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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

August 1, 2021

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I hope you are having an enjoyable summer! [All of Alexandria is cheering on our three Olympians as they ably represent our City and our nation in Tokyo.](#)

Congrats to Tynita Butts-Townsend (high jump), Troy Isley (boxing) and Noah Lyles (track) for making it to the largest stage on the planet.

Tuesday evening is National Night Out. The City will continue its participation in this national crime prevention event with community parties throughout our City

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Our public safety agencies will be well-represented to engage with our residents and talk about the excellent work they do to keep our community safe.

[Please join me at one of the events in your neighborhood on Tuesday night!](#)

This is also an important month as the students of the Alexandria City Public Schools return to classrooms. [The students of Samuel Tucker Elementary will be the first back as they start on Monday August 9th. The remainder of our students will begin their school year on Tuesday August 24th.](#)

[To help prepare for back to school, the Commonwealth of Virginia will be having it's annual sales tax holiday weekend next weekend.](#)

Best wishes to all of our students for a wonderful, and hopefully much more normal, school year!

As our students return to full-time, in-person learning, [Northern Virginia's five public health directors, including Alexandria's health director, have provided guidance for the appropriate mitigation of the spread of COVID.](#) This guidance includes universal masking for the unvaccinated, as well as faculty, staff and students in elementary schools, and for those in middle and high school.

Alexandria's School Board will be discussing their approach to COVID mitigation at their meeting this week.

As of yesterday, 96,467 Alexandrians have received at least one vaccine dose, which is just under 68% of the eligible population of those 12 and older.

Of those, 83,528 are now fully vaccinated.

While these are the official numbers from the Virginia Department of Health, they do not include Federal doses and out-of-state doses, which likely bring our numbers up further.

[ANYONE who is aged 12 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.](#)

After reaching the lowest transmission rates, hospitalization rates and deaths that we have seen, we are now unfortunately seeing an uptick in new COVID cases.

As a result, the CDC has issued new guidance recommending masks be worn in indoor spaces in communities where transmission is high. That now includes Alexandria.

Notable, however, is that those new cases are not accompanied by new hospitalizations and deaths. The three vaccines work!

While there has been much attention paid to the purported prevalence of "breakthrough" cases, it is important to focus on the data.

In the past month in Northern Virginia, there have been 2,714 new COVID cases, 66 new COVID hospitalizations and 1 new COVID death. Of those:

- **99.3% (2,695) of the cases have been from individuals not fully vaccinated**
- **98.4% (65) of the hospitalizations have been from individuals not fully vaccinated**
- **100% (1) of the deaths have been from individuals not fully vaccinated**

The City continues extensive efforts to educate and vaccinate those residents in our community who have not received these life-saving doses.

Over the past three months, the Health Department staff and its volunteers have been campaigning around our City to get our community vaccinated. That has resulted in:

- **1,205 Staff/Volunteer hours**
- **8,113 doors knocked**
- **63 events where staff and volunteers set up tables**
- **41 canvassing events**
- **4,774 interactions with residents which resulted in:**
 - **68% of people already being vaccinated or scheduled**

- **553 new appointments booked**
- **36% of the unvaccinated scheduling appointments**
- **12% of all interactions resulting in appointments**

In June, the Teen Wellness Center at Alexandria City High School began administering doses to interested students, their families and other community members.

The ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund was re-branded as the Alexandria Resilience Fund, which is distributing money into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created. Please join me in supporting this fundraising effort.

The latest updates will continue to be posted regularly on the City's Coronavirus website.

The Virginia Department of Health posts data daily online regarding positive tests, hospitalizations and deaths.

The Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association is posting daily updates regarding hospital capacity and capabilities.

Later this month, I am bringing back my "Running Town Hall" meetings. In partnership with the great folks at Pacers Alexandria, we will be hosting an opportunity to lace up your running shoes, talk about the issues facing our community and get a little exercise at the same time.

Join us on Thursday August 26th at 7 PM at 1301 King Street. I look forward to running with you!

For those who prefer something a little more sedentary, I continue my monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings on the first Thursday of each month.

You can watch last month's Town Hall online and please join me at this link this Thursday at 8 PM to watch and participate live.

Volunteers are needed throughout our community. [Please refer to Volunteer Alexandria for opportunities to give back to those in need.](#)

We are still actively recruiting volunteers to [join our Alexandria Medical Reserve Corps.](#) Medical Reserve Corps volunteers, both with and without medical training, have been critical to our efforts throughout this pandemic.

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

Initiatives and Updates

Schools For Our Future

Last month, [City Council approved a request from our School Board to provide funding to support the ACPS purchase of 1703 N. Beauregard Street to be swing space for future rebuilds as well as eventually a permanent school.](#) This building, an office building next to Ferdinand Day Elementary School, will provide an opportunity for another adaptive reuse of an under-utilized building.

[In May, City Council unanimously approved a 10-year capital improvement program for the Alexandria City Public Schools including \\$551.5 million over the next decade.](#) This provides the funding for both new and renovated facilities, as well as non-capacity infrastructure investments. Only 8 years ago, [the 10 year capital improvement program for our Schools was less than half as much at \\$203 million.](#)

This 10-year Capital Program includes rebuilds or builds of:

- Cora Kelly Elementary School
- George Mason Elementary School
- Minnie Howard Campus of our High School
- A new school to be determined

Two years ago, [the City Council unanimously approved land-use modifications to allow the old Patrick Henry Elementary School building to be temporarily used at "swing-space"](#) to facilitate a rebuild of Douglas MacArthur Elementary School. In [September of last year, the City Council unanimously approved the rebuild of MacArthur.](#) That rebuild is [now under way.](#)

All together, this is the largest period of new school facility construction in our City's history!

At the beginning of last school year, 15,588 students started in the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). That constituted a 2.95% decrease from the previous year or about 474 fewer students.

While the enrollment numbers are greatly impacted by the pandemic, last year year marked the first time in 14 years that we have seen a decrease in enrollment. During that period of growth, ACPS 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.**

With the resources now in place, we must work collaboratively to ensure that these new facilities come to reality.

On Tuesday August 10th, ACPS will be hosting a community meeting to provide updates on the planning for the rebuild of the Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School. Last month, the City Council agreed to allocate funding to ensure that a pool facility would be incorporated in the rebuild of this campus.

In June, feasibility studies were released by ACPS to inform planning for the new school buildings for **George Mason** and for **Cora Kelly**. Both reports examined the question as to whether "swing space" will be required during the construction process.

Over eight 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.

We have also worked to understand where the enrollment is coming from. The type and age of housing is a significant determinant of the student generation rates. Today, 88% of ACPS students live in housing that is over 30 years old.

We learned that 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.

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.

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

Almost three years ago, ACPS opened the first "net-new" school building in nearly two decades with the [opening of Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School on the West End](#). Over two years ago, ACPS [opened the newly rebuilt Patrick Henry K-8 School](#). Both of these new buildings added badly needed capacity in areas of the City with rapidly growing enrollment.

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 dangers of systemic underinvestment 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.

While the pandemic has paused a decade and a half of enrollment growth, it can be assumed that the trend will continue once our schools return to in-person learning. These long-term investments become critical to support the success of our students in the generations to come.

City Manager Hiring

In June [we learned that our City Manager, Mark Jinks, will be retiring at the end of the year](#). We will have the opportunity later this year to properly recognize Mark's dedicated and impactful service to our City, but at the moment this leaves a significant task before the City Council. We must make the most important personnel decision in City government: selecting our Chief Executive Officer.

Last month, [the City Council formally launched a national search for our next City Manager](#) and we want your input in this process. [There is an online survey posted seeking feedback and we will have further input opportunities in the fall](#).

Our goal is to have a new City Manager selected later this fall so that we may have an appropriate transition.

If you know the right person to help lead our City government through the incredible opportunities and challenges that face our community, please encourage them to apply prior to the September 17th deadline.



The Rescue Plan In Alexandria

Last month, the City Council unanimously adopted Alexandria's plan to allocate the first tranche of \$29.8 million, from the City's allocation in the American Rescue Plan.

In March, President Biden **signed the American Rescue Plan into law.** This sprawling and comprehensive piece of legislation provides significant resources to Alexandria's residents, our businesses, our schools and our local government.

After surveying the community, we received an enormous amount of ideas and concepts for how Alexandria could best deploy these resources to improve our City.

Alexandria's government will receive a total of \$59.4 million from the legislation, divided into two allotments, one that was received in May and the other to be received in May of 2022. All funds must be spent by December 31, 2024.

Beyond what the City will receive, the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) will receive \$34.8 million from this legislation. This is in addition to the \$15 million ACPS received from the **Federal legislation that was enacted before the end of last year.**

ACPS has provided a plan for public comment for their expenditure of these funds and they will be holding a **public hearing for comment on the plan on Tuesday evening.**

The American Rescue Plan included three criteria for how the local government funds may be used:

- To respond to the public health emergency with respect to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality

- For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue of such metropolitan city, nonentitlement unit of government or county due to such emergency
- To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

The Treasury Department recently released [an "Interim Final Rule," which ultimately provides detailed \(151 pages!\) guidance to localities as to how we can expend these dollars.](#)

This is a "once in a generation" infusion of money for Alexandria's City government and our school system. We must ensure that we not only spend every penny that the Federal government has provided to our community, but we also must use these resources wisely and to the long-term benefit of our community.

[I believe we should use this money to create sustainable structures that will not only help us recover, but benefit the City for decades to come.](#) Furthermore, given the substantial resources that ACPS, the Commonwealth and many Federal programs will be receiving, I believe that Alexandria's expenditure of these combined resources should be closely coordinated to ensure the maximum benefit for our community.

In May, the Governor and the leadership of the State Senate and House of Delegates [announced shared priorities for the expenditure of \\$4.3 billion that the Commonwealth will be receiving directly from this legislation.](#) The Governor has now called the General Assembly back into [a special session beginning this week to enact these priorities.](#)

Over the past few days, the Governor [has continued to roll out specific policy proposals for the expenditure of the Commonwealth's Rescue Plan revenues.](#) Many of these proposals, if enacted, have significant benefit for Alexandria.

While we continue our focus on the resources that will be directly appropriated to our local government, we must also commit resources to ensuring that each of our residents and our businesses avail themselves of portions of the legislation that might benefit them. The Rescue Plan is a large piece of legislation and our government can assist our residents and businesses in navigating its complexity.

Additionally, [the House of Representatives is bringing back what used to be known as "earmarks" and will now be called "Community Funding Requests."](#) In May, [Congressman Don Beyer released his funding requests under this new program,](#) including several priorities that were

requested by Alexandria's City Council on behalf of our community.

From the beginning of this crisis, it has been clear that the two levels of government, local and state, who are required to balance our budgets annually, could not address the immense financial need that has been created. Only the Federal Government could provide a sufficient amount of money to address some of these challenges.

As we put COVID-19 behind us, the hardship faced by our residents and businesses will continue for a while to come. The City will continue to find ways to provide the support required. I am hopeful we will take this opportunity to use these resources to wisely shape our future.

Landmark Redevelopment Advances

Last month, the City Council unanimously approved a plan to reshape the most significant redevelopment site in our City.

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

Days before Christmas, 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 58 years on Seminary Road to a new modern facility on the site of Landmark Mall.

The site, 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.

In June, 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 will purchase 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.

Nearly 55 years ago, [then-Virginia Lieutenant Governor Mills Godwin Jr. \(later Virginia's 60th and 62nd Governor\) came to Alexandria to open Landmark Mall](#). Today, the work to restore the Landmark Mall site to a productive use of real estate for our City is a top focus for our community.

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 slowed their 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.](#)

[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 this REIT.](#)

[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.](#)

[Over two years ago, Council approved revisions to the Master Plan to advance a comprehensive redevelopment of the site.](#)

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

Two decades 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.

We have finally assembled a partnership, financing and a plan to revitalize this site. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but I believe we can be cautiously optimistic that it is finally coming together with this exciting partnership.



Building Safety

The tragic collapse of a residential high-rise building in Surfside, Florida has prompted a national discussion about building safety. For many Alexandria residents, this conversation has necessarily prompted questions about the safety of their own homes.

For Alexandria, this is an issue that impacts our community more than most. In our city, we have 57 high-rise residential buildings that are over 40 years old. We did higher-density residential development long before other jurisdictions in Virginia. A 2007 Virginia Housing Commission survey of Virginia localities indicated Alexandria has most of the older high-rise residential buildings in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The good news is that we have no reason to believe these buildings are unsafe or at risk of anything similar to what occurred in Florida. Our Code Administration Department works to implement and enforce the uniform statewide building code.

Yet I do believe this is an opportunity for policy improvement and refinement to ensure transparency and safety for Alexandrians relating to these buildings in

the future. [To advance that effort, last month I sent a letter to Governor Ralph Northam requesting a new statewide study be authorized in the upcoming special session of the Virginia General Assembly.](#)

In that letter, I suggested several policy proposals, including:

- New reporting requirements and transparency regarding current structural findings by homeowners and condominium associations
- New authority for local building code officials to require inspections of buildings and structures in their community
- A building inspection/recertification process
- Emergency requirements that existing older buildings have structural assessments done within the next year

My hope is that we can use this tragedy as an opportunity to make the kind of policy refinements that will make buildings safer and give residents the kind of information that can give them confidence.

Modernizing Our Safety Net

A little over 50 years ago, [the New York Times ran an article reviewing the concept of a guaranteed basic income and featuring a guaranteed income program that then-President Nixon had brought to Congress.](#)

The program was championed by Donald Rumsfeld, who was at that time Nixon's Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Rumsfeld was assisted in managing this program by Richard Cheney.

The concept was relatively simple: what if we cut out the bureaucracy of public assistance programs and instead provided a guaranteed monthly income to lower-income populations, without any strings attached? It was driven at that time by a belief that in addition to being costly, the bureaucracy that had been developed to administer our public safety net programs was reducing efficacy of the programs themselves.

Fast forward a few decades, [and there is now a network of municipal governments around the nation experimenting with the concept.](#)

Alexandria will now join this effort. The City Council approved the allocation of \$3 million from a portion of the City's American Rescue Plan money. The City will provide 150 families with a \$500 per month debit card. This program will last for 24 months.

To gauge the result of this effort, the City will provide case management and engage a research partner.

Ultimately, the goal of the effort is to improve the economic stability of lower-income families.

I am hopeful that the City can also glean lessons from this experiment to better guide how we administer other programs designed to alleviate poverty in the future.

Centenarians!

We are celebrating those who have built our community!

If you know an Alexandria who is over the age of 100, or will be by the end of this calendar year, please let us know!

[In partnership with our friends from Senior Services of Alexandria and the Successful Aging Committee, the City is looking to honor our Centenarians.](#)

National Centenarians Day is September 22nd and we are working to honor these individuals who have made such an impact on our City.

Climate Action

Last week, the City's [new Energy and Climate Change Task Force](#) held their second meeting. This group is designed to turn our Environmental Action Plan into concrete steps the City can take to make progress.

[They have posted a survey looking for feedback from the community as they approach their important work.](#)

[Three years ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change again sounded the alarm.](#) Their report gave the world about 12 years to take meaningful action to mitigate catastrophic impacts of rising temperatures.

While the Federal government was largely disengaged from international efforts to address climate change, that is now changing. With or without Federal leadership, Alexandria is continuing to take meaningful climate action.

It was two years ago that the City Council adopted the [latest update of our Environmental Action Plan](#) . This ambitious plan does not commit or appropriate money, but it does set the strategic direction to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Expand Open Space
- Reduce water pollution
- Reduce vehicle miles traveled
- Reduce ozone

To be successful, this work necessarily involves the public and private sector and will ultimately require a state government fully committed to the cause.

The **City released a comprehensive report of the accomplishments achieved during 2020**, including reductions in GHG emissions, new programs to make commercial buildings more sustainable, transportation initiatives, new green building standards, expanded recycling, and more.

In April, **the City Council approved our new Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Readiness Strategy**. Earlier this year, the Council approved the City's **first Alternative Fuel Fleet Policy to accelerate the City's deployment of these vehicles**.

DASH recently added its first electric buses to its fleet. They are now serving our City on scheduled routes.

Last year, the Council **unanimously approved our new Green Building Policy**. This new policy reflects the collaboration of a **Task Force** that met for several months to arrive at this new direction.

While the Green Building Policy will ensure that new development is built in a sustainable manner, to make progress, we must address existing structures.

Last year, the City Council voted 5-2 **to create a C-PACE program in Alexandria**. A C-PACE program will allow commercial property owners to make improvements to reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and sustainability, financed by repayments collected as part of the property's real estate tax payment.

The City has again partnered with the **Northern Virginia Regional Commission to bring back Solarize Alexandria**. This program partners with residential property owners to conduct assessments on the feasibility of solar power installations.

Buildings account for 39% of total energy use, 68% of electricity consumption and 38% of all carbon dioxide emissions. When buildings are built efficiently, redevelopment can be a powerful force to reduce our energy demands and improve our environment.

Led by an incredibly motivated and knowledgeable group of residents, the City vaulted to the lead among local governments by adopting the **Eco-City Charter** over a decade ago. The charter defined a comprehensive vision for our City to improve environmental sustainability.

The Eco-City Charter then led the City to adopt the [Environmental Action Plan](#). The plan laid out specific actions the City should undertake. It detailed how we should measure success and it began to define the next phase of our Eco-City evolution.

In 2009, the [City Council adopted Alexandria's first Green Building Policy](#). The policy laid out a series of expectations of the development community, including [LEED Silver for non-residential development and LEED Certified for residential development](#). The policy included flexibility so that developers could utilize other standards to ensure environmental sustainability of their development.

Meeting the standard requires a myriad of different techniques. Simply put, green building reduces the energy and water usage of buildings, while creating more livable homes and better spaces for work.

Since the adoption of the policy, 95% of the development constructed or under construction has met this policy. This equates to about 10 million square feet of green building.

Yet a lot has changed in the ten years since the approval of this policy. Green building strategies have gone from being a novelty and luxury to being a market standard.

The new policy proposes to raise the bar, with all private development being requested to meet a LEED Silver standard, and all public development being required to meet a LEED Gold standard. In addition to LEED, the proposed policy also allows for alternate certification options, including [Green Globes](#) and [Earthcraft](#), with a process for use of alternate standards.

While the task force supported the notion that public construction activity to lead the way in sustainability, there was some disagreement as to whether LEED Gold was sufficient or whether the City should set [Net-Zero construction](#) as the goal. Ultimately Council chose to set Net Zero as the goal for public facility construction. MacArthur Elementary School, which is now under construction, will be our first Net Zero building.

Constrained budgets make it more challenging for our City to continue its leadership in sustainability practices, but we can and should work to lead the region in this policy area. These efforts are critical given recent Federal policy changes, but are also good for our economy and our quality of life. I look forward to working to see them to reality.

A Flood Resilient Alexandria

On Tuesday the 10th, [the City will be hosting a virtual meeting to introduce our new "Flood Mitigation Pilot Grant Program."](#) This new program will provide matching reimbursement grants to property owners making flood resiliency improvements. This is one of the components of our comprehensive approach to addressing the flooding that has impacted our community for decades.

The newly constituted [Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group](#) will hold its second meeting later this month. This new committee will help advise the Council and our staff as we work to implement our flood mitigation plans.

Earlier this year, the City Council unanimously adopted an [an ordinance to double our Stormwater Utility Fee.](#) to significantly increase the resources available for investments in our storm sewer infrastructure. This increase will cost a condo owner an additional \$39 annually, a townhouse owner an additional \$58, a small single-family homeowner an additional \$140 and a large single-family homeowner an additional \$233.

The Stormwater Utility Fee revenue, paid by all property owners in the City (including non-taxable properties), will allow for an acceleration of major capacity projects and "spot improvements," an increase in channel maintenance, new "state-of-good repair" investments, property owner grants and new staffing in support of these projects and the system.

[Recently enacted state legislation](#), sponsored by Senator Adam Ebbin at the City's request, gives the City the flexibility to use these resources to address all of the challenges facing our residents.

This increase will bring in an additional \$8.5 million annually and [support a newly accelerated 10-year program of investments](#). While these funds will address many smaller "spot improvement" projects, this funding will allow the City to undertake 11 of the top priority storm sewer capacity projects over the next decade:

- Commonwealth & Glebe: \$34 million
- Ashby & Glebe: \$16 million
- Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass: \$60 million
- Edison & Dale: \$13 million
- Dewitt Avenue: \$15 million
- East Mason Avenue: \$1 million
- Notabene & Old Dominion: \$4 million
- Mount Vernon, E. Glendale, E. Luray & E. Alexandria: \$10 million
- E. Monroe & Wayne: \$3 million

- Russell & W. Rosemont: \$6 million
- Russell & W. Rosemont (south): \$8 million

Over the last several months, the City Council has worked to accelerate efforts to address chronic flooding issues, this time due to more frequent and more intense rain events. These storms are causing our residents and businesses to suffer significant financial loss due to damage from flooding and sanitary sewer backflow.

Addressing this challenge requires immediate and sustained action in the following areas:

- Infrastructure Investment and Maintenance
- Financial and Technical Assistance to Residents
- Development Policy Reform

In November, the City Council **received the initial output from our recently-formed interdepartmental team** working to address these challenges. You can **watch the full worksession online**.

In June of 2018, **property owners in Alexandria paid a Stormwater Utility Fee for the first time ever**. The creation of this fee was driven by the need for additional revenue to comply with **the City's MS4 Permit. The permit reflects Alexandria's obligations to reduce pollutants contained in storm run-off which makes its way to the Chesapeake Bay and other waterways**.

The fee applies to all properties (regardless of their taxable status). For commercial properties, it is assessed based on the impervious surfaces on the property. For residential properties, there are four tiers (apartment, townhome, small single-family home and large single-family home). **There is a credit system in place to encourage actions that assist the City's storm sewers**. Essentially the fee is structured to be a user fee for the City's stormwater handling.

Prior to this increase the stormwater utility fee brought in \$8.4 million this year (which grows to over \$11 million when that revenue is borrowed against), and \$200 million over the decade (assuming modest, regular increases)

While important, these efforts are insufficient to address the capacity issues that remain throughout the City and will not protect the City from the impacts of this flooding in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

For over 3 decades, **Alexandria has designed and planned for our storm sewer system to withstand a "10-year" storm event**. Said another way, a storm that is expected to have a 10% chance of happening every year, is the designed capacity of our system.

For Alexandria, a 10-year storm event constitutes one that will drop 2.28 inches of rain over a 60-minute period or 4.81 inches over a 24-hour period. This is a capacity that is at, and in many cases above, that of neighboring jurisdictions.

Yet, now three times in the past two years, we have had rain events that far exceeded this capacity. This is not sustainable.

Alexandria spends a significant amount of money on infrastructure designed to manage water. **In May, the City Council approved a \$2.6 billion, ten-year Capital Improvement Program.** Of that, over \$320.5 million is to address stormwater and sanitary sewer infrastructure. **Alexandria Renew Enterprises, the City's sewer authority, plans another \$593 million of capital investments over the next decade,** primarily the RiverRenew project to remediate the Combined Sewer (sanitary and stormwater) system that serves Old Town.

Together, nearly a billion dollars is planned for water investments. This spending dwarfs planned investments in schools, transportation and other major priorities. Only a decade ago, **planned investments in water infrastructure were less than 10% of this total,** but addressing these challenges will require a sustained increase in that investment level of a long period of time.

The investments required in our Sanitary Sewer system are funded by maintenance fees paid by existing customers (on the Alexandria Renew Enterprises bills) and by connection fees paid by developers.

In 2016, the City conducted a comprehensive Storm Sewer Capacity Analysis. This exhaustive study looked at each of the City's eight watersheds (Backlick Run, Cameron Run, Four Mile Run, Holmes Run, Hooff's Run, Holmes Run, Potomac River, Strawberry Run and Taylor Run) and identified problem areas where current capacity does not meet our 10-year storm design standard.

The study identified 90 separate deficiencies in the system, and estimated \$61 million of construction costs required to address those deficiencies (construction costs are approximately half of expected budget costs). Over half of these deficiencies are concentrated in the Hooff's Run and Four Mile Run watersheds. The reports of flooding from our residents during these most recent events align closely to these deficiencies. It is that study that has informed the list of priority capacity projects listed earlier.

From the maintenance perspective, it is also clear that we have work to do. **The City is currently undertaking**

a \$2 million effort to clear approximately 7,000 feet of the Hooff's Run Culvert. This 70+ year old urban culvert is designed to be "self-cleaning." After the July 2019 flooding event, the City commissioned a firm to do a **robotic assessment of the condition of the culvert.** That assessment showed an average of 5% obstruction across the culvert and some areas of 15-20% obstruction. The clearing of the culvert commenced last year and is expected to conclude soon. It does not appear to have been done before, certainly not in recent memory.

For development, whether large-scale, mixed-use development or a small residential addition, **Alexandria's stringent stormwater requirements** stipulate that conditions after development to be the same and oftentimes better than they were. As a consequence, the flooding we have experienced in the City is typically in established neighborhoods, areas of our City where we have not seen new development (aside from infill) in decades. Yet, there may be options to further strengthen these existing requirements. We have sought additional authority from the General Assembly for these expanded requirements.

A climate-resilient City requires investments and potentially new policies to ensure that residents of our City do not suffer devastating damage with such frequency.

Putting in place the infrastructure that can support a changing climate will be a significant undertaking for our community. It will involve a large commitment of new resources and possibly private property impacts. I am pleased that the City has made this new investment.



New Campaign

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

In January, I did announce that I will be running for re-election as Mayor this year.

In June, I again received the Democratic nomination and I will be on the ballot for re-election this November.

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

