services more accessible to our residents.

Long-Term Care Facilities

While all of our residents are susceptible to infection, throughout the COVID-19 crisis, attention has been focused on particularly vulnerable populations.

Throughout the world, senior residents living in long-term care facilities and other congregate-living arrangements have been hard-hit by this virus.

These facilities have been home to heroic staff who have risked their own wellness, and that of their families', to protect the safety and welfare of the patients in their responsibility.

Due to a patchwork of laws, competition and other constraints, patients, their families and the staff that serve them have sometimes struggled to get good information on the extent of the infection in individual facilities.

[In May, I wrote to the Governor urging him to provide greater transparency for patients, families and staff](#), so that informed decisions can be made to protect the welfare of long-term care facility residents.

This month, the Governor announced that data on these facilities would be made public. **[Information about the extent of COVID outbreaks as these facilities across the](#)**

Commonwealth is now available to the public online.

This data showed that in Alexandria, roughly half of the COVID-19 deaths in the City were the result of infections at one of three Long-Term Care facilities.

While the release of this data provided greater transparency to the public, it was not news to the public health officials serving Alexandria. Our staff has been working closely with these facilities, **following our Long-Term Care Facility Framework**, to provide testing, support of staff, supplies and other assistance during this crisis.

There is certainly more work to do to protect all of our vulnerable populations. The newly public information highlights the need and the difficult work ahead.

Data for an Accountable Government

Over a year ago, the City unveiled **our public Performance Dashboard**, allowing the residents of our City to assess the performance of critical City services based on meaningful performance metrics.

With that data available, it's important for the Council and public to review performance periodically.

You can watch last year's presentation to the Council of the performance highlights from these dashboards and Council's discussion.

Last month, **the City added the results of our latest Resident survey to the dashboard**. This year's results find the residents of our community **giving the City high marks for livability, quality of life, the quality of our services and vibrancy of our economy**. Yet the results also showed opportunities for improvement, as affordability, cost of living and government transparency emerged as areas remaining for improvement.

Providing accountable results to the residents of Alexandria for their tax investment is a role of government. To support that accountability, government must have good data. We have now made another large step forward as we

work to better collect more relevant data to measure how we provide City services.

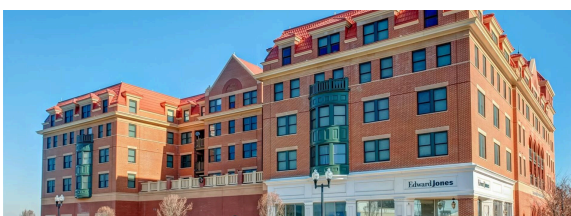
Over a decade ago, then City Manager Jim Hartmann introduced the Managing for Results Initiative, known as "MFRI." MFRI categorized our City services into programs and activities that could be measured and reported. The budget format was then revised so that the proposed budget aligned expenditures to those programs and activities. This allowed the City to measure the performance and efficiency of services during the annual budget process.

Our previous City Manager, Rashad Young, then created the Office of Performance and Accountability (OPA). OPA was designed as an internal consultancy to implement performance improvement and efficiency throughout city government operations.

Five years ago we took the next step, as OPA unveiled the first draft of our regular Performance Reports. These reports cover each of the service areas of the City's Strategic Plan. They provide the performance and quality measures that are expected of City departments, while assisting the Council and City management to make good, data-driven decisions about those services.

The **Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) also has a similar performance accountability system called iDashboard**. ACPS provides a consolidated dashboard of its key performance indicators to allow parents and community members easy access to this data.

While identifying and reporting the metrics to measure the services we provide is an important innovation, we have a long way to go. We must improve the quality of our data, increase the frequency of when it is reported, and use the data to make better decisions about how we allocate resources. I look forward to continued progress in this area.



Keeping Alexandrians Housed

When the crisis started at the beginning of March, there were just a bit over 2,000 Alexandria residents who were unemployed. **During the ensuing 14 weeks, nearly 14,750 Alexandrians have filed as unemployed.**

With this precipitous increase in unemployment throughout our City, our residents have been faced with challenges in paying their rent. While evictions had been deferred due to the closure of Virginia's courts, our residents who are out of work are incurring overdue rent, late fees and other expenses that will burden them even once they are able to go back to work. Starting last week, the General District Court in Alexandria is beginning to again hear these eviction cases.

Too many of our residents are facing the choice between complying with public health restrictions, and paying their rent.

While the City has a variety of housing relief programs that have been in place , many for decades, these efforts are insufficiently scaled or structured for this crisis.

To address the challenge we are facing in this time, the City has launched a new Emergency Rent Relief program .

For eligible residents, who have had their employment impacted by this crisis and meet eligibility requirements, the City is provided up to \$600/month, for up to 3 months to assist.

To further the assistance available, earlier this week, the Governor launched a state Rent and Mortgage Relief program for those residents who have been impacted economically.

This will not solve all of the economic challenges that are impacting our residents, but we are hoping it will help keep residents afloat during this time.



Getting Alexandria Back To Business

It is still too early to take stock of the full economic impact of COVID-19 and the resulting public health restrictions, but it is safe to say that Alexandria businesses have suffered a devastating blow.

Alexandria small businesses, particularly those in the service economy, employ many of our residents who live dangerously close to poverty. Supporting these businesses helps

us support our residents. In many cases, these residents are those who did not qualify for some of the Federal assistance that has been available recently.

Early in this crisis, the City **approved millions of dollars of tax deferrals** to provide Alexandria small businesses with the liquidity to assist them in surviving and later reopening.

We have worked with businesses to access Federal grants and lending. We have made a variety of regulatory changes to support the transition of our businesses to a "new normal."

As we now continue reopening, the City is awarding the grants from **the Alexandria Back to Business Grant Program**. This program, utilizing a portion of the City's Federal CARES Act funding, is providing grants to Alexandria businesses that have been impacted by COVID-19.

Over 300 businesses were awarded a total of \$3.5 million in grants that will be distributed over the next few days and weeks.

The grants, of up to \$20,000, are designed to support the investments that our businesses must make to adjust. Designed to fund the purchase of PPE, health and safety equipment, cleaning services, etc. Anything that helps ease a business' transition to this new environment will be considered for this program.

In addition to these financial and regulatory efforts, the City recently launched ALX Promise. This new program will recognize those businesses that have gone beyond the minimum standards to keep their customers and employees safe. Watch for the logo around our City!

Ultimately, Alexandria needs our small businesses to survive. While we cannot solve the economic dislocation caused by this crisis, we are working to help our businesses change and thrive.

New Transit To Serve Our City

Next month, the Board of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) will



decide whether to allocate **\$75 million to the City's Alexandria Duke Street Transitway** .

Transit Corridor B, as it was previously known, will be the final corridor implemented. With planning money awarded last year, the City will conduct community engagement later this year to update the decade-old plans for this transit service.

A little over a decade ago, the City adopted its latest **Transportation Master Plan** . At the time, the plan was a significant transition in that it shifted to a plan that prioritized transit.

We are now in the process of updating that 2008 Transportation Master Plan .

One of the most significant changes that came from the 2008 Master Plan was the designation of three transit corridors for high-capacity transit. The three corridors were Transit Corridor A, which was nominally north to south on Route 1 on the east end of the City, Transit Corridor B, which was intended as east to west on Duke Street and Transit Corridor C, which was north to south on the west end of the City using Van Dorn and Beauregard.

After the adoption of the 2008 Master Plan, **a community task force was assembled to provide some more details around the vision for each of the transit corridors** .

Transit Corridor A began service as "Metroway" over six years ago, and was the region's first bus rapid transit service, providing service to Potomac Yard and Crystal City, which further enhancements planned.

Transit Corridor C, now called the "West End Transitway" will be the next to come to reality. The West End Transitway has now been awarded **\$73 million of State and Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTa) funds** .

The slower pace of redevelopment in the Beauregard corridor will necessitate multiple phases to implement this project. With funding now in place (although not until 2024-2025), work begins to plan the implementation .

I represent the City on the **NVTa Board** and I Chair the **Planning and Programming**

Committee which recently recommended approval of the City' requested project.

High capacity transit provides our residents with alternatives to congestion and delay. I am optimistic that we will be able to bring these projects to reality.



Gun Safety

In the late 1990s the City of Alexandria had a ban in place on firearms being carried within public facilities (recreation centers, libraries, City Hall, etc). The administrative regulation survived court challenge in 1999.

Fearful that other jurisdictions would adopt similar legislation, **the General Assembly passed legislation during the 2002 General Assembly session that specifically prohibited the type of restriction that had been in place in Alexandria** . Unfortunately, the legislation was **signed into law** .

Fast forward 18 years, the General Assembly **enacted legislation restoring the authority of local governments to regulate firearms on public property** .

Last month, **the City Council enacted an ordinance to exercise this new authority** . That ordinance went into effect today.

I do not believe that firearms have a place in City facilities, except in the hands of our public safety personnel. I am appreciative that the General Assembly saw fit to give local government the authority to make these decisions in our local communities.

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