

The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

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Alexandria, Virginia

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Events/Updates

Righting A Wrong

On Saturday, the City will attempt to right a wrong. We will gather to dedicate the [Contrabands and Freedman Cemetery Memorial](#).

The Memorial represents the culmination of [three decades](#) of efforts to properly recognize the final resting place of 1,700 freed and formerly enslaved African-Americans.

[The Memorial](#) design is the result of a competition held in 2008. It represents a unique public-private partnership and is the result

This time of year is full of new beginnings for our City.

For more than a decade, Alexandria and Arlington have been working together to bring new dedicated transit to the densely populated Route 1 corridor.

Last week, [Metroway](#) began service, providing the region's first Bus Rapid Transit connecting Crystal City and Braddock Road.

Tomorrow, our students head back to school across Alexandria (Tucker Elementary kids have been in session for a month).

Not since the mid 1970s, will the Alexandria City Public Schools have as many students enrolled as they will tomorrow.

While first days are always special, Jefferson-Houston students will start the school year in a [brand-new building](#). Next Friday, I look forward to joining with my colleagues on Council and the School Board to [cut the ribbon](#) on this new facility.

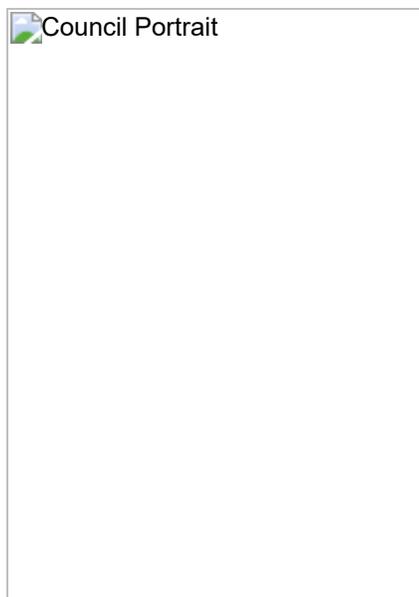
Please let me know how I can be of assistance. [Contact me anytime](#).

Council Initiatives

Building Better and More Accessible Recreation

Last fall I wrote about the [Resource Allocation Philosophy and Cost Recovery Model](#) which was adopted by the Council to determine how we set fees for our recreation services.

The Policy was designed to improve our cost recovery, but also improve accessibility by [increasing financial assistance for those of](#)

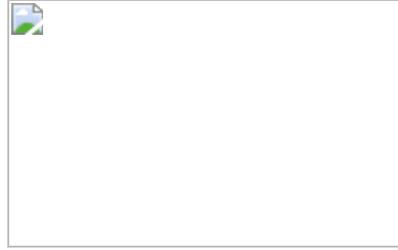


of tireless community advocacy.



[limited financial means.](#)

Prior to the adoption of the policy, 12% of the costs of Alexandria's recreation services were covered by fees. The national average is 34%. Loudoun County's recovery rate through fees was 63%.



For each service provided in our Parks and Recreation Centers, a tier has been determined. The placement of the service on the tier determines how much users will pay. This policy resulted in the [fee schedule](#) that is currently in place.

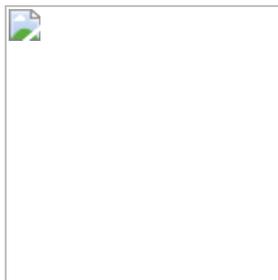
Home Energy Audits

[LEAP](#) is a non-profit organization based in Charlottesville and is dedicated to improving the energy efficiency of buildings in Virginia.

LEAP administers the [Home Energy Checkup](#) program that can be performed on your home. For only \$35, including a \$10 City rebate, your home will be assessed by a trained Energy Coach.

Not only will they make some energy saving improvements at no additional cost, but also make expert recommendations for how your home can be more energy efficient.

[Any Alexandria resident can schedule their appointment online. Appointments are available this month!](#)



In order to involve the community in determining how to allocate these scarce resources, the [City has set up three workshops](#). These working meetings will discuss the policy and build consensus around how each service will be aligned.

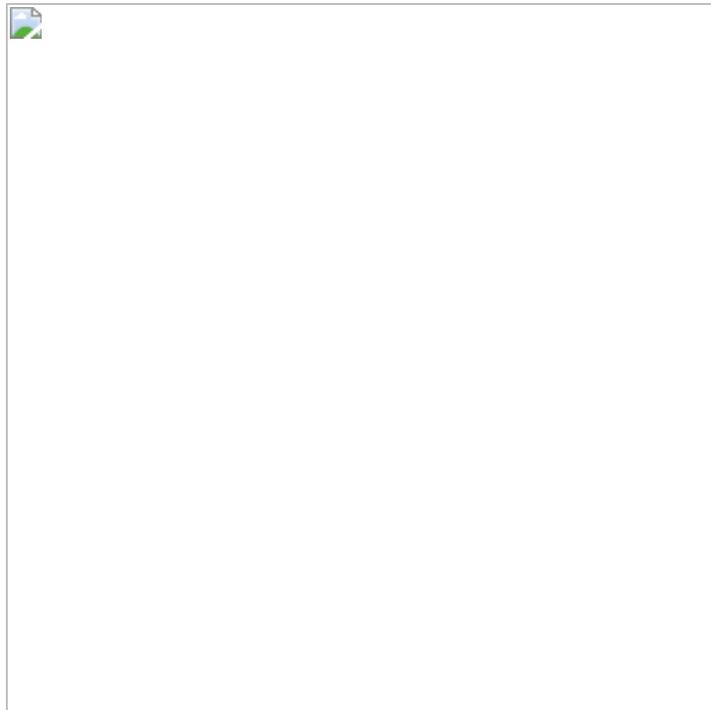
Please RSVP to attend one of these sessions and help shape the City's policy going forward.

Capital Bikeshare Grows

Late last month, the City's [Capital Bikeshare](#) network doubled. The addition of eight new stations in Del Ray and Carlyle showcases the bike sharing public/private partnership that now counts the District of Columbia, Arlington, Montgomery County and Alexandria as members.

The expansion did not come without a [full performance review of the existing system](#), which was originally installed in the Fall of 2012.

The City's Capital Bikeshare system was originally funded using Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds. The CMAQ funds now purchase new stations, while the City's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) now fund operations for existing stations.



Summer In Overtime

[The City will extend the season at the Old Town Pool this year!](#)

The pool will remain operational through Friday September 19th.

Starting tomorrow, weekday hours will be 6AM to 10AM and then 4PM to 8PM.

On weekends, the pool will be open 10AM to 4PM.

Have a great time at the pool!

Trash, Recycling and Yard Waste Collection Slides a Day

Happy Labor Day!

To allow our Staff to participate in the holiday, this week, the collection of Trash, Recycling and Yard Waste will [slip 1 day](#).

This only applies to those who receive City service.

New Crime Reports System

[The City now has a new system for reporting information on crime that occurs in our neighborhoods.](#)

Residents may use [raidsonline.com](#) to find out about crime in our City.

Quarterly to Monthly

Starting this fall, bills from [Virginia American Water Company](#) for running water and [Alexandria Renew Enterprises](#) for sanitary sewer services, will arrive monthly instead of quarterly.

The [new frequency](#) will not affect rates.

50 Meter Pool at Chinquapin

During the budget process in 2013, in partnership with [Advocates for Alexandria Aquatics](#), this Council set aside [significant new resources](#) to maintain and expand municipal aquatics.

Most of the funding that was set aside was designed to expand the indoor pool at Chinquapin Recreation Center.

Public transportation systems of all kinds depend on heavy public subsidies. In Alexandria, the DASH Bus system recovers approximately 30% of its costs from fare box revenue. Original estimates of Capital Bikeshare's performance were expected to be similar. Surprisingly, Alexandria's cost recovery in the first year reached 72% from rentals.

The system has provided a critical, low-cost connectivity option for short trips, used frequently by our residents and visitors alike. Current plans will allow continued expansion over the next few years. Please [use this link to suggest](#) station locations.

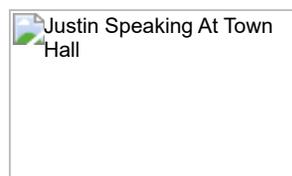
The new stations that were just recently added were:

- Eisenhower Avenue at Mill Race Lane
- Ballenger Avenue at Dulany Street
- Duke Street at John Carlyle Street
- Mount Vernon Avenue at East Nelson Avenue
- Mount Vernon Avenue at East Del Ray Avenue
- Mount Vernon Avenue at Kennedy Street
- Monroe Avenue at Leslie Avenue
- Potomac Greens Drive at Slater's Lane

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.



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

Upcoming Issues

Living on Borrowed Time?

In 1923, Virginia voters [rejected a referendum](#) that would have borrowed money to build roads around the Commonwealth. More than handing a political victory to then State Senator Harry Flood Byrd, the vote ratified a pay-as-you-go public investment philosophy for Virginia.

While the Commonwealth later took on debt for public investments, debt is a controversial issue at every level of government. Suggestions that debt is too high or frivolously issued is common fodder for political campaigns.

Nevertheless, debt is an essential tool of nearly every household, corporation or government entity in our nation.

My children attend elementary school in the oldest school building in use by the City today. Debt ensures "generational equity." Without debt, the taxpayers at the time of school construction would be footing the entire bill, as opposed to spreading the cost of financing a public improvement over the decades of life of the school.

As in my household, too much debt is a bad thing. In order to ensure discipline for the City's debt level, the City has [self-imposed debt limits](#). These limits measure the City's debt against the fair-market



This [Wednesday evening, at 7:00 PM in the cafeteria at TC Williams High School, the City will be holding a public meeting to discuss the findings of the feasibility study.](#)

Please take the time to participate and offer input on this exciting project.

Marketing Fund

The second round of funding for the [Alexandria Marketing Fund](#) is now open for applications. The deadline is Wednesday September 24th.

Groups of Alexandria businesses and non-profit organizations may use the Marketing Fund to support efforts that bring new revenue to Alexandria by attracting visitors.

The Fund is an important economic development initiative for the City.

Women's Issues Conference

On Saturday the 13th, Congressman Moran will be holding his final Women's Issues Conference.

The conference will be at Washington-Lee High School in Arlington and will feature several topical seminars and interesting speakers.

[Register for this free conference online.](#)

Monroe Avenue

Thursday, the City will be holding the second meeting to discuss options for "Complete Streets" and safety improvements on Monroe Avenue.

value of our property tax base, the income of our residents, and our overall government expenditures.

One of the reasons that the City of Alexandria has been rated [AAA/Aaa by Moody's and Standard & Poors since 1992](#) is that we employ extremely conservative use of debt.

For example, Arlington County limits its debt to 4% of its Fair Market Real Property Value. Both Fairfax and Prince William Counties limit their debt to 3%. Alexandria's limit is 1.6%, and this budget year we achieved 1.45%.

The median for other similarly rated and sized jurisdictions is 2.42%.

Each year, the Council must make a decision about the mix of debt to cash funding it will employ in the capital budget. Much like a home mortgage, the cash funding is the down payment, and the remainder is financed with debt.

This percentage has historically fluctuated, depending on the financial condition of the City and the priorities for capital spending.

In the [budget guidance](#) the Council adopted for the City Manager last year, we asked the Manager to present a budget that preserved the current cash funding level for our Capital Improvement Program. Said another way, we refused to take the easy alternative of simply increasing debt to make it through a difficult budget.

In the current fiscal year, the City is spending \$18 million of current year tax dollars towards our capital budget. We are then borrowing another \$30.9 million.

During the low points of the recession, it was a far different picture. In 2010, we spent \$4.4 million of then current year dollars towards the capital budget. We then borrowed \$54 million. The year before, in 2009, we spent \$2.1 million and then borrowed \$47 million.

With the high debt rating that the City enjoys, we borrow at among the lowest interest rates possible for [our debt.](#)

Yet, the debt service we pay is still a significant expenditure for us.

In the current fiscal year, we are spending \$64 million of our General Fund dollars on debt service. This is 10% of all of our General Fund spending. Five years ago, our debt service was 7% of our General Fund spending. Ten years ago, our debt service was 4.5% of our General Fund spending.

While these payments cover two decades of public investments (T. C. Williams High School, a new Public Safety Center, Charles Houston Recreation Center, new fire stations, new DASH Bus facility, etc), they also create pressure on other priorities in our budget.

As we move forward, we will need to carefully consider how we balance the burden of our many community needs, between the taxpayers of today and those of tomorrow.

When we do make the decision to borrow, it must be for investments proven to generate value far and beyond the costs to service the associated debt.

More Challenges Ahead

Each month the City Council is provided with a [Monthly Financial Report](#), detailing the previous month's financial performance and identifying any emergent fiscal concerns to be discussed. Generally these reports are very useful to spotlight new trends that may dominate upcoming budget cycles.

[The meeting will be at the Commonwealth Academy \(1321 Leslie Avenue\) at 6:00 PM.](#)

The [most recent report](#) received by the Council detailed the final month of the last fiscal year, June 2014. In closing out the year, we saw significant tax shortfalls in sales taxes, recordation tax, transient lodging (hotel) tax and revenue from the Federal government.

While the City Manager and his Staff carefully managed expenditures to adjust to the projected revenue levels, we are still forced to expend one million dollars that was set aside by the Council last year to cover any potential revenue shortfalls.

One of the more challenging expenditures was overruns related to costs associated with the many inclement weather days the City experienced last year. The City's budget for snow removal last year was \$840,000. The City spent over two million.

This Fall, In advance of Council's adoption of new budget guidance for the City Manager, the Council will receive updated forecasts for the revenue that we depend upon. In addition to the relatively slow growth in the real estate market and the drops in many "consumption-based" taxation, there are other storm clouds on the horizon.

[The Governor recently announced further revenue shortfalls at the state level that will](#), without a doubt, create further pressure on the City.

The continued budget challenges underscore the importance of creating more diversity in Alexandria's economy. Failing that, our budget will continue to be subject to the vagaries of Federal budget decisions, with very little recourse from other areas of our local economy.

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