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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by:*

*Councilman Justin M. Wilson*

Alexandria, Virginia

December 1, 2015

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## Events/Updates

**Scottish Christmas  
Walk Returns!**

I hope you had a restful and enjoyable Thanksgiving.

Early last month, [a jury in Fairfax County convicted the person responsible for the tragic murders of Nancy Dunning, Ron Kirby and Ruthanne Lodato.](#)

This closes a long and painful chapter for the Dunning, Kirby and Lodato families as well as for our community.

I am so thankful for the dedicated men and women, both past and present, of the Alexandria Police Department, the Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney's office, and the Alexandria Sheriff's Department who have worked on this case for so long. The City also received critical support from our federal and state partners.

I wish the Dunning, Kirby, and Lodato families peace, as we continue to remember and recognize their contributions to our community.

Since the last time I wrote, [we had an election here in the City.](#) I am so grateful to the voters of Alexandria for their support, and I'm excited to be back serving the residents of our City for another three years.

I congratulate Mayor-Elect Allison Silberberg on her election as our new Mayor. Additionally, I congratulate my colleagues John Chapman, Tim Lovain, Del Pepper, and Paul Smedberg on their reelections, and look forward to working with Councilman-Elect Willie Bailey on the Council.



[The 45th Annual Scottish Christmas Walk returns this Saturday to the streets of Old Town!](#)

Scheduled on December 5th from 11 AM to 1 PM, the parade begins at St. Asaph and Wilkes Streets and concludes at Market Square.

I'll see you at this can't miss event!

### **Time to Ring in the New Year!**

[Tickets are now on sale for First Night Alexandria!](#) Ring in the New Year in style in Alexandria.

[Enjoy family friendly performances throughout our community culminating in fireworks to ring in the New Year!](#)

### **Torpedo Factory Holiday Festival**

[On Saturday, the Torpedo Factory will keep the studios open late to help you get a head start on holiday shopping and entertain the entire family!](#)

The Festival includes a scavenger hunt, live music, snacks and a visit from Santa himself.

The events gets started at 4 PM and continue until 9 PM.

### **Holiday Boat Parade of Lights!**

[Wrapping up an amazing evening in Alexandria, the Holiday Boat Parade of Lights returns to the Alexandria waterfront this Saturday night.](#)

The event gets started at 5:30 PM and culminates with Santa on waterskis!

### **Del Ray Tree Lighting**

On Saturday at 6PM, the holidays begin in Del Ray!

**I also would like to acknowledge and thank Mayor Bill Euille for his lifetime of service to our City. Our city is a better place for Bill's service and his commitment to our community.**

**Bill's leadership helped our City make progress on so many issues of importance. His personal generosity has impacted lives around our City.**

**I will miss the opportunity to work with him. I have every confidence that he won't be far.**

**Best wishes to each of you during this joyous holiday season!**

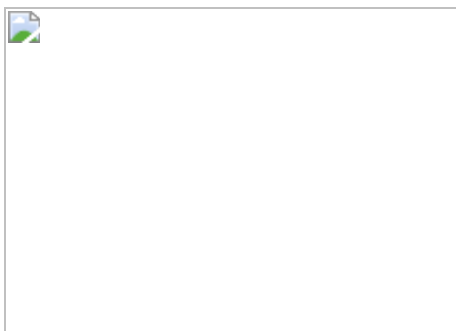
**Please let me know how I can be of assistance. [Contact me anytime.](#)**

## **Council Initiatives**

### **Guiding the Budget**

The most important decision the City Council makes each year is the adoption of the annual operating budget and capital improvement program. The operating budget generally funds the on-going costs of government (primarily personnel), while the capital budget funds one-time expenditures that provide the community with an asset (new schools, new roads, new playing fields, transit buses, etc).

It has always been my view that the most important part of the



budget process is the adoption of our annual budget guidance for the City Manager. While the budget is not presented until February or March, in the fall, the City Council adopts a resolution which provides the City Manager with direction as to how to prepare that budget.

The guidance typically provides direction on tax policy, expenditure priorities, debt policy, and other emergent issues. To prepare the Council to provide this direction, a retreat is scheduled.

Just before Thanksgiving, the Council had our annual retreat and [received the first glimpse into next year's financial picture](#). This is the beginning of the Council's process to adopt the Fiscal Year 2017 (July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017) Operating Budget and the Fiscal Year 2017 - Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Improvement Program.

The initial projections are that next year's revenues will grow at a rate of a little less than 2% overall. If that estimate holds, that would provide the City government with about \$12 million of new revenue.

With real estate taxes generating most of our resources, that growth is driven by an estimated increase of 1.5% - 2% in our real estate tax base. As in the past, larger growth in residential real estate is being offset by continued weakness in commercial real estate.

On the expenditure side, we quickly begin to see our challenge. [Given student enrollment growth](#), our staff is using an early placeholder of \$11 million of additional operating funds for the

[The Annual Del Ray Tree Lighting will occur, followed by carols, cookies, cider and Santa!](#)

This year, the T. C. Williams High School Choir joins the event.

All activities begin at Mount Vernon Avenue and Oxford Avenue at the site of the Del Ray Farmers's Market.

### **Women's Holiday Market**

On Sunday, December 6th, the Friends of the Alexandria Commission for Women will sponsor its 18th annual Holiday Market.

The event, at the Charles Houston Recreation Center (901 Wythe Street) is from 1PM to 5PM.

Each year the event raises money to support programs critical to women in Alexandria, including domestic violence and sexual assault programs.

The event showcases the work of creative women artists and artisans.

### **Four Mile Market Moves Indoors**

The 2015 citywide Needs Assessment survey shows that farmers markets are the number one recreation and cultural programs that Alexandria households have a need for (82%), and the offerings have just expanded accordingly.

The Four Mile Run Farmers & Artisans Market became the "4MR Winter Market" after Thanksgiving. The winter market will be indoors at the Four Mile Run Park Conservatory Center (the bright red building at 4109 Mt. Vernon Avenue) Sundays, 9am-1pm, from November 29th until April. Many of your favorite vendors will be staying on all winter-including greenhouse produce!

Alexandria City Public Schools. Our estimates include \$4 million of additional funds required for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA or Metro). The estimates also include \$7 million for personnel costs (salary increases and benefit expenses), \$4 million for non-personnel costs, and \$8 million of new debt service costs.

All together, that creates an estimated shortfall of \$24 million, before we start the process. By the time the Council adopts its budget in May, that gap must be addressed by tax increases, expenditure reductions, or some combination of the two. The Council begins to set that direction with the adoption of its budget guidance.

It is always easier to cut the budget in the fall, than it is for the Council to cut the budget in the spring during its budget process. As such, my preference is that the City Manager be directed to present a budget without an increase in the real estate tax rate.

Last year, [I was unsuccessful in my attempt to adopt guidance for the City Manager to not include a tax rate increase](#), but ultimately the City Manager chose not to propose a rate increase in his budget.

This year, I made a similar effort, and again was unsuccessful.

It is far too early to determine whether an increase in the City's real estate tax rate is necessary. Yet, in order to explain the necessity of a potential increase to the taxpayers, we must have the City Manager prepare a budget without such an increase.

My proposal last year was simply to prevent a tax rate increase from being included in the proposed budget. This year, I proposed restricting growth in the operating budget to the the new revenue that is available (currently estimated to be \$12 million), but allowing flexibility for new tax revenue to be utilized to fund the City's Capital Improvement Program.

While we have made progress over the past three years with new investment in capital infrastructure, I believe we have hardly made a dent in the backlog of under investment over the decades. In this current year's capital budget we invested \$750 per resident in new infrastructure. That's last among our neighboring jurisdictions. Arlington, Loudoun and Fairfax Counties are at or well above \$1,000 per resident. That disparity is evident in our schools, our roads, our transportation infrastructure, our recreation facilities, and more.

There are really only four ways to fix that under-investment: raise taxes, shift money from the operating budget, increase debt, or cut other capital programs.

I am still hopeful that the Council will use this budget as an opportunity to make an investment level in our infrastructure that supports our community and economic growth.

[You can watch Council's discussion on the adoption of the budget guidance online.](#)

### **Nothing is Ever Easy**

In 2005, the Army Material Command moved out of [The Victory Center on Eisenhower Avenue](#) in the City's West End.

Little did we know at the time, but the departure would doom the Victory Center to a decade of vacancy. This one vacant building today constitutes 18% of the vacant commercial real estate in our City.

In August, that vacancy potentially ended.

## See The Stars

One of the little known treasures of Alexandria is the Planetarium at T. C. Williams High School.

Even lesser known is that each month, Bob Nicholson, who has long managed the Planetarium, opens it up for the community for free.

[Reservations](#) are required, but don't miss out on this great resource! The next show is the evening of Tuesday, December 15th.

## Installing a Council

The new Alexandria City Council will formally take the oath of office on Monday, January 4, 2016 at 7 PM.

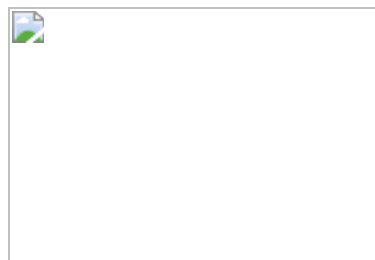
[The installation ceremony will occur in the auditorium of T. C. Williams High School at 3330 King Street.](#)

Immediately following the brief ceremony, there will be a reception.

I hope to see you there!

The [General Services Administration \(GSA\)](#) announced that it had awarded a lease to the owners of the Victory Center for the new headquarters of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

[This move brings 3,800 new employees to the Victory Center](#), a stone's throw from the Van Dorn Metro and easily accessible to the Beltway.



With the Federal Government leasing (not owning) this property, it would remain taxable. This is a huge win for the taxpayers of the City.

This is shot in the arm for our on-going efforts to revise the [Eisenhower West Small Area Plan](#). Coupled with our [successful attraction of the National Science Foundation last year](#), this again demonstrates that the City is willing to aggressively compete in the regional battle for commercial office tenants.

Under normal circumstances, that would have been the end of the story. Unfortunately, it was not.

Boston Properties, the owner of a property in Springfield that had unsuccessfully competed for the award, appealed the lease award to the United States Court of Federal Claims. While such appeals are not unusual, rarely does anything occur as a result.

In this situation, that was not the case. [On November 11th, Judge Charles Lettow voided the lease issued by GSA for the TSA Headquarters at Victory Center.](#)

This was certainly a stunning and unexpected result. To make the situation more mysterious, the Judge issued his ruling under seal, initially pending a series of redactions to protect the bid process.

[Last week, the Judge did release the public version of the decision.](#) Essentially, the crux of the ruling related to free space that was provided by the owners of Victory Center in excess of what was provided for in the Congressional authorization.

At this point, the next move is with GSA and the Department of Justice as they decide how to react to the Judge's ruling.

I am hopeful that the result of any next step is to bring TSA home to Alexandria.

## Making Roads Safer for All

Two months ago, I wrote about City efforts to improve the safety of our streets for pedestrians, drivers and bikers alike. Integral to doing this must be analyzing the results of previous efforts to determine what worked and what did not work.

With repaving of a section of King Street between Janney's Lane and



Russell Road on the schedule, the City assessed the current safety of the area. The data showed excessive speeds in both directions and a disturbing trend of vehicular crashes. In March of 2014, after a rather contentious process, [the City Council unanimously](#)

[approved a series of improvements designed to address challenges that had been identified.](#)

The approved proposal included a narrowing of vehicle lanes, painting of new bike lanes, installation of new signage to emphasize the residential nature of the corridor, new crosswalks, new signals, and more. In approving this plan, the Council requested analysis of the results after 18 months. [The analysis has now been released.](#)

The changes made to King Street have lowered speed in both directions, and reduced vehicle accidents. While these changes have not been dramatic, they do demonstrate the ability of these types of efforts to alter the behavior of drivers and improve the safety of all.

These findings and data will continue to provide information to the City, primarily through [our ongoing efforts to revise the City's Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan.](#)

Immediately to the east and west of the King Street improvements, the City is currently working to improve the safety of other challenging areas.

First, to the west, the City is preparing to repave the section of King from Janney's Lane to Braddock Road. Last month, the City held the first community meeting to present the [data that has been collected as well as the public input that has already been received.](#) If you were unable to attend that meeting, we would like your input. Please [use this form to provide feedback.](#)

To the east, the City is working to implement a Federal Transit Administration grant to make safety improvements at the intersection of King Street, Callahan Drive and Russell Road. Two community meetings have already been held, and the initial conceptual plans for the intersection [will be presented at a community meeting on Tuesday December 8th from 6:30 - 8:30 PM at Durant Memorial Center \(1605 Cameron Street\).](#)

### Host a Town Hall in Your Living Room!

My regular series of Town Hall Meetings continue!



You supply the living room and a bunch of your friends and neighbors. I will supply a member of the Alexandria City Council (me) with the answers to any of your questions about our City.

Just [drop us a line](#) and we'll get a Town Hall on the calendar! Thanks for the interest!

## Upcoming Issues

### A HOT Proposal Returns

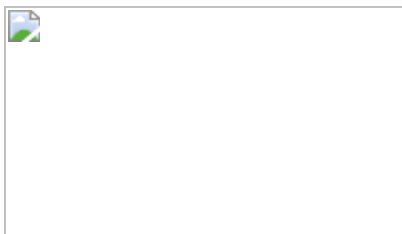
A few months ago, I wrote about the City's efforts to formalize and encourage public-private partnerships to advance recreational infrastructure.

At the state level the Commonwealth has been using public-private partnerships to advance transportation projects, including new High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes. Through [these arrangements](#), a private entity finances a portion of the transportation improvement in exchange for the ability to collect tolls from use.

Under Governor McDonnell, there was an effort to create new HOT lanes on Interstate 395/95 to cover the 35 miles from the border with the District of Columbia south to Stafford County.



Both Alexandria and Arlington had concerns over the details of the



proposal. Mainly, what impacts the operation of the new lanes would have on local streets, air quality, as well as potential impacts to private property in order to expand the existing highway right of way.

At the time, Arlington County [filed a Federal lawsuit](#) to oppose the proposal. While the City did not join the litigation, [the City did adopt a resolution expressing the concerns](#) on the details of the proposal.

In the end, state Government [chose to remove the section of the lanes that went through Alexandria and Arlington](#).

Now, nearly 5 years later, [Governor McAuliffe and his administration are trying again](#). They have made a new proposal for extension of the HOT lanes into the District of Columbia.

This proposal does differ from the original HOT Lanes proposal in several key ways. At this point the City staff and the City's advisory boards and commissions will be reviewing the proposal and recommending responses from the City.

### **WMATA Properties**

In previous months, I have written about the challenges facing our region's premier transit agency, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA).

[This past month, we saw a positive development as the WMATA Board concluded their long process of selecting new leadership for the authority](#). With the hiring of Paul Wiedefeld as the new General Manager/CEO, WMATA again has permanent, experienced leadership. I look forward to working with Mr. Wiedefeld to stabilize and improve a system that is critical for our region's economy.

As WMATA works to stabilize its finances, one of its efforts is to encourage sale or joint development of properties owned by the authority. WMATA has two such properties in the City: the Royal Street Bus Barn, and the Braddock Road Metro parking lot.

For the Royal Street Bus Barn site, the City had convened a community group [to develop design principles in anticipation of this redevelopment activity](#). WMATA [issued solicitations](#) for private interest in purchase of the site. With little interest from the development community, WMATA will be issuing a new solicitation early next year.

At the Braddock Road Metro site, the City's approved [Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan](#) allowed for some redevelopment on the existing site. [WMATA included that site in their planning work plan back in 2014](#). WMATA is anticipated to seek private partnership on that site early next year.

### **Water Rates on the Rise?**

Alexandria remains one in a relatively small list of Virginia jurisdictions who have a private water utility. [Virginia American Water Company](#) (VAWC), a subsidiary of a large national company, provides the water supply to Alexandria's residents and businesses.

As a private utility, VAWC is subject to the authority of the [State Corporation Commission](#) in Richmond. Last summer, VAWC [applied to the commission in order to create a new "Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Service Charge."](#)

As proposed, the new charge was to assist VAWC in collecting the resources to perform system-wide maintenance.

While the City certainly supports the maintenance efforts that are badly needed to protect our City's water supply, we do have concern about the mechanism.

At my request, the City [filed with the Commission in opposition of VAWC's request](#). The City's concern was that the change proposed by VAWC removes a significant "check" (the review by the State Corporation Commission), that exists to ensure the proper process is followed before rates are raised.

The Commission appointed a hearing examiner to look at the facts in the case and make a recommendation. The [response of the hearing examiner](#) in June supported the City's perspective.

Then, the City filed [a response urging the Commission's support of the findings of the hearing examiner](#).

In September, the [Commission concurred with their hearing examiner and that case is now closed](#).

Yet at the end of October, [VAWC applied to the State Corporation Commission for another rate increase](#). The increase is proposed to take effect on April 1, 2016 and would increase the typical residential customers' bill by approximately \$4 per month.

City staff is now performing analysis of this requested increase and will provide input to the State Corporation Commission to minimize the increase to the extent possible.

I'm hopeful we can continue our efforts working with VAWC to improve our aging water infrastructure.

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