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Alexandria, Virginia

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In This Edition

[Council Initiatives](#)

[Looking for Broadband Partners](#)

[72 Hour Rule](#)

[Credit Rating Renewed](#)

[Street Paving Begins!](#)

[Host a Town Hall](#)

[Upcoming Issues: Ramsey Homes](#)

Quick Links

[E-Mail Me](#)

[City of Alexandria Website](#)

[Pay City Taxes Online](#)

[Review Real Estate Assessments](#)

[Call Click Connect](#)

[Board & Commission Vacancies](#)

[Alexandria Health Department Restaurant Inspections](#)

[Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection](#)

[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

Events/Updates

August is the last month of the Council's summer recess.

Next month the City Council will be back in session facing the difficult issues of our community.

I don't usually use this space for book recommendations, but I did have the opportunity to read "[Building the Federal Schoolhouse](#)" while on vacation this summer.

The book uses Alexandria as a case study analyzing the impact of Federal education policy on local policy-making. It tells a fascinating political history of Alexandria over the past generation.

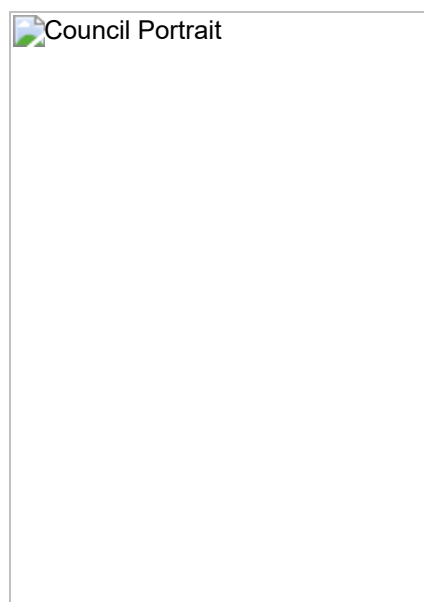
I recommend it if you have the time and inclination.

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

Council Initiatives

Seeking Broadband For Long Term Relationship

Last month, the City took a significant step forward in our efforts to bring new broadband options to Alexandria. As I wrote about in May, the Council had supported the idea of issuing an RFI (Request for Information) to solicit concepts from the private sector for partnership with the City in expanding broadband options, availability and capabilities.



Friendship Fire Festival Today!

[Today from 9 AM until 2 PM, the annual Friendship Fire Festival returns to the 100 block of South Alfred Street in Old Town!](#)

Celebrating the founding of the historic Friendship Firehouse in 1774, this festival is a great event for residents and visitors of all ages!

Tuesday is National Night Out

[On Tuesday evening, August 4th, neighborhoods all across our City will hold celebrations in support of our crime prevention efforts.](#)

With participation from the City's public safety agencies and the support of the many City government agencies that preserve our quality of life, this annual event is a great way to get to know your neighbors.

The full list of parties is on the City's website. I'll see you around the City!

Citizens Police Academy

The Alexandria Police Department does an excellent job of keeping our community safe.

By participating in the Citizens Police Academy, you spend 10 weeks learning about the department's unique mission, and meeting the men and women who perform it every day.

[Applications are due August 15th, and I highly recommend the program.](#)

City Academy

[For more comprehensive learning about the City's government, the City Academy provides such a program.](#)

Late last month, [the RFI was issued and we are now actively soliciting partnerships](#). The deadline for responses is September 3rd and I am hopeful we will have several good options to pursue.

[A little over a year ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.](#)

In [Chattanooga, Tennessee, a community of 170,000, a public electricity utility used hundreds of millions of dollars to build thousands of miles of underground fiber](#). In doing so, the utility enabled the residents and businesses of Chattanooga to receive the fastest Internet connectivity in our nation.

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

This is an issue that affects not only residents, but also our businesses and the ability of our community to attract commerce.

In 2009, the City made great strides in bringing Verizon FIOS to our City. [Unfortunately, Verizon made the decision to cease any new deployments of FIOS nationally](#), and Alexandria was left out.

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

More City Code Clean-Up

As an old City we have old laws. I have worked with our City Attorney over the past few years to modernize or repeal several old laws.

We [repealed antiquated laws that banned many massage services](#).

We [repealed laws that required bicycle registration](#).

We [got rid of laws prohibiting "for sale" signs on vehicles](#).

We [struck out code sections that required new streets to be named after Confederate Generals, banned cohabitation, and prohibited shoeshiners](#).

While it's relatively easy to repeal anachronistic laws, it becomes more challenging when the laws need to be modernized.

In June, I proposed that the City take a look at the so-called "72-hour Rule." The 72-hour Rule [is officially 10-4-8 of the City Code](#). This code section has been on the City's books for many years, and was last revised 30 years ago. This is in addition to any existing on-street restrictions.

Essentially the 72-hour rule provides that a vehicle cannot be parked on a City street for longer than 72 hours. The rule was enacted to prevent abandonment and long-term storage of vehicles on our streets. Unfortunately, today it is primarily used as a tool in "neighbor versus neighbor" disputes.

According to our Police Department, over the past three years, they have been asked to check a vehicle for compliance 1,200 times, and they have issued 397 citations for violations. This is a law where enforcement is primarily initiated by complaint.

In neighborhoods without off-street parking, the rule can become particularly problematic when residents are on vacation or on a business trip, without any place or anyone to move their vehicle.

This nine week program educates residents as to the details of the many City services received by Alexandrians.

The deadline for applications is Friday August 14th.

Sales Tax Holiday

In the past, the Commonwealth of Virginia had three separate sales tax holidays: one for back to school time, one for hurricane preparedness, and one for Energy Star efficient appliances.

[Starting this year, the three sales tax holidays will be held concurrently next weekend, from August 7 - 9.](#)

Use the opportunity to shop at some wonderful Alexandria businesses and enjoy the discount!

Thanks to the leadership of the boys from Boy Scout Troop 135, and in partnership with the Fund For Alexandria's Child, the scouts will be collecting school supplies all weekend at Staples store located in Potomac Yard.

The supplies collected will benefit foster children in Alexandria.

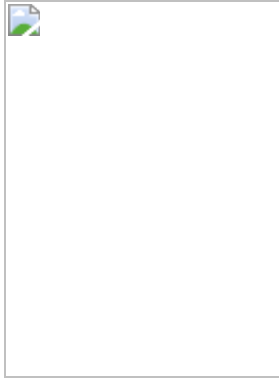
DASH Schedule Changes

On [Sunday August 9th, services changes effecting DASH Bus routes will go into effect.](#)

In addition to slight changes on the AT 1, AT 5 and AT 7, there will also be increases of frequency on the King Street Trolley.

Fall Rec Program Guide

[The Fall Program Guide for the Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities is out!](#)



In making my proposal, I have asked that our Staff examine possible changes, including consideration of a full repeal, an extension of the time period, or the creation of a permit scheme. This would allow residents to purchase permits to exceed the 72 hours in an extenuating circumstance.

Our City staff is presently conducting a review. They will solicit community input and return to the Council with a recommendation.

Let me know your thoughts.

Good Fiscal Stewardship

Each time the City goes to borrow money for its capital budget, it must go before the rating agencies to have its credit worthiness assessed.

Much like individuals must have a credit check performed before acquiring a mortgage, a car loan, or a new credit card, the City must go before Standard & Poor's and Moody's and have the two organizations assess whether we are doing a good job managing the City's finances.

[Last month, the City borrowed \\$23 million of general obligation bonds, and we refinanced \\$10 million of previously issued bonds.](#)

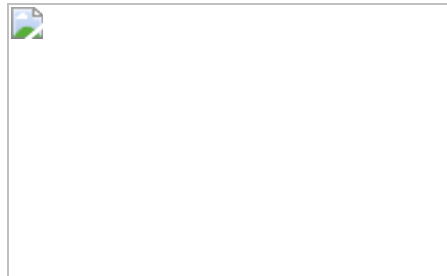
Both Moody's and Standard & Poor's re-affirmed the City's AAA/Aaa bond ratings, citing our strong fiscal management and conservative debt posture.

Those high ratings [qualify the City for the cheapest borrowing rates available](#), which will save our taxpayers millions over the life of these bonds.

In May, [the Council adopted our 10 year Capital Improvement Program, covering fiscal years 2016 - 2025](#). Over the 10 year period, the program calls for \$1.566 billion in capital investment throughout the City. Nearly 63% of those funds go to new investments in transportation and education infrastructure.

Our capital budget is funded primarily through a mix of debt and current year funding, also known as "cash capital." Relating this to your home mortgage, the cash capital is the down payment. We also pay interest each year on the debt that was issued in previous years.

Alexandria is very conservative with our use of debt.



For example, Arlington County limits its debt to 4% of its Fair Market Real Property Value. Both Fairfax and Prince William Counties limit their debt to 3%. Alexandria's self-imposed limit is 1.6%, and this budget year we achieved 1.31%.

The median for other similarly rated and sized jurisdictions is 2.42%.

Debt is a tool that allows us to balance the costs of large capital investments across the generations of Alexandria taxpayers that will benefit from them, and to pay for our investments from the returns we reap from them.

Registration for fall programs begins at 9 AM on Wednesday, August 12th.

Combined Sewer Committee Volunteers Needed

[To assist the City in developing the update to the Long Term Control Plan for our Combined Sewer System, the Council has created a community advisory group.](#)

We are now looking for volunteers to help lead this process to completion.

[Please volunteer today!](#)

In issuing the City's rating, Moody's wrote: "The stable outlook reflects our expectation that the city's satisfactory financial position will be maintained due to proactive management, sound financial policies and continued tax base growth and diversification."

It is important for us to maintain the careful stewardship that will protect our taxpayers and our City's infrastructure.

Road Paving Begins Tomorrow

The Capital Improvement Program approved in May by the City Council included \$5.6 million of funding during Fiscal Year 2016 (July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016) for street reconstruction and road resurfacing. This was a 25% increase over last year.



The City has 560 lane miles of roads that it is responsible for. This level of investment will allow the City to resurface approximately 50 lane miles of road each year.

Beginning tomorrow, this surfacing campaign begins for the year. Work will

begin on the intersection of King and N. Beauregard. That work will be followed by S. Van Dorn Street between S. Pickett Street and Edsall Road.

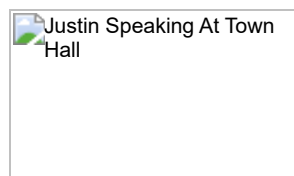
[The full FY 2016 Paving Schedule is available online](#), along with the [latest status of work](#).

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

Affordable Housing Versus Historic Preservation

The most difficult issues on the City Council are when two valued policy areas end up in direct conflict with each other, forcing the Council to choose the one that is ultimately more important.

In September, the Council will be facing such an issue. The potential redevelopment of the Ramsey Homes public housing development is such a conflict, pitting the City's commitment to historic preservation against the City's commitment to the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

The [Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority \(ARHA\)](#) is an independent entity, separate from the City, that utilizes Federal funding from the US Department of Housing & Urban Development

(HUD) to provide housing to low-income residents of Alexandria.

ARHA directly manages and oversees 1,079 units of affordable housing. In addition, ARHA manages the City's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, which utilizes Federal funding, to provide assistance for another 1,906 low-income families to reside in privately-owned housing units.

At the federal level, we have seen dramatic changes in how public housing is managed and developed. In the past, the Federal Government has been a proactive participant in bringing about the redevelopment of public housing. This was demonstrated in Alexandria when the City utilized [HOPE VI funding](#) to redevelop 100 units of Public Housing into [Chatham Square](#). This mixed-income development incorporated both market-rate and public housing.

Now in 2015, the Federal Government is forcing changes in public housing with its inaction. Today, HUD only funds 73% of every dollar required to operate Alexandria Public Housing units. The balance of revenue that ARHA collects as rent is not sufficient for sustainable management of their properties, and with the effects of sequestration, this is likely to get worse.

With aging properties sitting on valuable land, ARHA is now looking at the highest and best use of its land to preserve housing for low-income residents in our City.

Over 30 years ago, the City Council adopted [Resolution 830](#), which required the replacement of any public housing unit that was displaced by redevelopment. In past redevelopment efforts, replacement units have been obtained and created throughout our City.

In 2008, the City Council adopted the [Braddock East Master Plan](#), which called for redevelopment of several aging public housing properties. By allowing additional density near existing transit, it was designed to encourage private partnership in the redevelopment of this housing.

Today, under this Plan, James Bland Homes [are becoming Old Town Commons](#). This redevelopment activity has proven successful in providing a sustainable model for mixed-income housing in our City.

Last fall, with these experiences and lessons behind us, [ARHA issued an RFP \(Request for Proposals\) to solicit proposals from private developers for the potential redevelopment of 7 additional properties: Cameron Valley \(built in 1985\), Andrew Adkins \(built in 1969\), Samuel Madden \(built in 1945\), Ramsey Homes \(built in 1942\), Hopkins Tancil \(built in 1945\), Ladrey \(built in 1968\), and the ARHA Headquarters building on North Fairfax Street.](#)

As they have continued through the process, ARHA narrowed the number of properties down to five: Andrew Adkins, Samuel Madden, Hopkins Tancil, the ARHA Headquarters building and Cameron Valley.

[One of the properties that ARHA removed from the RFP process was Ramsey Homes. Ramsey Homes, which includes 15 total public housing units, consists of four buildings on N. Patrick Street between Wythe and Pendleton Streets. ARHA made the decision to pursue redevelopment of Ramsey Homes independently without a partner using VHDA tax credits.](#)

Ramsey Homes was constructed beginning in 1941 and acquired by the Federal Government for defense housing. Maps from the time describe it specifically as a home for African-Americans. In 1953, ARHA purchased the property and it has been operated as public housing since that time.

The property is not in good condition, and requires significant renovation to meet current standards. It is currently believed that without replacement or renovation, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will no longer provide financial support for the units in the near term.

Given that Ramsey Homes is in the Parker-Gray Historic District, any demolition applications are heard by the Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review (BAR). [In April, the BAR heard the case and unanimously voted to deny the permit to demolish the existing homes.](#)

Obviously, without permission to demolish, the redevelopment can not proceed, and ARHA would either have to renovate or close down Ramsey Homes.

As such, ARHA has appealed the BAR's decision to the City Council. In September, the Council will hear this appeal and have the option to uphold, overturn or remand the case back to the BAR.

If the Council were to overturn the BAR, the case would then proceed through the normal development review processes to determine whether the proposed new building is appropriate.

Let me know your thoughts!

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