

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)

# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by:*

*Vice Mayor Justin M. Wilson*

Alexandria, Virginia

April 1, 2018

## In This Edition

[Council Initiatives](#)

[The Budget](#)

[Karig Estates](#)

[Aging in Alexandria](#)

[Water Rates](#)

[Host a Town Hall](#)

[Upcoming Issues:](#)

[Employee](#)

[Compensation,](#)

[Dedicated Tax](#)

[Revenue, Opioids &](#)

[Combined Sewer](#)

## Quick Links

[E-Mail Me](#)

[Past Newsletters](#)

[City of Alexandria Website](#)

[Pay City Taxes Online](#)

[Review Real Estate](#)

[Assessments](#)

[Crime Mapping & Statistics](#)

[Call.Click.Connect](#) (Submit

Service Requests to City

Agencies)

[Board & Commission](#)

[Vacancies](#)

[Alexandria Health Department](#)

[Restaurant Inspections](#)

[Report Potholes](#)

[Schedule Child Safety Seat](#)

[Inspection](#)

**Happy Easter and Happy Passover to all those celebrating!**

**April 25th is an exciting day in Alexandria. We put our generosity to the test.**

**April 25th is [Spring2ACTion](#). This annual tradition is a coordinated one day giving initiative to support numerous non-profits that serve our community.**

**Last year, Alexandrians gave over \$1.59 million to Alexandria non-profits doing critical work for our residents.**

**Please join me as we work to top that number this year!**

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

## Council Initiatives

### Budget Process Continues

From 2002 until 2009 the City was enjoying the run-up in the residential real estate market. Our General Fund budget increased by an average of 6.5% per year. The work force in City Government grew from 2,229 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) to 2,660 FTEs during that period.

There were [even campaigns calling for Council to limit spending growth to 3% per year](#).

In Fiscal Year 2010, the bottom fell out as the Great Recession took hold. The City adopted its first negative budget in at least 40 years, reducing spending from Fiscal Year 2009 to 2010 by over 2%. From



[Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)

[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

## Events/Updates

### The Next Campaign

[In November, I made a significant announcement about my political future: I announced that I will be running to be Alexandria's next Mayor.](#)

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

If you have not been receiving my campaign updates and you wish to receive updates on this new campaign, [please drop my campaign a line](#) and we'll get you on the list for campaign updates.

### Join the Pothole Patrol!

The City is kicking-off its annual "Pothole Patrol" as we work to address the potholes that develop over the winter.

[You can report your favorite potholes online to be addressed immediately.](#)

### Old Town Home & Garden Tour

[Saturday April 21st from 10 AM to 4 PM is the 85th Annual Alexandria Historic Homes and Garden Tour.](#)

The tour, hosted by the Garden Club of Alexandria and the Hunting Creek Garden Club, will occur throughout Old Town.

Tickets are \$45 in advance and \$55 on the day of the tour.

### Mulch, Delivered

2010 to 2018, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 3.4% per year.

Sustaining an average budget growth of 3% per year with 4% annual student enrollment growth, employee healthcare costs increasing far above rates of inflation, long-deferred infrastructure needs, and ever-escalating funding challenges from Metro is impossible.

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 February, [the City Manager presented his proposed Fiscal Year 2019 budgets](#) to the City Council and our budget process is well under way.

Under current rates, projections are that we would experience an anemic 1.9% revenue growth. That would provide an additional \$14 million of new revenue available for both the operating and capital budgets.

[The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority \(WMATA\) is tentatively requesting an additional \\$3.6 million of operating funds from Alexandria next year.](#) This is to support existing operations and safety initiatives.

[The School Board's proposed operating budget for the Alexandria City Public Schools has requested an additional \\$10.9 million](#), about 5.1%, driven largely by enrollment increases and the planned opening of the [new Ferdinand Day Elementary School.](#)

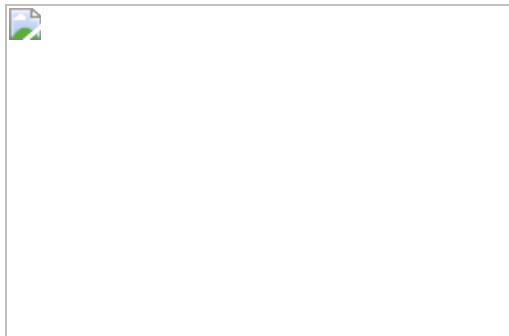
Providing City employees with scheduled "merit" increases alone costs an additional \$5 million.

The combination of the increases for WMATA, our schools and our employees' scheduled merit increases depletes ALL of the new revenue available for this upcoming fiscal year.

In the fall, the City Council approved budget guidance that required the City Manager to present a budget that included no increase in the real estate tax rate of \$1.13. Pursuant to state law, the Council was required to "advertise" the highest tax rate that we might consider during this budget process. [On March 14th, the Council voted unanimously to advertise the current rate of \\$1.13.](#) In adopting our budget, we can now choose a rate below the current rate, but no higher.

As a result, the City Manager was forced to make significant choices to present a balanced budget as required by law. The proposed general fund operating budget is \$742.3 million, an increase of 1.9% from Fiscal Year 2018. With \$4.3 million of reductions, the City government spending is itself only proposed to increase by 0.3%.

That restraint on the City side allowed the City Manager to propose full funding of the Alexandria City Public Schools Superintendent's requested operating transfer.



Last month the City began mulch deliveries.

Mulch is available in a full or half truckload, and each delivery ranges from \$50 - \$100.

[For the first time this year, deliveries can be scheduled online.](#)

### Alexandria's Earth Day

The City's Annual Earth Day festival returns on Saturday, April 28th.

[This year's event will be held 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!

### Time For Kindergarten

If you have a child who will be five years of age by September 30th, it's time to register for Kindergarten!

[All Alexandria City Public Schools will begin Kindergarten registration on Wednesday April 11th, from 3 PM until 7 PM.](#)

[Each school has an open house scheduled as well.](#)

### GMU Summer Camps

Looking for a summer camp for your kids?

George Mason University offers a wide variety of summer camps and programs at its multiple campus locations in the areas of art, technology, academics, sports, recreation, radio, forensics, debate, and more.

[More information is available online.](#)

### Spring Clean Up

[The City's Spring Clean Up program returns this month.](#)

Beginning Saturday April 14th and concluding May

The City Manager has proposed 69% of the new revenue to go to the Alexandria City Public Schools, 22% to transit programs and only 7% to the remaining City budget.

For the past two years the City Council has directed significant new resources into our Capital Improvement Program to address decades of under-investment in our City's infrastructure.

The City Manager's proposed 10 year Capital Improvement Program continued the focus on expanding infrastructure investment. The 10 year plan proposes spending \$2.1 billion driven largely by \$453.8 million to address Sanitary Sewer projects, \$601 million for transportation projects including WMATA capital funding, \$438.1 million of funding for Alexandria City Public Schools capital projects, \$153 million for City facility needs and \$60 million for land acquisition for both City and ACPS facilities.

[The City Manager has incorporated the recent recommendations of our Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Facility Investment Task Force in his proposed Capital Improvement Program.](#) This group has assisted the Council in not only synthesizing the considerable facility investment for both the City and the Schools, but also making serious policy recommendations for the governance and implementation of this spending.

For the first time in quite a few years, the 10 year Capital Improvement Program adopted by the School Board and the funding for that 10 year program proposed by the City Manager are largely aligned. That is a significant milestone. The alignment is a testament to the difficult decisions made by City Council over the past two budgets, the work of the School Board to align to that new revenue picture, and the hard work of the Task Force.

We have a month left in the budget process. [We have a series of work sessions to dig through each portion of the budget](#), You can [review the questions that have been posed by City Council so far in the process, and the answers that have been provided by our Office of Management and Budget.](#)

I look forward to working with the residents of this City to adopt a budget that is reflective of our values as a community.

### Karig Estates

In local government the most controversial decisions that come before the City Council relate to the use of land. As a ["Dillon Rule" state](#), Virginia provides local government with only the powers explicitly provided for by the General Assembly. Land use planning and zoning are one of the areas where the limitations of local authority are most evident.

The libertarian Cato Institute ranks restrictions by states of land-use each year. In a study last year, [Cato ranked Virginia as having the 9th least restrictive land-use regulation and the 18th least restrictive zoning regulation in the nation.](#) While some (including myself) might quibble with their methodology, it is true that Virginia has a strong "land rights" ethos.

At the local level, that generally manifests itself by allowing a landowner largely unfettered rights to develop property they own up to the limits of the existing zoning. We refer to such development as "by-right" development, and [the courts in Virginia have significantly restricted local government from having much say in whether such development can occur.](#)

For the City this means that most of the development that comes before the Planning Commission and City Council is not by-right. In many circumstances in the City, we try to avoid the by-right land-use, and instead trade additional density with the landowner to encourage

5th, a different section of the City will go each week.

[Check your date today!](#)

## Mason Speakers

Is your club or organization interested in having a speaker?

The George Mason University speakers program is comprised of over 100 faculty and staff who provide lectures and guest presentations on hundreds of topics to organizations and businesses free of charge.

Contact Sarah Gallagher at 703-993-8761 or [via email](#) for more information.

## First Thursday Returns!

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.](#)

## DASH Public Meetings

[In order to gain community feedback on proposed changes to the fare structure, DASH is holding two meetings this week.](#)

On Wednesday the 4th from 6 PM until 7 PM, a community meeting will be held at Ramsay Elementary at 5700 Sanger Avenue.

On Thursday the 5th, from 6:30 PM until 7:30 PM, a community meeting will be held at Mount Vernon Recreation Center at 2701 Commonwealth Avenue.

The Board of Directors will then hold a Public Hearing on Wednesday April 11th at 5:30 PM at City Hall.

## Reentry Expo

[The Alexandria Workforce Development Center will be](#)

more compatible development and receive developer-funded amenities to benefit the community.

This "trade" becomes a staple of the local land-use process. Recent small area plans in Alexandria have highlighted this arrangement. In the Waterfront Small Area Plan, the City traded additional density in exchange for acres of new open space and badly needed flood mitigation. In the Beauregard Small Area Plan, we traded additional density for acres of new open space, hundreds of new committed affordable housing units, transportation improvements, a new fire station, and more. In the North Potomac Yard Plan, we traded additional density for funding for a new Metro Station, new open space, infrastructure improvements and more. The list goes on.

The premise can be simple: the City provides additional density and the developer cedes some control over the development process.

[Yet, in recent years, the General Assembly has actually worked to further restrict what little local authority the City does have to "extract" proffers for the community from developers.](#) These restrictions on local government authority have unfortunately enjoyed bi-partisan support in Richmond.

Despite this typical practice, there are some areas of the City where this arrangement doesn't work. If additional density is not desired, the landowner maintains the right to proceed with by-right development. In those cases, the City now becomes a ministerial agency, largely restricted to ensuring that the landowner meets the rules of the underlying zoning.

In January, the City Council heard such a case. A landowner was attempting to develop a heavily wooded 3.13 acre site just behind Temple Beth El on Seminary Road. [The proposal was to build 4 large single family homes on the site.](#)

In November, the Planning Commission heard this case and determined that under the rules of the zoning in place on the site, the application met the criteria.

The dominant issues raised before the Planning Commission were concerns regarding the placement of the homes, impacts on the natural resources on the property (trees and water resources), and the lot orientation.

In response to concerns raised, one of the homes was moved slightly, and half of the trees on the site were proposed (voluntarily) to be protected with a perpetual easement. In addition, existing water resources were proposed to be protected with a 50 foot buffer as required by City Code.

Neighboring property owners, feeling as though the Planning Commission was incorrect in their interpretation of the law, appealed the case to the City Council. An exceedingly rare event, the City Council then held a hearing on the appeal.

After a few hours of difficult and complex testimony, the City Council voted 6-1 to uphold the Planning Commission's decision.

This is one of those rare situations where the City Council is not placed in a policy-making role, but instead in the role of interpreting our zoning code and ensuring compliance. While there were certainly aspects of this application I would have preferred be changed, that was not the question before the Council according to the law.

The City was recently notified that pro se plaintiffs have challenged the City Council's decision in Circuit Court.

I am hopeful that this case can be resolved swiftly in court.

## Aging in Alexandria

[hosting an "Alexandria Reentry Expo" this Wednesday from 10 AM until 12 PM.](#)

The event, scheduled at Lee Center (1108 Jefferson Street) will have a wide-range of exhibitors from organizations providing support for previously incarcerated women and men.

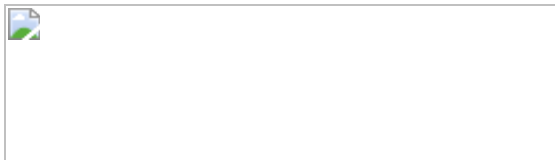
### **Bike Friendly Community**

The City has applied to be certified as a "Bicycle Friendly Community" by the League of American Bicyclists.

We need community input as part of the application process. The deadline is April 8th. [Please complete the survey online.](#)

The fastest growing population in Alexandria are those over 60 years of age. As the "boomers" age, their numbers are projected to double in our City from 15,473 in 2000 to over 30,000 in 2030.

Facing this population growth and their changing needs was a central focus of the Alexandria Commission on Aging's strategic planning effort over 5 years ago. The result was the ["The Alexandria of our Future, A Livable Community For All Ages; Strategic Plan on Aging 2013 - 2017."](#)



One of the goals adopted in the plan committed the City to address housing

needs to ensure a place for our aging population to "age in place." The recommendations cited the need to evolve our land-use policies to ensure a place for these uses in our community.

While the City still has a long way to go in addressing these critical needs, this year we are taking two significant steps forward.

A little over 3 years ago, after hours of divided testimony, [the City Council approved by a vote of 6-1 the development and operation](#) of a new "memory care" facility on King Street between Ivy Hill Cemetery and the existing Woodbine Rehabilitation. [Silverado was selected to operate this facility and it should be opening any day now, to provide care for 65 residents with Alzheimer's or other memory impairments.](#)

In approving this facility, the applicant agreed to provide two units at deeply subsidized rates to income-eligible residents of our community.

[In November of last year, the Council voted unanimously to approve a facility proposed by Sunrise Senior Living at 400 N. Washington Street.](#) In this facility, there will be a maximum of 93 assisted living units, including 27 memory care units.

In approving this facility, the applicant agreed to provide two studio units supported by ["auxiliary grants,"](#) to ensure that not only the housing, but the services are affordable for some of Alexandria's residents.

With the new Silverado facility opening very soon, and the Sunrise Senior Living facility opening in a few years, Alexandria has made two significant steps to ensure a place for our aging population in our community.

### **Fighting For Lower Water Rates**

Alexandria remains one in a relatively small list of Virginia jurisdictions that have a private water utility. [Virginia American Water Company](#) (VAWC), a subsidiary of a large national company, provides the water supply to Alexandria's residents and businesses.

As a private utility, VAWC is subject to the authority of the [State Corporation Commission](#) in Richmond. In 2014, VAWC applied to the Commission in order to create a new "Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Service Charge."

As proposed, the new charge was to assist VAWC in collecting the resources to perform system-wide maintenance.

While the City certainly supports the maintenance efforts that are badly needed to protect our City's water supply, we do have concern



about the mechanism.

At my request, the City filed with the Commission in opposition of



VAWC's request. The City's concern was that the change proposed by VAWC removes a significant "check" (the review by the State Corporation Commission), that exists to ensure the proper process is followed before rates are raised.

The Commission appointed a hearing examiner to look at the facts in the case and make a recommendation. The [response of the hearing examiner](#) in June of 2015 supported the City's perspective.

Then, the City filed [a response urging the Commission's support of the findings of the hearing examiner](#).

In September of 2015, the [Commission concurred with their hearing examiner and that case was closed](#).

Yet at the end of October 2015, [VAWC applied to the State Corporation Commission for another rate increase](#). The increase took effect on April 1, 2016 and increased the typical residential customer's bill by approximately \$4 per month. Additionally, they again applied for permission to create the new infrastructure services charge. Under state law, the increase goes into effect, but if the Commission lowers or eliminates the increase, every customer will be entitled to a refund.

In April of 2016, [the City Council voted unanimously to oppose the proposed increase](#).

Another hearing examiner was appointed. [At the end of November 2016, this hearing examiner provided his report](#). While the examiner did not accept all of the rate increases proposed by VAWC, he did approve a 3 year pilot of the new Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Service Charge. In [December, the City provided its response to this recommendation](#).

In May of last year, [the State Corporation Commission rendered their final decision](#). In their decision, the Commission limited VAWC's rate increase. Given the rate increase was put in place in April of 2016, all customers received refunds of the difference between the adopted and proposed increases.

[Now VAWC has received approval from the State Corporation Commission to begin the 3 year pilot of the new "Infrastructure Service Charge."](#)

To support the City's view on the inappropriateness of this type of unchecked rate increase mechanism, Senator Adam Ebbin [proposed legislation in the 2017 session to prevent such a fee structure in the future](#). Unfortunately, the legislation did not survive the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee.

I'm hopeful we can continue our efforts working with VAWC to improve our aging water infrastructure but respect our ratepayers and good process at the same time.

### **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

### Getting Employee Compensation Right

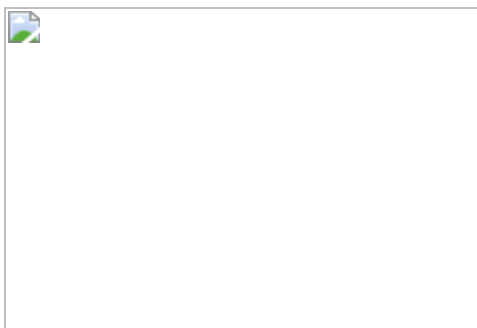
Local government is a people-intensive business. The services that residents of our City rely on every day are provided by a skilled and dedicated workforce. In a region such as ours, attracting and retaining such a workforce is a competitive business.

Fully 67% of the City's General Fund (not including schools and debt service) expenditures are personnel costs, including both salary and benefits. In this year's budget, that is \$228 million.

All City employees who are not at the end of the pay-scale qualify for a "merit increase" ranging from 2.3% to 5%. Funding those increases for all eligible City employees requires an additional \$5 million this year, over a third of all available new revenue at current tax rates.

Balancing the level of benefits provided with the ability to attract and retain the best workforce is a challenge for the City.

In recent years, the City has made a variety of changes to employee benefits. This was in an attempt to mitigate the costs of employee compensation on the City's taxpayers.



One of the largest compensation costs is providing health care coverage to our employees and their families. Like most employers, we have seen very large increases in these costs over the past two decades. Today the City spends nearly \$25 million a

year on healthcare for our employees and families.

[Over a decade ago, the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee made a series of recommendations to help mitigate these costs.](#) Many of those are in place today including premium cost sharing, self-funding (or self-insurance), and plan design changes. These changes have saved the taxpayers millions of dollars each year, with minimal impact on employees.

[In 2004, the Government Accounting Standards Board \(GASB\) required governments to account for their liability for the payment of healthcare benefits and retirement benefits \(OPEB\) during retirement.](#) Previously, these costs were recognized and paid on a "pay as you go" basis.

[Alexandria became one of the first jurisdictions to comply with this new standard](#) and we created a trust fund to save dollars for these future obligations. The City's unfunded liability for this obligation is now \$57.7 million, a decrease of \$10.7 million from the previous

year. This prudence protects taxpayers in the future from large unexpected obligations. It also protects employees from sudden benefit reductions due to an economic downturn.

[In 2009, the City eliminated life insurance for retirees.](#) That one benefit alone consumed a third of our retirement benefit obligations.

Most City employees (excluding most public safety) participate in the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), a state administered defined benefit pension plan. [The City implemented new cost-sharing for the VRS pension in 2012, with a five year implementation.](#) This effectively shifted a portion of the funding of the pension program from the City to employees.

[In last year's proposed budget, the City Manager proposed a change to the City's Supplemental Pension Plan.](#) The City's Supplemental Pension Plan is an additional defined benefit pension plan that the City has had in place since 1970.

Previously members had a choice between accepting an annuity upon retirement and a lump-sum payment. The lump-sum payment is based on 30-year US Treasury bond rates, which has been decreasing for decades. As a result, the lump-sum payment was unduly lucrative compared to the annuity option. To protect the health of the fund and save money, the City Manager proposed a change to how the lump sum is calculated.

While the changes that have been made to benefits over the years have reduced the costs to taxpayers, there is recognition that we must continue to invest to attract and retain the employees who serve our community.

In the City Manager's proposed budget this year, he has suggested new funding to increase the lowest hourly wage of any City employee to match a "living wage" of \$15 per hour. To support those City employees beginning or expanding their families, the City Manager's proposed budget has included funding for 6 weeks of paid parental leave for eligible employees.

[Yet for some of our employee groups, particularly in public safety, we are struggling to compete.](#) With significant growth in hiring and in compensation among neighboring jurisdictions, the competition grows more acute each year. Given the substantial cost of training and the consistency of that training across the region, inability to retain these employees can be very costly for the taxpayers.

To begin the process of meeting [the City's compensation philosophy](#), the City Manager set aside \$1.5 million to address some of the pay inequities existing within the Police Department and Fire Department. The City Manager's plan was to allow this money to serve as seed money for a multi-year effort to address these issues.

It has become clear that the \$1.5 million will be insufficient to address these issues. I am optimistic that the Council can identify additional resources during this budget process to ensure that we can attract and retain those employees that regularly put their lives on the line to protect the safety of our community.

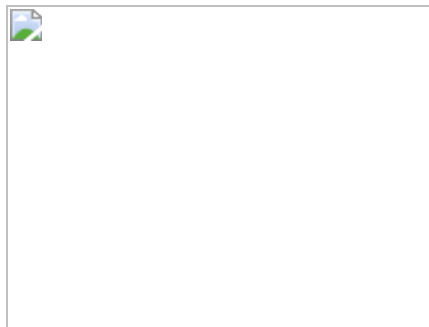
With every change to employee benefits and compensation, the City must consider the competition for employees between neighboring jurisdictions. There are ways to mitigate the taxpayer costs of employee compensation and benefits but they must not come at the expense of the service level that residents of Alexandria expect and demand.

### **Dedicated Tax Revenue**

In 2003, faced with rapid development activity that was diminishing our City's available open space, former Councilman David Speck [proposed](#) the creation of an Open Space Fund, and suggested the



dedication of 1 penny of the real estate tax rate to be transferred to that fund each year to fund the acquisition and preservation of open space in our community.



The City Council in 2003 created this new dedication. Since that time, those funds have enabled the City to purchase acres of open space around our City--both active and passive spaces that have benefited our quality of life.

A few years later, in 2005, faced with the rapid loss of housing that was affordable to middle and low income residents, former Councilwoman Joyce Woodson and former Councilman Ludwig Gaines [proposed](#) the dedication of an additional penny of the real estate tax rate to fund the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

The City Council in 2005 created this new dedication. Since that time, those funds have enabled the City to work with private and public partners to create new housing, and preserve threatened housing that has remained affordable to middle and low income residents struggling to remain in our City.

During the budget downturn, both of the dedications were reduced to fund little more than the debt service on open space acquisitions and affordable housing development that had already occurred. In the proposed budget this year, the dedication for affordable housing remained at 0.6 cents, and the dedication for open space remained at 0.3% of real estate tax revenue (the open space dedication was changed to a percentage of revenue a few years ago).

Over the past decade, the Council's appointed Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee has repeatedly opposed the practice of dedicating real estate revenue in their [annual report](#) to the Council, citing the limitations such a practice can have on the flexibility in the City's budget process.

While I have strongly supported initiatives to preserve and create open space, and I have strongly supported initiatives to preserve and create affordable housing, I share the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee's opposition to the advance dedication of tax revenue.

In my view, such a dedication subverts our annual budget process and places one type of expenditure (in this case open space and affordable housing) above all others.

If Council supports funding open space acquisition or affordable housing development, it has an annual opportunity to budget money to do so.

The challenge of advance dedication is particularly troublesome in the current environment we are in; an environment that will necessitate cuts to City spending each year. With dedicated real estate tax revenue, our City Manager will be forced to propose a budget with potentially devastating cuts to essential services, while maintaining the dedicated funds for affordable housing and open space. That choice may not be in keeping with the values and wishes of our community.

This was last a big issue for the City Council in adoption of our FY 2014 budget, 5 years ago.

In adopting our budget that year, the [Council voted unanimously](#) to remove those dedications to provide the Council with greater flexibility.

In the aftermath of that vote, there were [efforts to reconsider](#) the Council's action. In the end, the Council voted 6-1 to reaffirm our decision to remove the dedication for Open Space, and voted 5-2 to [retain the dedication for Affordable Housing](#). I was in the majority on the first vote, and in the minority on the second vote.

There was a very worthwhile debate of the Council on both of these items. I encourage you to [watch the video](#) to understand the perspective of each member at the time.

This issue is now poised to return to the Council. There have been new proposals to increase the dining tax and dedicate those funds to our affordable housing development efforts. [Our staff came to the City Council with a presentation of various options at the end of February](#).

I am hopeful and optimistic we can find ways to budget additional resources to address affordable housing development while doing so consistent with good budget practice.

Let me know your thoughts.

### **Opioid Effort**

[In 2016 there was a 38% increase in drug overdose deaths in the Commonwealth of Virginia. For the fourth straight year these deaths outpaced motor vehicle accidents and gun-related incidents.](#)

[From 2012 to 2016, 44 Alexandrians died due to Opioid overdoses.](#) The current trend suggests that we will have another double-digit increase this year in Alexandrians being treated for overdoses.

The nation's crisis of drug abuse has been well-publicized in the media. Within Virginia the increase has been driven by heroin and fentanyl, and the combination of the two.

[The Governor declared the opioid addiction issue a public health emergency a year and a half ago.](#) New resources are being focused on the problem at every level.

[During last year's budget process, I asked our staff to provide some analysis as to how we can expand resources to address this issue.](#)

During the middle of the current fiscal year, the City Manager added two additional resources to our Acute and Emergency Treatment section within the Department of Community and Human Services to help expand our capacity. In Alexandria, we have long provided funding supports to work to address the underlying causes of addiction.

[Partnering with other jurisdictions, we have now initiated litigation to recoup the costs the City has incurred in addressing this public health emergency.](#) I am hopeful that this litigation will not only recoup taxpayer dollars, but also drive the much needed change in industry to stem this emergency.

[Additionally, on the 9th of April, the City's Opioid Work Group will hold an "Opioid Community Action Planning Meeting" to help coordinate our City's response to this emergency. The event, from 6:30 until 8 will be held at T. C. Williams in the cafeteria.](#) Please RSVP online.

While we have seen increases in overdoses in our City, we have been fortunate to not see the same levels of overdose activity as

elsewhere in the Commonwealth and our nation. We must maintain vigilance and awareness, as well as invest in prevention programs with real results.

### **A New Plan for Combined Sewer System**

[A year ago, the General Assembly enacted legislation that required the City to address remediation of our Combined Sewer System on a timeline far more aggressive than what the Commonwealth's own environmental regulator had agreed was reasonable.](#)

In 95% of our City, stormwater (run-off) is collected and returned to rivers and streams with very little treatment to remove pollutants accumulated from roads, parking lots, and other surfaces upon which it falls. Separately, sanitary sewage is sent to the [Alexandria Renew Enterprises wastewater treatment facility](#), where it is treated and later returned to waterways as clean water.

However, in a 540-acre section of Old Town, a Combined Sewer System still collects both sanitary sewage and stormwater together and sends it to the wastewater treatment facility for its final disposition.

[During most rain events, due to capacity and design issues, this system experiences a Combined Sewer Overflow condition. This is where a mixture of stormwater and sewage flows untreated into waterways via stormwater outflows.](#)

In addition to the impact that this has on the cleanliness of our rivers and streams, this type of overflow is strictly regulated by law primarily the Clean Water Act.

The City operates this Combined Sewer System [under a permit from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality \(VDEQ\)](#). In 2013, the City was issued a new five-year permit for the operation of the system.

The City has always been in compliance with all permits for the operation of the system, releasing amounts of sewage within the limits permitted and has conducted targeted sewer separation activities along with redevelopment and other planned activities.

The 2013 permit required the City to work with the community to adopt a new Long Term Control Plan. The plan that was prepared reduces the presence of dangerous bacteria in the flow that is returned to the water. The new plan was submitted to the state on schedule.



[Politico recently ran a very comprehensive look at St. Louis' efforts to address their combined sewer issues.](#)

[Marketplace had a review of the Baltimore Combined Sewer System.](#)

[National Geographic covered the Combined Sewer challenges in Washington, DC.](#)

These cities, and many others face similar challenges to the task we face in Alexandria. While there are some differences, we all share the immense complexity and costs. [Washington's "Clean Rivers" Project is expected to take 20 years and cost \\$2.6 billion](#) to cover 53 outfalls.

[Three years ago the Council created a new stakeholder committee](#) to monitor the creation of and offer feedback on the Long Term Control Plan.

The [committee made its recommendations](#) which came before the Council in May of 2016.

As a result of the new legislation, the City must work to engineer and implement a solution to one of the Combined Sewer outfalls on a more accelerated timeline than we believe feasible.

The challenge is significant. We certainly did not plan to rectify this outfall on the timetable that the Commonwealth has provided. Even with the unreasonable timetable, Alexandria remains ahead of many jurisdictions around the nation on this issue. Stormwater planning and work coordinated with redevelopment activity has left us better situated than most. This is not a new issue for Alexandria.

[The City Manager's proposed budget includes \\$385 million of new capital funding to address this Combined Sewer remediation.](#)

To fund these obligations, the City Council adopted a 30% increase in the Sanitary Sewer Maintenance fee that is paid on Alexandria Renew Enterprises bills across the City. The estimates are that ANNUAL 30% increases will be required going forward.

[In June, prior to our summer recess, the Council approved a funding agreement with Alexandria Renew Enterprises and Fairfax County.](#)

This agreement combines planned work at the Alexandria Renew facility to reduce wet weather overflows into Hooff's Run with the remediation required to address two of the Combined Sewer outfalls. These projects are now under the same umbrella and have been labeled the "West Side Wet Weather Facilities."

These projects will cost a little over \$100 million in 2017 dollars. With Fairfax County now sharing roughly a quarter of the cost, the City's commitment is expected to be \$76.5 million.

To determine the new direction for remediation of our the City reconvened the community stakeholder committee. [Late last year they met and received new engineering alternatives to address the challenge.](#)

[We are now pursuing a more extensive partnership with Alexandria Renew Enterprises to address the Combined Sewer remediation. This will likely involve transferring the ownership of the four Combined Sewer outfalls to Alexandria Renew to allow the City to leverage their capacity and capabilities to address these issues,](#)

[The new draft plan has now been published and we are accepting public comment until April 22nd.](#)

While the City moves forward on addressing the Commonwealth's new mandate, the money that Governor Terry McAuliffe proposed in his final budget [to address the City's Combined Sewer System \(CSS\)](#) remains in limbo.

With remediation expected to require hundreds of millions of dollars, the City requested funding from state coffers to assist in this challenge. Other jurisdictions in Virginia with similar systems have benefited from such funding.

[Then-Governor McAuliffe proposed \\$20 million to assist the City in addressing these challenges.](#) Unfortunately, both the Senate and the House of Delegates removed this funding.

This is now the second time that Virginia's Governor has recognized the importance of state funding assistance for Alexandria to tackle this significant clean water initiative by providing funding. But now

Governor McAuliffe and previously Governor Bob McDonnell have both had the General Assembly remove that funding.

With the current state Budget impasse, Governor Ralph Northam has now proposed a new budget for consideration in the Special Session of the General Assembly. [He has again proposed the \\$20 million to assist the City.](#)

I am hopeful that once the General Assembly adopts its budget, these important resources remain.

Vice Mayor Justin M. Wilson  
703.746.4500  
[justin.wilson@alexandriava.gov](mailto:justin.wilson@alexandriava.gov)  
[www.justin.net](http://www.justin.net)  
Alexandria City Hall  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Paid for by Wilson For Mayor