

The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

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Alexandria, Virginia

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Events/Updates

Election Day

Election Day is Tuesday! Alexandria voters will head to the polls to [choose our US Senator, our US Representative, and consider one proposed amendment to Virginia's Constitution.](#)

[Today is the last day of in-person absentee voting.](#)

You may vote from 8AM until 5PM at the Registrar's

This month I write from New York, where I'm resting and getting ready for another marathon tomorrow morning.

When I get back to town, I hope you'll join me on Tuesday in voting.

Alexandria voters will be choosing our [Member of Congress, one of Virginia's Senators and deciding on a Constitutional Amendment.](#)

So much of the policy we make at the local level is shaped by what occurs across the river in Washington. It is important that we take the time to be counted. I'll see you at the polls.

Please let me know how I can be of assistance. [Contact me anytime.](#)

 Council Portrait

Council Initiatives

Metro Leaving the Station?

The [Federal Environmental Impact Statement \(EIS\) process](#) is a long cumbersome process designed to assess environmental impacts of proposed actions and help shape decision-making by presenting policymakers with the full range of costs and benefits.

We are now nearly four years into the EIS process on our efforts to bring a new Metrorail station to Potomac Yard. While the duration is in the norm for a project of this size, it is frustrating that it has taken this long. However, we are now nearing a critical juncture in the effort, as the draft statement will be released to the public in the Spring.

Once the statement is released, there will be a series of public hearings and workshops held by both the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and the City. That public input will lead into a Council decision on the locally preferred option.

office (132 N. Royal Street), or from 10AM until 5PM at Beatley Library (5005 Duke Street).

This election will be the first election in which Virginia voters will be required to present a photo ID.

Make sure you are prepared to [meet the requirements](#), so that you are able to participate.

If you do not have identification, [Alexandria's Registrar will be issuing voting identification cards](#).

Leaf Collection Begins

[The City's fall residential leaf collection effort has begun](#).

Leaf bags are available at a variety of locations around the City, and the collection schedule can be accessed [online](#).

eNews Re-Launched

[The City's ENews system was relaunched and is now available for new users to sign up](#).

The system provides regular e-mail updates on City events and occurrences across a variety of categories that you select.

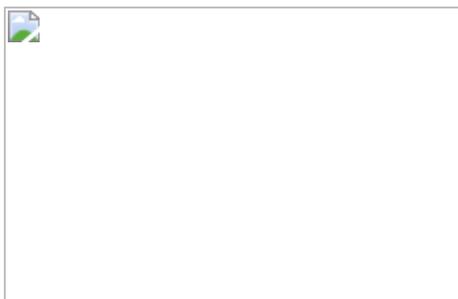
Anyone who was previously registered on the old system is required to again sign up for the new system.

Turkey Trot

On the morning of Thanksgiving, the 39th Alexandria Turkey Trot 5 mile race returns to the streets of Del Ray and Rosemont.

[Registration is now open](#). Sign up today, and I will see you there!

12K Returns to Alexandria



While the EIS process began considering many options for the location of the Metro, the process boiled down to [three "build" options](#), and the "no-build" option.

We have been considering Alternatives A, B and

D. Alternative A is the site of the original reservation for Metro. Alternative B is the location that had been agreed upon with the landowner in 2010 when the [North Potomac Yard Plan](#) was approved. Alternative D was an option utilizing an aerial station to place the station in a more central location.

Those three build options grew to four, as our Federal partners asked us to consider a variation of Alternative B, called B-CSX, which involved moving the existing CSX freight and passenger rail tracks in order to prevent any of the impacts of Alternative B on existing National Park Service land adjacent to the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

While all five alternatives will be addressed in the draft report, it has been clear for some time that both alternatives B-CSX and D are simply not feasible for a variety of financial and logistical reasons.

Of the build options the choice of a locally preferred option comes down to Alternatives A and B.

Late last month, the Potomac Yard Metro Implementation Committee, on which I serve along with the Mayor, received an update of the [financial analysis for the construction of the Metro](#).

While the report continues to consider all four build options in detail, it also confirmed what we have long known: construction of the Potomac Yard Metro is the largest economic development project this City has undertaken. It will positively impact the future of our City for generations to come.

Most importantly for the taxpayers of this City, the construction of the Metro is not funded with General Fund tax dollars. The adopted funding plan included a developer contribution, proceeds from a new Special Tax District for landowners in Potomac Yard, and a portion of tax revenue from the development in Potomac Yard (utilizing a form of Tax Increment Financing).

Since the approval of that plan, [we have also added \\$69 million from the new regional transportation funds originating from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority](#), from a variety of taxes approved by the General Assembly.

Both alternatives A and B generate positive cash flow for the City, create thousands of jobs, and diversify the City's tax base in a way that we have only dreamed about.

For those reasons, and many others, it should come as no surprise that when the [Alexandria Chamber of Commerce released their 2015 Legislative Agenda last week](#), it affirmed Potomac Yard Metro as its number 1 priority for the City's economic vitality.

While there is certainly more work to do, this project continues to make progress.

With a little luck, we hope to have a station opened within 5 years.

Give Us A Piece of Your Mind

Back for the second year, with a brand new course, the .US National 12K returns to Alexandria.

[Registration is now open for the race](#) to be held on Sunday November 16th.

10K For a Good Cause

Rounding out the Alexandria racing calendar, the Run for Shelter returns.

The 10K race, benefiting the Carpenter's Shelter, occurs on Saturday November 22nd in the Eisenhower Valley.

[Register online today!](#)

Real Estate Tax Due

Payments for the second half payment of your real estate tax bill are due on Monday November 17th.

Payments can be made [online or in person](#).

Child Safety Seat Inspections Get Easier

Last year, our Sheriff brought Child Safety Seat inspections back to Alexandria.

[Now the process has gotten even easier with a new web form to make your appointment](#).

Thanks to our Sheriff for continuing his commitment to the safety of Alexandria's children.

Help Four Mile Run Park

Lead by an energetic group of community volunteers, the first crowdfunding campaign in our City [successfully raised money to plan new trees in Four Mile Run Park](#).

The volunteer effort continues as a community mulching and park cleaning day will be held on the morning of Veteran's Day (November 11) at 9AM to prepare the trees for winter.

After years of austerity at the local level, the state government in [Richmond is again looking for local governments to help resolve their budget challenges](#). The fiscal condition of the Federal government [places our region's overall prosperity in doubt in the near-term](#).

The costs to the City of providing our core services, including public safety and education, continues to rise. To make matters worse, we are starting to see signs that [residential real estate values](#) are stagnating.

All of these factors shape into yet another difficult budget year.

As the City continues to explore new ways to collect public input on these very difficult decisions, [there is a new survey posted on AlexEngage](#) (an online forum created for civic engagement) to collect relatively simple input into some of our core initiatives.

The survey will remain up until the 5th. Please take the time to voice your opinion.

Lighting our Streets

Street lights around our City help provide safety for our residents and property. In Alexandria, our street lights are operated and maintained by Dominion Virginia Power under the [Virginia Energy Purchasing Governmental Association \(VEPGA\)](#). This is a statewide agreement that provides negotiated pricing for local governments to purchase power and related services. [The VEPGA agreement was recently renewed for another four years](#).

In Alexandria, we have struggled with street light outages, and the response of Dominion Virginia Power to reports of those outages.

In the Fall of 2013, Dominion Virginia Power performed a citywide assessment of street light outages and addressed those. In the summer of 2013, the City staff performed a similar assessment.

As part of this year's approved budget, the Council set aside money to perform two assessments during the year. Additionally, we communicated with Dominion Virginia Power our desire that they enhance the ability of residents to report light outages.

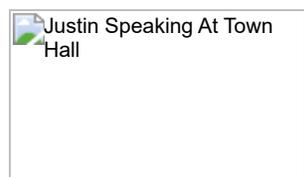
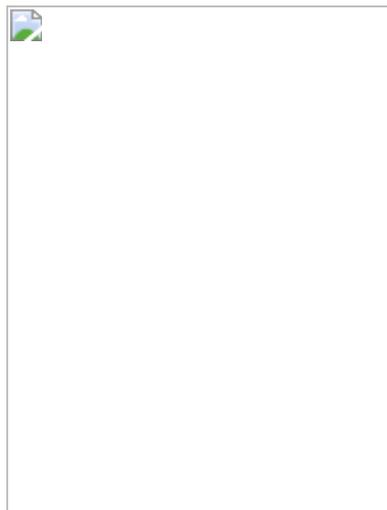
In response to that request, [Dominion Virginia Power has created a web form for the reporting of these outages](#).

Give it a try and let me know how it works for you.

Host a Town Hall in Your Living Room!

My regular series of Town Hall Meetings continue!

You supply the living room and a bunch of your friends and neighbors. I will supply a member of the Alexandria City Council (me) with the answers to any of your questions about our City.



Volunteer today by [e-mail](#).

Tell Us About Your Park

The City is currently planning the future of our existing [neighborhood parks](#).

In order to solicit the vision of our users, we are asking that residents [complete a survey about the parks they use](#).

Thanks for your opinions!

Pedestrian & Bike Master Plan

The City is currently working to adopt a new [Pedestrian & Bike Master Plan](#).

In order to adopt a plan that is reflective of our community, we're looking for your opinion.

[Please complete a survey with your views on the future of pedestrian and bike safety.](#)

Just [drop us a line](#) and we'll get a Town Hall on the calendar! Thanks for the interest!

Upcoming Issues

Dominion Transmission Line Filing Delayed

Over the past few months, I have written about the proposal by Dominion Virginia Power to construct a new 230-kilovolt transmission line through the northeast section of our City.

Since receiving the [original proposal](#), the Council [has created a resident work group](#) which has attempted to work with Dominion and the City to provide input in advance of the upcoming State Corporation Commission filing.

Since that time, Dominion has [revealed proposed routes that they are considering](#) and their timetable.

Ultimately, it is the State Corporation Commission that will decide on the need and the actual route, after weighing the costs that will be applied to the ratepayers against the benefits of reliability. The City is working to provide as much input as possible to that process.

This past week, Dominion notified the City that they will be delaying their planned State Corporation Commission filing until the proposal can be informed by a new demand study being finalized in December.

There will be additional work group meetings as the process continues.

Getting the Calendar Right

Elected School Boards are a relatively new phenomenon in Virginia and in Alexandria. It was [only 2 decades ago that Alexandria voted for elected school boards](#). Next year, Alexandria will elect its eighth school board.

Elected or appointed, one of the most challenging aspects of the relationship between a school board and a city council in Virginia is the adoption of a budget.

Even when school boards are elected, the city council maintains sole revenue authority. Once the City Council has adopted its budget, the City issues funds to the School Board for the resources that have been allocated. Last year, that amounted to 30% of our general fund dollars.

I am a firm believer that the quality of the process determines the quality of the outcomes. As of late, the process of the City Council and the School Board agreeing on the City's appropriation has not been optimum.

Traditionally, the City Manager has presented his/her budget to the Council in February. Prior to his presentation, the Superintendent presented his/her budget to the School Board, and they adopted a budget request for the Council.

In 2010, the School Board decided to depart from that practice, and instead adopt their budget after the City Manager made his/her presentation to the Council.

With this change, the Council has been forced to consider the Superintendent's proposed budget without the benefit of the collective view of the nine members elected to set policy for our schools. By the time the School Board adopts their budget, the

Council has already made significant decisions around how it will proceed.

Last year, after extensive discussion at the City-Schools Subcommittee, there was agreement to work through this issue and bring the two budget calendars into alignment.

In June, the Superintendent [proposed a new calendar to the School Board](#) that would have resolved the issue by moving the Board's budget adoption earlier. Due to concerns about the shorter process, the Board chose not to accept that proposal.

Last month, the City Manager proposed changes to the City's budget process for a variety of reasons, including better alignment with the Schools.

Last week, the Council adopted a budget process that commences on Tuesday March 3rd and concludes on Thursday, May 7th in 2015.

With this change, I'm hopeful the Schools will now move up the adoption of their budget so that the two elected bodies can be in sync going into another very difficult budget process.

Serving the Public

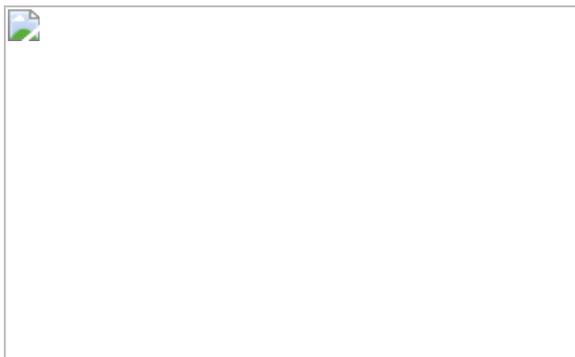
Regardless of your view on how large the public sector should be, it has not been a good era in which to be a public servant.

Nationally, there are 656,000 less Americans [working in local government today](#) than there were only [5 years ago](#). Governments around the country have cut jobs, cut benefits, cut pay, and reduced job security as a method to weather the brutal impacts of the economy.

Alexandria is no exception. We have reduced jobs, including lay-offs. We have eliminated benefits, raised the cost to employees of remaining benefits, and frozen pay.

In the past, City employees received both a Market Rate Adjustment (previously known as a "COLA" or Cost of Living Adjustment), and a Merit Adjustment, which reflected progression along the City pay scale.

Since FY 2008, the City has provided no Market Rate Adjustment



due to the effects of the economy. Yet the City has funded the annual Merit Adjustment, which provides eligible employees with a raise

of 2.3 - 5% depending on their performance and where they are on the payscale.

This adjustment alone cost \$4.6 million in the most recently approved budget. As a point of reference, one cent on the real estate rate brings in \$3.5 million.

Our employees are facing the same increases in costs of living that affect all of the residents of our community. With relatively stagnant incomes and increases to the costs of benefits, this has challenged

the finances of our employees. Of course our residents, particularly Federal employees, have lived with a similar environment.

While these issues affect many employee groups, the concerns expressed have been most acute within public safety and education. Here the high demand for workers and relative portability mean that the best and brightest are hotly recruited by our neighbors.

Within public safety specifically, the [City has long experienced challenges on compensation](#). While progress has been made in addressing pay inequities, there [is continued pressure to address these issues sooner](#).

Many of our employees provide the most critical services that our residents demand. Having a highly trained, and experienced workforce is absolutely critical to providing these services in a safe and efficient manner.

I am confident that in the upcoming budget process these workforce compensation issues will take a central role in our deliberations.

More Kids To Educate

I have previously written on the growing enrollment in the Alexandria City Public Schools, and the challenges and opportunities that it creates.

As a member of the [Long Range Educational Facilities Work Group](#), quantifying and planning for the current and future student enrollment growth has been our focus.

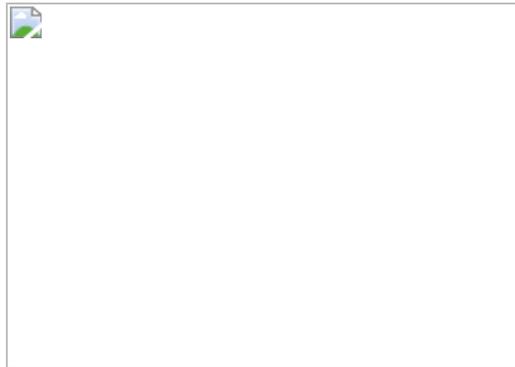
One of the earliest tasks completed by the group was to agree upon a methodology for how we can project future enrollment. Ending the days where the Schools had one projection for student enrollment and the City had another, was paramount.

Every year, we examine the actual student enrollment to refine our projections and ensure that our methodology is sound.

A week and a half ago, [the Work Group received the draft enrollment data](#) for the Fall 2014 school year. .

The headline is that enrollment in the Alexandria City Public Schools grew by 4% over last year. We have 593 more kids in the system than we had last year. Between September 2006 and this school year, the system has averaged over 4% growth every year.

The last time [14,156 children walked into the doors at ACPS was over 40 years ago in the early 1970s](#).



Our projection for this year was 14,111, which means the projection was on target.

Yet, when you segment the numbers a bit, there was some variation that requires more analysis. Kindergarten enrollment came in 8% under our projections. While it grew from last year, it did not grow as much as we expected. Our "Kindergarten Capture" rate is the rate of births that present as Kindergartners in our schools five years later. For the last 7 years, that rate has been higher than average. It has now settled back into its historical norm.

On the other side of the equation, our projections for 9th Grade enrollment were 17% lower than the number of 9th Graders who showed up this year. In this case, our "cohort survival" (the percent of students that go from one grade to another) rate is proving higher than we expected. Patterns of students leaving the system prior to high school appear to be changing.

In the final analysis, this data reminds us of the need to address this enrollment growth head on. At the end of the year, we will release the draft plan of the Work Group. It will lay out a plan for how to address these challenges.

I look forward to your input as we work to ensure the success of our children.

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