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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by:*

*Vice Mayor Justin M. Wilson*

Alexandria, Virginia

April 1, 2016

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While it doesn't feel much like Spring at this point, April is here. City Council is entering the busiest time in our calendar.

This time of year tends to be filled with many events to support the great Alexandria non-profit organizations that serve our City.

In about 3 weeks, [ACT for Alexandria brings back Spring2ACTION on April 20th](#). This annual day of giving galvanizes our community in support of so many organizations and causes. Please join me in participating on the 20th. Together, we can exceed the \$1.2 million that was raised last year.

In the Alexandria City Public Schools, [we were able to recognize Brandon Davis, the Principal of Cora Kelly School for Math, Science and Technology, as the Virginia Distinguished Principal of the Year](#). Principal Davis has clearly set the bar very high for our children and educators at Cora Kelly. Alexandria's children will benefit for generations to come.

Let me know if I can be of assistance to you.

[Contact me anytime.](#)

## Council Initiatives

Investing in Our Infrastructure



[Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)

[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

## Events/Updates

### First Thursday Returns!

Next Thursday is the first "First Thursday" of the year!

[The Del Ray Business Association continues the tradition from 6 - 9 PM on Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray.](#)

Attendees are encouraged to bring non-perishable food items to support the [Blessings in a Backpack](#) program currently operating at Mount Vernon Community School and Maury Elementary School.

### Mulch, Delivered

Last month the City began mulch deliveries.

Mulch is available in a full or half truckload, and each delivery is \$50.

Contact 703-746-HELP to schedule a delivery.

### Alexandria's Earth Day

The City's Annual Earth Day festival returns on Saturday April 30th.

[This year's event will next to the George Washington Middle School at the Lenny Harris Memorial Field.](#)

The event will be from 10 AM until 2 PM. I'll see you there!

### Design the Potomac Yard Metro

As the City continues its efforts to build a new Metro station at Potomac Yard, we

The most important decision the City Council makes each year is the adoption of the annual operating budget and capital improvement program. The operating budget generally funds the ongoing costs of government (primarily personnel), while the capital budget funds one-time expenditures that provide the community with an asset (new schools, new roads, new playing fields, transit buses, etc).

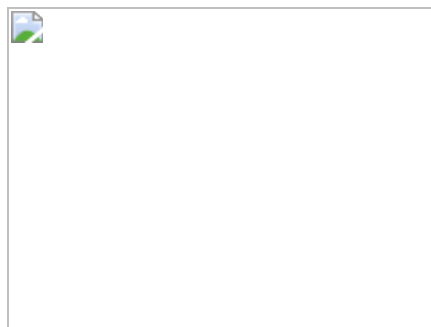
In late February, the City Manager [presented his proposed Fiscal Year 2017 budgets](#) to the City Council and our budget process is now underway.

The proposed general fund operating budget is \$671.6 million, an increase of 3.46% from Fiscal Year 2016. With revenue growth in the low single digits, the City Manager included a proposed increase of one cent in the real estate tax rate.

At the proposed rate of \$1.053 and including the impact of assessment increases, the average single family homeowner will pay an additional \$238 during 2016. The average condominium homeowner will pay an additional \$60.

[Alexandria currently has the second lowest real estate tax rate of major Northern Virginia jurisdictions](#), and given the [current budget proposals of our neighbors](#), that is unlikely to change.

The budget process is now underway in earnest. The City staff have been working to answer questions from individual members of the Council regarding the proposed budget. This year, the staff is responding in [the traditional budget memo format](#), as well as trying a new ["questions and answers" format for answering the same questions](#).



The Council held its first Public Hearing on March 14th. We took four hours of testimony from residents around our City. A day later, we made the first critical decision of the budget process.

State law requires that early in the budget process, we "advertise" the highest real estate tax rate that we might adopt. When we adopt the budget on May 5th, we can go lower than the "advertised" rate, but we cannot go above it.

On March 15th, [the Council unanimously voted to advertise a real estate tax rate of \\$1.073](#), a three cent increase. If Council were to adopt the full three cent increase, the average residential homeowner would pay \$275 more than they did in 2015 (\$119 due to increase in assessments and \$156 due to the increase in the rate).

Last month, I wrote about [the significant deficiencies in a variety of municipal facilities](#). Just getting these facilities up to a passable condition could cost over \$100 million over the next decade.

[I also wrote about our road paving plan](#). Due to years of underinvestment, our roads are in dismal condition and we have tripled our road maintenance budget to play catch-up around the City.

In January, [I wrote about the daunting infrastructure needs that face the Alexandria City Public Schools](#). Years of underinvestment and robust student growth over the past decade have left us with little choice but a rapid investment in new capacity.

[A year ago, I wrote about the scarcity of funding for new transportation infrastructure](#) and how increased needs to sustain the

are now working on station design.

[Use AlexEngage to give us your opinion on state design today!](#)

**King, Callahan & Russell**

[The City continues our efforts to improve the pedestrian safety of the King Street, Callahan Drive and Russell Road intersection.](#)

To assist in that effort, we have [set up a survey to collect information](#) related to proposals for improvement. Let us know your thoughts.

**Apply for the Marketing Fund**

[The Alexandria Marketing Fund is an economic development initiative of the City.](#)

The Fund provides seed money to support new and innovative marketing efforts that help increase City revenues and promote Alexandria as a destination for visiting, shopping, dining and doing business.

The next round of funding is preparing to be awarded and the deadline is a week from today.

[Apply online today!](#)

**Alexandria After School Arts Academy**

Register your child today for the Alexandria Arts Academy.

This new after school program is aimed at children 7-10 and begins on April 11th.

The program teaches dance, theater, drawing, painting and collage making. It culminates in June with the Alexandria Youth Arts Festival.

The 24 sessions are held Monday - Wednesday at the

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) were crowding out local investments for transportation.

Collectively, we have a basic infrastructure crisis. Deferring this work increases costs on future taxpayers, and chokes off investment.

It is time to address our infrastructure and I am hopeful that the City Council will use this opportunity to do so.

**A Better 911, A Safer Alexandria**

In an emergency, before a resident ever encounters a "First Responder," they encounter the men and women who answer the phone at the City's 911 center.

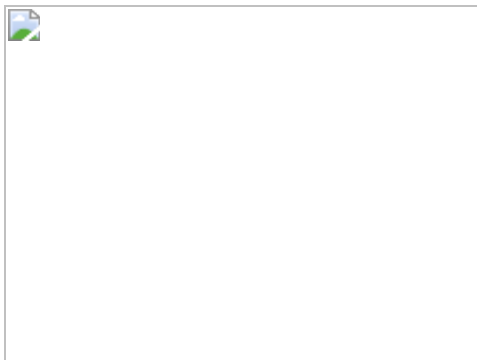
In 2011, the [City opened the new headquarters of the Alexandria Police Department on Wheeler Avenue](#). The new facility, which has saved the City taxpayers millions of dollars by vacating numerous leased spaces, consolidated the entire department under one roof.

In conjunction with the transition, the [City used the opportunity to consolidate the previous Police Department Communications and Fire Department Communications](#). In the past, 9-1-1 calls were transferred between the departments during emergencies.

[The new Department of Emergency Communications was created](#) and located at the Wheeler Avenue location.

With the department established, it now became time to provide the new department with the appropriate resources necessary to protect the safety of our community.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 2011, the City began planning and



budgeting for an entire replacement of our Public Safety Communications system, the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, the Police Records Management system, Fire Station Alerting system, and more.

As we concluded the [implementation of this](#)

[system in 2015, the project had become a \\$15 million investment](#). The CAD system and Fire Station Alerting System went live on January 21, 2015.

These new systems provide better data to our dispatchers, better pre-arrival data to our first responders, and more efficient and prompt dispatch of emergency response. It provides our dispatchers with better data on the location and status of resources.

The new system provides for greater interoperability with our neighboring jurisdictions, thus improving our mutual aid response.

Earlier this week, the City was able to avail ourselves of another feature of this investment, the ability to receive text messages from those seeking emergency response. [Our friends in Arlington and Fairfax County have already deployed](#) this functionality.

[While the City still encourages residents to call 9-1-1 if emergency assistance is required, the ability to text 9-1-1 is now available for our residents in an emergency situation.](#)

**Building our Information Infrastructure**

Durant Arts Center at 1605  
Cameron Street.

[Sign up online today!](#)

### Special Film Screening

[SCAN, along with the Child Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria, the City, and the Center for Alexandria's Children, are hosting a special film screening.](#)

The screening is of the moving "Breaking the Silence" and is scheduled for Tuesday April 12th at 6 PM at the Lee Recreation Center (1108 Jefferson Street).

Learn more about preventing the tragedy of child sexual abuse.

Our efforts to bring new broadband infrastructure to Alexandria are entering a new phase.

Last July, the City took a significant step forward in our efforts to bring new broadband options to Alexandria. The Council had supported the idea of issuing 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.

The [RFI was issued and we actively solicited those partnerships](#). The deadline for responses was September 3rd and we received 10 responses from potential private partners.

Last month, the City completed the [initial financial estimates for the first phase of the infrastructure build-out](#). With a full cost of just under \$8.5 million, 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.

This is an exciting project and one that gives the City the best chance to leverage its unique assets to bring new broadband services to our residents and businesses.

### Waterfront Vision: Realized

Our Potomac River waterfront is the reason Alexandria exists as a community. [The history of this waterfront](#) is the history of Alexandria. It is what has brought people and commerce to our community for generations.

Unfortunately, for the past few decades, the future of our waterfront has also been the source of discord and community division. Far too often it has led to litigation. This litigation has, in some cases, [persisted for decades](#).

When the last City Council was sworn in over three years ago, it was an early goal to resolve all on-going litigation, craft settlements with disputed landowners, and move forward as a community together. I believe that has been a success.

The implicit compromise of the [approved Waterfront Small Area Plan](#) was as simple as it was controversial. Can we allow some increased development on three derelict sites in exchange for the following: new waterfront parks, public accessibility throughout the shoreline, new flood mitigation, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality?

While achieving this vision has not always been easy, we now stand closer than ever.



A year ago, [the Virginia Supreme Court ruled in favor of the City](#) in the final litigation related to the Waterfront Plan. [Last June, the Court denied a request for the case to be reheard](#), thus ending the litigation.

Last May, the property exchanges occurred between the City and the Old Dominion Boat Club. The [City now owns the existing Club property](#), and the Club [now owns properties farther south along the waterfront](#). In order to create a seamless, uninterrupted park along the waterfront, this exchange was required.

With City funds from our settlement, the Boat Club will [soon construct a new club for their members on their new site](#). Additionally, the City will create a landmark park with integrated flood mitigation at the base of King Street, thus addressing flood challenges that have long plagued the corridor.

A year and a half ago, the Council approved [Phase One of the Waterfront Landscape and Flood Mitigation Design](#). This exciting design marries the vision of the Olin Group and the input of hundreds of residents who participated in the planning efforts. It also received input from the [Art and History Report](#) to ensure our history is a key component of the future of our waterfront.

Prioritizing the development of the public promenade and the flood mitigation, the [Council approved the implementation plan](#) for the public improvements.

Given the planned timing for the implementation of the full flood mitigation and park plan, [we have been working to plan for interim uses for Fitzgerald Square](#).

We need your help! [Please head to Alex Engage to give us some thoughts before April 3rd](#), as we work to develop interim uses for this important new park.

The City will also be working to determine how the waterfront public and private amenities will be managed long into the future. [The Waterfront Commission has been examining different governance models, with some form of a "Community Investment District" likely coming to the City Council for consideration](#).

Please [let me know your thoughts](#) as we work to achieve the vision of a more vibrant and accessible waterfront for our City.

### **Curbside Composting!**

In late 2013, the City Council, in concert with the Arlington County Board, [voted to extend our agreement with Covanta Energy to operate the Alexandria/Arlington Waste-To-Energy Facility](#).

The extension resulted in significant cost savings for those Alexandria residents that receive City trash and recycling services, and thus pay the Residential Refuse Fee along with their Real Estate Tax.



During our FY 2014 budget process, I asked our staff to prepare a [package of suggestions for reinvestment of some of the savings from the lower costs of the operation of the Waste-To-Energy facility](#).

The package that resulted included new public space recycling, the new yard waste collection program, and [a pilot program for collection of compost at farmers markets around the City](#).

With the adoption of last year's budget, the Council funded the creation of a pilot program for residential food waste collection.

We are now launching this program. The first day of collection will be Monday April 11th.

As this is only a pilot, we have selected a subsection of the City to participate. If [you live in one of the selected areas](#), please [sign-up online to participate in the program!](#)

I'm excited about this new effort to redirect food waste from our refuse collection and provide for improved resource recovery. [Let me know how you enjoy participation in this new program!](#)

### 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

### Keeping Art Alive on Our Waterfront

The Torpedo Factory Arts Center is an iconic presence on the City's waterfront. Bringing a half a million visitors into working artists galleries, the Factory is a economic development engine and unique arts resource for our community.

The City of Alexandria purchased the Factory from the United States Government in 1969. The Arts Center was opened in 1974 and has been a model for similar centers around country.

Yet, for the past several years, the challenges of the Factory and the possible solutions to those challenges have been divisive.



In 2009, the [City commissioned a study to review the Factory and the opportunities of the site](#). The result of the study was a series of organizational changes to the Factory [that led to the creation of a new non-profit Board](#) to run the operations and leverage private resources to support the Factory.

With the existing lease nearing conclusion on June 30th of this year, the Torpedo Factory Arts Center Board [commissioned another study to look at the strategic options available to the City and the Factory](#).

This report recommended more changes to the governance, the management, and vision of the Factory.

With the impending lease expiration, this now comes before the City Council.



My focus is on deriving a structure for the operation of the Factory that:

- expands the vitality of the Factory
- improves its financial sustainability
- improves its diversity
- ensures the success of Alexandria's premier arts destination long into the future.

I am confident that working together we can chart such a course.

## Food Trucks

In May of 2014, the City Council [adopted a pilot ordinance to allow some limited use of food trucks within the City's borders](#). While not allowing on-street vending from food trucks, the ordinance did allow food trucks at:

- Public locations (schools, recreation centers, etc) where permission was granted
- Private property
- Farmers markets with the permission of the market master
- City special events

While a very modest introduction of food trucks to our City, it was intended to provide a "test" of the concept and allow further consideration.

Given the limited opportunities to vend, we have [seen limited interest from the food truck vendors](#). In December, the Council voted to make the "pilot" rules permanent and gave new direction to the City Staff. We asked staff to engage the community and return to the Council with a pilot initiative to allow some on-street vending.

[After some analysis](#), the City Staff has proposed three on-street locations for consideration:

- [A location on N. West Street near the Braddock Road Metro](#)
- [A location on N. Fairfax Street near Canal Center](#)
- [A location on Eisenhower Avenue about halfway between the Patent and Trademark Office and the new National Science Foundation location](#)

[Through Sunday night, the staff is soliciting public input on these three proposed locations using the AlexEngage system](#). Please take the time to let us know your thoughts before this comes to the City Council later this month.

## Exciting Finds on the Waterfront

A key component of the approved Waterfront Small Area Plan was the [Alexandria Waterfront History Plan](#). The History Plan documented the rich history of the waterfront and laid out a framework for inclusion of that history in the next phase of Alexandria's waterfront.

Central to that plan was an archaeological plan to ensure that the



landowners of the three waterfront development sites engaged reclamation professionals. They would assist in the reclamation of history that might be found during excavation efforts.

With the development work at 220 S. Union Street underway to create the [new Indigo Hotel](#), the efforts have yielded exciting findings from Alexandria's history.

Most recently, excavations have yielded a ship's hull, which appears to have been buried during the late 18th Century. That is in addition to the previous find of a 1755 warehouse that was built at the behest of the Trustees of Alexandria.

In January, this find was briefly on display on site as archaeologists worked to preserve the ship in advance of its transport elsewhere. [A video with expert interpretation is available for review.](#)

With the ship now safely at the City's old DASHBus facility at 116 S. Quaker Lane, we are now preparing to place the ship on display for three days before it is moved to a more permanent storage facility.


[Tickets are available online for time slots on April 14th, 15th, and 16th.](#) In addition to reserving tickets, [please consider making a contribution to help support the preservation efforts!](#)

## A HOT Proposal Returns

A few months ago, I wrote about the City's efforts to formalize and encourage public-private partnerships to advance recreational infrastructure.

At the state level the Commonwealth has been using public-private partnerships to advance transportation projects, including new High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes. Through [these arrangements](#), a private entity finances a portion of the transportation improvement in exchange for the ability to collect tolls from use.

Under Governor McDonnell, there was an effort to create new HOT lanes on Interstate 395/95 to cover the 35 miles from the border with the District of Columbia south to Stafford County.

Both Alexandria and Arlington had concerns over the details of the proposal.  Mainly, what impacts the operation of the new lanes would have on local streets and air quality, as well as potential impacts to private property in order to expand the existing highway right of way.

At the time, Arlington County [filed a Federal lawsuit](#) to oppose the proposal. While the City did not join the litigation, [the City did adopt a resolution expressing the concerns](#) on the details of the proposal.

In the end, state Government [chose to remove the section of the lanes that went through Alexandria and Arlington.](#)

Now, nearly 5 years later, [Governor McAuliffe and his administration are trying again.](#) They have made a new proposal for extension of the HOT lanes into the District of Columbia.

This proposal does differ from the original HOT Lanes proposal in several key ways. At this point the City staff and the City's advisory boards and commissions will be reviewing the proposal and recommending responses from the City.

The Virginia Department of Transportation will be hosting a community meeting to provide information on the proposal. This meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 13th from 6 PM until 9 PM at Hammond Middle School.



**Being Strategic**

In a community as diverse as Alexandria, with needs that range from emergency shelter to marina slips, it can be difficult to craft shared vision. To achieve a direction that is reflective of the values of our community, a strategic plan can help map out a collective vision.

With the City's [previous 2004-2015 Strategic Plan](#) now expired, we are now undertaking the creation of a new Strategic Plan covering FY 2017 - FY 2022.

Using AlexEngage, we received [a lot of good input as to what Alexandrians wish to see in our community in the future.](#)

On Saturday, April 9th, the City will have [the next community meeting at George Washington Middle School at 10 AM.](#) The goal of the meeting will be to refine the vision of the plan and the goals, with an eye towards prioritizing those goals in a subsequent meeting in June.

This fall, the draft strategic plan will come to the City Council.

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