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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

December 1, 2021

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In This Month's Edition:

- **City Manager Selection**
- **Landmark Mall**
- **Bond Rating Renewed**
- **Broadband**
- **Public Housing Redevelopment**
- **School Enrollment**
- **Safer Streets**
- **Budget Preview**
- **Arlandria-Chirilagua**
- **Legislative Package**
- **Cut-Through Traffic**
- **School Board Districts**



We mark the passage of time in Alexandria by our parades.

Little did we know that the St. Patrick's Day Parade of 2020 would be our last parade for quite a while.

[This Saturday we will be back parading through the streets of Alexandria as the Scottish Christmas Walk returns!](#)

It is also a season of change and transition in our City.

[A month ago, Alexandria's voters went to the polls and made their voices heard.](#)

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[E-Mail Me](#)

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[City of Alexandria Website](#)

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[Review Real Estate Assessments](#)

[Crime Mapping & Statistics](#)

[Alex 311](#) (Submit Service Requests to City Agencies)

[Board & Commission Vacancies](#)

[Real-Time Traffic Data](#)
[Alexandria Health Department
Restaurant Inspections](#)
[Report Potholes](#)
[Schedule Child Safety Seat
Inspection](#)
[Smoke Detector Installation
Request](#)
[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)
[License Your Dog or Cat](#)
[Report a Street Light Outage](#)
[Report a Traffic Signal Outage](#)

I am excited to have earned the trust of the voters of our City for another 3 years. I will be joined on the Council with my three returning colleagues: Councilwoman Amy Jackson, Councilman Canek Aguirre and Councilman John Taylor Chapman.

We will be welcoming 3 very strong newcomers: Councilwoman-Elect Sarah Bagley, Councilwoman-Elect Alyia Gaskins, and Councilman-Elect Kirk McPike.

This is a great team for our City.

This new City Council will continue our work in putting the pandemic behind us.

While the news reports are full of breathless speculation about the impacts of a new variant, the goal for our community remains the same: We must vaccinate every eligible resident of our City to protect ourselves, our families, friends and coworkers.

In September, we began administering COVID-19 vaccine boosters for [eligible residents of our City](#). About a quarter of Alexandria's fully vaccinated residents have now received a booster dose.

If you are 18 or older and received the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna or the single dose of Johnson & Johnson you are eligible for a booster dose.

For more information or to sign-up for a booster dose, [please head to our vaccine website](#).

In September, [Governor Ralph Northam used part of his recurring pandemic updates to note that nearly 100% of Alexandrians aged 12 to 15 had been vaccinated, the highest such rate in the Commonwealth](#). It is in fact our youngest population, a population that has been eligible to be vaccinated for the shortest period of time, [that is now the most vaccinated portion of our community](#). Alexandria's middle and high schoolers are leading the way!

They are now being joined by their younger brothers and sisters, as we were approved to begin vaccinating

those aged 5 through 11. Already nearly a third of Alexandria's residents aged 5 through 11 have been vaccinated in the last month!

As of yesterday, 118,272 Alexandrians have received at least one vaccine dose, which is 76.9% of the eligible population of those 5 and older.

Of those, 101,890 Alexandrians are now fully vaccinated.

ANYONE who is aged 5 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.

For those who have already been vaccinated, you may now download your vaccination record from the Virginia Department of Health.

Along with nearly every other place in our country, the City experienced a recent spike in new cases, largely fueled by the Delta variant and those remaining unvaccinated residents. While our cases went up, our hospitalizations and deaths did not increase, largely due to our very high vaccination rate.

When the Delta variant took hold, the CDC issued new guidance recommending masks be worn in indoor spaces in communities where transmission is substantial or high. Alexandria remains in the "substantial" level of transmission at this time.

With our students back in our schools, the Alexandria City Public Schools is publishing school by school infection data on a weekly basis.

The City and the Alexandria City Public Schools have now implemented vaccine mandates for our respective staffs.

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

As of a week ago, over 5.4 million Virginians have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Of those, 1.1% have developed a breakthrough COVID-19 infection. 0.038% have been hospitalized

and 0.0137% have lost their life due to COVID-19. The vaccines work and they work quite well.
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.

I continue my monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings on the first Thursday of each month.

You can watch October's Town Hall online. Join us tomorrow night at 8PM for my December Town Hall.

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

City Manager Selection Tonight

In June **we learned that our City Manager, Mark Jinks, will be retiring at the end of the year.** We will have the opportunity to properly recognize Mark's dedicated and impactful service to our City, but we must

first make the most important personnel decision in City government: selecting our Chief Executive Officer.

Five months ago, [the City Council formally launched a national search for our next City Manager](#). Tonight, that process concludes as the Council will hold a Special Meeting at 6 PM to announce and vote on Alexandria's new City Manager.

I am excited that the City Council has selected the right leader to move our City government forward as we tackle the important challenges and opportunities that await us. Our new City Manager will formally take on their responsibilities next month.

I am grateful for the extensive public input that assisted the City Council in making this selection. [You can watch the announcement live online this evening](#).

Landmark Property Transfer

Last month, the [Alexandria Industrial Development Authority \(IDA\)](#) closed on [the purchase of an 11-acre parcel on the site of the former Landmark Mall](#). The purchase of this property was immediately followed by IDA's issuance of a 99-year ground lease of the property to [Inova Health System](#).

After two decades of discussion about how to redevelop Landmark Mall, the City of Alexandria is finally redeveloping Landmark Mall!

[In July, the City Council unanimously approved the 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 last 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 this exciting partnership is making things happen on this site for the first time in decades.

Bond Rating Affirmed

At the end of October, I joined our City Manager, our Finance Director and other members of our senior leadership team to make our annual presentation to the bond rating agencies.

Last month, **S & P Global Ratings** and **Moody's Investor Services** both reaffirmed the City's bond ratings of AAA and Aaa respectively. **The confirmation of these ratings, in advance of the issuance of \$159.9 million of bonds, allows the City to access the lowest possible borrowing costs, saving the taxpayers millions over the life of our bonds.** These bonds will be used to finance school capital

investments, City capital projects and the refunding of existing outstanding municipal bonds.

A **municipal bond refunding** is essentially the municipal version of a mortgage refinancing, where the City is taking advantage of lower interest rates and replacing portions of our municipal debt with new debt at lower rates.

The City will issue these bonds shortly using a competitive bidding process.

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

In May, **the Council adopted our 10 year Capital Improvement Program, covering fiscal years 2022 - 2031.** Over the 10 year period, the program calls for \$2.66 billion in capital investment throughout the City. Over 35% of this funding goes to City and School municipal facilities. Another quarter goes to transportation initiatives, including Metro.

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

In issuing the City's rating, Moody's cited Alexandria's "healthy financial position given strong operating trends and conservative budgeting practices and that the sizeable tax base will continue to grow and diversify."

Standard & Poor's similarly cited Alexandria's "Robust economic growth and management team that proactively manages the city's economy, finances, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks."

This is the first year that the rating agencies have focused on the ESG risks. The agencies cited the City's work managing these risks as a considerable positive, noting the City's work on climate change, flooding and equity.

Over the past few years, I have pushed for new policies to make the City's balance sheet even stronger. **Nearly six years ago, the Council unanimously adopted a new "cash capital" policy, which served to reduce debt levels and the risk of our borrowing.**

A year ago, the Council approved amendments to our "Spendable Fund Balance," essentially expanding the amount of reserves we have

available. This new policy was recommended by the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee, and it was specifically cited by the rating agencies in support of our ratings.

Alexandria is very conservative with our use of debt.

Arlington County limits its debt to 4% of its Fair Market Real Property Value. Both Fairfax and Prince William Counties limit their debt to 3%. Alexandria's self-imposed limit is 2.5%, and this budget year we achieved 1.5%.

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

In fact, in the Standard & Poor's analysis, they noted that the City was rated higher than the "sovereign" (the US Federal Government) because "we believe the City can maintain better credit characteristics than the U. S. in a stress scenario."

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

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

Broadband Competition

Alexandria is now seeking proposals to issue new franchises to provide broadband services for our City. These proposals are due at the end of the month, with an expectation that we will issue new franchise agreements early next year.

Earlier this year, City Council gathered on Eisenhower Avenue to have a formal groundbreaking for the build of our municipal fiber network.

Just over 8 years ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to help bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.

It has taken far too long, but the City is finally moving ahead on an effort to bring new broadband capacity to our community.

A year ago, the City issued a revised solicitation to select a vendor to construct a municipal fiber network to serve City and School facilities around our community. Earlier this year, a contract was

awarded to Jones Utilities Construction, Inc to perform this work.

Over 7 years ago, the City issued a Request for Information (RFI). This RFI solicited concepts from the private sector for partnership with the City in expanding broadband options, availability, and capabilities. We received 10 responses from potential private partners and those responses shaped the approach the City is now taking.

For years, Alexandria has sought new private investment in broadband infrastructure. For most of our residents, we have one company providing Internet connectivity and television. With new **Verizon FIOS deployment plans shelved** around the country and **Google Fiber largely dead**, the investment in broadband infrastructure must fall to local governments. Regardless of the performance of incumbent providers, technological innovation and reliability thrives on competition.

This is an issue that impacts not only residents but also our businesses and the ability of our community to attract new investment.

Concurrent with the FY 2017 budget process, the City completed the **initial financial estimates for the first phase of the infrastructure build-out**. The plan is designed to replace the City's existing connectivity agreement for City facilities with a City-owned fiber network.

By **leveraging E-Rate funding from the FCC**, achieving operating savings from the costs of the existing agreement, and the potential for private leases of our infrastructure, the effort may be able to pay for itself.

One of the core components of the original proposal I made was that the City **adopt a "Dig Once" policy**. Essentially that's a policy that makes the City more efficient by leveraging existing underground infrastructure work to add conduit and other infrastructure at the same time. With hundreds of millions of dollars of sewer and transportation work scheduled over the next decade, we should sequence and combine that work to be the most efficient.

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

Public Housing Redevelopment



The Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) directly manages and controls 1,079 units of affordable housing in our City. In addition, ARHA manages the City's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, which utilizes Federal funding to provide assistance for another 1,906 low-income families to reside in privately-owned housing units. Together, this is approximately 4% of the City's overall housing stock.

ARHA is an independent entity, with a City Council-appointed Board, but separate from the City, that utilizes Federal funding from the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) to provide housing to low-income residents of Alexandria.

With an aging housing stock and decades of underinvestment in public housing at the Federal level, ARHA has worked to advance redevelopment efforts to refresh and preserve homes for low-income residents in our City.

Almost exactly 40 years ago, the City Council adopted **Resolution 830**, which committed the City to "one for one" replacement of any public housing unit that was destroyed by redevelopment.

As of April of 2019, Resolution 830 is no more, replaced by Resolution 2876. The new resolution, endorsed by the City and our public housing authority Board, modernizes the City's commitment towards preservation for a new generation of challenges.

Making the commitment stated in Resolution 830 is rather easy. Actually achieving that replacement in an environment of rapidly-appreciating property values, is extraordinarily difficult.

That difficulty was again demonstrated by **the announcement three and a half years ago that the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) and its private development partner could not come to terms to move forward with the redevelopment of the Andrew Adkins development.** While not unexpected given the challenges of this project, this was a terribly disappointing turn of events that delays redevelopment efforts by multiple years.

In the wake of the failure of Andrew Adkins, ARHA returned to the drawing board, seeking changes to the financing of existing properties, **completing the redevelopment of Ramsey Homes into "The Lineage"** and preparing for the next phase of redevelopment.

Last month, ARHA made two successive announcements that will define this important next phase:

- ARHA [announced a redevelopment partner to refresh Samuel Madden Homes into a modern mixed-income community](#)
- ARHA [issued a solicitation to choose a redevelopment partner to pursue redevelopment of The Ladrey Building and the site of the ARHA Administrative Building.](#)

Pursuing these redevelopments will help reshape, refresh and expand a significant portion of ARHA's housing stock.

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

Now as we conclude 2021, the Federal Government is forcing changes in public housing with its inaction. Today, HUD funds a shrinking portion of the dollars required to operate Alexandria Public Housing units. The balance of revenue that ARHA collects as rent is not sufficient for sustainable management of their properties, and this is likely to get worse. While there is some potential for large new investments given legislation being considered, it will remain to be seen.

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

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

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

In the fall of 2014, with these experiences and lessons behind us, [ARHA issued an RFP \(Request for Proposals\) to solicit proposals from private developers for the potential redevelopment of seven additional properties: Cameron Valley \(built in 1985\), Andrew Adkins \(built in 1969\), Samuel Madden \(built in 1945\), Ramsey Homes \(built in 1942\), Hopkins Tancil \(built in 1945\), Ladrey \(built in](#)

1968), and the ARHA Headquarters building on North Fairfax Street.

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

The story of public housing redevelopment has been one of ups and downs. This is a significant undertaking, but we will now have a historic opportunity to partner with the private sector and provide new housing for a variety of income levels near existing transit in our City. This effort will also provide financial stability for ARHA in the face of continued change at the Federal level.

School Enrollment

This year, 15,477 students started in the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). That constitutes a decrease of 111 students from the previous year.

While clearly impacted by the pandemic, this is the second year in a row that we have seen a reduction in student enrollment, but it comes on the heels of 13 straight years of enrollment increases. During that period, 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.

We also see a clear divide emerging in the new post-pandemic enrollment trends, as enrollment in our high school (grades 9 - 12) continues to increase, while enrollment for elementary and middle school students dropped. While both the increase and the decreases were modest, they are potential trends to be watched in the future.

In July, **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!

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

In September, ACPS held a community meeting to provide updates on the planning for the rebuild of the Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School. You can watch this meeting online. Before our summer recess, 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](#).

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](#). Almost three 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 under-investment 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.

The [Superintendent has now proposed his Capital Improvement Program covering Fiscal Year 2023 through 2032. The School Board is now working to consider this proposal before formalizing this request to the City Council](#).

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

Safer Streets/Vision Zero

Last month, [an Alexandria pedestrian was hit and killed on a sidewalk on Glebe Road when a vehicle left the roadway](#).

[The data shows that crashes have slowly trended downward over the last few years. Overall crashes](#)

involving pedestrians have stayed steady at roughly five or six per month. Last year we had 21 crashes that resulted in death or serious injury. We had four individuals lose their lives on our roads last year, two of which were pedestrians.

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.

We kicked-off a Vision Zero initiative for Alexandria. While this initiative will involve significant resources and planning, it simply means that we would design road spaces, traffic regulations and operations to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries. Four years ago, the Council approved our Vision Zero Action Plan, which specified the actions we would take to see this aggressive vision to reality.

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, the City will conduct similar analysis of the impact of that effort.

We have also looked at signalization efforts that can improve safety. 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. **Our current year priorities include implementing these changes at numerous intersections around the City.**

We have also explored the creation of additional "**pedestrian scrambles**" to create an "all pedestrian" phase at problematic intersections.

We have HAWK (High Intensity Activated crossWalk) signals in place to ensure high visibility of pedestrians in high traffic corridors. **A new one was recently installed on W. Braddock Road near Minnie Howard School.**

I do believe there is more we can do.

Our Vision Zero Dashboard shows that while we have made progress, the data indicates the need for more work.

The research shows that **speed is closely linked with the lethality of a pedestrian crash.** Lowering speed limits where appropriate will likely continue to be in our toolbox around the City. Our Traffic & Parking Board approved such a speed limit reduction on Seminary Road between I-395 and the City border.

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.**

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.

Budget Preview

In about two and a half months our new City Manager will present [the proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2023 \(July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023\) and the proposed Capital Improvement Program \(CIP\) for Fiscal Year 2023 through Fiscal Year 2032.](#)

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).

The upcoming budget will be proposed and adopted against the backdrop of an unprecedented uncertainty. [Last month, the City Manager presented his initial outlook for the upcoming budget to our annual Council retreat.](#)

In Virginia, the structure of municipal finance is heavily reliant on real estate taxes. Consequentially, in Alexandria the real estate market, both residential and commercial, dictates our budgetary fate.

Real estate tax revenues are currently projected to grow by 3.8%, which is a healthy rate of growth, not unlike growth in recent years. Much higher than expected vehicle prices are driving vehicle personal property tax revenues. Our consumption-based taxes, including sales and dining, are staging strong recoveries.

Yet on the expenditure side of the ledger, we are seeing increases in costs across our balance sheet, driven by new costs for cash capital and debt service to support City and School capital investments.

With these revenue estimates and expenditure estimates, this brings us to a projected revenue shortfall of \$8.4 million, not including employee compensation changes that will likely be necessary to address competitive pressures.

Given that our local budget must be balanced, that shortfall must be resolved with either spending reductions, tax increases or some combination of the two.

To formally commence that process, **the City Council adopted our annual budget guidance for the City Manager.** Given the considerable uncertainty, the adopted guidance asks the City Manager to propose his budget with a "bookends" approach, showing a budget that resolves the budget gap without tax increases (all reductions), a budget that resolves the budget gap without service reductions (all tax increases) and a budget that includes a mix of the two options.

This will be a challenging environment to adopt a budget within. With our residential taxpayers already paying more this year due to the appreciation in our residential tax base, I believe we should again work to avoid a rate increase while protecting the core services our residents depend on.

The City Manager's budget presentation is on February 15th.

Arlandria-Chirilagua

For the past two years, the City has been engaged in an extensive planning process to help manage change and preserve and expand affordability in the Arlandria section of our City.

Far before the pandemic and the investment by Amazon just north of Alexandria, Arlandria has been in the crosshairs of strong economic forces that threaten to eliminate the diversity and affordability that is a core value of our City. The **Amazon investment has brought national attention to this plight.**

The Council worked to accelerate and prioritize the planning efforts for this area of our City to deploy tools that would serve to counteract some of these impacts.

The City's largest effort to date is now available to review as our staff **has released the draft Arlandria-Chirilagua Small Area Plan.**

This plan will now be before our Planning Commission on Wednesday December 8th and will come to City Council for consideration on Saturday December 18th. Public input is welcome at both venues.

Let me know your thoughts!

Legislative Package

Next month the Virginia General Assembly returns to Richmond for the so-called "long-session." The General Assembly alternates between a 45 day session in odd number years and a 60 day session in even number years.



Two years ago, we were prepping for a switch of party control for the first time in 22 years in the House of Delegates and 8 years in the State Senate. The regular session of 2020 was extraordinary with significant legislation enacted, and it was just a prelude to an extended special session, which addressed legislation and budget decisions related to COVID and numerous reforms to Virginia's criminal justice system.

For the past two years we enjoyed an unprecedented level of influence for our City. Our delegation boasts BOTH Majority Leaders (Senator Saslaw leading the State Senate and Delegate Herring leading the House of Delegates) and a few committee chairs.

With the recent election results, things will change dramatically. With a new Governor and a flip in partisan control of the House of Delegates, the only legislation likely to make it to the Governor's desk for signature, will be changes that enjoy bipartisan support.

Every year, the City Council adopts a Legislative Package for the upcoming General Assembly session. While the state government is certainly a significant financial supporter of the City's budget, Richmond also sets a legal environment that affects how we provide services to our residents.

Along with Vice Mayor Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, I serve on the City's Legislative Committee, which recommends the Legislative Package each year to our colleagues.

This year, we have again chosen to prepare a "Statement of Legislative Principles" and a "Statement of Legislative Priorities." Given the breadth of legislation likely to be filed, and potentially enacted, we felt it more appropriate to weigh in on the broader themes that we wished to see addressed on behalf of the City in the upcoming session.

Yet we do have specific asks within the legislative priorities, including:

- Funding and Authority For Infrastructure Investments
- Protecting and Expansion of Local Authority and Funding
- Projecting our most vulnerable residents
- Promoting Access, Equity and Equality
- Combating climate change and promoting clean energy

We have included a specific list of legislative asks to support our efforts to address inland flooding, including efforts to regulate the stormwater impacts of smaller infill development and ensure new state resources to support the necessary infrastructure investments. We have included requests for increased regulation of

Dominion Virginia Power, funding for abandoned cemeteries, broadband investments and efforts to support building safety.

The City is represented in the State Senate by [Senator Richard Saslaw](#), [Senator George Barker](#), and [Senator Adam Ebbin](#). In the House of Delegates, the City is represented by [Delegate Charniele Herring](#) and my current colleague, Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, will be joining our delegation in the House of Delegates.

[Click here to determine who represents you.](#)

Cut Through Traffic

Last month, the City Council finalized the recent update of our [Alexandria Mobility Plan](#). During the outreach phase of that update, one of the most consistent areas of input we received were concerns about the impacts of congestion on quality of life.

[The data collection that was performed for the Central Alexandria Traffic Study revealed that relatively small number of residential streets were carrying inordinate amounts of "cut-through" traffic](#), mostly using those streets to access the Telegraph interchange with the Beltway.

In response to input from the Central Alexandria Study, the City implemented [a variety of mitigation efforts to reduce neighborhood cut-through and work to keep heavy volumes of traffic on the highways and arterial roads](#).

As traffic volumes have returned in the wake of the pandemic, it is clear that more is necessary.

After work with civic associations, [our staff is proposing some new mitigation efforts to reduce some neighborhood cut-through traffic](#).

The first pilot would be for the first quarter of 2022 and would change light timings on Quaker and Duke, as well as on side streets, to focus traffic volumes on the arterial roads.

The second pilot would occur beginning in August and would also limit access from West Taylor Run Parkway to Telegraph Road.

The plan is to assess the impact, collect data and engage with the community to ensure these changes achieve the results they are designed to create.

Let me know your thoughts!

School Board Districts

Last year our nation conducted the Constitutionally-required decennial Census. While the process has been delayed due to a variety of factors, the City did finally receive [our population data](#) at the end of the summer.

We learned that our City grew by nearly 14% over the previous decade and that our community grew more diverse.

While the process of reflecting these population changes in the districts drawn for the General Assembly and the United States Congress was entrusted to the newly-created [Virginia Redistricting Commission](#), that process has now collapsed, meaning the Virginia Supreme Court will draw the districts.

Given our City Council is entirely at-large the local impact of these population changes only apply to our School Board districts. Our School Board currently consists of 9 members, with 3 members each from the [3 School Board Districts \(A for the east end, B for the center of the City and C for the west end\)](#).

Based on the population changes in the recent Census, District A has a population of 56,160, District B has a population of 49,507 and District C has a population of 53,800. To maintain equal representation, the districts will have to change before the next election.

While ultimately, the City Council will take this question up once the General Assembly districts are settled, [our staff has suggested that the most straightforward would be to move the Alexandria Renew precinct, which has 3,819 residents, from District A to District B](#). That would even out the population in each of the districts and ensure equal representation across the City.

This question will come to the City Council sometime in the new year. Let me know your thoughts!

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