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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

Councilman Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

April 1, 2015

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Events/Updates

Spring Clean-Up Returns This Month

March was a very busy and eventful month in our City.

Below, I have discussed the release of the budget and the major accomplishment in the effort to bring Metro to Potomac Yard.

The City also saw [the conclusion of the long-running litigation relating to our Waterfront](#).

On another one of our waterfronts, [we saw the long-awaited Four Mile Run restoration efforts get under way](#).

We [dedicated a stirring new memorial to Alexandria's police officers](#) whom, while keeping our community safe, have been killed in the line of duty.

The City said goodbye to a community pillar [as long-time General District Court Judge Daniel O'Flaherty passed away at 89](#) after a lifetime of service to our City and our nation.

Finally, [our good friend and Delegate Rob Krupicka made the decision to step away from elected office](#) and focus more on his family and his business interests.

April promises to be even more exciting. [Spring2Action returns on Wednesday April 22nd](#). Get your credit card ready and help a great collection of Alexandria non-profits serve our community. Last year we raised over a million dollars. How high will it go this year?

 Council Portrait

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

Council Initiatives

Budget Released

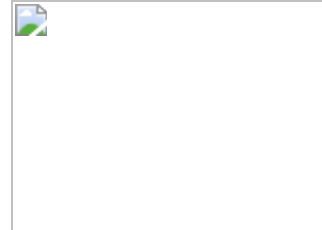
On March 3rd, Acting City Manager Mark Jinks presented his [proposed budget to the City Council](#). As always, the presentation is of two budgets, the proposed FY 2016 Operating Budget (July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016) and the proposed FY 2016 - FY 2025 Capital Improvement Program.

The City Council is now several weeks into a [furious schedule of budget worksessions and public hearings](#) that culminates in the adoption of the budget on May 9th.

As I wrote last month, this budget was presented in the midst of a challenging environment both locally and regionally. While the [residential real estate market experienced some growth](#), our commercial real estate tax base was battered again, and consumption-based tax revenue was anemic at best.

The Acting City Manager entered the process with little more than a half of a percent of new revenue. In the fall, when the City Council adopted guidance for the preparation of this budget, [we voted 4-3 to give the City Manager the authority to propose a tax rate increase](#). While the City Manager had that authority, he chose not to exercise it.

Yet the City Manager did work to create additional revenues to help balance the budget. [New fee increases have been proposed](#). The proposed budget leverages new revenues from Potomac Yard development. The proposed budget shifts the costs of some services from the General Fund to special funds generated by fees. In the end, the proposed budget relies on a paltry 1.7% increase in General Fund revenue.



As has been the case for much of the past decade, the budget also proposes significant reductions to ongoing City spending:

A net reduction of 3.8 full time equivalents. If approved, the City will have the smallest workforce in over a decade.

Elimination of a Deputy City Manager position

Elimination of the City Architect position

Renegotiation of the City's agreement with the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home

Reduction to Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA) advertising

Reduction of two part-time juvenile probation officer positions

Elimination of City funding of the Alexandria Law Library

Close Cora Kelly Recreation Center on holidays

Close William Ramsay Recreation Center on holidays and Sundays

Close Warwick Pool for the summer (renovation is now planned and funded in FY 2017)

[For the four Saturdays beginning April 25th, it will be Spring Clean Up in Alexandria.](#)

This is your opportunity to place bulky or metal items at the curb to be removed by the City's Resource Recovery division.

Please remember that hazardous materials will not be collected and [must be disposed of using the typical process](#).

DASH Changes

Last month the City's [DASH Bus system implemented a variety of relatively minor schedule changes](#).

Additionally, starting today, [they will no longer be accepting on-bus reloads of SmarTrip cards](#).

First Thursday is Back

[The 2015 season of First Thursday on Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray returns on Thursday.](#)

The monthly street party returns to Del Ray from 6:00 - 8:30 PM on Thursday evening.

This month's theme is hats! Grab a great hat to join the crowds on the Avenue in Del Ray.

Income Tax Assistance

The City, in partnership with [Community Tax Aid, Inc.](#) is hosting free tax preparation for qualifying residents.

[From now through April 15th, tax preparation sessions will be held on Saturdays from 9 AM until noon, and on Wednesdays from 6:30 - 8:00 PM.](#)

The sessions will be hosted at 2525 Mount Vernon Avenue.

Residents must meet income guidelines and provide documentation to receive services.

Mt. Jefferson Park & Greenway

[A draft plan and options have been developed for the the Mt. Jefferson Park and Greenway in Del Ray.](#)

[Comments on the proposed vision for the public space can be e-mailed to the City today.](#)

Real Estate Tax Relief

The City provides partial or complete real estate tax exemptions for those homeowners who are elderly or disabled and meet certain income criteria.

[Applications for relief must be filed by April 15, 2015.](#)

Have Coffee With Chief Cook

Alexandria Police Chief Earl Cook will be hosting three "Coffee with the Chief" forums around the City.

Join the Chief for informal discussion about anything on your mind.

The sessions will be:

April 14, 2015 from 5:30 - 6:30 PM at Burke Library (4701 Seminary Road)

April 15, 2015 from 6:30 - 7:30 PM at Charles Houston Recreation Center (901 Wythe Street)

April 16, 2015 from 5:30 - 6:30 PM at Duncan Library (2501 Commonwealth Avenue)

Host An Ace!

The [Alexandria Aces Collegiate Summer Baseball Club](#) returns for its 8th season at Frank Mann Field in Four Mile Run Park.

As always, the Aces are in search of host families for the players. If you have room in your home to host a future star, [please reach out to the Aces organization today!](#)

Reduction of Chinguapin Recreation Center summer operating hours

Eliminate one refuse truck and two vacant driver positions

Full automation of the Union Street Parking Garage

While reductions were necessary, the proposed budget does suggest new investments to core areas of City operations:

To address rising student enrollment, \$6 million of new operating dollars are proposed for the Alexandria City Public Schools. While this represents 55% of all new revenue available to the City, [it is still \\$3.2 million less than the request approved by the School Board.](#)

Over \$4 million of new resources to fund the City's obligations to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

Over \$2 million to address long-standing pay inequities within the Alexandria Police Department

Expansion of Alexandria Fire Department career ladders

Funds to begin implementation of the City's recently adopted [Youth Master Plan.](#)

Early in our annual budget process, state law requires the Council to adopt a cap in the real estate tax rate that we might consider. Once the cap is adopted, the Council can ultimately lower the rate, but not increase it that year.

On March 17th, the Council [voted unanimously to adopt a cap of \\$1.043, which is the current rate.](#) The real estate rate will not increase this year, and any increases to City spending must be funded by alternate means.

With a large funding gap remaining for our Schools and challenges in our capital budget, the remaining budget process will be challenging to conclude.

As individual members of Council pose questions about the proposed budget, the answers are provided via budget memoranda. These [can be reviewed on the City's website for insight into the changes the Council may be considering.](#)

In April the Council will begin making suggestions for modifications to the proposed budget. [Please let me know any thoughts you have on the budget that has been proposed.](#)

Potomac Yard Metro Moves Forward

In 2008, along with then-Councilman Rob Krupicka, I proposed a new start to efforts to bring Metro to Potomac Yard. We included [language in the City's Transportation Master Plan](#) explicitly calling for a new station at Potomac Yard. We also tied the construction and funding of Metro to the development occurring in the Yard.

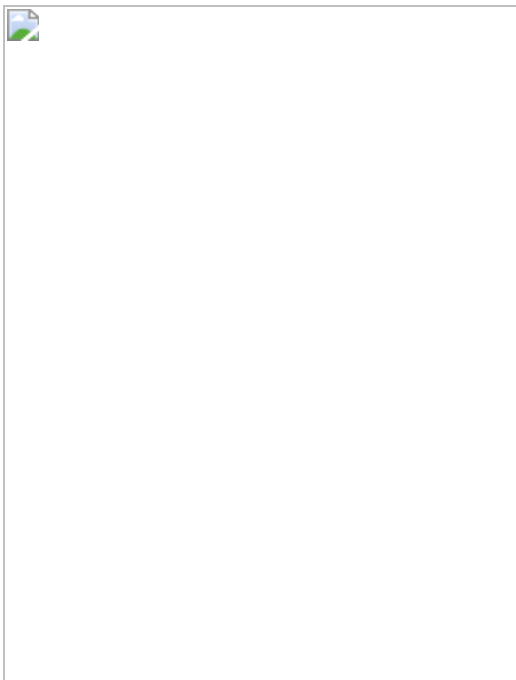
The result is [a funding plan for Potomac Yard Metro](#) that not only leverages the development activity in Potomac Yard, but also does so without requiring the contributions of taxpayers elsewhere in the City.

The largest environmental, [economic development](#) and transportation initiative in our City's history is being accomplished using [one of the most innovative funding mechanisms used anywhere in the country.](#)

Last week, the project took a gigantic step forward with the release of the [Draft Environmental Impact Statement for public review and comment.](#) The release of the draft statement, coordinated with the

Federal Transit Administration, the National Park Service and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), kicks off a lively period of public input which leads up to the Council's adoption of our Locally Preferred Alternative.

[Workshops and hearings](#) will be held by both the City and WMATA over the next few weeks. The comment period will be open until May 18th.



[This project will leverage the creation of up to 26,000 new jobs, and will bring up to \\$2 billion of new tax revenue to the City. It removes thousands of vehicles from one of the most crowded corridors in our City. It promotes the creation of a walkable community our City has long desired in Potomac Yard.](#)

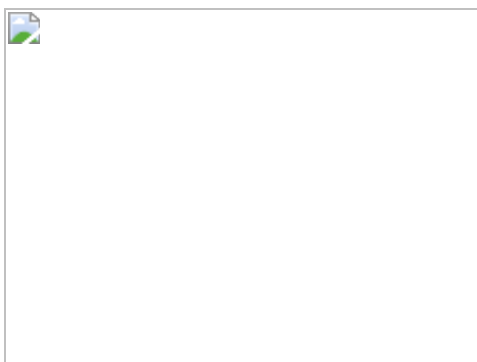
Once the Environmental Impact Statement process concludes with a Record of Decision, the construction efforts can commence.

As the City focuses on efforts to erase the structural imbalance in our budget, the successful completion of this project is a key component in that effort.

Paving Roads

Last month, I wrote about the City's annual Spring Pothole Campaign. Several crews from the Transportation and Environmental Services Department are out each day addressing potholes around the City. They have a lot to choose from. If you know of others they should address, please [report them using the Call, Click, Connect system](#).

While potholes are a rite of spring, we have many roads that are overdue for more significant work. Our [October 2013 assessment of all 521 lane miles of roads](#) within the City showed significant deficiencies to address.



Last year, in an attempt to address this issue, the Council voted to double the dollars allocated to our Street Reconstruction and Resurfacing project. This infusion of money provides that the department will resurface 45 lane miles during the current fiscal year.

The proposed FY 2016 Capital Improvement Program suggests additional increases in the resources for these road projects.

Under the budget that was approved last year, the following roads will be resurfaced before the end of the fiscal year on June 30th. This work will commence once the weather is warm enough for the asphalt plants to open:

Braddock Road from Russell Road to N. West Street
 Commonwealth Avenue from E. Monroe Avenue to E. Custis Avenue
 E. Taylor Run Parkway from Duke Street to the dead end
 Duke Street from N. Quaker Lane to S. Jordan Street
 S. Van Dorn Street from S. Pickett Street to Edsall Road

If the proposed budget is approved as is, the following schedule of resurfacing will be funded:

For Fiscal Year 2016 (July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016):

Taney Ave from Van Dorn St to the Dead end
 Wheeler Ave from Duke St to the Dead-end
 Janneys Lane from Cloverway to King St
 Monroe Ave from Stonewall Rd to Leslie Ave
 Yoakum Parkway from Edsall Rd to Stevenson Ave
 N Hampton Dr from Ford Ave to King St
 E. Taylor Run Pkwy from Duke St. to Dead End
 Duke St. from N. Quaker Ln. to S. Jordan St.
 S. Van Dorn St. from S. Pickett St. to Edsall Rd
 N. Van Dorn St. from Seminary Rd. to Menokin Dr.
 N./S. Columbus St. from Green St. to Oronoco St.
 Eisenhower Ave. from Bluestone Rd. to Mill Rd.
 King St from Menokin Dr. to Janney's Lane

For Fiscal Year 2017 (July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017):

E./ W. Myrtle St. Entire Length
 Dawes Ave. from King St. to Seminary Rd.
 Cambridge Rd. from Duke St. to Janney's Ln
 Oakcrest Dr. Entire Length
 N. Owen St. Entire Length
 St. Stephens Rd Entire Length
 Colonel Ellis Ave. Entire Length
 Russell Rd. from Mt. Vernon Ave. to Masonic View Ave.
 Circle Hill Dr. Entire Length
 Fontaine St. from Woodland Terr. to Ridge Road Dr.
 Fordham Rd. Entire Length
 Raymond Ave. Entire Length
 Tennessee Ave. from Old Dominion Blvd. to Valley Dr.
 Halcyon Dr. from Tennessee Ave. to N. Overlook Dr
 Leslie Ave. from Randolph Ave. to Duncan Ave.
 E. Glebe Rd. from Jefferson Davis Hwy to Russell Rd
 Kenwood Dr. from King St. to Crestwood Dr.
 Crestwood Dr. Entire Length
 Cameron St. from Union St. to Buchannan St.
 Mt. Vernon Ave. from Braddock Rd. to Hume Ave.
 Randolph Ave. Entire Length
 N. Pickett from Polk Ave. to Dead End
 N./ S. Henry St. from Slater's Ln. to Franklin St.
 Pendleton St. Entire Length
 Prince St. from Dangerfield Rd. to S. Columbus St.
 Chambliss St. Length in City

For Fiscal Year 2018 (July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018):

Hume Ave. Entire Length
 Francis Hammond/ Skyhill Rd.
 W. Timber Branch Pkwy. From Braddock Rd. to Dead End
 Taney Ave. from N. Early St. to N. Gordon St.
 Scroggins Rd. from Braddock Rd. to King St.

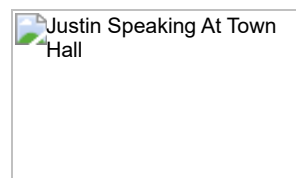
Beverly Dr. from Old Dominion Blvd. to Wellington
 Wilkes St. from Patrick St.
 Seminary Rd. from Beauregard to City Limit
 Kennedy St./ Landover Rd. Entire Length
 Cathedral St. Entire Length
 Ft. Williams Pkwy Entire Length
 N./ S. Columbus from Green St. to Oronoco St.
 E/W Myrtle St Entire Length
 Malcolm Pl. Entire Length
 Oakland Terr. Entire Length
 Dartmouth Rd. from Crown View to Dead End
 Crown View Dr. from Clover Way to Dartmouth Rd.
 Skyhill Rd. from Janney's Ln. to Dead End
 W. Taylor Run Pkwy. From Janney's Ln. to Dead End
 Bryan St. from W. Taylor Run Pkwy. To Dead End
 E/W Abingdon St. from First St. to Dead End
 N/S Alfred St. from First St. to Church St.
 E/W Linden St. Entire Length
 Virginia Ave. Entire Length
 Allison St. Entire Length
 Royal St. from King St. to Bashford

These schedules are subject to change given conditions.

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

The Future of Transportation In Alexandria

This year's budget presents a major shift in the way we budget for and save for transportation projects.

During the 2007 General Assembly session, a bipartisan compromise was forged to provide new funding for transportation around the Commonwealth. The legislation was signed by then-Governor Kaine.

In addition to statewide and regional funding mechanisms, the legislation created authority for local governments in Northern Virginia to enact an [additional commercial real estate tax to fund transportation efforts](#). In Virginia, all real estate had previously been taxed at the same rate. This new authority allowed commercial real estate to be taxed at a higher rate.

Shortly after enactment, the [Supreme Court of Virginia invalidated much of the bipartisan transportation funding package](#). However the Supreme Court did leave the add-on commercial real estate tax authority intact.

[Fairfax County](#) and Arlington County quickly exercised this new authority and it remains in place today.

In Alexandria, we created a committee of residents to study the issue. [They provided a recommendation that the City gradually begin assessing the add-on tax](#). Largely due to concerns regarding the

impact the tax would have on the City's small businesses, the City chose not to pursue the tax in 2008.

In 2010, the issue returned. This time, [the City had developed a priority list of projects and there was considerable political support around adopting the add-on tax.](#)

Again, due to concerns about the impact on the City's small businesses, the Council chose not to adopt the commercial add-on tax. However, the Council [did choose to increase the real estate rate \(applying to all properties\) by 2.2 cents to provide the same level of funding.](#) Thus, the City's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was born.

Since that time, the TIP has been used to fund new and expanded transportation efforts throughout our City. [Last year's TIP](#) funded many important transportation initiatives, including DASH expansion, the new dedicated transit corridors (including the newly operational MetroWay on Route 1), road improvements throughout the City, and Capital Bike Share.

This year, everything changed. [In February, the Chairman of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority \(WMATA\) Board of Directors touted that WMATA would balance its budget without fare increases or service reductions.](#)

Unfortunately, left unsaid in that statement from the Board was that WMATA intended to request large increases in operating support from its member localities, and by extension, the taxpayers of Alexandria and the region.

Starting this year, [the City Manager's proposed TIP devotes 25% of the total funding to the increased subsidy request from WMATA.](#) In order to accomplish this, a number of major projects were removed from the TIP and are no longer funded.

It is my view that this violates the intent and community expectation around the TIP and its funding. The TIP was designed to create and operate "new" transportation services and improvements, [not plug budgetary holes for WMATA.](#)

These are difficult times for our regional transit authority. WMATA recently [had its bond rating downgraded.](#) Its board [has struggled to agree on a future direction for the authority.](#) The economic troubles for the region have challenged ridership. Safety concerns still plague the operation.

There is no easy fix for the fact that the City's WMATA funding is crowding out our new transportation initiatives. It is my view, however, that this should prompt a larger conversation about how we fund transportation in Alexandria. Let me know your thoughts.

The Future of our Schools

[Kindergarten enrollment is under way](#) for the 2015-2016 school year in the Alexandria City Public Schools.

While it is always exciting to see children begin their education in our system, there are important decisions and potential changes on the horizon for our schools.

First, the School Board has circulated the draft of their [2015 - 2020 Strategic Plan.](#) This plan will serve as the strategic road map of priorities for the operation and funding of our schools. While the Board is still revising this plan, they are [inviting input until it is finalized before the summer.](#)

Over the past 2 years, I have used this newsletter to write about the impacts that the [large increases in student enrollment](#) have had on our children, our educators and our budgets. I have written about the

work of the Long Range Educational Facilities Work Group that I serve on along with the Mayor and the Chair and Vice Chair of the School Board

While the work group's work is not complete, we are able to draw some conclusions about the nature of the challenges before us.

While student enrollment increases have challenged every corner of our City, these increases have been particularly acute on the West End. There are 247

students who live in the Tucker Elementary zone and cannot attend due to capacity challenges. Similarly, there are 152 students who live in the Ramsay Elementary zone and must attend other schools.



It was 1999 when the School Board last tackled the difficult and politically perilous task of redrawing the attendance zones. Our school system has grown by leaps and bounds since that time.

With that in mind, [our School Board recently initiated the process of redrawing the attendance zones](#). While the process has just begun, there will be opportunities over the next year for residents to weigh in on each aspect of the process. A little less than a year from now, the new School Board will vote on the final plan. The new districts will go into effect for the 2016 - 2017 school year.

Councilman Justin M. Wilson
703.746.4500
justin.wilson@alexandriava.gov
www.justin.net
Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314