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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

September 1, 2020

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Usually at this time of year, we're marking the end of summer and celebrating the return of our students to school.

While our students are returning to school, it will be a school year like no other. Supporting our students during this time will require the work of all in our community.

The last month has also been one of mourning as well, as we lost two great Alexandrians.

[Bob Calhoun left us at the beginning of August after a lifetime of service to our](#)

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City. Serving two separate stints on the City Council and two terms in the Virginia State Senate, Bob left an indelible mark on our City and the Commonwealth.

Bob had a quick wit and an encyclopedic knowledge of Virginia and the way that policy is made. We will miss his passion for public service.

We also lost Kevin Beekman, a champion of Arlandria and tireless community volunteer. Kevin was a quiet force in our City, creating the Four Mile Run Farmers and Artisans Market, improving Four Mile Run Park, and advocating for safer streets as a member of the City's Traffic and Parking Board.

For those who have read this newsletter regularly, Kevin was a key member of my editing team, reviewing my drafts faithfully each month, offering good advice and protecting me from my own mistakes.

Losing both Bob and Kevin will leave large voids in our community.

Five months ago, when I wrote you, 44 of our neighbors had tested positive for COVID-19.

Four months ago, we were up to 754 having tested positive.

Three months ago, 1,974 Alexandrians had tested positive.

Two months ago, 2,325 Alexandrians had tested positive.

Last month, 2,798 Alexandrians have tested positive.

As of yesterday, 3,378 Alexandrians have tested positive for this virus since the pandemic first reached our City.

Sadly, 62 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 4.5% yesterday (below the WHO recommended criteria). That is now the lowest rate in Northern Virginia.**
- **We have launched a new targeted testing initiative in partnership with Neighborhood Health to continue to identify new infections and ensure treatment for those infected.**
- **Last month the Commonwealth released the free COVIDWISE exposure notification app for iOS and Android devices. Download it today!**
- **While no vaccine is yet available, last month the Alexandria Health Department published the framework plan for vaccine distribution**

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. Two months ago, the entire Commonwealth entered Phase 3 and we remain in that phase.

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 maintain the public health precautions. That means continued social distancing, masks, frequent hand washing, staying home when ill and avoiding crowds.

While the Governor's existing Executive Order requires face coverings in all public spaces, the City Council will be

considering an ordinance this month that would extend that requirement to outdoor areas (where social distancing is not possible) as well. Testimony on this ordinance will be taken at our public hearing on Saturday September 12th beginning at 9:30 AM.

In July, I had the opportunity to appear on PBS NewsHour to discuss our City's efforts more comprehensively.

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.

I am now doing 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 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

School Construction

Tonight, **Alexandria's Planning Commission will be considering approval of land-use applications to allow a rebuild of Douglas MacArthur Elementary School.**

The school, on Janney's Lane, was originally built in 1943 to accommodate the children of employees supporting the war effort. The school has an approximate capacity of 558 students, with over 650 enrolled today.

The proposal before the Planning Commission this evening, and the City Council later this month will increase that capacity to 850 students.

Last year, **the City Council unanimously approved land-use modifications to allow the old Patrick Henry Elementary School building to be temporarily used as "swing-space"** to facilitate the rebuild of Douglas MacArthur Elementary School.

The MacArthur project is the latest effort to address the significant enrollment growth that we have seen in our schools.

Assuming the Planning Commission makes a recommendation this evening, this application will come before the City Council at our Public Hearing on Saturday September 12th.

In addition to the approval of the rebuild of MacArthur, the Planning Commission will also be considering **a Zoning Text Amendment that will allow for increases in the density of our public school buildings around our City.** The proposal will modify the process for an increase in the **Floor Area Ratio (FAR)** for these buildings. Today, three of our schools already violate the current FAR requirements on their sites. Several others would violate the FAR if they were expanded, including MacArthur. This text amendment is intended

as both a clean-up effort, but also to set the zoning expectations as ACPS proceeds with school construction work in the future.

Last fall, 16,062 students started in the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). That constitutes a 2% increase from the previous year or about 325 additional students.

Last year was the thirteenth straight year of enrollment growth. During that period, ACPS has added over 5,000 students.

The last time we had this **many children attending our schools was nearly 50 years ago in the early 1970s.**

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

The City's approved 10-year capital improvement program for the Alexandria City Public Schools includes \$530 million over the next decade. This provides the funding for both new and renovated facilities, as well as non-capacity infrastructure investments. Only 7 years ago, **the 10 year capital improvement program for our Schools was less than half as much at \$203 million.**

The financial impact of COVID-19 has caused the City to delay the execution of many capital projects, including the rebuild of Minnie Howard School. Yet, I am optimistic that we will retain our commitment to these important investments in the aftermath of the pandemic.

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

The School Board Chair and Vice Chair at the time, the Mayor at the time, and I joined a

group of community members and staff to steer the effort.

We also worked to understand where the enrollment is coming from. For example, we learned that low-rise apartments generate nearly three times the students as high-rise or mid-rise apartments do. We learned that single family homes generate nearly double the students as townhouses. We know that public housing and other income-restricted units far outpace any other property type for student generation.

We now know that housing units built over 30 years ago account for four times the student generation as those built in the past 30 years.

These data points remind us of the need to address this enrollment growth head-on.

In June of 2015, the City Council and the School Board adopted the **Joint Long Range Educational Facilities Plan**. The Plan is the culmination of the group's work in conjunction with the efforts of both ACPS and City staff. The Plan looks at each elementary school building in the City, assesses the facility's educational adequacy, and provides a roadmap for increasing capacity and addressing deficiencies.

Two years ago, the Council and School adopted phase two of this effort, **planning for additional capacity at the high school level and in pre-school.**

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

It can be perilous to overreact to one year of enrollment growth. Yet after more than a decade of growth, it is clear that this is our "new normal." While the enrollment growth does present a costly challenge for the City and its taxpayers, it is a good challenge to have.

Supporting Small Businesses

Any new small business owner is taking an enormous risk. They are betting their resources on the future success of an idea. It's a risk that our system relies on. It results in businesses that provide products and services that enrich our lives. It supports tax revenue that eases the burden on residential taxpayers. For individuals, it provides careers.

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have reminded us not only of the importance of our City's consumption-based revenues, but also of the incredible vulnerability these small businesses operate under, even under the best of circumstances.

In government, we have an obligation to provide a regulatory process that is efficient, predictable, and expedient. Sometimes our existing processes fall short of that mark. Throughout my tenure on Council, I have worked to improve processes to make Alexandria the best place for small business in our region.

Tonight the Alexandria Planning Commission will be considering a comprehensive package of reforms that will streamline the ability of new businesses to open up and begin their sales. Assuming the Commission makes a recommendation on this matter this evening, this package will come to the City Council on Saturday September 12th for final passage.

The new package of reforms proposed would significantly accelerate the process of approval for:

- Restaurants
- Outdoor dining areas
- Daycare centers
- Outdoor food and crafts markets
- Health and athletic clubs
- Food and beverage production
- Amusement enterprises
- Convenience stores
- Social Service uses
- Home occupations

In June of 2016, by a vote of 6-1, the City Council took a significant step in improving the process that businesses must go through to get started in Alexandria.

The changes adopted four years ago impacted many areas. They created additional areas eligible for Administrative Special Use Permits, and reduced the number of applications that require any kind of Special Use Permit.

Many new businesses seeking to operate in Alexandria require a Special Use Permit by virtue of the zoning of the property they have chosen. Our zoning code allows certain uses in many zones but only under special conditions.

A normal Special Use Permit first undergoes a thorough review by our City Staff. The City Staff then makes a recommendation to the City's Planning Commission. The Planning Commission ultimately makes a recommendation to the City Council.

At any step in that process, the application can become bogged down, can be substantially modified, or rejected. It is an unpredictable process that introduces both cost and uncertainty to a nascent small business who can rarely avoid either.

Two years ago, Council took another significant step in improving the processes for these small businesses. Over 40% of the Special Use Permits heard by Planning Commission and City Council had been when a business requires a parking reduction, a request to reduce off-street parking requirements.

Up until two years ago, the City's commercial parking standards were based on legislation adopted in 1963. These standards apply when a new business seeks to operate in an existing space and when a landowner seeks to build new commercial space. For new development they provide for how many off-street spaces must be created and for a new business in an existing space, they provide for how many off-street spaces must be found.

The City Council and Planning Commission have routinely adopted deviations from these standards to eliminate the need of newly opening small businesses to provide off-street parking that in most of our business corridors simply does not exist. Yet the process of making that request is time-consuming and uncertain.

Upon the recommendation of a community task force, the City Council voted 6-1 to approve new parking standards for commercial properties. These new standards streamline the process for new businesses to open and facilitate shared parking arrangements. These new standards are also more realistic and reflect the amount of parking actually needed for businesses.

Over the years, City government has worked to make changes to our processes to support small business growth.

In 2003, the City Council pioneered the use of administrative special use permits as part of the approval of the Arlandria Plan. Under the Administrative Special Use Permits, the staff can apply defined criteria and provide a new business with permission to operate (if it operates under a pre-approved set of restrictions), avoiding the necessity for hearing before the Planning Commission and City Council.

Over a decade ago, the City created the Small Business Task Force, which recommended expansion of the Administrative Special Use Permit process.

In 2008, the City Council approved a package of reforms to further ease the impacts on new small businesses. In 2010, the Council approved a separate package of additional reforms.

In 2009 the City opened the Multi-Agency Permit Center to streamline permitting for new businesses and residents alike.

Every day of delay is money for a new business. These new changes will help our small businesses be successful in Alexandria, during this pandemic and beyond. I look forward to continuing our efforts to ensure that small business can thrive in our community.

Flooding In Alexandria

In 2011, the City's flood zone maps were last updated, expanding the flood zones in Old Town, Rosemont and Arlandria. The expansion of these zones extended the number of property owners required to purchase

policies from the Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as a condition of their mortgage.

Every property owner is eligible to purchase **FEMA Flood Insurance**. While it is only required for those in higher-risk areas, given the unpredictability of flooding, the purchase of flood insurance is recommended.

The City participates in the NFIP Community Rating System (CRS). This program allows localities to be certified based on flood plain management practices. The lower the score a community receives, the larger the discount received by property owners who purchase flood insurance. **In 2013, the City became the first community in the Commonwealth of Virginia to receive a CRS score as low as 6.** That entitles Alexandria property owners to a 20% discount when purchasing flood insurance, the highest discount level of any locality in Virginia.

FEMA has now undertaken a new update of the City's flood maps. Later this month, draft flood maps for consideration will be released and there will be a process to accept community input. Once finalized, the new maps are expected to go into effect in 2022.

While flood insurance policies can help prevent financial ruin when property owners are faced with severe flood events, infrastructure (**both "grey" and "green"**) investment can also mitigate the impact of severe flooding events.

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.

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

Together, nearly \$750 million is planned for water investments. This spending dwarfs planned investments in schools, transportation and other major priorities.

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

In June of 2018, **property owners in Alexandria paid a Stormwater Utility Fee for the first time ever.**

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

The current stormwater utility fee is projected to bring in \$11.3 million this year, and \$200 million over the decade (assuming modest, regular increases). Those revenues will support \$101 million of capital projects over the next decade, including:

- \$51 million for water quality infrastructure initiatives required under our MS4 Permit
- \$19.3 million for stormwater capacity improvements
- \$5 million for stream and channel maintenance

Some of the specific problem areas that now have identified stormwater projects are:

- Carlisle Drive Alley
- Founders Park
- Key Drive (Unnamed Tributary channel wall)
- Lloyd's Lane
- Loyola Street
- Oakland Terrace (Timber Branch channel wall)
- Saylor Place
- W. Alexandria Alley

The City recently completed two major stormwater projects, the **Lake Cook Stormwater Management Retrofit Project** and the **Ben Brenman Pond Stormwater Management Retrofit Project**. Both projects received funding from the **Commonwealth's Stormwater Local Assistance Fund**. Completion of these projects have placed the City ahead of schedule in meeting our regulatory goals.

For over 3 decades, **Alexandria has designed and planned for our storm sewer system to withstand a "10-year" storm event.** A storm that is expected to have a 10% chance of happening every year, is the designed capacity of our system.

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

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 property impacts.

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

Property Conversions

In the shadow of the ongoing pandemic, the City is facing an economic crisis without recent precedent. While the City continues to address the public health crisis, the human crisis and the economic crisis, we must also turn some of our attention to what is next: defining the region's recovery.

One area of our economy that will likely never be the same is our commercial real estate market. **Today, nearly 27% of the City's overall revenues are derived from the real estate tax that is imposed on commercial properties.** The impacts of COVID-19 on the consumption of vacant commercial real estate, office and retail specifically, will be devastating in the short-term and possibly transformative in the long-term.

With a 16.2% office vacancy rate in the City, this was already an area of concern for us prior to the pandemic. Since January of 2010 exactly one (there is a second coming soon) new Class A office building has been delivered in the City of Alexandria without the City's financial participation (either through tax incentive or discounted financing).

While nowhere near as severe, over a decade ago, we were facing a similar inflection point for our City's economy.

With job growth stalled and commercial development lagging, an ever-growing burden of the cost of government was falling upon our residential taxpayers; a phenomenon that continues to this day.

Back then the City convened the Mayor's Economic Sustainability Work Group comprised of deeply experienced City residents to chart a new path to sustained economic growth. **The group provided a detailed report whose recommendations have become a checklist of policy reforms for the City to pursue.** In many policy areas,

the recommendations reflected conventional wisdom. In some policy areas, they became conventional wisdom.

One such area related to the relative benefits of commercial development versus residential development. The report enshrined a desire to return to "50/50" balance in our tax base between residential and commercial properties. The report warned against further conversion of commercial properties to residential uses. It even urged that the City explore ways to modify existing zoning to remove residential development rights to ensure that only commercial development occurred.

There is no question that commercial development provides a rich return for the taxpayers of this City. City **analysis shows that all commercial property uses provide a net positive return.**

For every dollar of tax revenue from a new hotel in the City, only 7 cents is required to provide services to that hotel. For every dollar of tax revenue from an office use, only 12 cents is required for services to that office use.

This benefit has become ingrained as orthodoxy for most in our City. Conversely it is also accepted as settled fact that residential development provides a net loss for the taxpayers.

Yet, is that true?

Even before COVID, with office demand significantly diminished and residential demand still strong and durable, the pressure for landowners to forgo riskier commercial development and focus on residential development is strong.

To examine the issue, the City and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership studied several office to residential conversions to determine how the taxpayers fared in the aftermath.

The results of the study reversed several of the conclusions from a decade ago.

The Oronoco, **now a multi-family building on the City's waterfront was an office building when it was sold and converted to residential.** Sold for \$21 million, the

property was assessed at \$126 million two years ago, after the conversion, more than covering any additional services required for the residents.

An office building at 4501 Ford Avenue on the West End had sat vacant for the better part of decade. **It was converted to a residential "live/work" concept.** It was assessed at \$20 million prior to the conversion. It is now assessed at \$64 million.

The data shows us that on the average for every tax dollar received from multi-family development, 38 cents is required to provide services. This estimate aligns very closely with our student generation rates, Whether children attend school from a property is a major determinant of the financial return.

So where does this analysis leave us? This is arguably one of the most important land-use questions the City faces. Should the City allow commercially zoned property to remain underutilized or completely unused for decades, or pursue possible conversions to residential to ensure near-term economic growth?

For me, I believe that this data shows that the City must be discerning. All residential development is not a net loser for the City taxpayers, but conversely, all of it is not a net winner.

We must continue to promote commercial development in areas that can support new development and redevelopment. Yet as we hopefully transition to a post-COVID world, it is reasonable to expect that our commercial property base will look radically different. Residential conversion is an option to address stubborn office vacancy, address a housing shortage and done properly, it can help the City transition our economy in the future.

Let me know your thoughts on this important issue.

City Finances After COVID

The budget that the City Council adopted in the Spring was the tenth budget I have been a part of as a member of City Council. Our budget process typically begins in February with the City Manager's

presentation. It is a furious process with weekly budget work sessions, significant public input and an occasionally difficult process of negotiating what is "in," and what is "out."

This year's process was like none other.

In February, the City Manager presented his proposed Fiscal Year 2021 Operating budget and the 10-year Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Year 2021 - Fiscal Year 2030.

In March, we started over. The City Manager delivered revised revenue estimates that reflected the estimated impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the City revenues and expenditures.

The damage that the outbreak left on the City's FY 2020 budget was sadly a preview for what was in store. For the previous fiscal year which ended June 30th, the City was heading towards an expected surplus of \$5 million - \$10 million. The revised estimates projected us to have a SHORTFALL of \$35 million. This is a financial calamity without precedent in our City's history.

That the City was able to make adjustments to this extraordinary degradation of revenue without devastating reductions to services at this point is a testament to decades of conservative budgeting practices. The requirements that support the City's AAA/Aaa bond ratings ensure ample reserves, and a capital budget supported by healthy amounts of current year budget support. It is those elements that have proven vital during this time.

To conclude the last fiscal year in balance, the City Manager instituted emergency measures, including:

- Hiring Freeze
- Reduction of discretionary operating costs
- Reduction/freeze of pending capital projects
- Draw-down on contingency funds

Those measures sustained the City through the year, but revisions to the proposed Fiscal Year 2021 budget and the Fiscal Year 2021 - 2030 Capital Improvement Program were also required.

The City Manager then presented **a second version of the proposed budget**. Given the level of revenue deterioration, the changes in the proposed budget are significant. These changes include:

- Removal of the proposed 2-cent real estate tax rate increase and deferral of the proposed capital investments
- Removal of all proposed salary adjustments to City employees (pay freeze)
- Reduction of the proposed operating budget transfer to the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) by \$7.4 million
- Removal of nearly every single proposed new expenditure
- Deferral of numerous capital projects, including the ACPS rebuild of Minnie Howard School and the waterfront flood mitigation work

The scale of the reductions required dwarf what was required during the Great Recession or the period after 9/11. While we have now adopted the FY 2021 budget, the impacts of the economic dislocation from the pandemic will shape FY 2022 and beyond.

With the receipt of our financial report in June, we were able to see some early indications of the damage our economy has suffered:

- March 2019 meals tax collections were \$2.2 million. March 2020 meals tax collections were \$755,491.
- March 2019 transient lodging (hotel) tax collections were \$1.3 million. March 2020 transient lodging tax collection were \$450,884.

While the impacts of this outbreak are presently being felt on the consumption portion of the City's revenues (Dining tax, Sales Tax, Business, Professional, and Occupational License {BPOL} and Transient Lodging Tax), these challenges will eventually impact the City's real estate tax base, which is decisive for the City's financial fortunes.

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

Two months ago, as we were on track to fully expend the \$13.9 million that the City

received, **I wrote to urge the quick release of the second tranche of funding.** I am pleased that last month, **the Governor announced the allocation of that money** to address the significant need that remains.

Next week, the City Council will be discussing how to allocate the second tranche of this money.

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 received \$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 and second tranches.

In addition to expenses of City government to respond to the crisis, the City has fully obligated our initial allocation of the funds 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 is very much out of sync with the **current legislation circulating from the Majority in 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.

Get Your Ballot For November

On September 18th, voting will begin for this November's election. You may now **apply online to receive a ballot in the mail.** Voters



who submit a request now for a ballot by mail will receive that ballot shortly after the 18th of September.

For the first time in Virginia history, this November's election will be conducted with "no-excuse" absentee voting available.

While past elections required voters to identify a reason that they could not vote in-person on Election Day, **thanks to legislation patroned by Delegate Charniele Herring, enacted during this year's General Assembly,** that is no longer required.

The upcoming election will select our next President, United States Senator, Member of the United States House of Representatives and make a decision on two proposed amendments to the Virginia Constitution. This election will occur in the face of an unprecedented pandemic.

Our General Registrar's Office and Electoral Board are working to plan for our November elections.

To ensure that voters remain safe, voting by mail is strongly encouraged for this election. Already, over 20,000 Alexandrians have requested ballot by mail. This is more than the total voters who voted absentee by mail and in-person in 2016!

The ballots received by mail can be returned by mail or brought in person back to the General Registrar's office at 132 N. Royal Street.

As we speak, the General Assembly is working to advance legislation that would allow localities to set up ballot drop-boxes to return mail ballots, but that has not been finalized as of yet.

In addition to mail ballots, Alexandria's General Registrar will make available early-voting from four locations beginning in September.

Beginning on September 18th, early voting is available at 132 N. Royal Street (next to City Hall) during business hours, Monday through Friday, from 8 AM until 5 PM.

Beginning in October, there will be extended and weekend hours at the 132 N.

Royal Street location, as well as hours at Beatley Library (5005 Duke Street), Minnie Howard School (3801 W. Braddock Road) and George Washington Middle School (1005 Mount Vernon Avenue).

Thanks for making sure your voice is heard in this very important election.

School Reopening

In a season of many tragedies and loss, the loss of a considerable amount of education for our children has been particularly frustrating. Children should be in school learning. Watching some students miss the traditional senior year of high school and others miss the beginning of Kindergarten is a loss that can never be replaced.

Educational policymakers around our nation are in an impossible situation as they attempt to provide a first-class education to our students against the backdrop of an extraordinary pandemic.

Last month, the Alexandria School Board adopted the proposal of Superintendent Dr. Gregory Hutchings to begin the 2020-2021 school year with a "VirtualPlus+" model.

This model provides for virtual education in our schools for the first quarter. At that time, the plan will be evaluated and determine whether a transition to hybrid and eventually in-person education is possible.

For students with disabilities, this proposal suggests returning to in-person instruction at the end of this month or early October.

For our students and families, our schools serve many important functions beyond educational instruction. They provide child-care, food and nutrition services, health care services, transportation and more. The pandemic has forced a disaggregation of how we provide school. Filling the gaps has required difficult choices and partnerships with various public agencies, non-profits and private providers.

As part of the VirtualPlus+ plan, there will be school-day care available for students from various providers. **APCS has provided a list of available alternatives** and the City's

Department of **Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities** has also providing **detailing of their programmatic offerings.**

While the decision to close schools in March 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," that was issued three months ago 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.**

I recognize there are stark realities presented by virtual education. Many of our students cannot learn virtually. Students will fall behind academically, socially and emotionally. Some of our more vulnerable students (lower-income, special education, limited language proficiency, etc) are in an even more precarious situation. I don't believe you will find anyone involved in educational policy-making right now who believes this is optimal.

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.

With the endorsement of the Superintendent's proposal, the work of supporting our families is not solely the work of ACPS. The City government, our non-profit partners and our community will need to collaborate to provide the critical services our students and their families require during this time. While the conditions are clearly sub-optimal, we owe it to our students to support every student during this extraordinary time in their lives.

Flu Shot Clinics

Whether you get a flu shot every year or you have never gotten one before, this is the year to get a flu shot.

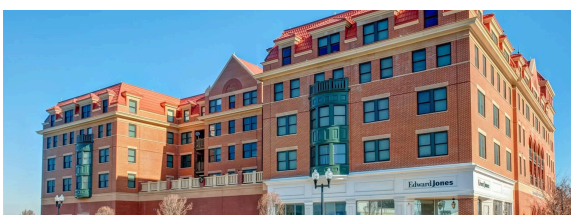
Getting a flu shot this year not only protects you from the flu, but also frees up healthcare capacity and helps others in your community.

To make it easy, the Alexandria Health Department will be hosting two free flu shot clinics.

On Saturday September 26th, from 9 AM until 3 PM, a drive-through clinic will be hosted at T. C. Williams High School. Access the school via Quaker Lane (not King Street). Individuals will be served only in vehicles, with a maximum of 4 persons per vehicle. For this clinic, patients must be age 12 or older.

On Saturday October 3rd, the second clinic event will be held at Hammond Middle School from 9 AM until 3 PM. This event will be walk-in only and will serve patients 6 months and older.

Both events are expected to be quite popular, so please arrive early and wear face coverings at either event.



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 23 weeks, nearly 19,000 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. **While the moratorium was briefly lifted, it is now back in place for a few more days.**

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 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 providing up to \$600/month, for up to 3 months to assist.

To further the assistance available, last month, **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.

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