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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by:*

*Mayor Justin M. Wilson*

Alexandria, Virginia

April 1, 2019

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## Events/Updates

**Old Town Home & Garden Tour**

**Happy Easter and Happy Passover to all those celebrating this month.**

**April 10th is an exciting day in Alexandria. We put our generosity to the test.**

**April 10th 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 \$1.81 million to Alexandria non-profits doing critical work for our residents.**

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

**From time to time I use this space to highlight the accomplishments of youth in our City. [Last month, a T. C. Williams Senior, Ana Humphrey, bested students from around our country to win the 2019 Regeneron Science Talent Search.](#)**

**The Regeneron STS (formerly sponsored by Westinghouse) is the nation's oldest and most prestigious science and math competition. Ana claimed the \$250,000 grand prize for building a mathematical model to determine the possible locations of planets outside of our solar system.**

**Congrats to Ana, her family, and the educators who helped her achieve this incredible accomplishment.**

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

## Council Initiatives

### Developing Our Budget

A few weeks ago the City Council made the first big decision of this year's budget process. State law requires that the Council vote to "advertise" a tax rate. The rate that the Council chooses to advertise becomes the ceiling for the Council during the budget process. We can adopt a lower rate, but we can go no higher.

Ultimately Council voted 4-3 to advertise a maximum of a half-cent tax rate increase. If Council chooses to use the maximum authority, our current tax rate of \$1.13 per \$100 of assessed value could increase up to \$1.135.

You can [watch Council's discussion about this decision online.](#)



[Saturday April 27th from 10 AM to 4 PM is the 86th 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 online in advance and \$55 on the day of the tour.

### First Thursday

Thursday is "First Thursday" in Del Ray!

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

### Mulch, Delivered

Online mulch delivery orders can be submitted.

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

[Deliveries can be scheduled online.](#)

### Free Tax Assistance

Eligible Alexandria residents can receive assistance in completing their Federal taxes.

[Sessions are held on Saturdays and Wednesdays between now and April 13th.](#)

### Alexandria's Earth Day

The City's Annual Earth Day festival returns on Saturday, April 27th.

[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!

While I did not support the Council's decision to entertain a possible increase this year, I'm still hopeful Council will make it through this budget process without increasing our rate.

The adoption of the annual operating budget and capital improvement program is the most important decision the Council makes each year. 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 Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2020 \(which begins July 1, 2019\) and his proposed 10 year Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Year 2020 - Fiscal Year 2029.](#)

You [can watch the City Manager's full presentation to the Council online.](#)

The City Council has already had numerous [budget worksessions and a public hearing](#) as we work towards our scheduled budget adoption on May 1st.

It has always been my view that the most important part of the budget process is the adoption of our annual budget guidance for the City Manager. In the fall, the City Council [adopts a resolution which provides direction to the City Manager as how to prepare that budget.](#)

The guidance typically provides direction on tax policy, expenditure priorities, debt policy, and other emergent issues. To prepare the Council to provide this direction, a retreat is scheduled.

In early November, the Council had our annual retreat and [received the first glimpse into next year's financial picture](#) .

In the budget guidance adopted by the Council for this year, I successfully included language requesting that the City Manager not include an increase in the real estate tax rate in his proposed budget.

The City Manager presented a \$761.1 million Operating Budget, which represents a very small 1.7% growth over the previous year. Of the available new revenue, the City Manager has proposed allocating two-thirds to the Alexandria City Public Schools, and the remaining third to the needs of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). The remaining City operations are only growing 0.6% in this proposed budget.

The City Manager's proposed operating budget transfer for the Alexandria City Public Schools [matches the approved budget request of the Alexandria School Board.](#)

The Capital Improvement Program that the City Manager has presented contemplates \$1.6 billion of capital investment over the next decade. This proposal includes \$478 million for school facilities, \$380 million for transportation (including WMATA) and \$150 million for City municipal facilities.

The City Manager's proposed Capital Improvement Program largely matches the request of the School Board for capital investment as well.

Throughout the budget process, members of the City Council will submit questions to clarify various aspect of the City Manager's budget and to determine the fiscal impact of various policy proposals. Per our budget rules, any proposal to modify the budget must be informed by this type of analysis. [You can view the budget memos that have been provided to the City Council so far in the process.](#)

## Spring Break in Service

Volunteer Alexandria is launching "Breaks with Impact," an alternative Spring Break program for Middle School and High School students.

This program educates youth in challenges facing our community and then puts students to work in solving those challenges.

[Learn more and register online.](#)

## 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 3rd, 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.](#)

On Saturday April 13th at 9:30 AM, the City Council will be holding our April public hearing. On that agenda we will accept public testimony on the proposed tax rate specifically and Council's proposed amendments to the budget. [You can sign up to speak to the Council online](#) .

In advance of that hearing, our City staff will publish the Council's proposed additions and deletions to the budget. Each proposal must be supported by at least 3 members of the Council to be considered, and any addition must be offset by a reduction elsewhere in the budget or increased revenue from another source.

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

## Metro Closure

There will be no Metro Rail Blue or Yellow line service south of the airport from Memorial Day to Labor Day 2019. [Our draft mitigation plan is now online for your review](#). We are [still accepting comments on the plan in our survey](#).

[You can also watch the staff presentation of the latest version of the plan at our last legislative meeting late last month.](#)

[Last year, our region came together and adopted a new dedicated funding stream to support the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority \(WMATA\)](#). This significant accomplishment was not without fault, but it did represent a positive step forward in addressing a backlog of investments required in Metro's basic infrastructure.

Once the crown jewel of the Washington, DC region, Metrorail is experiencing a very difficult time. Metro is a basic building block of our region's economy. If there is a perception that the system is unsafe, then that awareness can be crippling to the region.

Paul Wiedefeld, the WMATA General Manager for the past 4 years, has been aggressively working to tackle these challenges. [WMATA finalized the SafeTrack Plan, which concentrated three years of work into one year.](#)

Advancing this work required expanded time when the system is not operating. To make this happen, extended weekend hours were discontinued, new mid-day maintenance was scheduled, and most importantly, a series of "surges" occurred across the system.

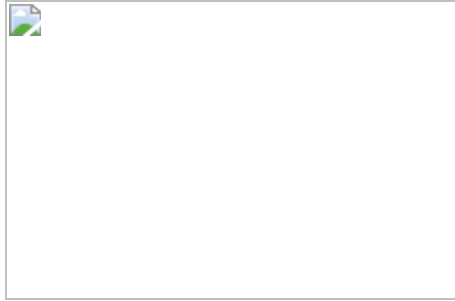
[Working with WMATA, DASH, and other local partners, we came up with a series of alternatives to assist Alexandria riders in their commutes](#) .

[We will now have to put those lessons to the test as WMATA moves forward with the new set of closures for this summer.](#) This time, the closures will be to rebuild outdoor station platforms that are past the end of their usable lives. The first phase of this work will involve closing down the Braddock Road, King Street and Eisenhower Avenue stations.

This will require a dramatic regional response. Far beyond the impact of the SafeTrack, this closure holds the potential to cripple our region. This closure will require the City and its regional partners to identify transit alternatives, teleworking options, economic development planning, and more. It will not only impact the ability of our residents to access their employment locations, but it will also hinder the ability of customers to access Alexandria businesses and employees to access their employers in Alexandria.

The proposed mitigation plan relies on four pillars:

- [WMATA service \(shuttles and expansions of existing bus service\)](#)
- City/DASH alternatives
- Mobility alternatives (transportation network companies and transit modifications)
- Communication and outreach



The bedrock of this plan is the WMATA shuttles and service expansion. These shuttles will run 5 minute headways (intervals) during peak periods and WMATA has now sized them to accommodate 97% of the typical "peak of the peak" ridership through the corridor.

[Last month the City's Traffic & Parking Board endorsed a set of changes to the HOV restrictions on several streets in the City to encourage carpooling during this period.](#)

[This month WMATA will commence the preparation work for this infrastructure repair effort.](#) This preparation work will have some service impacts, as well as some changes to the way vehicles and buses access our stations.

Our staff will continue their work with WMATA staff to develop a plan that will ensure that our City will continue functioning during this period.

The work to restore Metro back to the level required to support this region continues. In the short-term, additional sacrifice will be required. As a daily Metro rider myself, I know the service challenges first-hand. I'm optimistic that these efforts will result in a more reliable system for Alexandria and the entire region.

### **End of the Decal, Yet One Question Remains**

[Almost 12 years ago, during my first stint on the City Council, I proposed that the City consider eliminating the windshield decal used to enforce payment of the vehicle Personal Property Tax.](#)

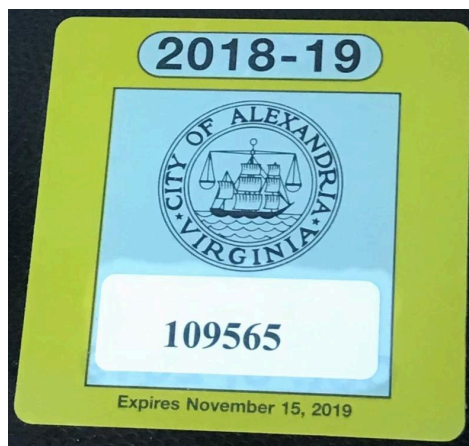
Last month, [the City Council voted unanimously to end the requirement to display the decal.](#)

Now we're asking for your feedback on a potential elimination of the vehicle registration fee itself.

When proposing the elimination of the decal originally, I cited the diminished efficacy of the windshield decal as a tool for enforcement of payment, and the improved customer service by eliminating the decal. At the time, Fairfax County had just scrapped the decal for their vehicles, which was forcing consideration of the change throughout the region.

Now, over a decade later, 76% of Virginia localities have all transitioned away from the windshield decal. Loudoun County eliminated their decal last year and Arlington plans to do the same in 2020.

While concerns around potential lost revenue prevented the City from pursuing this change back in 2007, it is now believed the the revenue impact would be negligible.



[Our staff recently returned with new analysis of the option and the financial impact.](#) In the proposed budget that is now before the City Council, the City Manager [has included a formal proposal to eliminate the decal next year.](#) Included in that proposal are changes in enforcement methodologies and technology to ensure

no lost revenue.

As a result of this change, the City will need to make changes to [existing Overnight Parking Districts](#) in place in our City to ensure the enforcement of those restrictions remain feasible.

The remaining question is what to do about the Vehicle Registration Fee (formerly the "decal fee"). Today that fee is \$33 and is estimated to bring in \$3.85 million of revenue to the City in this upcoming budget.

[If the City were to entertain an increase in the Vehicle Personal Property Tax rate, up to \\$5.33 \(from the existing \\$5 rate\), the City could eliminate the Vehicle Registration Fee, while maintaining the same revenue level overall.](#) The average value of a personal use vehicle in our City is \$11,137. This change would have the effect of lowering the tax burden for a little over 69,000 vehicles in our City, and increasing the tax burden for a little over 48,000 vehicles.

[While this change would add more progressiveness into our Vehicle Personal Property Tax, it would involve a trade-off.](#) What do you think? Council will be making this decision as we adopt the budget on May 1st.

[I would love to hear your thoughts!](#)

### **BAR Consolidation**

In February, the City Council completed the process of consolidating our historic district boards of architectural review [by appointing seven volunteers from our community to the new Alexandria Board of Architectural Review.](#)

[Last month, the newly consolidated board held its first meeting as a body.](#)

Alexandria has two historic preservation districts, the [Old & Historic District](#) and the [Parker-Gray District](#). Both of these districts had a Board of Architectural Review (BAR) charged with preserving the historic fabric of each area.

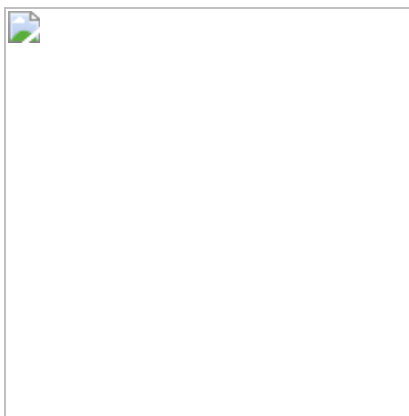
The Old & Historic District and the BAR were created originally in 1946.

In 1984, there was an effort to expand the existing Old and Historic District to include the areas that are today part of the Parker-Gray District. While that was ultimately rejected, a decision was made to create a separate district with its own board.

Once the General Assembly took action, City Council appointed the first Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review in 1986.



Both boards were responsible for hearing applications for permits to demolish or certificates of appropriateness.



In 2011, the Parker-Gray Ad Hoc Design Guidelines Work Group was formed to streamline the approval process, expand the use of more modern materials, and reduce the fees.

This group agreed upon a series of [recommendations](#) that were [adopted by the City Council in the Fall of 2013](#).

A consequence of those changes was to shift many requests that required a full public hearing before the BAR, to be able to be approved administratively by City staff.

The meetings of the Parker-Gray BAR were reduced significantly in duration, and two meetings in the past year were cancelled due to a lack of agenda items.

In an effort to reduce the impact on the City's staff, as well as improve the customer service for our property owners, my former colleague [Councilman Paul Smedberg and I jointly proposed combining the Old & Historic District and Parker-Gray Boards of Architectural Review into a consolidated Board of Architectural Review for both districts](#).

The City Council voted 6-1 to initiate a Text Amendment to consider this change. Our City staff [worked with stakeholders](#) to prepare a recommendation.

Ultimately, this change made our government more efficient and improved the customer service that we provide to residents in both historic districts. I thank the many dedicated volunteers who offered their time and energy to serve on the previous boards and the newly consolidated board!

## The Evolving Alexandria Waterfront

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

On Saturday, [members of the Council, along with the Chair of our Parks & Recreation Commission and Waterfront Commission, cut the ribbon to officially open the expanded Waterfront Park](#). Included in the new park is ["Mirror Mirror," an interactive public art installation designed SOFTlab](#). This is the first in a series of public art installations in the space.

The new park at the base of King Street is the culmination of decades of work by so many in our community to create new open space, provide public accessibility and bring new vitality to our Waterfront. But we are just getting started.

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.

Four years ago, [the Virginia Supreme Court ruled in favor of the City](#) in the final litigation related to the Waterfront Plan.

A short while later [the Court denied a request for the case to be reheard](#), thus ending the litigation.



Almost four years ago, the property exchanges occurred between the City and the Old Dominion Boat Club. The [City now owns the previous Club property](#) and the Club [now owns properties farther south along the waterfront](#). Creating a seamless, uninterrupted park along the waterfront required this exchange.

With City funds from our settlement, the Boat Club [completed construction of a new club for their members on the new site](#).

The [demolition of the long-shuttered Beachcomber Restaurant was completed](#). Two years ago, [the City's Board of Architectural Review for the Old and Historic District approved demolition of the existing Boat Club location](#).

While we have now opened the interim park, soon the City will create a landmark park at the base of King Street. With integrated flood mitigation, it will address flood challenges that have long plagued the corridor. Almost three years ago, the Council [received the plan for the first phase of this park implementation](#).



Almost four years 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.

[The City Manager's proposed budget includes new resources, intended to be matched by private resources, to continue programming of these new public open spaces.](#)

[Through the leadership of local business leaders, a new foundation was formed to acquire, restore and host a tall ship on the waterfront.](#) This summer, [The Providence](#) will arrive to its new home on our waterfront. The Providence is a full-scale replica of the Continental Navy's first warship.

Elsewhere on the waterfront, [the new Indigo Hotel](#) is open and is serving customers with a brand new restaurant facing the Potomac River. [Construction of this hotel yielded exciting historical discoveries](#) and provided some international acclaim.

Just next to that, on the site of the Robinson Terminal South, [Robinson Landing](#) is under construction. [This effort will conclude next winter.](#)



[Last month the City Council unanimously approved amendments to Special Use Permits in support of restaurants and further activation of the pier](#) facing the Potomac River behind Robinson Landing.

[On the other side of the Indigo Hotel, last year the Council unanimously approved new condos and retail adjacent to the new open space.](#)

In the fall of 2015, the [Council unanimously approved the redevelopment of Robinson Terminal North](#) at the other end of the waterfront. A year and a half ago, the [City was notified that the developer wished to place the project on hold](#) due to the market conditions. We later [learned that the property is on the market to be sold.](#)

The pending sale certainly slows down the process of achieving the approved vision for Robinson Terminal North. However, a new owner, with a lower cost basis and better capabilities for redevelopment, will likely be a good thing for all involved.

The City Manager's proposed budget [includes over \\$50 million to accelerate the implementation of the infrastructure elements of the plan](#), specifically the flood mitigation. This will allow the City to proceed with a Progressive Design-Build (PDB) to advance the design and engineering work.

[Components will include the construction of a 6 foot bulkhead along the waterfront from Duke to Queen, a new storm sewer system and two pump stations.](#)

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

## Fire Department Staffing

We are now making new progress in aligning our Fire Department staffing with the recommendations of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

NFPA is an organization that promulgates standards and codes for usage by local governments. In 2001, the NFPA [published a new standard that detailed the minimum staffing standards for fire apparatus](#). Today, Alexandria is the only jurisdiction in our region that maintains less than 4 person minimum staffing.

In the Fall of 2014, the City's then-new Fire Chief [came to the Council with an entirely new model](#) for cross-trained firefighter-medics. This is the model in use in all of our neighboring jurisdictions.



By cross-training the existing single-mode medics, the belief was that we could achieve appropriate minimum staffing on all engines, ladders and the rescue company in order to meet the NFPA standard.

[While the new model has allowed the City to achieve appropriate minimum staffing on many of our fire engine companies, there are still apparatus remaining with minimum staffing not meeting the standard](#), largely due to staffing turnover.

When the City began the transition to the new staffing model in 2014, we had 64 single-role medics with 10 single-role EMS supervisors.

Today we have 28 remaining single-role medics, with all 10 of the single-role EMS supervisors choosing to convert to dual-role EMS captains.

Last year, In order to accelerate the City's efforts to achieve minimum staffing on each of our ladder trucks, the City applied for a grant under the "[Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response \(SAFER\) program](#)". We used this grant to fund 9 new positions. The City has previously used SAFER to expand our Fire Department staffing.

A SAFER grant covers 75% of the costs of these positions in the first and second years, and 35% in the third year. At that point, the City becomes responsible for all of the costs going forward.

Last year's SAFER grant allowed the City to reach the point where 10 of our 13 apparatus are staffed at four-person minimum, leaving three remaining engine companies.

Last month, [the Council chose to apply for another SAFER grant for this year](#). If the Council finds the necessary funding during this budget process to fund the local match requirement, this will allow the City to reach the important milestone of four-person minimum staffing across all apparatus.

This is an important step forward to ensure that Alexandria's residents and their property are protected by fire suppression and emergency medical services which meet minimum standards. This is an investment in the safety of our personnel and our residents.

### **Advancing 5G and Small Cell Deployment**

Last year, [I provided an update on the City's deployment of a municipal fiber network](#). Our work continues with procurement activities for the fiber build efforts occurring later this year.

Yet the broadband-dependent applications of tomorrow will be delivered through a variety of different technologies. The [next iteration of cellular technology is known as 5G](#), which will be capable of delivering broadband capabilities far beyond current deployments.

How to facilitate the deployment of 5G has been the topic of both Federal and state rule-making and lawmaking. [Last year, the Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\) issued an order attempting to accelerate deployment of 5G by preempting some local authority over this infrastructure work](#). Similarly, the Commonwealth of Virginia [adopted new legislation facilitating the construction of so-called "small cell" installations](#), which are often required for 5G deployment.

The City has already received 21 applications for small cell installations around our community.

[Our City staff is working to develop new guidelines and ordinances to allow this new wireless deployment](#), while being respectful of the potential aesthetic impacts to our streetscape.

Ultimately, we want to ensure Alexandria not left behind as technology advances. To do so we must quickly adopt a regulatory framework that supports prompt deployment of this infrastructure.

### **Host a Town Hall in Your Living Room!**

As Mayor, I am continuing my regular series of Town Hall Meetings.

You supply the living room and a bunch of your friends and neighbors. I will supply the Mayor who will hopefully have 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

### Landmark Mall Redevelopment

There is no clearer demonstration of the City's financial challenges than the predicament that currently faces Landmark Mall.

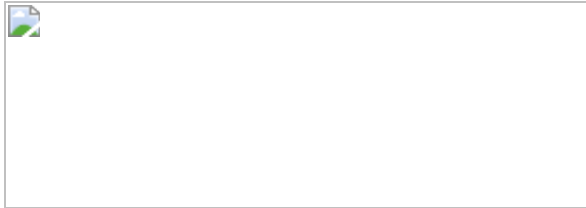
[Tomorrow night our Planning Commission will be hearing revisions to the Master Plan to advance a comprehensive redevelopment of the site.](#)

Eighteen years ago, when the ownership of the properties at Landmark Mall received their tax assessments from the City, the [actual mall site was assessed at \\$76.4 million](#). The [Sears store was assessed at \\$19.7 million](#). The [Macy's store site was assessed at \\$17 million](#).

At the City's tax rate in 2000, these three sites alone generated \$1.25 million in real estate tax.

Today, the three properties are assessed at \$25.2 million, \$14 million, and \$12.6 million, respectively. They generate about \$500,000 in real estate tax today, less than half of what it used to be.

To make the situation even more severe, real estate tax is only a portion of the picture. The reduction in revenues from sales tax, dining tax, and other business taxes has also been dramatic at this site.



The City has taken a number of steps over the years to revitalize the site.

In 2009, the City Council approved the [Landmark/Van Dorn Small Area Plan](#). This plan laid out a comprehensive vision for the redevelopment of the entire corridor including the properties on the existing Mall site.

The bankruptcy of one of the owners, unfavorable market conditions, and the complexity of the relationship between the three owners on the site resulted in little action for several years.

In June 2013, after taking over ownership of the mall site, the Howard Hughes Corporation [received approval by the Planning Commission and City Council for a redevelopment of their portion of the site](#). A slower than expected leasing market has slowed that company's intentions to redevelop.

In 2015, Howard Hughes Corporation was back at City Hall to apply for very minor amendments to the approval that was issued in 2013. [These changes were approved by City Council in April of 2015.](#)

While no one should be convinced until they see bulldozers knocking down the existing mall site, there is a lot going on. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but I believe we can be cautiously optimistic that it is finally coming together.

- [Early in 2017, Macy's announced the closure of their store at Landmark.](#)

- [The Howard Hughes Corporation later announced that it had purchased the Macy's store site.](#)
- [The Howard Hughes Corporation subsequently announced that the existing mall site is closing.](#)
- [Mill Creek is engaged to handle the residential portion of the redevelopment.](#)
- There have been discussions between the City and Howard Hughes about potential public/private partnerships that will help spur the redevelopment.
- Sears spun-off a new Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) in 2015 called Seritage Growth Properties to maximize value out of their remaining real estate. [The Landmark Mall Sears store property is now owned by the new REIT.](#)

The redevelopment of the Landmark Mall site has been a long time in coming to fruition. I am optimistic that we are finally making real progress in this effort.

### **Growing Student Enrollment**

The [new Patrick Henry Elementary and Recreation Center](#) opened earlier this year. The new school building, constructed next door to the existing building, added additional capacity and is the first in a series of significant capacity projects scheduled in this era.

The School Board's approved plan was to demolish the old Patrick Henry building shortly after opening. [That plan has now been delayed as the School Board considers whether to retain the old building for additional time, using it as swing space to advance the planned rebuild of Douglas MacArthur Elementary School.](#)

This change does present the prospect of significant impacts to a few communities and must be carefully considered.

Tonight the Alexandria City Public Schools will be hosting another community meeting to discuss at Patrick Henry Elementary (4643 Taney Avenue) at 6:30 PM.

The pressure to expeditiously develop school capacity is understandable. Over six years ago, the City convened the Joint [Long Range Educational Facilities Work Group](#). The group was given the essential charge to understand our recent increase in student enrollment, better project enrollment growth in the future, and to decide what to do about it.

The School Board Chair and Vice Chair at the time, the Mayor at the time, and I joined a group of community members and staff to steer the effort.

[The day after Labor Day last year, 15,737 students started in the Alexandria City Public Schools \(ACPS\). That constitutes a 1.3% increase from the previous year or about 203 additional students.](#)

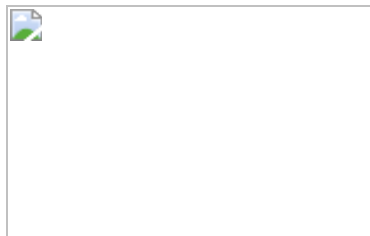
While this year's increase is among the smallest we have seen in over a decade, this year is the twelfth straight year of enrollment growth. During that period, ACPS has added over 5,000 students.

The last time we had this [many children attending our schools was nearly 50 years ago in the early 1970s.](#)

We have also worked to understand where the enrollment is coming from. For example, we learned that now low-rise apartments generate nearly three times the students as high-rise or mid-rise apartments do. We learned that single family homes generate nearly double the students as townhouses. We know that public housing and other income-restricted units far outpace any other property type for student generation.

[We now know that housing units built over 30 years ago account for four times the student generation as those built in the past 30 years.](#)

These data points remind us of the need to address this enrollment growth head-on.



In June of 2015, the City Council and the School Board adopted the [Joint Long Range Educational Facilities Plan](#). The Plan is the culmination of the group's work in conjunction with the efforts of both ACPS and City staff. The Plan looks at each elementary school building in the City, assesses the facility's educational adequacy, and provides a roadmap for increasing capacity and addressing deficiencies.

Earlier this year, the Council and School adopted phase two of this effort, [planning for additional capacity at the high school level and in pre-school](#).

With the pressure of elementary enrollment increases continuing unabated, urgency has remained to identify new capacity. This pressure is particularly acute on the West End of the City. With funding and support from the City Council, the School Board purchased 1701 N. Beauregard Street, a vacant office building.

In September of 2017, [the Council provided the land-use approvals necessary for the conversion of this building into a new elementary school](#). Last fall, [that new building opened as Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School](#).

[The City Manager's proposed 10 year capital improvement program for the Alexandria City Public Schools includes \\$478.8 million over the next decade](#). This provides the funding for both new and renovated facilities, as well as non-capacity infrastructure investments. Only 6 years ago, [the 10 year capital improvement program for our Schools was less than half as much at \\$203 million](#).

The largest single investment in the existing Capital Improvement Program is \$124 million to address high school capacity. At just about 4,000 students, T. C. Williams High School is the largest in the Commonwealth, and both campuses are strained to accommodate the enrollment.

The [School Board is presently engaged in deliberations and community consultation around what the future of high school will be for Alexandria](#).

My view remains that a new \$124 million investment in our City's only high school is one of the most significant undertakings we have addressed in recent years. Determining the correct way to make that investment is a decision that the entire community should make after reviewing the many considerations that shape a decision of that importance.

While capacity will remain the focus of the investments we must make in our school facilities, we have seen far too many examples of the perils of systemic under-investment in our school facilities. Returning our school facilities to a state of good repair while sustaining a preventative maintenance cycle must be a priority of our collective investment. There can be no excuse for poorly maintained learning environments for our children.

It can be perilous to overreact to one year of enrollment growth. Yet after more than a decade of growth, it is clear that this is our "new normal." While the enrollment growth does present a costly challenge for the City and its taxpayers, it is a good challenge to have.

Mayor Justin M. Wilson

12/3/24, 4:01 PM

April 2019 Council Connection

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