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# The Council Connection

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

August 1, 2023

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## Tonight is National Night Out!

Alexandria will again be participating in this nationwide celebration of the partnerships that prevent crime and keep our neighborhoods safe.

There will be 37 different parties occurring around our City, with representatives from the Alexandria Police Department, the Alexandria Sheriff's Department, the Alexandria Fire Department and so many other City agencies and partners participating. I'll see you tonight!

[Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection](#)  
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[Report a Street Light Outage](#)  
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[On Saturday, the Friendship Fire Festival returns to the 100 block of South Alfred Street in Old Town. The event begins at 9AM and lasts until 2 PM.](#)

We'll be celebrating the 249th year of the fire company, the first in Alexandria.

There will be activities for children, historic artifacts and more!

In less than 3 weeks, the summer will conclude for Alexandria students as the Alexandria City Public Schools will be back in session!

While Samuel Tucker Elementary began last month, the remainder of our schools will open up on Monday August 21st. [This year will be an special back-to-school for the families at Douglas Macarthur Elementary, as they will occupy their brand new school building on Janney's Lane!](#)

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



## How We Fund Schools

When the City Council approved our Operating Budget in the spring, [we increased the General Fund transfer to the operations of the Alexandria City Public Schools \(ACPS\) by \\$9.9 million, a 4% increase.](#) The City's General Fund appropriation to ACPS's operating budget is just under \$258.7 million, which itself is just under 30% of the City's Operating Budget, and our largest agency appropriation.

All of the \$258.7 million that the City Council appropriated to ACPS is collected from the local taxpayers of Alexandria, primarily through the real estate tax and other local taxes. [ACPS also receives \\$63.6 million from the Commonwealth of Virginia to fund the cost of our schools.](#) This appropriation, which covers a little less than 20% of the operating costs of our schools has been a constant source of tension between local governments in Virginia

(particularly those in Northern Virginia) and the state government.

The **Commonwealth's contributions to local schools are determined through the Local Composite Index (LCI)**. The LCI incorporates the value of local real property, gross income and taxable retail sales activity to arrive at a "local ability to pay." Based on this formula there are communities (most of which are in Northern Virginia) that are expected to cover 80% of the costs of their schools (referred to as the "Standards of Quality") from local revenues at one extreme, and localities that cover only 17% of the costs locally, at the other extreme.

In Alexandria, we have consistently voiced concerns in Richmond about the LCI as an inappropriate tool given that it puts too much emphasis on the purported wealth of a community and too little emphasis on the costs of services required by the student body. In the case of Alexandria, with a student body with high levels of poverty, English language learners and special education, the costs of educating our students is not represented by the pockets of wealth in some areas of our City.

During the 2021 General Assembly session, the two houses **adopted a resolution** that directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC), the General Assembly's body for studying complex policy areas, to study the funding of education in Virginia.

The JLARC study **has now concluded and resulted in a comprehensive report on the Commonwealth's funding of K-12 education**.

The study has provided important findings, including:

- Virginia schools receive less money from the Commonwealth than other states.
- The Standards of Quality do not accurately reflect the local costs of education
- The formula does not address the costs of educating students with higher needs
- The formula is far too complex to manage

How resources are provided to schools determines the opportunities for children to succeed. The report is a serious review of one of the most important financial relationships in Virginia. The report makes significant recommendations that, if implemented, would not only provide additional state money for Alexandria's schools, but also place the Commonwealth's schools on a much stronger financial footing for the future.

I am hopeful that the General Assembly and the Governor will focus on addressing these important

findings during the 2024 legislative session.



## Torpedo Factory

**Last month, the City announced the selection of 29 artists (in 27 applications) who will receive three-year studio leases at Alexandria's Torpedo Factory, our world-class art center on Alexandria's Waterfront. Eleven of these artists are newcomers to Torpedo Factory. They will join 18 returning artists with new leases beginning October 1st.**

Last fall, **26 artists began new three-year leases as artists at the Torpedo Factory.** Fifteen of these artists joined 11 current studio artists and become part of Alexandria's internationally-recognized arts community.

Last year's process was the first of three annual jury processes to evaluate those interested in joining the Torpedo Factory as a studio artist and those who currently operate their studio at the arts center. The resident artists who participated in last year's process had most recently juried into the arts center between 1975 and 2003.

This year's process had artists most recently juried between 2004 and 2017.

**The Torpedo Factory Arts Center** is an iconic presence on the City's waterfront. Bringing a half million visitors into working artists galleries, the Factory is a economic development engine and unique arts resource for our community.

The City of Alexandria purchased the Factory from the United States Government in 1969. The Arts Center was opened in 1974 and has been a model for similar centers around country.

Yet for the past several years, the challenges of the Factory and the possible solutions to those challenges have been divisive.

**Three years ago, the City Council endorsed an action plan for the future of the Torpedo Factory.**

Our staff brought a few proposals for the future of the Torpedo Factory to stakeholders for input, and a year and a half ago these were brought to the City Council. **You can review those proposals online.**

At the end of 2021, the City Council **unanimously endorsed a framework of principles for next steps for the Torpedo Factory that I proposed to my colleagues.**

These principles call for an entirely new structure to strategically manage the Torpedo Factory and the many new arts assets that the City is bringing to reality as part of the [Old Town North Arts District](#).

You can watch Council's discussion [beginning at the 1:56:00 mark in the video from the December 2021 Legislative Meeting](#).

Alexandria is an arts destination, but that destination is broader than one building. I am excited that Council has now endorsed this vision to expand our commitment to arts real estate in our City, with the Torpedo Factory as a focal point of that expansion.

This discussion has gone on for a while. In 2009, the [City commissioned a study to review the Factory and the opportunities of the site](#). The result of the study was a series of organizational changes to the Factory. [Those led to the creation of a non-profit Board](#) to run the operations and leverage private resources to support the Factory.

With the lease nearing conclusion a several years ago, the Torpedo Factory Arts Center Board [commissioned another study to look at the strategic options available to the City and the Factory](#).

This report recommended more changes to the governance, the management, and vision of the Factory.

Candidly, the future of the Torpedo Factory has been studied to death. We have used the divisiveness of this issue as an excuse to avoid making a decision on its future. Unfortunately, inaction is a decision in and of itself.

My focus is on deriving a structure for the operation of the Factory that:

- expands the vitality of the Factory
- improves its financial sustainability
- improves its diversity
- ensures the success of Alexandria's premier arts destination long into the future.

I am confident that working together we can achieve these goals.

**It has now been seven years since the City took steps to provide stability by assuming caretaker leadership for the Factory**. Since that time, the City provided leases to the existing artist tenants, and has been providing day to day management. I am pleased we are now making decisions and creating a sustainable structure for the governance of the Factory so that it can flourish in the future.

Ensuring the presence of a diversity of arts and artists in the Torpedo Factory Arts Center on our Waterfront is a priority of mine. I look forward to working with our community and various partners to bring this vision to reality.



## West End Voting Changes

In the 2020 Presidential Election, about 79% of Alexandrians turned out to vote, making their voices heard in an important national inflection point. While the 82,773 Alexandrians constituted a drop from the 83.4% who turned out in 2016, it was certainly a record number of voters.

As our City continues to grow and change, our election infrastructure must change as well. The Virginia Code specifies that voting precincts should have no more than 5,000 voters when created and that if more than 4,000 voters turn out from a precinct in a Presidential election, the local government must adjust voting precinct boundaries to shrink the precincts.

Given the size of Alexandria's current precincts located west of Interstate 395, our Electoral Board is proactively considering a recommendation to split four precincts into six precincts. The City is conducting a survey on this proposal this month and we want your feedback!

The four precincts proposed to be impacted by this change are:

- Precinct 305, which currently votes at John Adams Elementary School (5651 Rayburn Avenue)
- Precinct 306, which currently votes at William Ramsay Recreation Center (5650 Sanger Avenue)
- Precinct 208, which currently votes at the Schlesinger Center (4915 E. Campus Drive)
- Precinct 210, which currently votes at Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School (1701 N. Beauregard Street)

Two of these precincts have 4,700 registered voters each. One of them has 5,200 registered voters and one has 2,600 registered voters.

The newly proposed precincts would be:

- Precinct 305, which currently votes at John Adams Elementary School (5651 Rayburn Avenue)
- Precinct 306, which currently votes at William Ramsay Recreation Center (5650 Sanger Avenue)



Avenue)

- Precinct 310, which would vote at the Del Pepper Center (4850 Mark Center Drive)
- Precinct 208, which currently votes at the Schlesinger Center (4915 E. Campus Drive)
- Precinct 210, which currently votes at Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School (1701 N. Beauregard Street)
- Precinct 212, which would vote at The View Alexandria (5000 Fairbanks Avenue)

Under this proposal no precinct would have more than 3,300 voters, nor less than 2,100 voters.

The Electoral Board will be conducting a public meeting to review this proposal a week from today at the Del Pepper Center (4850 Mark Center Drive) from 6 PM until 8 PM.

Ensuring efficient access to voting is a core function of our democracy. I appreciate that the Electoral Board is proactively working to ensure a high level of service for Alexandria's voters.

**[Let us know your opinion on these important changes!](#)**



## **Taxpayer Receipt**

I have now been a part of adopting thirteen City budgets as a member of the Council. Each year, I try to find new ways to engage residents in the process, and increase transparency and understanding of budget priorities and trade-offs.

Several years ago, I worked with the staff in our City's Office of Management and Budget to create a **[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)**.

Modeled after the **[Federal Taxpayer Receipt](#)**, this website will take the assessed value of your home and detail how much of your real estate tax is going to the various programs and services of City government.

We entered **[Fiscal Year 2024](#)** at the beginning of July. We have updated the receipt to reflect the newly enacted budget. Give it a try and **[let me know](#)** how you like it!

## **Power Reliability**

As of yesterday afternoon, all Alexandrians now have their lights back on. **[Saturday's storm wreaked havoc on our community as it toppled numerous trees, which took power lines down with them.](#)** Dominion Virginia Power crews worked throughout our City to restore power to those who had been impacted.



We rely on electricity. Our residents and businesses need electricity supply that is stable and predictable. While this most recent storm event caused outages that were unavoidable, we also need more resilient infrastructure.

Unfortunately, for the past few years our residents and businesses have not received the type of service that we expect from Dominion Virginia Power.

**A little over a year ago, representatives of Dominion Virginia Power returned to a meeting of City Council** and made commitments to expand investment in the critical electricity infrastructure in Alexandria. This was an important new commitment.

Our staff has now been working with Dominion to translate these new commitments into actual infrastructure projects, that will improve reliability in our City.

**Dominion has begun to reveal their priorities for these expanded investments, including reconditioning work, substation improvements, and utility undergrounding. While, we wish to see a greater level of investment, done more expeditiously, these projects are positive steps forward for Alexandria.**

In the fall of 2021, **I filed a petition with the Virginia State Corporation Commission as part of Dominion's Triennial Review.** My petition requested that Dominion's allowed profit be reduced to account for the instability in Alexandria's electricity supply.

Our expectations of Dominion have been clear:

1. A multi-year infrastructure investment plan to improve reliability of electricity service for the City of Alexandria, including appropriate exercise of all available authority under the **Grid Transformation and Security Act** to accelerate implementation
2. Improved transparency for customers relating to reliability data and recovery performance
3. An enhanced Service Level commitment for customer requests (street light repairs, property construction/renovation, municipal projects, etc)

The City has a long history of working with Dominion Virginia Power to improve reliability and it will be important to extend that partnership again.

Our residents and businesses expect reliable electricity. We will continue to work with Dominion and its regulators to make that reality.





## Violent Crime

In a 48-hour period last month, the City experienced two shootings, one that left an individual fighting for his life and the other that took the life of an Alexandria resident. This spate of violence is a continuation of a disturbing uptick in violent crime that has been plaguing our City and our region.

We will end this violence, but it requires the partnership and support of our community. We need your help!

Part 1 crime is the most serious crime (homicides, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft). In 2022, the incidents of Part 1 crime in Alexandria increased 4.7% from the previous 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.

So far in 2023, our Part 1 crime trends are deeply concerning:

- Robberies are up 49%
- Burglaries are up 17%
- Stolen automobiles are up 69%
- Larcenies are up 21%
- Aggravated assaults are up 53%

Overall Part 1 crime has increased nearly 28% from this period last year.

While Alexandria remains a safe community, this cycle of violence must be ended to maintain our quality of life. That requires that we prevent crime where possible and ensure that those committing violence in our community face justice.

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

The underlying causes of the increases in violence (not just in Alexandria, but around the region and our nation) are so varied, that there is no single answer to this issue. However, the City is approaching this uptick in violence using multiple approaches:

- Restoring Police Staffing/Reducing Attrition
- Expanding "upstream" investments (family supports, mental/behavioral health, housing, re-entry programs, etc) proven to reduce violence
- Expanding community policing
- Continue advocacy for new laws in Washington and Richmond to slow the flow of dangerous

## firearms into our community

Two months ago **18 new Alexandria police officers and 15 new Alexandria sheriff's deputies graduated from the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Academy.** As one of the largest classes Alexandria has put through the academy in recent years, this class has signed-up to keep our community safe in an important time.

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. Together with officers who are concluding other training, this will result in a 15% increase in our available sworn police staffing in one year.

The Police Department has recently established a new Community Assistance Safety Team (CAST), a dedicated unit focusing resources on crime hotspots to disrupt violence. This team has already had success as they have been deployed making critical arrests and reducing incidents of crime in the areas of focus.

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 this 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.

Coupled with new investments in preventative (upstream) investments, we can buck national and regional trends and reduce violence and property crimes in our City.

Our Police rely on information from the public. Please report anything that is out of the ordinary to 703-746-4444 or 911, as appropriate.



## Bridges From Arlington

**Last week, Arlington County announced the full return of the West Glebe Bridge to all traffic.** The bridge, which separates Alexandria and Arlington had been deteriorating for several years and required a full replacement.

This is the first major accomplishment of a new infrastructure partnership between Alexandria and Arlington. This partnership will ensure a state of good repair for these critical pieces of transportation infrastructure.

Alexandria and Arlington have five bridges that connect vehicular traffic between the two jurisdictions, all along Four Mile Run:

- West Glebe Road bridge
- Arlington Ridge Road bridge
- Shirlington Road bridge
- Route 1 bridge
- Potomac Avenue bridge

In the case of the **West Glebe Road** and **Arlington Ridge Road** bridges, there were considerable needs. Both bridges were built in the mid-1950s and inspections by Arlington County showed that they have large deficiencies. Restrictions on their use were put in place due to safety concerns.

**With the West Glebe Bridge reconstruction complete, the Arlington Ridge Road bridge work will be next.** The future bridge project is currently in 60% design.

Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) records show that the West Glebe, Arlington Ridge and Shirlington Road bridges are Arlington County's responsibility and the Route 1 and Potomac Avenue bridges are the City of Alexandria's.

Past bridge work has been split between the jurisdictions, but those agreements have never been formalized. With the West Glebe bridge requiring \$10 million - \$14 million of work and the Arlington Ridge bridge requiring \$23 million - \$28 million of work, these arrangements are not insignificant.

**Through some negotiation between the two jurisdictions, we were able to enter into a new agreement providing for future cost-sharing of all 5 bridges, for maintenance and eventual replacement.**

This new arrangement provides that the two jurisdictions will split the costs of the immediate work required to the West Glebe and Arlington Ridge bridges, 50-50.

Going forward, any work on bridges between the two jurisdictions will be split 67%/33%, with the jurisdiction recognized by VDOT as primarily responsible shouldering the larger portion.

This new arrangement ensures that these bridges will be kept in a state of good repair in the future, and clarifies the financial responsibility for doing so. I look forward to both impacted bridges being returned to service as quickly as possible.



### Holmes Run Trail Repairs

The back to back flooding events in July of 2018 and 2019 undermined the Holmes Run Trail and bridges along the trail. Since that time, this important community resource has been unavailable.

With pandemic delays behind us and budget available, the City is now working to bring this trail back to our residents.

The work has been divided into a few phases at a few different sites:

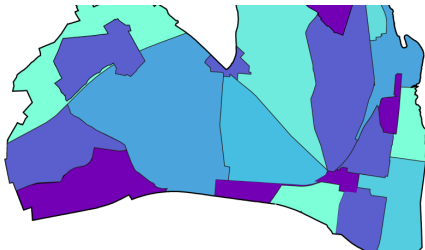
The first phase is the replacement of a new bridge and stream bank repair on the Dora Kelly Trail at Morgan Street. This project has received a \$5 million grant from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVT A). The design will be completed later this year, and construction will begin next summer. The completion is anticipated in late 2025/early 2026.

The next phase of work is at the bridge west of 395 and at the Ripley Street access ramp. The design is now complete. Construction procurement is under way, with a contract award anticipated in the fall. This work will be completed later in 2024.

The final phase of work is the restoration of the Holmes Run Trail Bridge at 4600 Duke Street. The demolition of the current bridge and the stabilization of the bank was completed. The new bridge was put in place last month with installation occurring now. The bridge crossing is anticipated to open early in the fall.

It has been frustrating to have the trail unavailable for so long, but we're working to build a more resilient trail to benefit our community for generations to come!

### Alexandria West Plan



Since the fall, our community has been engaged in a comprehensive update of the Alexandria West Small Area Plan. This plan will encompass a wide swath of our City, the entire northwest corner. This process has engaged residents throughout the plan area over the past few months.

You can watch the full community meeting from a month ago.

In September, **the community will come back together to discuss the themes we have heard from public input and begin to shape this exciting plan.** We want your input and ideas!

The City's Master Plan is made up of **18 Small Area Plans** and several Citywide sub-plans (Transportation, Housing, Open Space, etc). This is how the City meets **the obligations of state law to adopt and update a comprehensive plan.**

Over 22 years ago ago, the City Council adopted **"Plan for Planning,"** a vision for how the community could proactively work to get ahead of development pressures and ensure that our community's vision would shape transition in our neighborhoods.

Since that time, the City has been revising and modernizing these Small Area Plans, working intensely with different neighborhoods around the City to adopt a vision for the future of our community.

But no plan is worth the effort if the City will not implement what was planned. Over the past several years the City has worked to improve our efforts to implement plans and policy goals in a variety of areas. **To provide accountability for those efforts, the City publishes an annual report detailing the status of implementation of the most significant City planning initiatives.**

Before our recess, the Council adopted our **Interdepartmental Planning Work Program**, reflecting the planning efforts that will be accomplished in the near-term.

In September, I provided information about our planned fall kick-off of community engagement for an Alexandria "Vision Plan," which will craft an updated community vision for our City's future. This will ultimately update our Master Plan, future Small Area Plans, and our zoning ordinance.

**There will be several opportunities to provide input using meetings and surveys this month.**

I am excited to see these neighborhood planning efforts moving forward! I look forward to your input.

## **Want Solar Power?**

Are you interested in harnessing solar power for your home?

**Beginning last month, you can sign up to participate in Solarize Alexandria.**



Solarize Alexandria is a partnership between the City, the [Northern Virginia Regional Commission](#), and [LEAP](#).

The goal is to increase the deployment of solar power generation in our residential communities. In addition to reducing emissions and reducing your power bill, [the City of Alexandria provides a real estate tax exemption for qualifying solar installations](#). This is on top of applicable Federal tax incentives.

The program begins with a free assessment from the program installer. Sign up today!

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