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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson*

April 1, 2023

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**A year ago, Alexandrians donated over \$2.6 million to non-profit organizations addressing need in our community, all in one day!**

**On April 26th, Spring2ACTion returns for the 13th straight year, with a goal to blow through last year's record and help sustain the important work being done in our City. Join me in supporting Alexandria's non-profit community on this special day.**

**If you're able to donate blood, instead of money, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is holding a blood drive in partnership with Inova Blood Donor Services in two**

- [Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection](#)
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**weeks. On Saturday April 15th, from 9 AM until 1 PM you can donate blood at 100 West Luray Avenue. [You can sign-up to donate online.](#)**

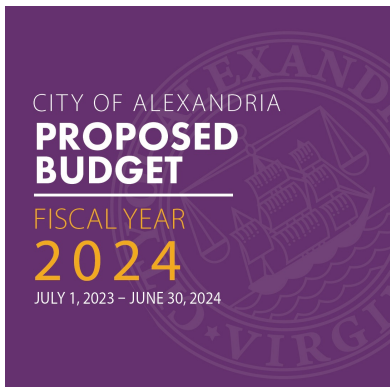
**Saturday April 22nd is National Prescription Drug Take Back Day. This event will provide safe and convenient ways to dispose of prescription drugs that are unneeded. [There are numerous sites available throughout Alexandria.](#)**

**The City is also accepting orders for leaf and wood mulch! We deliver. [Make your purchase online.](#)**

**If you would like to host a town hall in your neighborhood, [please drop me a line](#) and we'll get it on the calendar!**

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

## Initiatives and Updates



## Budget Proposal

At the end of February, the City Manager presented [his proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 \(July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024\)](#) and [his proposed Capital Improvement Program \(CIP\) for Fiscal Year 2024 through Fiscal Year 2033.](#) Since that time, the City Council has been actively engaged in our annual budget process, which will culminate in adoption of our budget on May 3rd.

We have held several budget work sessions to learn and pose questions about each portion of the budget. You can [view these work sessions on line.](#)

We would like your input on the proposed budget! This month there will be two public hearings available to provide input on the budget, first on Saturday April 15th beginning at 9:30 AM. On Tuesday April 25th at 5:30 PM, we will be holding a public hearing specifically on the proposed real estate tax rate. [If you wish to address the Council on the proposed budget, you can sign-up to speak online.](#) You can address the Council in-person at City Hall or virtually on zoom.

Additionally, we have [a form that will collect written input to the City Council on the budget.](#)

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 on-going 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).

Shortly after the presentation of the budget, state law requires that the City Council adopt a ceiling for the real estate tax rate that might be considered during the budget process. Once that rate is "advertised," the Council cannot adopt a rate that is higher, but may go lower.

Two years ago, the City Council was able to adopt the first reduction in the real estate tax rate in 15 years, bringing the rate from \$1.13 to \$1.11. This year, the City Manager has proposed maintaining the current \$1.11 rate. If the City Council adopts the City Manager's proposal, this will be the 7th straight year that the rate has remained the same or decreased.

The Council voted to advertise a rate of \$1.12, leaving the possibility of a one cent increase for consideration. While there are significant budget pressures on the horizon, specifically the rising debt service associated with large infrastructure projects for the City and our schools, I do not believe a tax rate increase is necessary this year.

**In November, the City Manager presented his initial outlook for the upcoming budget at our annual Council retreat.** The current fiscal year's budget was built around some of the healthiest revenue growth we had seen in over fifteen years. For next year, that revenue growth has been cut in half as growth in the real estate tax base has slowed.

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 6.79% per year. The work force in City Government grew from 2,229 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to 2,660 FTEs during that period.

In Fiscal Year 2010, a little over a decade ago, 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 Fiscal Year 2011 through the current fiscal year, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 3.64% per year.

**The authorized work force in City Government is now at 2,765 FTEs,** little above where we were nearly 15 years ago. That's in spite of the fact that our population has grown significantly during that period of time.

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, ever-escalating funding challenges from Metro and a hyper-competitive market for municipal employees is impossible.

It was in this context that the City Manager prepared and presented his budget. The City Manager's proposed General Fund Operating Budget is \$881.1 million. This represents a 5.0% increase in spending versus the current approved budget, with over half of all new revenue from the real estate tax being proposed for support of the Alexandria City Public Schools operating budget.

Every budget has a "story." The City Manager's proposed budget:

- **Public Safety:** Funds the implementation of the new collective bargaining agreements for both our Police Department and Fire Department, including large compensation and staffing increases
- **Schools:** Fully funds the approved operating budget of the Alexandria City School Board, increasing the operating transfer by \$9.9 million
- **Infrastructure:** Commits new resources to support the infrastructure proposed as part of the Capital Improvement Program.
- **Employee Compensation:** The proposed budget funds merit and market-rate increases across City government.

With the impacts of average assessment increases included, this means the average single-family homeowner would pay \$490 more in real estate taxes in 2023 than in 2022. The average condo owner would pay \$101 more in 2023 versus 2022. If the Council were to elect to increase the rate by 1 cent, the average single-family homeowner would pay \$584 more in 2023 and the average condo owner would pay \$263 more in 2023.

In addition, the City Manager has proposed no increase in the annual Residential Refuse Fee of \$500, which covers the costs of trash, recycling and yard waste collection (among other services). This fee is paid only by the 20,647 homeowners who receive City trash collection.

The stormwater utility fee is proposed to increase to address stormwater management and Chesapeake Bay clean-up mandates. This fee is paid by all property owners, including non-taxable properties. The new annual fee will be \$86.44 for condos, \$129.65 for



townhomes, \$308.70 for small single-family homes and \$515.53 for large single-family homes.

In addition to the budget documents linked above, **all questions asked by members of Council during the process are posted, along with answers, online for the public to review.** Any request to change the proposed budget must be initiated with a budget question, so it is a good window into the thoughts of your elected representatives.

There is no more important process than the adoption of our annual budget. The budget is a reflection of the values of our community and I look forward to working with our residents and my colleagues over the next month to craft a budget that is reflective of those collective values.

**Let me know your thoughts!**



## **Firefighter Staffing**

On June 30<sup>th</sup> 2010, the Alexandria Fire Department had an authorized workforce of 252 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees. **With approval of the City Manager's proposed budget, the authorized workforce will be 347.50 employees.** No other City department has experienced that type of workforce growth during that period.

As a result of that investment, 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.** Alexandria was the only jurisdiction in our region that maintained less than 4 person minimum staffing.

In the Fall of 2014, the City's then-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.

In January, **the City Council voted to commit funding to support the second public-sector collective-bargaining agreement in Virginia since the 1970s.** This new agreement, between the City and International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 2141,

represents the firefighters, paramedics and fire marshals of the [Alexandria Fire Department](#).

This new agreement will provide for significant increases in compensation for new and existing employees, and a pathway to reduced hours in their work week. It will help make Alexandria a more competitive employer in a very tight regional marketplace for talent.

In order to reduce the workweek of our firefighters from 56 hours to 50 hours, the Fire Chief is proposing to hire 25 additional firefighters. This additional staffing will provide the necessary relief staffing while also reducing required overtime.

In 2012, 2017 and 2018, the City successfully (last year the City was unsuccessful) sought grants under the "[Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response](#)" ([SAFER](#)) program. This Federal grant program provides support to local governments to expand these critical public safety services.

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

Last month, [the Council unanimously voted to apply for another SAFER grant for this year](#). This grant is proposed to fund the addition of 25 FTE, which provide the relief necessary to reduce the work week as envisioned in our new collective bargaining agreement.

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.



## Zoning For Housing

For much of the 20th Century, [wide swaths of Alexandria housing was off-limits to Alexandrians that were not white](#). That reality was enforced by a patchwork of ordinances, restrictive covenants, intimidation and lending practices that served to effectively segregate our City for generations. While de jure policies that explicitly enforced segregation [were made illegal long ago](#), the legacy of these policies live on today. In fact, in recent years, [Alexandria has grown MORE segregated](#). These realities are detailed in the [Draft Regional Fair Housing Plan](#) that I wrote about a few months ago.

The question before our community is what can be done about it. It was generations of intentional acts that

led to our current reality. It will require intentional acts to change it.

As our City has grown more segregated, the lack of housing supply has left Alexandria inaccessible for low and moderate-income residents. It is those paired challenges that leave our City at a crossroads.

Yet, the City cannot raise and spend enough money to make an appreciable impact on this problem. The City's power to determine how land is used, our land-use authority, provides a critical tool to spur the creation and preservation of both committed affordable housing as well as market-rate housing. Said another way: building additional housing supply, whether committed as affordable housing or market-rate housing, helps address our housing affordability challenges and reverse generational impacts.

**Last month, the City kicked-off an acceleration of the Zoning for Housing work program.** For the rest of this year, we will engage with residents to develop a package of specific land-use proposals in these areas:

- Single-Family Zoning
- Removal of Restrictive/Exclusionary barriers from the zoning code
- Bonus Height
- Expanded Transit-Oriented Growth
- Industrial Zones
- Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)
- **Inclusionary Zoning**
- Townhouse Zoning
- Property Conversions
- **Expansion of the Residential Multi-Family Zone (RMF)**

This is the most ambitious housing effort in the City's history and we want the voice of residents from throughout our community involved in this process. **You can watch the full kick-off event online**, including presentations from Richard and Leah Rothstein, **the authors of the forthcoming book, "Just Action,"** a follow-up to Richard Rothstein's **seminal tome "The Color of Law."**

Somewhat inexplicably, local governments have been reluctant to use the single most effective tool to increase the supply of affordable housing: build more housing. The reluctance of local governments has been even more surprising given that a supply-based approach has been the policy of the last three Presidential administrations, two Democrats and one Republican. It's **the policy of our current Republican Governor.** It has been the approach of the Sierra Club and the National Association of Home Builders. It has been the approach of the Brookings Institute, the Hoover Institution and even the Cato Institute.

**In September of 2019, the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) unanimously adopted new regional housing creation targets.** This was the first-ever regional commitment to accelerate the development of housing supply as a means to address our affordability crisis.

These targets, while voluntary, commit the City to the creation of additional units, with most of those units committed to be affordable for low to middle income households. To ensure that this housing creation does not exacerbate existing transportation challenges, most of this new housing must be located near job centers and high-capacity transportation infrastructure.

**In March of 2020, the City Council became the third jurisdiction in the region to endorse these targets.**

In 2013, while adopting our **Housing Master Plan**, City Council had set an ambitious goal to create or preserve 2,000 affordable units by 2025. **We are on track to meet this goal.**

With the adoption of the new COG housing targets, the City has committed to an additional 11,500 housing units, with 4,250 as committed affordable or workforce housing.

Over the last three years, the City has achieved the preservation or creation of **just about 1,000 units of committed affordable housing.**

The housing non-profit HAND has begun an annual report to measure the work that each jurisdiction in the region is doing to achieve our commitments. **The HAND "Housing Indication Tool" report shows that Alexandria has made significant progress, with more work to do.**

While there is a broad agreement in our community about the problem and the need to focus on solutions to our affordability challenges, bringing together agreement on the correct solutions to pursue is a little more challenging.

While the City's Housing Master Plan contains a variety of tools in our housing "toolbox," the options the City has are generally limited to:

1. Raising and Spending Tax Dollars: To develop and preserve housing as well as assist residents in obtaining housing.
2. Using land-use policy (zoning) to create and preserve housing

There will be many opportunities for engagement throughout this process, **including another public**

**meeting this month.** The City will continue to seek creative partnerships, new land-use tools and innovative financing to preserve and create affordability in our City. I am pleased to see these efforts come to fruition.



## Food Waste Collection

Last year, when City Council approved our current budget, an amendment I proposed was included to expand the City's collection of food waste. My proposal funded both an expansion of **our existing Farmers' Market Composting program** and a new curbside collection program.

Our Farmers' Market composting program has added two new sites, the Old Town North Market (901 N. Royal Street) and the Southern Towers market collection point (4901 Seminary Road).

Last month, **we launched the new curbside collection program.** Under this new program, up to 2,000 residents who receive City trash and recycling collection **can register for collection to begin this spring.** These residents will receive a free start-up kit and 6 months of service for free. The City has contracted with **Compost Crew** to provide this service.

After 6 months of service, residents can opt to continue the service with a monthly or annual fee.

Earlier this year, **the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that it has awarded the City additional funding to supplement local funds in expanding this new program.** These funds, drawn from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) are a portion of \$9.4 million distributed nationally to support compost and food waste reduction projects.

I am excited to see this program come to fruition. This is a program that will reduce waste and improve the environment. I hope you find it useful!

## Speed Cameras

During the 2020 General Assembly session, **new legislation was enacted that authorized local governments to begin using photo speed monitoring equipment.** This new authority allows the cameras in school crossing zones and highway work zones and authorizes fines of up to \$100 for an infraction.

During the approval of last year's budget, I included a proposal to set up 5 of these cameras in an area of the City where the data indicated that excessive speeds were threatening safety.





This Spring, the cameras will be installed in the following 3 locations:

- Francis Hammond Middle School (Seminary Road, between Kenmore Avenue and North Jordan Street)
- John Adams Elementary School and Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School (North Beauregard Street, between North Highview Lane and Reading Avenue)
- George Washington Middle School (Mount Vernon Avenue between Braddock Road and Luray Avenue)

The cameras, once installed, will be tested. They will be fully activated for the next school year.

These new cameras will help the City to improve road safety by preventing crashes and reducing the lethality of unavoidable crashes. I am excited to see these cameras being placed in service.



## Landmark Inova Alexandria Hospital

Last month, the [City Council unanimously approved the development of Blocks A and Q of the previous Landmark Mall site.](#)

This approval is for the anchor of the Landmark redevelopment, [a new Inova Alexandria Hospital, a cancer center, a specialty care center, a parking garage and central plaza.](#) This portion of development will constitute over 1 million square feet of new development.

This exciting step means that the new vision of a vibrant and successful Landmark Mall site is being realized!

Last year, Foulger-Pratt, the private development partner spearheading the redevelopment of Landmark Mall began [demolition on the existing site.](#)

Construction activity will be beginning shortly, [under the aggressive schedule they have presented to the community.](#)

In 2021, the [Alexandria Industrial Development Authority \(IDA\)](#) closed on [the purchase of an 11-acre parcel on the site of the former Landmark Mall.](#) The purchase of this property was immediately followed by IDA's issuance of a 99-year ground lease of the property to [Inova Health System.](#)

After two decades of discussion about how to redevelop Landmark Mall, the City of Alexandria is finally redeveloping Landmark Mall!

**In July of 2021, the City Council unanimously approved the plan to reshape the most significant redevelopment site in our City.**

**Long sought, this arrangement was named by the Washington Business Journal as the 2020 Real Estate Deal of the Year.**

Days before Christmas 2020, **the City joined with a few partners, some familiar and some new, to announce the future of the Landmark Mall site.** The new development plan will move **Inova Alexandria Hospital** from its home for **the past 60 years** on Seminary Road to a new modern facility on the site of Landmark Mall.

The location, one of the largest sites inside the Beltway awaiting redevelopment, will see a billion dollars of new investment, including a new Level II trauma center, medical office buildings, residential, retail, parks, a new fire station replacing **Fire Station 208**, new committed affordable housing and a new transit hub anchoring the City's new bus rapid transit network, DASH and Metrobus.

This will not only revitalize a site that many had given up on, but will also provide a catalyst for redevelopment and enhancement throughout the West End of our City.

Over a year ago, the City Council unanimously approved **a master plan amendment and rezoning of the site of the existing Inova Alexandria Hospital.** This land-use decision was the first legislative action required to bring this plan to reality.

Despite over two decades of decline, it is not a mystery why we had been unable to spur redevelopment on this site in the past. It is a complicated site, with a complicated ownership structure requiring significant infrastructure investment.

Conquering those obstacles requires a unique partnership and financial arrangement. A local firm, **Foulger-Pratt** is leading a joint venture in partnership with **Howard Hughes Corporation**, the current owner of the mall site, and **Seritage Growth Properties**, the owner of the Sears site. They were able to bring **Inova Health System** into the arrangement to anchor this redevelopment.

The City will finance some of the infrastructure improvements required on the site and we have purchased the future hospital site to lease back to Inova. Inova's proceeds from selling their existing site on Seminary Road is financing their expenses related to the move.



We have finally assembled a partnership, financing and a plan to revitalize this site. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but this exciting partnership is making things happen on this site for the first time in decades. I look forward to now watching this vision come to fruition.



## 2022 Crime Facts

Protecting the safety of our community is the most important obligation of local government. If are residents are not safe, nothing else matters.

Alexandria remains a safe community. In 2021, [we saw an overall decrease in Part 1 crime, as our community recovered from the pandemic.](#) This recovery came as the City was being served with [the fewest number of police officers on the streets of our City in recent memory.](#) This progress was the testament to the hard work of the Alexandria Police Department and the vigilance of our residents.

Last month, the City Council received [our 2022 crime statistics.](#) This report contained good news and bad news for our community.

Part 1 crime is the most serious crime (homicides, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft). This year, the incidents of Part 1 crime in Alexandria increased 4.7% from last year. This increase was driven primarily by robberies, larcenies and auto theft. The City experienced a large drop in aggravated assault, to the lowest level in 4 years.

Part 2 crime are primarily "quality of life" infractions as well as incidents driven by enforcement activities. These incidents increased as well, with increases in Destruction/Vandalism, drug and narcotic offenses, driving under the influence and drunkenness.

While overall violent crimes decreased by over 12% versus 2021, we saw a doubling of crimes involving firearms, from 76 incidents to 152.

Last year the budget approved by the City Council included new funding for a Special Investigations Unit focused on investigating those responsible for homicides, felony sex offenses and crimes driven by weapons. Over the past 18 months, this new unit has arrested 76 violent felons, a third of which were directly implicated in gun crimes.

We have continued to see mental health and behavioral health incidents driving emergency response. [The City's ACORP program,](#) a co-response program pairing a sworn police officer with a mental health practitioner, has seen considerable success. Over the

past year, ACORP handled 2,387 behavioral health calls. Only 2% of 911 calls that ACORP responded to resulted in an arrest and 17% resulted in an involuntary transport to a hospital. Nearly two-thirds of the ACORP calls were referred to community services.

In approving last year's budget, the City Council chose to build on this success by expanding ACORP by adding two new ACORP pairs, for a total of 3.

The increases in incidents of crime in 2022 are concerning, **but the City's violent crime remains 25% lower than we were 15 years ago.** Our property crime remains 7% lower than 15 years ago. Yet, we cannot tolerate any crime in our community and this report compels further action.

Last year the City hired the largest-ever class of new police officers entering the Academy. As those officers conclude their training, we will make large progress on some of the staffing challenges the Police Department has experienced for the past few years. Coupled with new investments in preventative (upstream) investments, we can buck national and regional trends and reduce violence and property crimes in our City.



## Broadband Update

**Almost a decade ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to help bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.**

Last month, **Ting activated their first customers in the City of Alexandria.** This activation brings fiber internet to the home for Alexandrians and joins the battle in competition for these critical services.

Separate from this announcement, **Verizon began conversion of their existing copper infrastructure to fiber optic cable in some areas of our City. With the completion of this work, they are now offering Verizon FIOS internet service along with their landline phone service.** They are now accepting orders as well.

It has taken far too long, but the City has finally realized the vision of a truly competitive marketplace and bringing new broadband capacity to our community.

A year ago, **the City announced that we had received four proposals from vendors seeking to offer competitive broadband services for our community.**

In March of last year, the City Council **unanimously advanced franchise agreements with two of the firms, Ting and Lumos.** While we issued franchise

agreements to both companies, ultimately Ting was the only company that decided to move ahead at this time.

A year and a half ago, City Council gathered on Eisenhower Avenue to have a **formal groundbreaking for the build of our municipal fiber network.** Construction is **now occurring at numerous locations in the City.**

**Just over two years ago, the City issued a revised solicitation to select a vendor to construct a municipal fiber network to serve City and School facilities around our community.** A contract **was awarded to Jones Utilities Construction, Inc to perform this work.**

Over 9 years ago, the City issued 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. We received 10 responses from potential private partners and those responses shaped the approach the City is now taking.

For years, Alexandria has sought new private investment in broadband infrastructure. For most of our residents, we have one company providing Internet connectivity and television. Regardless of the performance of incumbent providers, technological innovation and reliability thrives on competition. That competition benefits the residents of our City.

This is an issue that impacts not only residents but also our businesses and the ability of our community to attract new investment.

Fortunately, competition is now here!

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