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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

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In This Month's Edition:

- **A Cleaner Potomac**
- **Time To Vote**
- **Early Childhood**
- **Virginia Tech**
- **Public/Private Partnerships**
- **Sanitary Sewers**
- **City Manager Hiring**
- **Flooding**
- **Next Campaign**



Quick Links

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Tomorrow morning, [Art on the Avenue](#) will return to Mount Vernon Avenue in [Del Ray](#). For the 26th year, one of the region's largest art festivals will bring people to our City to enjoy what makes our community great.

For a moment, we will have the normalcy that has eluded us for a year and a half. The return of this fall tradition will be a reminder of what awaits us as we put this pandemic behind us.

A few days ago, [Governor Ralph Northam](#) used part of his recurring pandemic updates to note that nearly [100% of Alexandrians aged 12 to 15 had](#)

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[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!

As of yesterday, 106,918 Alexandrians have received at least one vaccine dose, which is 75.1% of the eligible population of those 12 and older.

[Of those, 94,541 Alexandrians are now fully vaccinated.](#)

[ANYONE who is aged 12 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.](#)

Last week, the City began administering [third doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to residents who are 65 or older, have designated health risks or work in specific vulnerable careers.](#)

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

The pandemic makes flu vaccines all the more important, as they protect hospital capacity and protect vulnerable populations. Tomorrow, [the City will be hosting a free flu vaccine clinic at Hammond Middle School at 4646 Seminary Road.](#) Anyone who is 6 months or older can be vaccinated against the flu from 9:30 AM until 2 PM.

Along with nearly every other place in our country, the City experienced a recent spike in new cases, largely fueled by the Delta variant and those remaining unvaccinated residents. Fortunately, the spike was short-lived and the City's new infections have slowed, albeit not as much as we would like.

As a result, [the CDC has issued new guidance recommending masks be worn in indoor spaces in communities where transmission is high. That includes Alexandria.](#)

With our students back in our schools, [the Alexandria City Public Schools is publishing 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.](#)

While there has been much attention paid to the purported prevalence of "breakthrough" cases, it is important to focus on the data.

[As of a week ago, over 5 million Virginians have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Of those, 0.5% have developed a breakthrough COVID-19 infection. 0.021% have been hospitalized and 0.0054% have lost their life due to COVID-19. The vaccines work and they work quite well.](#)

[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 last month's Town Hall online and please join me at this link next Thursday 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.

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

Initiatives and Updates

A Cleaner Potomac River

[Yesterday, we celebrated the groundbreaking of the largest infrastructure project in Alexandria's history](#). For decades, the combination of stormwater and sanitary sewage has overwhelmed portions of the Combined Sewer System that serves a 540-acre area in Old Town.

This combination results in this mixture ending up in the Potomac River and other waterways. This will now end.

[Four years ago, the General Assembly enacted legislation that required the City to address remediation of our Combined Sewer System by July 1, 2025](#). With the recent commencement of construction activities at four separate sites, the City is on schedule to meet this mandate.

Almost a year ago, **[the Alexandria Renew Enterprises Board of Directors, the governing body of Alexandria's sewer authority, approved the issuance of \\$454.4 million contract to Traylor/Shea. This joint-venture will complete the final design and construct the tunnel network that will address overflows into the Potomac River from the combined sewer system that serves Old Town](#)**.

With remediation expected to require nearly a half billion dollars, the City requested funding from Commonwealth coffers to assist in this challenge. The City has now received over \$140 million of commitments from the Commonwealth thanks to the support of Governor Northam, and our General Assembly delegation, specifically Senator Saslaw.

Most recently, **[the Governor announced an additional allocation from the Commonwealth's American Rescue Plan dollars to support this project](#)**.

In June of 2018, **[City Council approved transferring the ownership of the four Combined Sewer outfalls to Alexandria Renew Enterprises](#)** to allow the City to

leverage their capacity and capabilities to address these issues.

At the end of that same month, [the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality approved a plan jointly prepared by the City and Alexandria Renew to meet the more stringent timeline](#) imposed by the General Assembly.

The City is now well on our way to meeting this new timeline.

[The construction work will occur primarily at 4 sites, the three outfall locations and the location of the Alexandria Renew treatment facility.](#)

The challenge of this project is significant. We certainly did not plan to rectify this outfall on the timetable that the Commonwealth dictated. Even with the timetable, Alexandria remains ahead of many jurisdictions around the nation on this issue and we will be the first in Virginia to remediate our Combined Sewer System. Stormwater planning and work coordinated with redevelopment activity has left us better situated than most.

This is a significant investment in the cleanliness of our water ways. As a community, we will need to be patient with this significant construction work, but the legacy of cleaner water will benefit generations to come.

Time To Vote

Early voting for our November election began last month. So far 1,011 voters have returned ballots by mail, 1,452 voters have voted in person, and an additional 6,811 voters have received ballots by mail but have not yet returned them.

On November 2nd, Alexandria voters will elect a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, members of the Virginia House of Delegates, Alexandria Mayor, Alexandria Sheriff, Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney, all six members of the Alexandria City Council and all 9 members of the Alexandria City School Board.

On Tuesday November 2nd, all City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM for the General Election.

[Sample ballots are now available for your review online.](#)

Last year, Virginia introduced "no-excuse" early voting, so voters have three choices to vote this November:

1. [You can request a ballot by mail online now.](#)
Ballots will be mailed out beginning on Friday

September 17th. The ballot can be mailed back or dropped 24/7 at the drop-box located in front of 132 N. Royal Street.

2. **You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office, Monday - Friday from 8 AM until 5 PM.** Saturdays, Sundays and evenings, as well as voting at Beatley Library (5005 Duke Street) **will be available later in October.**
3. You can vote in person **at your precinct** on the General Election day of November 2nd.

I'll see you at the polls!

Early Childhood Education

Over the past decade, we have reduced the number of Kindergartners that start in the Alexandria City Public Schools each year without any formal pre-Kindergarten educational experience. Alexandria has recognized the importance of early-childhood education to the success of our students. For those who continue to lack that experience, most will start out behind their peers on their first day in the classroom.

In the fiscal year that began 3 months ago, the City Council allocated funding that provided new services for 200 children aged from 3 to 5. But we also learned **that children remain on our waiting lists for early childhood services.** We were also reminded that we do not receive our full share of **Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI)** money from the Commonwealth. We leave this money on the table as we do not have space or matching funding for the children.

But even if new staffing could be funded, **early childhood education is facing a staffing crisis** around our region and the nation. The inability to attract and retain talent is threatening the capacity of public and private providers to offer and expand services.

In adopting the City's plan for allocation of the first tranche of funding from the American Rescue Plan, **the Council chose to reserve just under \$3 million to support a new effort to stabilize early childhood educational workforces.** This effort will make new investments in the workers supporting our early childhood providers to ensure they remain in their careers, better their skills and provide the critical educational services for our children.

We must work with both non-profit and for-profit entities to identify the gaps, build capacity, and ensure that every child starts ready to learn.

Virginia Tech Breaks Ground

Last month, Governor Ralph Northam, Dr. Timothy Sands, the President of Virginia Tech, and other distinguished guests returned to Alexandria to break ground on the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus!

You can watch the full ceremony on YouTube.

Almost three years 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 and our City at-large.

At the end of June of last year, 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. **A year ago, the Planning Commission and City Council provided the additional approvals necessary to bring this campus to reality.**

Virginia Tech's presence in Potomac Yard will define this area for generations to come. As such, the **Council voted unanimously a year ago to request the inclusion of "VT" as part of the official name of the future Potomac Yard Metro station.**

A year ago, Dr. Lance Collins, previously the Dean of Engineering at Cornell University, began 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.

Once onboard, Dr. Collins announced an impressive advisory board that will guide the institution's founding and he welcomed **the inaugural class.**

Earlier this year, **Boeing announced a \$50 million commitment to make the Innovation Campus the most diverse graduate technology campus in the country.**

As we work to ensure that our entire community benefits from this investment, **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.

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.

It was barely two years ago that **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, this exciting work continues.



Public/Private Partnerships

Politicians of nearly every stripe extol the virtues of "Public/Private Partnerships," sometimes called "P3" for short. While the partnerships come in many flavors, it usually involves the blending of private and public resources to achieve a community good.

Last month, the City Council unanimously adopted new guidelines that will govern how we consider both solicited and unsolicited public/private partnerships.

An amazing group of residents and organizations raised money to build the Miracle Field next to the Lee Recreation Center to help provide recreation opportunities for the special needs community.

Residents in Arlandria are continuing **to raise money to support Four Mile Run Park**, and have used private donations to create the park plaza that hosts the **Four Mile Farmers and Artisan Market** on recently acquired public space.

Residents and business leaders worked together to **raise significant resources to build the Alexandria Police Memorial.**

The Del Ray Citizens Association **came forward to sponsor some park improvements in the pocket park at the corner of Commonwealth and E. Del Ray Avenue**, which was renamed the Judy Lowe Memorial Park.

Residents and businesses have partnered to make improvements at **Ewald Park.**

Three years ago, **we dedicated a brand new playground at Brooks Elementary School.** The playground was the result of public money, donated

money, donated services and the support of non-profit organizations.

Four years ago, we dedicated a new teen center at Charles Houston Recreation Center. The center was the result of private fundraising, in-kind donations and countless volunteer hours.

At a different scale, the City's Waste-To-Energy facility is a large and enduring partnership with Arlington County and Covanta, a private entity.

Not every service can be provided in partnership with the private sector, but this new set of policies provides a framework for the orderly consideration of these types of arrangements.

Sanitary Sewer Master Plan

The most basic of infrastructure for our community is our sanitary sewer system. It is forgotten and ignored as long as it works.

Alexandria has 240 miles of sewers serving the entire City, which funnels wastewater primarily to Alexandria Renew Enterprises, but also to the Arlington County Water Pollution Control Plant for a small portion of the City.

To ensure that this basic infrastructure is sized and maintained for our future, the City recently conducted an update of our Sanitary Sewer Master Plan. This has resulted in an updated document for review.

This new plan provides for recommendations of specific areas of the system requiring new capacity over the next few decades, new maintenance efforts and proposals for how these investments are to be funded.

This plan will soon come to the City Council and we are certainly interested in any input that you might have.

City Manager Hiring Process

In June we learned that our City Manager, Mark Jinks, will be retiring at the end of the year. We will have the opportunity later this year to properly recognize Mark's dedicated and impactful service to our City, but at the moment this leaves a significant task before the City Council. We must make the most important personnel decision in City government: selecting our Chief Executive Officer.

Two months ago, the City Council formally launched a national search for our next City Manager and we want your input in this process. There is an online survey posted seeking feedback. Last week, the City

Council held a town-hall meeting to get input from residents on this important hiring process.

Our goal is to have a new City Manager selected later this year so that we may have an appropriate transition.

If you know the right person to help lead our City government through the incredible opportunities and challenges that face our community, please encourage them to apply prior to the September 17th deadline.

Flooding

Last month, the City welcomed Dr. Daniel Medina to our staff. Dr. Medina will serve as a matrixed leader to manage our flooding resilience program.

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

Earlier this year, the City Council unanimously adopted an **an ordinance to double our Stormwater Utility Fee**. to significantly increase the resources available for investments in our storm sewer infrastructure. 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 Stormwater Utility Fee revenue, paid by all property owners in the City (including non-taxable properties), will allow for an acceleration of major capacity projects and "spot improvements," an increase in channel maintenance, new "state-of-good repair" investments, property owner grants and new staffing in support of these projects and the system.

Recently enacted state legislation, sponsored by Senator Adam Ebbin at the City's request, gives the City the flexibility to use these resources to address all of the challenges facing our residents.

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

In addition to these locally-funded infrastructure initiatives, [the City Council voted in July to allocate \\$5.8 million of our American Rescue Plan funding to address maintenance and investment in our Storm Sewers.](#)

A month ago, the City launched [our new "Flood Mitigation Pilot Grant Program."](#) This new program will provide matching reimbursement grants to property owners making flood resiliency improvements. This is one of the components of our comprehensive approach to addressing the flooding that has impacted our community for decades.

The newly constituted [Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group](#) has begun meeting and will meet again next week. This new committee will help advise the Council and our staff as we work to implement our flood mitigation plans.

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.](#)

Alexandria spends a significant amount of money on infrastructure designed to manage water. [In May, the City Council approved a \\$2.6 billion, ten-year Capital Improvement Program.](#) Of that, over \$320.5 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 a billion dollars 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 10% 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 recently completed 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 it does not appear to have been done before, certainly not in recent memory.

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. I am pleased that the City has made these new investments. Now we must explore every option to accelerate this work.



New Campaign

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

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

In June, I again received the Democratic nomination and I will be on the ballot for re-election this November.

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

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