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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

September 1, 2022

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On Monday, a little over 15,000 students began their second week of school in the Alexandria City Public Schools (the students at Samuel Tucker Elementary began their second month of school).

For the first time in a long-time, the return to school was almost "normal." For the sake of our kids and their success, we should be grateful for that.

I wish our students, our educators and support staff a fabulous school year full of success and accomplishment.

[Starting today, Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt becomes the Interim Superintendent of](#)

[Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection](#)
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[our schools](#). I have had the opportunity to chat with Dr. Kay-Wyatt and I look forward to working with her during this season of change in our division.

Next Sunday, September 11th, is the 21st anniversary of the terrorist attacks on our nation. As a community, we come together to remember those we lost that fateful morning, the heroic acts of public servants and everyday heroes, and ensure that the unity of that time is still possible.

[Please join us in Market Square at 10 AM on the 11th to commemorate this part of our nation and our community's history.](#)

[The City is continuing to respond to the spread of the Monkeypox \(MPV\) virus.](#) While the virus remains [quite rare](#) in Virginia, anyone who has come into contact with an infected individual can become infected. In the Commonwealth, there have been 325 cases so far, with 47 of those cases here in Alexandria.

The Alexandria Health Department is now working to vaccinate those who meet the [current eligibility criteria](#) against the Monkeypox virus. [If you are interested in getting vaccinated, you can sign-up online.](#)

We continue to work to vaccinate every resident in our City to protect against COVID-19. [ANYONE who is aged 6 months or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.](#)

Starting in June, vaccinations became available for the youngest children.

If you are 5 or older and received the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna or the single dose of Johnson & Johnson you are eligible for a booster dose.

[For those 50 or older, or immunocompromised, you are now eligible for a second booster if you are more than 4 months since your last one.](#)

Additionally, if you received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and booster over 4 months ago, you may now receive a booster of either Moderna or Pfizer.

For more information or to sign-up for a booster dose, [please head to our vaccine website](#).

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

COVID testing is [widely available throughout our City](#). Additionally, if you have not requested your free at-home test kits from the Federal government, [you can request it online today](#). Tomorrow is the last day that you can order these free tests.

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.

Later this month, I am bringing back my "Running Town Hall" meetings. In partnership with the great folks at [Pacers Alexandria](#), we will be hosting an opportunity to lace up your running shoes, talk about the issues facing our community and get a little exercise at the same time.

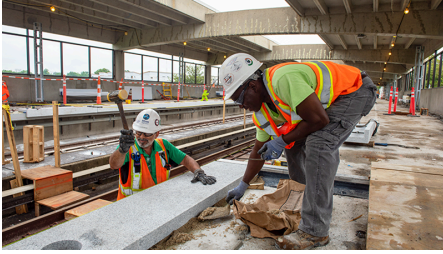
Join us on Thursday September 22nd at 6:30 PM at 1301 King Street. I look forward to running with you!

After two years of doing virtual town-hall meetings, including weekly sessions during most of 2020, I am moving back to in-person, "Living Room Town Hall" meetings. If you would like to host a town hall in your neighborhood, [please drop me a line](#) and we'll get it on the calendar!

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

Initiatives and Updates

Metro Rail Work Begins Soon



In a week and a half, the Metro Rail stations that serve Alexandria will again be cut off from the rest of the system.

In June, the [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority \(WMATA\)](#) released their plan for travel alternatives during the extensive Yellow and Blue Line work that is planned to begin on September 10th. As anticipated, this plan includes new free shuttle routes and reduced Blue Line headways. [The Virginia Railway Express has also announced that its service will be free in September and October for trips to and from Alexandria.](#) The City has also worked to supplement these options with [free Capital Bike Share and expanded water taxi service.](#)

The first phase of this shutdown is one that we expected and eagerly anticipated. In order to connect the newly-constructed Potomac Yard Metro Station, rail service south of the National Airport station will need to be shutdown for 6 weeks from September 10th until October 22nd.

The second impact was not anticipated. The rehabilitation of the Yellow Line bridge and the adjacent tunnels, will require a shutdown of the bridge for 8 months, also beginning on September 10th.

These closures will again cut Alexandria off from the rest of the system and significantly impact Alexandria transit riders at a time when the City and its regional partners will be working to bring our residents back to transit.

In May, representatives from WMATA attended our City Council meeting to discuss the ongoing planning for the upcoming shutdown. [You can watch the discussion online](#) or [view the slides from the presentation.](#)

After the May meeting, [I wrote to WMATA Interim General Manager Andrew Off](#) detailing the City's requests for mitigation, as well as reiterating the City's position that this major infrastructure work cannot occur unless WMATA has completed their [work to bring the 7000 series cars back into service.](#) Recent [lapses by WMATA](#) have only affirmed this position.

Three years ago, Alexandria's Metro Rail stations reopened after a difficult summer of platform improvement work cut the City off from the rest of the system. [We spent part of a September 2019 City Council meeting looking back at the mitigations that we had put in place and how they had fared.](#)

It was a challenging period for our City, its residents, our visitors, and our businesses and their employees.

With a year of planning and regional collaboration, we were able to throw nearly everything we had at the shutdown.

While riders settled into new, slower routines, there were still challenges that impacted our City. The shuttle buses had issues with capacity and traffic flow. Some Metro Bus and DASH routes had similar problems as well. Traffic impacts exacerbated existing congestion. Some businesses saw reductions in revenue.

Fortunately, we know what works. In 2019, the City worked closely with WMATA, DASH and other regional partners to ensure that the shutdown did not become a disaster for our residents and our businesses. We must again do the same.

The work to restore Metro back to the level required to support this region continues. In the short-term, additional sacrifice will be required. As a regular Metro rider myself, I know the service challenges first-hand.

With new leadership and major infrastructure investment, I am optimistic that these efforts will result in a more reliable system for Alexandria and the entire region.



Car Tax Relief

Last month, [a little over 100,000 Alexandria vehicle owners received bills for their 2022 Vehicle Personal Property Tax](#). Under normal circumstances, the valuations of vehicles do not increase. In 2018 and 2019, only about 1% of Alexandria's registered vehicles increased in value.

Yet, [the pandemic has caused chaos in the used car market place](#). Last year, many Alexandrians saw increases in the value of their cars. This year, this phenomenon continued, as the City Manager's proposed budget assumed an 8.5% increase in revenues.

Instead, [vehicle values are increasing by an average of 26% for 87% of vehicles in the City](#). This is extraordinary.

To protect taxpayers, the City Council approved a proposal for one-time relief for vehicle owners.

The approved relief package:

- Assesses only 78.8% of the Fair Market Value of vehicles (based on NADA clean trade-in value as of January 1, 2022)
- Provides no 2022 tax for vehicles assessed at \$5,000 or less, and lesser amounts of relief for

cars valued higher. About 32,000 vehicles owners receive a tax bill for \$0 as a result of this relief.

This package provides all vehicle owners with tax relief, while reserving the greatest relief to vehicles with the lowest valuations.

Alexandria's second-largest General Fund revenue is the vehicle personal property tax. As a local tax assessed on vehicle owners annually, based on an assessed value, there is perhaps no tax more hated in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In 1998, the Virginia General Assembly adopted the Personal Property Tax Relief Act, which was to begin a process of phasing out the tax altogether, by providing an ever-growing appropriation of state money to local governments until the tax was eliminated.

When state revenues did not materialize in the way the Commonwealth had anticipated, the appropriations to local government were capped and the tax remained in place, albeit at a much lower level. Today, Alexandria receives an annual appropriation of \$23.5 million from the Commonwealth. In our Fiscal Year 2021, we collected \$36.5 million from vehicle owners, to provide for a total of \$60 million of total General Fund revenue.

Almost 15 years ago, during my first stint on the City Council, I proposed that the City consider eliminating the windshield decal used to enforce payment of the vehicle Personal Property Tax.

In 2019, the City Council voted unanimously to finally end the requirement to display the decal.

Later, the City Council eliminated the Vehicle Registration Fee (formerly the "decal fee"). That fee had been \$33 and brought in \$3.85 million of revenue to the City before it was eliminated.

We are hopeful that the used car market will get back to normal next year.



Broadband Competition

Almost 9 years ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to help bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.

It has taken far too long, but the City is finally on the verge of creating a truly competitive marketplace and bringing new broadband capacity to our community.

In January, the City announced that we have received four proposals from vendors seeking to

offer competitive broadband services for our community.

The four bidders who responded to this solicitation were:

- **Lumos Telephone LLC**
- **NATC Tower Company**
- **Shenandoah Cable Television, LLC (Shentel)**
- **Ting Fiber, Inc.**

In March, the City Council **unanimously advanced franchise agreements with two of the firms, Ting and Lumos.** While we issued franchise agreements to both companies, ultimately Ting is the only company that is moving ahead at this time. **Ting is now accepting pre-orders for their services.**

Separate from this process, **Verizon began conversion of their existing copper infrastructure to fiber optic cable in some areas of our City. With the completion of this work, they will begin offering Verizon FIOS internet service along with their landline phone service.**

Last year, City Council gathered on Eisenhower Avenue to have a **formal groundbreaking for the build of our municipal fiber network.** Construction is **now occurring at numerous locations in the City.**

Over a year ago, the City issued a revised solicitation to select a vendor to construct a municipal fiber network to serve City and School facilities around our community. Earlier last year, **a contract was awarded to Jones Utilities Construction, Inc to perform this work.**

Over 8 years ago, the City issued a Request for Information (RFI). This RFI solicited concepts from the private sector for partnership with the City in expanding broadband options, availability, and capabilities. We received 10 responses from potential private partners and those responses shaped the approach the City is now taking.

For years, Alexandria has sought new private investment in broadband infrastructure. For most of our residents, we have one company providing Internet connectivity and television. Regardless of the performance of incumbent providers, technological innovation and reliability thrives on competition.

This is an issue that impacts not only residents but also our businesses and the ability of our community to attract new investment.

Concurrent with the FY 2017 budget process, the City completed the **initial financial estimates for the first**

phase of the infrastructure build-out . The plan is designed to replace the City's existing connectivity agreement for City facilities with a City-owned fiber network.

By **leveraging E-Rate funding from the FCC**, achieving operating savings from the costs of the existing agreement, and the potential for private leases of our infrastructure, the effort may be able to pay for itself.

One of the core components of the original proposal I made was that the City **adopt a "Dig Once" policy**. Essentially that's a policy that makes the City more efficient by leveraging existing underground infrastructure work to add conduit and other infrastructure at the same time. With hundreds of millions of dollars of sewer and transportation work scheduled over the next decade, we should sequence and combine that work to be the most efficient.

Competition is coming! This is the best chance we have had to leverage our assets to bring new broadband services to our residents and businesses.



Stream Restorations

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

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

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

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

In order to meet the City's obligations under the Federal Clean Water Act and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, the City holds an MS4 Permit (Municipal Separate

Storm Sewer System). **The permit, issued by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, imposes a "pollution diet" on the City.** We are in the second 5-year permit cycle that will culminate in reaching our portion of the TMDL.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The City was more recently awarded SLAF funding for three other projects. **The EPA has advanced stream restoration as a technique for the reduction of pollutants in the Bay.** This technique involves repairing the human impacts on streams, with the goal of restoring these streams back to their natural states.

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

The Lucky Run Stream Restoration project received \$668,000 of SLAF funding and proposes to enhance the stream, re-introduce native plants, and improve the aesthetics of this area located in the shadow of

Interstate 395 on the West End. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2017. [More information was presented to the community at a meeting in 2019.](#)

[The Strawberry Run Stream Restoration](#) project received \$800,000 of SLAF funding and proposes making natural stream restoration improvements in an area bounded by Fort Williams Parkway, Taft Avenue and Duke Street. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2018.

[The Taylor Run Stream Restoration](#) has received \$2.55 million of SLAF funding and proposes restoring the natural stream-bed and repairing a threatened sanitary sewer connection in an area near the Chinquapin Recreation Center. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2018. [At the end of January 2021, a community meeting was held to review changes and solicit community feedback.](#)

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

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

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

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

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

In May of last year, [our staff provided an update on the City's Stream Restoration strategy](#). The was followed by a presentation by our Environmental Policy Commission, which has come out against stream restoration as a technique. [You can watch the full](#)

presentation and Council discussion beginning just after the 3:44:00 mark in the video.

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

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

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

On Saturday September 10th, IEN will convene the next step in this consensus building process. **They will host a Stream Health Improvement Workshop**, to engage with the community on the options available. This input will inform a presentation that IEN will bring to the City Council at the end of this year. Please RSVP for this important workshop to provide specific input in this process.

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

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

Waste-To-Energy Facility Upgrades

Last month, the Covanta Alexandria Waste-to-Energy facility announced **the completion of environmental upgrades that will cut nitrogen oxide emissions in half**. This important facility improvement improves



sustainability for an operation that provides a significant environmental benefit for the 400,000 households served in Alexandria and Arlington.

In February 1988, the [Alexandria/Arlington Resource Recovery Facility](#) began operating on Eisenhower Avenue. The facility was jointly developed by Arlington County and Alexandria, and is operated by Covanta Energy.

[It has the capacity to convert 975 tons of solid waste every day into 23 megawatts of renewable power that is then sold back to Dominion Virginia Power. This diverts 42,448 garbage trucks from landfills, and powers 15,000 homes for one year.](#)

In 2012, the City Council and Arlington County jointly approved an extension of the lease and operating agreement for the facility through 2025. A component of that extension was an [additional option](#) to extend the agreement through the end of 2038. This would keep Covanta operating the facility for the remainder of the useful life of the plant.

In approving the initial extension, the City Council asked the City Staff to perform an [economic analysis](#) of the extension proposal and ensure that it works in the best interests of our taxpayers. With that analysis in hand, the City Council ultimately elected to extend the agreement. The analysis found that opting for the extension this year saves the City taxpayers \$26.1 million over the remainder of the agreement.

[Extension of the agreement](#) locked in the rate that the City paid; thus providing significant savings on the per ton fee that we pay to the facility. That fee makes up a significant portion of the Residential Refuse Fee that residents pay to receive City trash and recycling services. The savings that we realized allowed the Council to both reduce the fee, as well as expand recycling services.

That agreement will now expire in 2038 and the future of waste disposal will need to be carefully considered in the intervening time. In preparation for this study, [a white paper considering alternatives to address the future of this facility was prepared.](#)

While there is a decade and a half until the end of the useful life of this facility, the planning required to determine the future of such a significant operation will be substantial. That planning will commence soon.

Community Remembrance Project

Last month and 123 years ago, at the corner of King and Fairfax Streets in Old Town, [an angry mob of](#)



white Alexandrians lynched Benjamin Thomas, a 16-year old African-American boy. Young Benjamin had been arrested the day before, accused erroneously of assaulting a child. While several African-Americans were arrested and punished for attempting to prevent the lynching, no person ever faced justice for the murder of Benjamin Thomas.

Only two years prior, on April 23, 1897, Joseph McCoy, **an 18-year old African-American was also lynched by an angry white mob, on the corner of Lee Street and Cameron Street in Old Town.**

Without effort, the deaths of Benjamin and Joseph will be just another two victims of a multi-decade campaign of racial terror that took the lives of at least 4,400 African-Americans across 20 states from end of Reconstruction in 1877 through 1950.

Our community has rightly demanded more. A few years ago, led by dedicated community volunteers and the staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria, **we commenced the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project.** Our local effort is part of the **Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project**, based in Montgomery, Alabama,

This process seeks not only to ensure that Benjamin and Joseph are not lost to history, but more ambitiously to grapple with the systems that have reinforced white supremacy throughout our City's existence.

For the past few years, **we have held annual remembrances for both Joseph and Benjamin which have drawn many Alexandrians and educated our community.**

This undertaking is reaching a critical inflection point and we want you to be part of the journey.

First, on, Saturday September 24th, at 4 PM, **we will gather as a community in Market Square to collect soil that will be brought to Alabama** to be part of the permanent display at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

Then, **we will take a pilgrimage to Alabama in October, and you are invited to travel with us.** For a few days, we will visit sacred sites and connect the murder of Benjamin and Joseph to the broader context of history. It promises to be a powerful experience and I am very much looking forward to participating.

Next Steps on Housing

In the spirit of Back-to-School earlier this month, here's a little essay about what I read on my summer vacation:

Just about two decades ago, I was a newly minted civic association president, working to lead my neighborhood through the issues of the day in our city.

Candidly, I had no idea what I was doing. I was thrust into the role prematurely because Rob Krupicka ran off and got elected to City Council. Controversy over land-use policy is the lifeblood of public discourse at the local level. I didn't know an SUP from a Site Plan, a variance from a setback, or anything in between. Employing the strategy of "faking it until I make it," with the guidance of some great folks leading our Land-Use Committee, I started to learn.

Two decades later, I'd like to think I've developed a little more knowledge of land-use policies and practices. With that knowledge has come an appreciation, and perhaps awe, for the power vested in local governing bodies to make land-use decisions. The power that collectively the 7 members of Alexandria's City Council wield can impact where people live, the wealth they can obtain, the education available to them, who their neighbors are, the stability of their family, how they get around their community, where they can work, the success of business ventures, and beyond.

One consequence of City Council service is that all my time spent reading is consumed by Council dockets, budget proposals, and correspondence from constituents. However, I do try to do a little reading for fun (non-fiction, of course!) when I'm on vacation.

Two years ago, I came back from the beach, having read [Professor Richard Rothstein's "The Color of Law,"](#) and [wrote on social media and in my newsletter](#) about how the book helped me appreciate that the present-day racial and economic segregation of Alexandria was not happenstance, not the free will of our residents, but instead the sum of generations of Federal, State and local policymaking working EXACTLY as designed.

On Spring Break this year, I took in [Dr. Jenny Schuetz's book, "Fixer-Upper,"](#) which detailed the challenge that Federal, State and local policymakers have in building a coherent and coordinated housing policy that actually meets demand, addresses climate needs, and reverses generations of inequity. Dr. Schuetz laid out an impressive policy roadmap but noted the "tenuous and uneasy" coalition between housing creation advocates and advocacy groups representing Brown, Black and low-income communities, a factor that is definitely present in Alexandria.

That tension plays out in real-time here in Alexandria. We can easily approve very large, committed affordable

unit developments (we just easily approved [our largest-ever affordable project](#)--a 30-70 AMI {Area Median Income}, 500+ unit, LIHTC {Low Income Housing Tax Credit} project a few hundred yards from my home), but [we struggle to approve market-rate projects](#), not because of any specific concerns about density, parking, or the normal land-use controversies, but simply because the creation of market-rate housing supply is not broadly accepted by the community as part of the “solution” to our housing affordability woes (despite numerous studies on ‘filtering’ and the impacts on a housing market).

Last month, I used a flight back across the ocean to get through [M. Nolan Gray’s “Arbitrary Lines,”](#) a broadside against the concept of zoning as a practice in our nation, and a clarion call for a systemic replacement. While his thesis is certainly provocative, and I’m not sure I accept all of his conclusions, his suggestion that zoning in Alexandria (and other places) doesn’t effectively do the things we want it to do and does some things we no longer want it to do, certainly rings true.

After nearly 12 years of making land-use decisions on City Council and studying these issues in Alexandria and elsewhere, I have come to some conclusions:

1. Alexandria has a TERRIBLY complex zoning code and master plan, full of conflicting provisions, difficult to interpret directives and mind-numbing specificity. It’s very difficult for a landowner to understand, a member of our staff to enforce and for a resident of our community to decipher.
2. Our zoning code and master plan are the accumulation of decades of input from the residents of our City, those who have done the research, showed up at City meetings, testified and written to elected and appointed officials. Every provision has a champion and a good rationale at the time.
3. Our zoning code and master plan have achieved positive results through our history. They have also caused significantly negative consequences, some intended and some unintended.
4. Virginia is a quirky state (a “Dillon Rule” state), which limits the authority of local government and forces jurisdictions to adopt artificially lower-density zoning to maintain control when sites are ultimately developed. Most of the significant development that occurs in the City involves the City “trading” increased density for “stuff,” that we might want. We might ask a developer for a different use, a school site, park land, extra flood mitigation, more sustainable construction, a site for a fire station, public art, preservation of trees, a Capital BikeShare station, land for a transitway, a special brick sidewalk, cash or on-site units of

committed affordable housing (typically the biggest ask), varied hours for trash pickup, EV parking spaces, electric appliances, etc, etc. Most of this “stuff,” are the types of things we could not require or even ask for if the landowner was proceeding in adherence to the zoning on their site, so-called “by-right” development.

For years, my colleague Councilman Chapman and I have had a good-natured disagreement about whether we need to undertake a comprehensive rewrite of our Master Plan. Since she joined the Council in January, Councilwoman Gaskins has joined that cause! They both will argue that parts of our master plan are woefully out of date (absolutely true!), and that many of the assumptions in the plan are no longer considered modern policy for an urban community like ours (also, true).

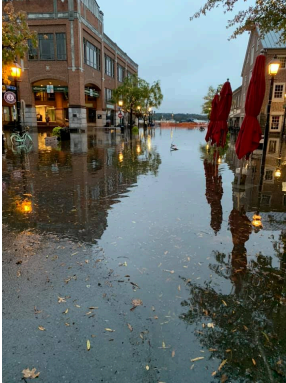
On the other hand, I have suggested that we have updated our master plan frequently over the years in the areas of the City that are experiencing growth and we have also regularly updated the core components of the Plan (transportation, housing, sewers, etc). I argue that it is our zoning approach that is in more dire need of revision.

Whatever we call it, a season of change is upon us:

1. The [regional fair-housing assessment that I referenced two years ago](#) is finally coming to fruition, with recommendations as to how we make Alexandria housing access more equitable. Land-use policy will figure prominently in those recommendations, I suspect.
2. The Planning Commission’s recent deferral of proposed updates to our [“Height for Affordable Housing” program](#), presents an opportunity for us to consolidate a series of “Zoning for Housing” proposals into a comprehensive proposal that will be more substantial, better understood and prepared to make an impact in improving affordability.
3. This fall, we will kick off community engagement for an Alexandria “Vision Plan,” which will craft an updated community vision for our City’s future. This will ultimately update our Master Plan, future Small Area Plans, and our zoning ordinance.
4. In May, [the President rolled out new White House policies to increase housing supply nationally](#), including new incentives in Federal grant processes for jurisdictions that have reformed zoning and land-use policies and new financing for housing creation nationally (including ADUs and other “soft-density” which Alexandria recently legalized).
5. As I posted about a few days ago, [the Governor has recently expressed interest in zoning](#)

reform as a tool to improve housing supply. I doubt I will agree with everything he proposes. However, if the Commonwealth engages in substantive conversation about zoning reform, including giving local governments the power to manage the externalities of development, we can likely provide a more predictable process for landowners to develop the housing supply we need.

It's an exciting time in housing policy at all levels of government. We're all starting to row in the same direction. I'll keep you updated!



Flood Insurance Discounts

Alexandria would likely not exist if not for the Potomac River, but the waters from the Potomac threaten property around our City.

Roughly 20% of the land in Alexandria is mapped as part of the floodplain, and many of our residents are required by their mortgage issuer to purchase flood insurance. While most of the threatened property is along the banks of the Potomac River, some residents far from waterfront property find themselves at flood risk.

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. Alexandria was recently reviewed and our class was again affirmed at 6.

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.



George Mason Hotel

In 1929, the George Mason Hotel opened up at the corner of S. Washington Street and Prince Street in Old Town. Designed by the architect William Lee Stoddart, the hotel boasted a toilet in each room!

While the hotel used a few neon signs on the roof to lure guests, in 1971, it shut down for good. The building later became the headquarters of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

The building was sold when NCMEC moved to a new location in the City of Alexandria.

This transition has led to an opportunity to return this building to its original use.

Hotels are the most lucrative land-use for the City of Alexandria and its taxpayers. Hotels generate significant real estate tax, transient lodging (hotel) tax, dining tax, sales tax and Business, Professional and Occupational License (BPOL) tax. In return, hotels consume hardly any services, with no kids in schools, minimal public safety needs and limited impact on transportation networks. No other land-use can match it.

When a private entity explored the concept of converting the old George Mason Hotel back to its original use, the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) went to work.

AEDP identified a state program, the **Tourism Development Financing Program (TDFP)**, administered by the Virginia Tourism Corporation. This program identifies tools to address the needs of gap financing for projects supporting tourism activity.

In this case, a \$69.6 million project was partially financed by its investors, leaving a \$6.1 million gap. Using the TDFP, private loans sought by the hotel developer could be serviced by 3 revenue sources, all ultimately paid by hotel guests:

- The Commonwealth agrees to provide its 1% sales and use tax charged to each hotel guest over 20 years to pay off the debt
- The City agrees to provide its 1% sales and use tax charged to each hotel guest over 20 years to pay off the debt
- The hotel guests will pay a special 5% "access fee" over 20 years to pay off the debt

As the City Council considered this arrangement, concerns were raised by members of Council and labor activists, as to whether additional protections for workers could be included as part of the performance agreement with the hotel.

Last month, City Council voted 4-3 to approve the arrangement, submitting the application to the Virginia Tourism Corporation and including new protections in the performance agreement to support the right of employees to organize with a union if they wish to do so.

The landowners of this property have vested rights under the existing zoning to convert the property to a multi-family residential use (as well as other "by-right" uses). By reverting to the hotel use, this property will

generate a net tax return to the City's taxpayers of \$37.6 million over the next 20 years, a return 500% higher than an allowed residential use.

Aparium Hotel Group will operate the hotel and they expect it to be open in late 2023.

This project will bring back the historic use of the building and provide strong economic return for the City's taxpayers.

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