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your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

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The waiting ends this weekend! [Alexandria native Noah Lyles will hit the track in Paris](#) taking on the best in the world and seeking to rewrite storied pages of the record books.

A watch party (a partnership between ACPS and The Lyles Brothers Foundation) has been organized for the 200M final on Thursday August 8th from 1 PM until 3:30 PM at Alexandria City High School.

Go Team USA!

[Next Tuesday evening is National Night Out!](#)

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

There will be numerous 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 there!

[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 250th year of the fire company, the first in Alexandria.

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

There will be many opportunities this month to shop, eat and drink throughout Alexandria:

- **[Saturday August 10th is the 15th Annual Sidewalk Sale! Over 60 boutiques will participate to showcase the best of Alexandria retail.](#)**
- **[Alexandria Restaurant Week returns from August 16th through August 25th. With discounted menus at numerous restaurants around Alexandria, it's a great time to grab a bite!](#)**
- **[On Saturday August 17th, the 4th Annual Bands & Brews: Del Ray's Summer Bar Crawl, will return to the streets of Del Ray. This event will benefit Alexandria non-profits and promises to be a lot of fun!](#)**

In 2 and a half 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 19th.

To help prepare for back to school, the Commonwealth of Virginia will be having it's annual sales tax holiday this weekend.

We are now accepting applications for participation in the 51st session of the Alexandria Police Community Police Academy. This exciting program will help you learn more about Alexandria's Police Department and the dedicated men and women who keep our community safe.

If you would like me 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



Regional Housing Partnership

At the end of June, Vice President Kamala Harris announced that the Biden-Harris Administration had awarded \$85 million of Federal resources to support local actions around the nation designed to lower housing costs and boost housing supply.

The funds are awarded as part of PRO Housing, Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing. A few days later, leaders from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) travelled to Alexandria's West End to announce that Alexandria, along with several of our regional partners had been awarded a portion of this money to support housing efforts convened by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG).

Last fall, the City Council voted unanimously to seek these new resources to advance recommendations from our Fair Housing Plan and Zoning for Housing efforts.

It has taken generations of cumulative, coordinated, and frequently bigoted policy approaches at the Federal, State and local government levels to create the broken status quo of American housing policy. It will take coordination of all three levels of government to create a coherent housing policy that ensures the availability of housing for residents in the future. This

grant is an important step into a more positive future for housing policy around our region and our nation.

Last fall, the City Council approved [**a series of policy proposals**](#) designed to expand Alexandria's housing production, improve affordability and address past and current barriers to equitable housing access. [**You can watch the full City Council discussion and votes beginning at the 2:45:00 point of the video.**](#)

These actions were the culmination of a year of engagement with residents around our City. In an effort to be fully responsive to the input we have received, [**our staff posted the specific input and their responses to the input on our website.**](#)

We began this effort nearly two years ago, with great ambition and high-minded language. We ended up with a [**modest package of reforms**](#) that removed barriers to the creation of a diversity of housing types, informed by [**deep analysis of infrastructure requirements**](#) and [**the history that has shaped housing access in Alexandria for generations.**](#) I believe these reforms will move our community forward, improve accessibility and protect the quality of life we cherish.

Prior to our votes, our staff formally presented the specific proposals in a joint worksession with the Planning Commission. You can [**watch the full joint work session, including our Planning Director's presentation online.**](#)

The specific land-use proposals made by our staff address 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 effort was prompted by an urgent reality: Alexandria has become largely inaccessible to those of low and moderate incomes.

[**You can watch my comments at our kick-off event at the beginning of the year,**](#) and leading into presentations from Richard and Leah Rothstein, [**the authors of the recently released book, "Just**](#)

Action, a follow-up to Richard Rothstein's **seminal tome "The Color of Law."**

All of the sessions **were recorded and are viewable online.**

While this effort had a pair of motivations, a foundational acknowledgement is that 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 last year. This plan **was formally received by the City Council shortly thereafter.**

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 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. In March of 2020, the City Council became the third jurisdiction in the region to endorse new housing targets** in conjunction with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG).

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

The housing non-profit HAND began an annual report to measure the work that each jurisdiction in the region is doing to achieve our commitments. HAND recently released the annual update of this measurement. **The HAND "Housing Indication Tool" report shows that**

Alexandria has made significant progress, with more work to do.

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.

The City will continue to seek creative partnerships, new land-use tools and innovative financing to preserve and create affordability in our City.



Supporting our City Workforce

We rely on our local government employees to perform the critical roles that protect the safety and health of residents, provide essential services to our community and sustain the infrastructure to provide those services. But that only works when we have people serving in these critical roles.

When excluding debt service, capital and money transferred to other organizations, about 72% of the City's General Fund revenues are budgeted for personnel costs.

In the City Manager's proposed budget for this year, **he proposed \$10.5 million of new resources to address pay competitiveness for our workforce, including merit increases and market-rate increases, as well as targeted increases for police, fire, library and our labor and trades employees.**

As City Council discussed the budget, one area of focus were the high levels of employee vacancies occurring in specific areas of our local government, including double-digit vacancy rates **among mental health positions** within our Department of Community and Human Services, **among our 911 operations positions** within our Department of Emergency Communications, **among our Sheriff's Deputies** and beyond.

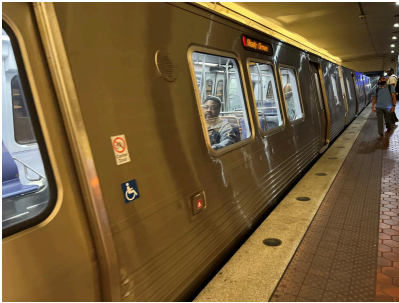
These chronic vacancies threaten the ability to provide critical services and can create unsafe situations for residents in need.

To address these challenges, the Council identified \$3.8 million of additional resources to bring stability to these areas of our workforce.

Before our recess in June, the Council approved allocation of this funding, including:

- **\$900,000 to address mental health staffing challenges**
- **\$1.75 million to provide one-time retention incentives to areas of the workforce with high turnover**
- **\$1 million to implement recommendations of a comprehensive review of our pay and classification system**

Providing these additional resources will ensure stability in critical areas of the City workforce, providing services the residents of our community rely upon.



WMATA Funding

Do you live here and have opinions? If so, between now and August 4th, we want your opinion on how you get around our community.

A few months ago, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) **unveiled a fun new feature where a rider can generate a 2023 ridership report**, detailing their transit ridership for the past year. For me, that showed I rode Metrorail 287 times last year and took another 34 Metrobus trips in the same period. Unfortunately, my ridership alone won't balance the budget!

On Tuesday November 14th, coinciding with the March for Israel, WMATA's Metrorail system carried 563,000 riders. **This was the highest single day of ridership on Metrorail since the beginning of the pandemic.**

While it was exciting to reach this milestone, the excitement is tempered by realization that in 2019, the AVERAGE ridership on Metrorail was 626,000 riders each day. Even with years of recovery, Metrorail's ridership remains only around half of its pre-pandemic level.

I have written previously about the success of Alexandria's DASH bus, with the implementation of our new route network and the elimination of fares. DASH was the first regional bus system to exceed pre-pandemic ridership, and **now has hit all-time ridership records in each of the past few months**. Metrobus has also seen a similar recovery, as its ridership is **now exceeding pre-pandemic levels**.

The stubborn gap between ridership of the region's core rail system and the region's bus systems is pronounced and depicts stark differences in the populations each mode is transporting. Metrorail, is the

mode of choice for the region's white collar workforce. These workers worked from offices in Washington, DC prior to the pandemic, **and have remained in home offices in large numbers, more so than almost any other metropolitan area in the nation.**

Conversely, our bus systems are carrying the region's workers who must work outside the home, residents conducting non-commuting trips and students. Those trips have continued and grown in volume.

The region's transit services have historically been financed by fare revenues and taxpayer subsidy from the region's states and local governments. The City of Alexandria is contributing \$56.6 million of operating dollars this year to WMATA and \$16.6 million of capital contributions. During and after the pandemic, **Federal subsidies kept WMATA (and other transit agencies) afloat as ridership slowly recovered.**

The pandemic and its aftermath has coincided with an era of significant infrastructure investment for Metrorail, as the region addressed decades of deferred maintenance. That work has adversely impacted transit riders across the region. Most notably for Alexandria, this led to a significant shutdown in 2019 and again earlier this year. **Yet Metrorail is recovering and is running a higher level of service than at any point in its history.**

As the Federal revenues now disappear, a reckoning is afoot. Without the full recovery of Metrorail ridership, we cannot support transit service levels as we have.

With the presentation of a sobering budget, the WMATA staff presented a dire picture of the region's transit finance in the future. A combination of relief that had been provided to the taxpayers of local jurisdictions during the pandemic, decreased fare revenue and the impact of inflation and collective bargaining agreements for WMATA's employees has left a \$750 million operating deficit going forward. **The size of this gap is such that WMATA cannot solve this on its own solely with fare increases and service reductions.** Doing so would devastate the system across the region. Yet, the local and state taxpayers are not equipped to come to WMATA's rescue either.

In December, the Chief Administrative Officers of the region's jurisdictions, led by Alexandria's City Manager Jim Parajon, **prepared an interim report that detailed a framework for how we move forward as a region to stabilize the finances of WMATA.**

While I do not agree with everything proposed in this framework, it is a clear-eyed assessment of the decisions before us.

The 2024 General Assembly session was tumultuous to say the least. While the Governor's budget proposal and the **budget approved by State Senate** did not include the necessary resources for WMATA, the House of Delegates fortunately did in their approved budget. Ultimately, the budget that was signed by the Governor included the resources necessary to provide two years of breathing room.

While Virginia was the last to come on board, the additional investment was an important step, but leaves the heavy lifting still to come.

Providing long-term financial security for the region's transit service will require collective action across the three state governments, its local jurisdictions (including Alexandria) and the Federal Government. **This type of conversation is one that is playing out around the nation**, but it will require a series of difficult decisions locally.

To convene the decision makers who must craft this type of compromise, the **Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments has partnered with WMATA to create "DMV Moves."** This regional effort is designed to bring together policy-makers across DC, Maryland and Virginia to create a unified vision and sustainable financial model for transit in this region.

Transit is essential to our region's economy and our quality of life, but the financial model that has supported its existence for a generation is upside down. The work ahead requires defining a new model to sustain transit for another generation.



Vision Zero Projects

Last month, **a teen had his life changed forever when he was run down at Duke and Jordan Streets, in an incident where the driver left the scene.**

It was a stark reminder of the dangers that persist on Alexandria roads. A little over six years ago, **the City Council adopted our Vision Zero Action Plan, with a vision to end deaths and serious injuries on our roads by 2028.**

As we continue that work, **last month Alexandria's Traffic and Parking Board approved significant safety changes to three roads:**

- **South Pickett Street**
- **Eisenhower Avenue**
- **Holland Lane**

We recently celebrated an important milestone in our efforts: **Last year, we had zero traffic fatalities in our City.** While this is the first time we have reached this milestone since we began our Vision Zero journey, we know that the work is not yet complete. But we do know we are making progress.

The data shows that crashes have slowly trended downward over the last few years. Overall crashes involving pedestrians have stayed steady at roughly four or five per month. Last year we had 15 crashes that resulted in a serious injury.

Each of these tragic incidents change the lives of the victims and their families in dramatic ways. But for each tragedy, there are also countless close calls and near misses that don't get reported.

In Alexandria, we are fortunate to have pedestrian scale, walkable neighborhoods with urban amenities throughout our City. Yet if residents do not feel they can safely traverse the streets of our City, then all the urban amenities are for naught.

The City **has invested millions of taxpayer dollars to improve pedestrian safety throughout our community.** Those resources have included improving pedestrian access to schools, building and improving sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic calming efforts, bike lanes, new signalization, and more.

Yet there are still areas of our City where sidewalks are non-existent or unusable, intersections are unsafe and unsafe driving is rampant. We must improve the safety of our streets for all users. Doing so requires changing the behavior of all users of our roads.

My view is that in order to significantly improve pedestrian safety in our City, we will have to be willing to make trade-offs in the pursuit of safety. The data show that the changes that will most significantly improve safety are also the most controversial in our community.

For instance, **the first phase of the King Street Complete Streets** effort involved the removal of parking, narrowing of travel lanes, improved crosswalks, signage, new bike lanes, etc., to reduce speed and improve safety. **The initial analysis showed that the project has reduced speed, reduced crashes and improved safety.**

The second phase of the work on King Street was an even more dramatic overhaul of the corridor, including reductions of travel lanes, pedestrian islands, crosswalks, etc. **When the City Council and Traffic & Parking Board received the initial analysis of those**

changes, as with the first phase, crashes have been reduced and average speed has been reduced.

On Seminary and Quaker, the City reduced speed limits to improve safety. **When that action was reviewed, it also indicated a reduction in speed and crashes.**

On Seminary Road, **the road was narrowed, safer crossings for pedestrians created and new areas for pedestrians and bikers created.** While the pandemic delayed the data collection and analysis, **a year and a half ago the City released a similar analysis of those changes.** The report showed what we expected:

- Traffic volumes, travel times and crashes went down.
- Speeds decreased slightly
- Traffic did not appear to divert to neighborhood streets

At a few problem intersections, the City created a "**Leading Pedestrian Interval**" to allow residents to get a head-start crossing before traffic can move. **Allowing right turns on red was pushed by the Federal Government during the 1970s as a response to the energy crisis. Some communities in the country are banning right turns on red to improve pedestrian safety by reducing complexity at intersections.** Last year **we implemented both of these changes at over 30 intersections.**

Last year, we also:

- Reduced the speed limits on 3 roads
- "Daylighted" 9 intersections
- Added 300 linear feet of new sidewalks
- Added or upgraded 90 crosswalks
- Made safety improvements to 33 intersections
- Added or upgraded 1,800 linear feet of bike lanes

But there is so much more work to do in the interest of safety. **Our work plan for this year includes intersection audits, new safety enhancements, new neighborhood slow zones, intersection improvements, new enforcement efforts, education and much more!**

The ideal condition on our roads is to separate users by mode, particularly when there can be large disparities in speed. That means building new sidewalks and new lanes for bikes.

Alexandrians should be able to use our streets safely. We will have to take ourselves out of our comfort zone to make that happen. Ultimately, these efforts will not

only provide mobility options for our residents, help achieve climate initiatives, but also save lives.



Torpedo Factory

Last month, **the City announced the selection of 24 artists (in 23 applications) who will receive three-year studio leases at Alexandria's Torpedo Factory, our world-class art center on Alexandria's Waterfront.**

Twelve of these artists are newcomers to Torpedo Factory. They will join the 12 returning artists with new leases beginning October 1st.

Last year, the City announced the selection of 29 artists (in 27 applications) who received three-year studio leases. Eleven of those artists were newcomers. They joined 18 returning artists.

In 2022, 26 artists began new three-year leases as artists at the Torpedo Factory. Fifteen of these artists joined 11 current studio artists.

This year's process was the third 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. With the exception of 6 founding artists who are excluded from the re-jurying process, all artists at the Torpedo Factory will have re-juried within the past 3 years.

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.

Over four 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 two and a half years 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 eight 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.



Alexandria West Plan

At the end of June our City staff released the draft of the new Alexandria West Small Area 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.**

You can watch the community meeting where our staff presented the draft plan. Today is the last day for public comment. **Please complete the survey today!**

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 23 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.**

I am excited to see these neighborhood planning efforts moving forward, specifically as we work to conclude a new Alexandria West Plan! I look forward to your input.



Tax Payer Receipt

I have now been a part of adopting fourteen 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 2025](#) 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!

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