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Vice Mayor Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

February 1, 2018

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It's hard to believe that it is already February!

This month the Council will begin the most intense part of the year as we start our annual budget process.

On the last day of the short month, the City will be hosting a ["Community Conversation" on the challenges of Heroin and other opioids in our City.](#)

This forum will bring together the many City agencies and partners who are working to address this public health emergency facing our nation.

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



Council Initiatives

Investing in Our Infrastructure

In August, the City suspended the use of our Public Safety Firing Range. The facility where personnel from the Police Department and Sheriff's Department train and qualify on service weapons, was experiencing safety issues and could no longer operate.

Last month, students from both Alexandria middle schools spent instructional time at home due to facility issues at those buildings.

Decades of under-investment in our basic infrastructure is leaving our community unable to provide critical services.

Despite large efforts to address deferred capital investment in recent years, the City stands at a crossroads. With a perfect storm of infrastructure needs for school, sewer, city facilities, transportation

and recreation, the practices of the past will not sustain us in the future.

[Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)

[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

Events/Updates

The Next Campaign

[In November, I made a significant announcement about my political future: I announced that I will be running to be Alexandria's next Mayor.](#)

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

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

PTAC Summer Camp Fair

Working to plan your child's summer and need help?

[The Alexandria PTA Council will be hosting their annual Summer Camp Fair on Tuesday February 27th from 5:30 PM until 8 PM at the T. C. Williams Cafeteria.](#)

This event brings together over 40 summer camps of all kinds!

Tax Help

Starting this weekend, eligible Alexandria residents can receive assistance in completing their Federal taxes.

[Sessions are held on Saturdays and Wednesdays between now and April 14th.](#)

The City Academy

[The City is accepting](#)

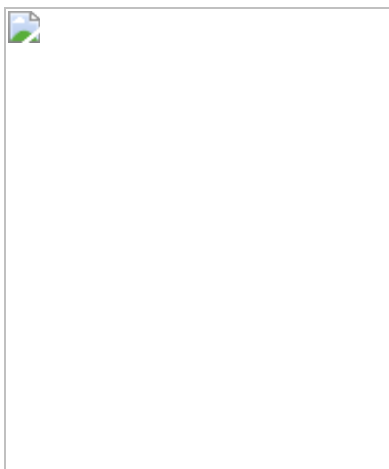
- After decades of shrinking student enrollment, we have now had 11 straight years of significant enrollment growth. [Only three school systems in the Commonwealth of Virginia have grown more than ours in the last decade. We're the only one of the top four growing systems to have not constructed a net new building \(only renovations or rebuilds\) during that period.](#)
- Out of 17 school buildings, only 3 of Alexandria's schools were built AFTER 1966.
- [The City's sanitary sewer, stormwater sewer and combined sewer remediation challenges are not areas that can be deferred any longer.](#)
- [Our city facilities reflect decades of neglect and require millions in maintenance.](#)
- [The challenges of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority \(WMATA\) have demanded dramatic increases from each member jurisdiction. For Alexandria, those increases have dominated our local transportation funding sources.](#)
- [The little funding that has remained for basic recreation services to support quality of life in our community has fallen victim to budget reductions.](#)

[The City Council's adoption of the City's Operating and Capital Improvement Budget in May of last year included making a new 10 year commitment to invest in our municipal facilities.](#)

In adopting that budget, we knew that doing things the way we had always done them was not sufficient. To ask that much of our taxpayers we also had to take a dramatic step forward and bring together the disparate visions of the City and School municipal facilities plans.

To do so, we created the [new Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Facility Investment Task Force](#). This blue-ribbon group brings together significant expertise to help the City prioritize and streamline a municipal facilities vision that ensures the success of City and School services for decades to come.

[The City Manager's proposed Capital Improvement Program](#)



included \$2 billion of investment over the next decade. Yet the constraints of the Council's guidance and paltry projected revenue growth left over \$500 million of recommended, but unfunded, capital investments.

That \$500 million of unfunded capital investments serves as a hidden debt on our municipal balance sheet. These are obligations that need to be met eventually. Yet instead of the 2.5% rate (the true interest cost of our most recent debt issuance) that we are paying for the City's actual debt, this hidden debt is

costing us much more.

With construction costs [climbing at an annual rate of nearly 5%](#) and the costs of delay/defer (patching, retrofitting, and otherwise "buying time") with existing aged infrastructure growing regularly, this hidden debt is far more onerous than the well-managed municipal debt load the City carries.

[applications for participating in our City Academy.](#)

The nine week program, beginning in March, will help you understand the way your government works!

[You may apply online today.](#)

Citizens Police Academy

It's time to start the next class of the Citizens Police Academy.

[This acclaimed program is one of the Police Department's key public outreach efforts.](#)

[The class meets for ten weeks each Wednesday, starting in March.](#)

[Sign up today!](#)

President's Day Parade

[The annual George Washington Birthday parade returns to the streets of Old Town!](#)

On Monday, February 19th from 1 PM - 3 PM, the parade is always an essential part of the season!

Be A Snow Buddy

[Volunteer Alexandria and the City work together to recruit "Snow Buddies."](#)

Snow Buddies work across our City to help residents who are unable to clear snow during inclement weather.

Sign up today!

In June, the City Manager constituted the new Ad Hoc group, and they have now concluded their work. [You can watch the meetings and read the materials online.](#)

At the beginning of November at our City Council retreat, the [Task Force provided their first deliverable](#) . Included with that report is a recommended [list of projects to be funded and the associated time period for each](#).

[Earlier this week, the Task Force presented their second and final deliverable](#) to the City Council and School Board. These recommendations build on their first deliverable with a series of process reforms designed to improve the joint management of the City's infrastructure work.

The Task Force has recommended a rethinking of the processes and collaboration associated with the development of both the City and Alexandria City Public Schools' (ACPS) Capital Improvement Programs.

Implementing these recommendations will require both the City and ACPS to step out of our comfort zones and modify processes that been utilized for decades. Their recommendations have provided the Council and School Board with a charge to unify our capital budgeting processes.

Doing so will more efficiently utilize our resources and respect the sacrifice of the taxpayers who have provided them.

Helping Small Businesses Succeed

Any new small business owner is taking an enormous risk. They are betting their resources on the future success of an idea. It's a risk that our system relies on. It results in businesses that provide products and services that enrich our lives. As taxpayers, it supports tax revenue that eases the burden on residential taxpayers. For individuals, it provides careers.

In government, we have an obligation to provide a regulatory process that is efficient, predictable, and expedient. Sometimes our existing processes fall short of that mark.

[In June of 2016, by a vote of 6-1, the City Council took a significant step in improving the process that businesses must go through that seek to get started in Alexandria.](#)

The changes recently adopted affect many areas. They will create additional areas eligible for administrative special use permits, and reduce the number of applications that require any special use permit.

Many new businesses seeking to operate in Alexandria require a Special Use Permit by virtue of the zoning of the property they have chosen. Our zoning code allows certain uses in many zones but only under special conditions.

A normal Special Use Permit first undergoes a thorough review by our City Staff. The City Staff then makes a recommendation to the City's Planning Commission. The Planning Commission ultimately makes a recommendation to the City Council.



At any step in that process, the application can become bogged down, can be substantially modified, or rejected. It is an unpredictable process that introduces both cost and uncertainty to a nascent small business who can rarely avoid either.

Last month, Council took another significant step in improving the processes for these small businesses. Over 40% of the Special Use Permits heard by Planning Commission and City Council are when a business requires a parking reduction, a request to reduce off-street parking requirements.

Up until last week, the City's commercial parking standards were based on legislation adopted in 1963. These standards apply when a new business seeks to operate in an existing space and when a landowner seeks to build new commercial space. For new development they provide for how many off-street spaces must be created and for a new business in an existing space, they provide for how many off-street spaces must be found.

The City Council and Planning Commission have routinely adopted deviations from these standards to eliminate the need of newly opening small businesses to provide off-street parking that in most of our business corridors simply does not exist. Yet the process of making that request is time-consuming and uncertain.

[Upon the recommendation of a community task force, the City Council voted 6-1 to approve new parking standards for commercial properties.](#) These new standards streamline the process for new businesses to open and facilitate shared parking arrangements. These new standards are also more realistic and reflect the amount of parking actually needed for businesses.

Over the years, City government has worked to make changes to our processes to support small business growth.

[In 2003, the City Council approved the Arlandria Plan](#) , which pioneered the use of Administrative Special Use Permits. Under the Administrative Special Use Permits, the staff can apply defined criteria and provide a new business with permission to operate (if it operates under a pre-approved set of restrictions), avoiding the necessity for hearing before the Planning Commission and City Council.

A decade ago, the City [created the Small Business Task Force, which recommended expansion of the Administrative Special Use Permit process.](#)

[In 2008, the City Council approved a package of reforms](#) to further ease the impacts on new small businesses. In 2010, the Council [approved a separate package of additional reforms.](#)

[In 2009 the City opened the Multi-Agency Permit Center to streamline permitting for new businesses and residents alike.](#)

Every day of delay is money for a new business. These new changes will help our small businesses be successful in Alexandria.

Transparency in Our Government

About 14 years ago, [Alexandria became one of the earliest jurisdictions in Virginia to post local campaign finance reports online.](#) Anyone can easily review who finances the campaigns of Alexandria's elected officials.

In 2009, I, along with Councilman Smedberg and then-Councilman Krupicka, [successfully sought approval from Richmond](#) to impose new restrictions on land-use applicants. Specifically, the new laws we

adopted [require land-use applicants to reveal any financial interests that they might have with policymakers.](#)

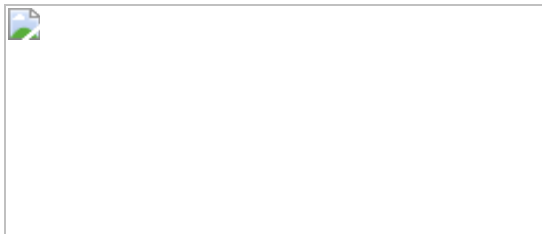
Five years ago, we made improvements to the motions that the City Council makes and votes on to initiate executive sessions. These changes serve to provide our residents with more information about the closed sessions that Council conducts.

Five years ago, we moved the Council's work sessions from the Council Work Room (off camera) into the Council chambers so that the public can more easily observe our discussions.

All elected officials in the state are required to submit an annual [Statement of Economic Interests](#). Over two years ago, Alexandria [became the first local government in Virginia to post these disclosures online](#).

The City also began [posting online the reports of our Internal Auditor for public review](#).

In January of 2016, [the Council adopted a Transparency Resolution to consider ideas for improving transparency in City operations](#). The



adopted resolution included language that I drafted requesting that our Clerk begin producing an annual report

detailing the Council's use of executive session during the previous year. Executive session is a closed meeting of Council, neither televised nor witnessed by any members of the general public, for specific purposes.

The [Code of Virginia strictly limits the circumstances where the City Council can meet in executive session](#). As a practical matter, the sessions are used primarily to address personnel issues, litigation strategy, and the acquisition or disposition of public property. In the case of the latter two examples, the executive sessions are used to protect the City's negotiating posture and thus protect the taxpayer dollar.

Before going into executive session, the Council must vote on the reason for the executive session. After the executive session concludes, the Council must return into public view and each member must certify that we complied with the law during the private session.

The [latest of these executive session reports is now posted and available for public consumption](#). It shows that the Council met in executive session 15 times during the last Council term and each vote to go into executive session was unanimous.

[Last month the Council considered a relatively innocuous routine update to the delegation of authority to the City Attorney to settle litigation and claims against the City](#). In approving the resolution, I worked with my colleagues to include language that provides the public with regular report of the litigation and claim activity.

I hope the public finds these new measures of transparency helpful in shedding additional light on Council's actions.

Short Term Rentals

Whether it is Uber and Lyft or AirBNB, local government is ground zero in the battle to keep up with "disruptive technologies." For many of these businesses they have exploited new trends and

technologies raising questions about how they align with existing law.

In the case of short-term rentals, popularized by AirBNB, the Commonwealth of Virginia has struggled to arrive at the correct way to level the playing field and provide Virginia's local governments with appropriate tools to address quality of life impacts.

During last year's General Assembly session, [legislation was finally adopted seeking to address these types of businesses](#). The adopted legislation allowed local governments in Virginia to create a registry, require registration, charge a fee for registration, and impose fines on those who do not register.

With the new law now in effect, [the City moved to implement this new authority](#). In November, City staff [brought a new ordinance to the City Council to create a registry of these short-term rentals](#). At the same time, our Finance Department is now working to negotiate a tax collection agreement with AirBNB to allow them to collect and remit the appropriate taxes from those short-term rentals operating within the City.

Council ultimately voted unanimously to [approve this new ordinance and the mandatory registration has begun](#).

Narrowing the Options For Amazon

In October [the National Science Foundation \(NSF\) completed their move to Eisenhower Avenue in Alexandria](#). With 2,100 employees and contractors, and an agency that attracts tens of thousands of overnight visitors each year, this is a big win for Alexandria.

The competition to attract NSF was heated, and the win was a home-run for the City and its taxpayers.

In the fall, the technology behemoth Amazon announced a search for a new headquarters. [The solicitation envisions \\$5 billion of investment and nearly 50,000 employees slated for these new facilities](#). If NSF was a home-run, Amazon is a walk-off grand-slam in the bottom of the 9th inning in game seven of the World Series.

Almost 240 jurisdictions around North America responded to this solicitation.

While the Commonwealth ultimately submitted a response on behalf of numerous jurisdictions, the City worked with Fairfax, Arlington and Loudoun counties to respond to this solicitation.

The Commonwealth's response including sites in Potomac Yard (partnered with Crystal City) and the Eisenhower Avenue area.

[Last month Amazon narrowed down the areas under consideration to 20 finalists](#). Included in that list were three locations in our region: Washington, DC, Montgomery County, Maryland and our Northern Virginia response.

Amazon also announced their final decisions will be made in 2018.

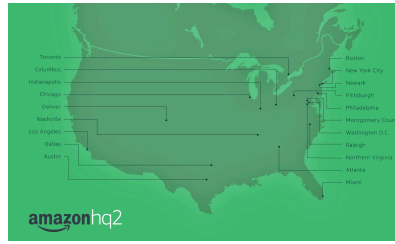
The City will work to win, but that's not the point of this newsletter update.

Whether Amazon's future headquarters ends up in Alexandria or not, we can all learn a bit from the solicitation itself. [When one of the most innovative companies on the planet puts out a very clear blueprint for how it approaches choosing where to invest, it would be foolhardy for jurisdictions not to pay attention](#).

The solicitation validates some of the policy we have made in our community in recent years, and should prompt us to redouble our

efforts in other policy areas.

To begin, Amazon wants to be in a Metropolitan area. They know that their workforce of the future will be drawn to urban communities.



They want connectivity. The solicitation specifically cites: "sidewalks, bike lanes, trams, metro, bus, light rail, train." The City's efforts to invest in new transit alternatives, enhanced pedestrian infrastructure and transit-oriented communities are not just efforts to improve the

quality of life of our existing residents, but significant economic development efforts. These are valuable things to people and businesses, big and small.

They want sustainability. Amazon is the largest purchaser of renewable power in the nation and they are looking for a new headquarters that gives them the opportunity to expand their leadership in this important area. Their existing headquarters uses "district energy" that recycles heat from data centers to warm nearby offices. Three of the City's recently adopted small area plans ([Eisenhower West](#), [North Potomac Yard](#) and [Old Town North](#)) call for district energy as a sustainability effort in planned redevelopment. We are preparing to update our green building standards to ensure sustainability is a critical component in future private development.

They want a community with superior information connectivity. They seek details on fiber and communication infrastructure.

They want an educated workforce. They are looking for areas with strong institutes of higher education.

They want an area where their employees will want to live. They cite the need for a diverse community with a variety of housing types and recreation opportunities.

Amazon's new headquarters would be a valuable addition to Alexandria. If it ends up in our region, but not in Alexandria, that would be a big win for Alexandria as well.

Yet, whether we win or lose this solicitation, the process should be instructive. The innovative companies of this decade and beyond will all seek a similar model for their future investment.

Growing sustainably while preserving our neighborhoods will require the City to be responsive to this roadmap for the future.

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

Budget Process Begins

[The City Manager will present his proposed budgets on Tuesday, February 20th, and the City Council will adopt the budget on Thursday, May 3rd.](#)

From 2002 until 2009, the City was enjoying the run-up in the residential real estate market. Our General Fund budget increased by an average of 6.5% per year. The work force in City Government grew from 2,229 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) to 2,660 FTEs during that period.

There were [even campaigns calling for Council to limit spending growth to "just" 3% per year.](#)

In Fiscal Year 2010, the bottom fell out as the Great Recession took hold. The City adopted its first negative budget in at least 40 years, reducing spending from Fiscal Year 2009 to 2010 by over 2%. From 2010 to 2017, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 2.9% per year.

Today, the City workforce is at 2,564 FTEs, 4% lower than 2009.

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 ongoing 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. In the fall, the City Council adopts a resolution which provides direction to the City Manager as 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.

In early November, 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 2018 (July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019) Operating Budget and the Fiscal Year 2019 - Fiscal Year 2029 Capital Improvement Program.

The current projections are that next year's revenues will grow at a rate of 1.3% overall. If that estimate holds, that would provide the City government with about \$9.2 million of new revenue.

On the expenditure side, we quickly began to see our challenge. Driven largely by [student enrollment growth](#) , the Superintendent [has proposed a budget that requires \\$9.77 million \(4.6% growth\) of additional operating funds](#) from the City for the Alexandria City Public Schools. That request alone is greater than ALL of the new revenue estimated to be available to the City under current tax policy.

The estimates also include \$4.9 million for additional City government costs (mostly salary increases and benefit expenses), \$7.7 million of cash capital and debt service for our capital budget, and \$4.8 million for transit services (mostly Metro).

All together, that creates an estimated shortfall near \$28 million, before we start the process.

By the time the City Manager presents his budget, 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.

In the budget guidance adopted by the Council for this year, I successfully included language requesting that the City Manager not include an increase in the real estate tax rate in his proposed budget.

Once the budget is presented, [the Council will have a series of worksessions and public meetings](#) to solicit public input and finalize the adopted budget.

The Council will host a budget public hearing on Monday March 12th at 4:00 PM at City Hall.

I hope to see you there.

230KV Transmission Line

About 3 years ago, [I wrote about Dominion Virginia Power's proposal to construct a new 230 KV transmission line through the northeast corner of our City.](#)

In June of 2014, the [City formed a community group to begin reviewing Dominion Virginia Power's proposal](#) and offering feedback to the Council and directly to Dominion Virginia Power on their proposed routes.

The most important occurrence at the first meeting was the release of Dominion Virginia Power's [proposed routes](#). Each of these routes have negative impacts for our community.

The group concluded its work at the end of 2014 [with a series of recommendations to the City Council, State Corporation Commission and Dominion Virginia Power.](#)

As this process concluded, Dominion believed that the urgency behind the proposed transmission line had subsided. The process was then delayed for some time to allow them to analyze their studies.

Ultimately, the decision about the necessity of this transmission line and its routing will be made by the State Corporation Commission. However, the City and its residents will have some opportunity to help shape that decision.

The City continues to have significant concerns about this proposal and the potential impacts on Alexandria.

The City reconvened the community group and a series of meetings were again held.

[The group returned to the City Council in May of 2016 with a recommendation of the "least objectionable" routes](#) as well as a request for opposition to any above ground route.

The Council adopted a resolution opposing any above ground routing, and identifying the "least objectionable" routes as ones that either:

- Used the existing CSX railroad right of way
- Used waterways, both Four Mile Run and the Potomac River
- Used the George Washington Parkway

Dominion then formally notified the City that they will finally file with the State Corporation Commission. That filing was to include two routes, the route utilizing the CSX railroad right of way, and an alternate scenario where Dominion "reconductors" an existing route primarily outside of the City.

Yet that did not happen.

[In November, Dominion returned to the City with another update.](#) Given the extensive costs of utilizing the CSX railroad right of way, Dominion would now like the City to consider whether we could support their utilization of a route along or near Potomac Avenue. In exchange for this change, Dominion indicated a willingness to increase the compensation they will provide to the City from \$15 million to \$40 million.

Use of Potomac Avenue would potentially have a several adverse impacts to the City that would need to be considered carefully.

To consider the potential trade-offs associated with such a change we are again convening the community group.

The group held their first meeting on the new proposal last month. You can review [the information provided by Dominion online](#).

Additional meetings will be scheduled shortly.

A Plan For the Future of Policing

In many jurisdictions around the nation, it is a challenging time for the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve. It is incumbent upon Alexandria to continue to lead the way in this area.

We have a highly skilled police force that serves our community well every day.

Our officers participate in training aimed at de-escalation of volatile situations. We outfit our police officers with non-lethal force options to assist in the de-escalation of these incidents.

We have officers that participate in [training designed to address implicit bias in policing](#).

[The Alexandria Human Rights Commission conducts a review of each police](#) shooting incident. The Commission also reviews internal investigation data to question and provide accountability of the department.

Last year, the Council approved the FY 2018 to FY 2027 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). A [placeholder was included within the CIP to fund the deployment of body-worn cameras for our police officers](#). Although a few years away, the planning for this endeavor has begun.

In April of last year [the City released a first of its kind external study and analysis of five years of Alexandria Police traffic citation data](#). Conducted by the [Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University](#), this effort looked at over 91,000 citations issued from 2011 - 2015.

The goal of this review was to identify possible areas of biased policing. While the study authors provide significant detail as to the challenges of bench-marking this type of data, the result of the study should prompt further analysis and conversation.

To ensure that the conversation did not end here, [our new Police Chief Michael Brown appointed a new Community Advisory Team to advise the Police Department on these issues](#).

With the report and the [release of the actual raw data](#), our Police Department has gone beyond what most departments not under consent decrees have chosen to do.



Yet the efforts continue as we work to provide a level of transparency that increases public confidence in the great work done by the men and women who serve our community every day.

In October, Chief Brown provided a formal response to [community proposals for increased transparency around policing data](#). Chief Brown announced a [series of measures that have already been implemented](#) and will be implemented to align with the community suggestions.

These changes include expanded data collection, expanded public reporting, and continuation of resident oversight for use of force data and complaint review.

Last month the Chief released [his draft "21st Century Policing Plan"](#) and he is now seeking the input of the public. Once you have reviewed the plan, [please take our survey](#).

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