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your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

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In This Month's Edition:

- Fire Department Collective Bargaining
- Fair Housing Plan
- New Broadband
- Climate Action
- Youth Safety
- Stormwater Utility Credits
- Street Names
- Cleaner Potomac River
- Planning Work Program



Quick Links

[E-Mail Me](#)[Past Newsletters](#)[City of Alexandria Website](#)[Pay City Taxes Online](#)[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](#)

Today marks the beginning of Black History Month. There will be a [series of events scheduled throughout the month to celebrate the rich African-American history of our City.](#)

This month-long observance will be kicked-off this weekend with the launch of the Southern Route of Alexandria's [African-American Waterfront Heritage Trail](#). This new historic interpretative trail tells the story of the early African-American experience in our City.

On Monday the 20th, [the George Washington Birthday Parade returns to the streets of Old Town.](#)

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- [Report a Traffic Signal Outage](#)

For this year only, [the parade will follow a different route](#), along Upper King Street, to end the parade in front of the George Washington Masonic Memorial.

This new routing will allow the parade to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the [Masonic Memorial](#), an iconic Alexandria structure.

At the end of this month, the City Manager [will present his Fiscal Year 2024 budget proposal](#). This will commence our budget process, which culminates in the adoption of our budget on May 3rd.

After two years of doing virtual town-hall meetings, including weekly sessions during most of 2020, I am moving back to in-person, "Living Room Town Hall" meetings. If you would like to host a town hall in your neighborhood, [please drop me a line](#) and we'll get it on the calendar!

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

Initiatives and Updates



Fire Department Collective Bargaining

Last month, [the City Council voted to commit funding to support the second public-sector collective-bargaining agreement in Virginia since the 1970s](#). This new agreement, between the City and International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 2141, represents the firefighters, paramedics and fire marshals of the [Alexandria Fire Department](#).

This new agreement will provide for significant increases in compensation for new and existing employees, and a pathway to reduced hours in their work week. It will help make Alexandria a more competitive employer in a very tight regional marketplace for talent.

This new agreement for the Fire Department comes on the heels of a similar agreement [which the City Council committed to fund in November](#). That agreement, between the City and the Southern States Police Benevolent Association (SSPBA), covers the sworn personnel of the [Alexandria Police Department](#).

Both new agreements commence on July 1, 2023.

Nearly 46 years ago, [the Virginia Supreme Court invalidated the collective bargaining rights of public sector employees in Virginia](#). At that time, 19 Virginia jurisdictions, including the City of Alexandria, had some form of collective bargaining with public sector employees.

Under [legislation adopted by the Virginia General Assembly during the 2020 session](#), localities in Virginia can again allow their employees to collectively bargain on the conditions of their employment. Alexandria has now led the Commonwealth with the first and second agreements under this new authority.

While both sides did not get everything they wanted in both of these agreements, I believe we have set a solid foundation for cooperation over the coming years.

I look forward to similarly constructive relationships with the organizations that our remaining public-sector employees have or will select to represent them.



Fair Housing Plan Released

Yesterday, Alexandria and 7 other jurisdictions in the region [released a draft of a new Regional Fair Housing Plan](#). It has been over a quarter of a century since the region's jurisdictions have come together to plan fair housing as a region.

The challenges that residents face finding safe, affordable and accessible housing do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. The work to address those challenges, and the inequities that impact them, must be addressed comprehensively.

For the next 60 days, we will be collecting public comment on the proposed plan, and there will several public hearings scheduled around the region, including in Alexandria.

As we review this plan, it's important to consider how we got here. To do so requires a review of a few decades of our history.

In 1969, [President Nixon's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) launched his "Open Communities" initiative, which proposed to deny Federal funding to jurisdictions that sustained housing segregation](#). The effort was designed to implement the recently enacted Fair Housing Act. A backlash ensued, and President Nixon abandoned the plan that had been advanced by his HUD Secretary. His HUD Secretary was George Romney, Senator Mitt Romney's father.

Almost a half-century later, [President Obama's HUD promulgated the "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" Rule \(AFFH\)](#) to require local jurisdictions to identify barriers to fair housing and create a plan for removing those barriers.

President Trump famously repealed that rule with [a racist tweet promising "suburban housewives" they would not have to face the invasion of "low-income housing" in their neighborhoods.](#)

The President's demagoguery was rightfully met with the scorn it deserved, particularly in Alexandria. Yet, great controversy envelops each attempt in our City to integrate low-income housing in our community, whether it is new housing development at [Ramsey Homes, Fairlington Presbyterian Church or South Patrick Street.](#) Zoning reform efforts and parking policy changes to facilitate low-income housing are met with similar fates.

It was through this lens that the City Council voted over 2 years ago to embark on this regional analysis. [While no longer mandated by HUD, we joined an consortium of local governments in DC, Maryland and Virginia, convened by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, to perform the analysis the AFFH Rule intended to require.](#)

Coincidentally, last month, Secretary Marcia Fudge, now leading HUD for President Biden, [rolled out a new "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" rule to breathe new life into the Fair Housing Act.](#)

We as a region will hold ourselves accountable to understanding and remediating housing inequities that fester over 50 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act.

Local governments have frequently led the charge AGAINST Federal efforts to enforce the Fair Housing Act. With the Federal government having abandoned its responsibility, this is an opportunity for local governments to lead the way in achieving the vision of this landmark Civil Rights legislation.

I hope that we will continue this important work. Please share your opinions!

New Broadband Services

[Almost a decade 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 realizing the vision of a truly competitive marketplace and bringing new broadband capacity to our community.

A year ago, the City announced that we had received four proposals from vendors seeking to offer competitive broadband services for our community.

In March of last year, the City Council unanimously advanced franchise agreements with two of the firms, Ting and Lumos. While we issued franchise agreements to both companies, ultimately Ting was the only company that decided to move ahead at this time. Ting is building infrastructure to provide service and accepting pre-orders for their services now.

Separate from this process, Verizon began conversion of their existing copper infrastructure to fiber optic cable in some areas of our City. With the completion of this work, they will begin offering Verizon FIOS internet service along with their landline phone service. They are now accepting orders as well.

A year and a half ago, City Council gathered on Eisenhower Avenue to have a formal groundbreaking for the build of our municipal fiber network. Construction is now occurring at numerous locations in the City.

Just over two years 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. A contract was awarded to Jones Utilities Construction, Inc to perform this work.

Over 9 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. 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.

Competition is coming!



Climate Action

Last fall, the City Council created our new [Office of Climate Action](#). This office brings together existing positions along with new positions created in last year's budget, to provide central coordination of the City's efforts to improve climate resiliency and advance sustainability efforts.

Last month, we announced the hiring of [Ryan Freed to be the City's new Climate Action Officer to lead this new office](#).

This important hire coincides with the City's [Energy and Climate Change Task Force](#) presenting [a draft of the Energy and Climate Change Action Plan for Alexandria](#).

This comprehensive plan is designed to turn our Environmental Action Plan and our declaration of climate emergency into concrete steps the City can take to make progress on this vital issue impacting our future.

Between now and February 10th, [we would like your feedback on the draft plan!](#)

This plan identifies 13 strategies across five sectors:

- Buildings
- Transportation
- Carbon-Free Electricity
- Waste
- Other

[Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change again sounded the alarm](#). Their report gives the world very little time to take meaningful action to mitigate catastrophic impacts of rising temperatures.

Here in Alexandria, we have already seen the dire impacts of a warming planet, as flooding and other storm damage gives us a preview of the decades to come. The geopolitical events of the past year remind us of the non-environmental rationales for de-emphasizing fossil-fuel energy.

Just last year, [a new study](#) has shown the impacts of climate change on accelerating sea-level rise, [an impact that places our City in significant peril](#).

While the Federal government was largely disengaged from international efforts to address climate change, that is now changing. With or without Federal leadership, Alexandria is continuing to take meaningful climate action.

It was over two years ago that the City Council adopted the **latest update of our Environmental Action Plan**. This ambitious plan does not commit or appropriate money, but it does set the strategic direction to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Expand Open Space
- Reduce water pollution
- Reduce vehicle miles traveled
- Reduce ozone

To be successful, this work necessarily involves the public and private sector and will ultimately require a state government fully committed to the cause.

The **City released a comprehensive report of the accomplishments achieved during 2020**, including reductions in GHG emissions, new programs to make commercial buildings more sustainable, transportation initiatives, new green building standards, expanded recycling, and more.

In April of 2021, **the City Council approved our new Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Readiness Strategy**. Earlier the same year, the Council approved the City's **first Alternative Fuel Fleet Policy to accelerate the City's deployment of these vehicles**.

DASH recently added electric buses to its fleet. They are now serving our City on scheduled routes.

In 2020, the Council **unanimously approved our new Green Building Policy**. This new policy reflects the collaboration of a **Task Force** that met for several months to arrive at this new direction.

While the Green Building Policy will ensure that new development is built in a sustainable manner, to make progress, we must address existing structures.

Over two years ago, the City Council voted **to create a C-PACE program in Alexandria**. A C-PACE program allows commercial property owners to make improvements to reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and sustainability, financed by repayments collected as part of the property's real estate tax payment.

The City has again partnered with the **Northern Virginia Regional Commission to bring back Solarize Alexandria**. This program partners with residential property owners to conduct assessments on the feasibility of solar power installations.

Buildings account for 39% of total energy use, 68% of electricity consumption and 38% of all carbon dioxide emissions. When buildings are built efficiently,

redevelopment can be a powerful force to reduce our energy demands and improve our environment.

While the task force supported the notion that public construction activity to lead the way in sustainability, there was some disagreement as to whether LEED Gold was sufficient or whether the City should set **Net-Zero construction** as the goal.

Ultimately Council chose to set Net Zero as the goal for public facility construction. Both MacArthur Elementary School and the Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School are now being constructed under this new standard.

Constrained budgets make it more challenging for our City to continue its leadership in sustainability practices, but we can and should work to lead the region in this policy area. These efforts are critical given recent Federal policy changes, but are also good for our economy and our quality of life. I look forward to working to see them to reality.



Youth Safety & Resiliency

A little over 26 years ago, **our community was reeling, as Romulo Eric Ardila was murdered in a gang-related fight outside George Washington Middle School.**

One of Ardila's friends **was quoted in the Washington Post at the time saying:** "Everybody cares about him when he's dead. When he's alive, only his friends and family cared about him. That's how this world works."

When history repeated itself last year, **with the tragic murder of Luis Mejia Hernandez,** properly honoring his memory required action. **There is rarely one cause or one solution to the kind of unspeakable violence that causes one student to take the life of another,** but we can learn much by engaging with the youth most impacted.

In the aftermath of Luis' murder, **Councilwoman Gaskins and I proposed a framework** for a series of youth-led engagements to better understand how we can productively invest in the resilience of our youth.

Last month, the Health & Safety Coordinating Committee, which I chair along with Councilwoman Gaskins, **received the first update on the result of these efforts.**

What we learned in the focus groups should not surprise us. Students told us that policymakers should:

- Offer creative, inclusive, flexible youth programs that foster social connection and a sense of belonging and promote youth behavioral health
- Use a variety of methods and partnerships to creatively encourage young people and ensure that they are aware of the resources and programs available to them
- Build effective Youth-Adult Partnerships by providing adults with ongoing trainings and technical assistance to promote positive youth development, and by providing youth with a strong foundation and opportunities to participate in decision and policy making with adults
- When asking youth for their input and feedback, it is critical that adults listen, take their ideas seriously, and hold themselves accountable to respond to their concerns.

We are working to bring these recommendations to reality in the form of compelling programming, services and improved communication. This will require the work of all facets of our community, but the result is worth the commitment.

Last month, there were also important developments within ACPS in the area of youth safety. In the aftermath of the rancorous community discussion regarding the presence of Alexandria Police Officers in our schools, the [School Law Enforcement Partnership \(SLEP\) Advisory Group](#) was constituted by the School Board. This group was charged with reviewing the relationship between ACPS and the Alexandria Police Department.

This committee provided [their recommendations last month](#) and tomorrow evening the School Board will discuss how they will proceed on their findings.

Our youth have shouldered the worst of the challenges we have collectively faced over the past 3 years. Ensuring that every young person in our City is equipped to thrive during these challenging times remains a top priority in our community.



Stormwater Utility Fee Credits

Between now and February 15th, [residential and commercial property owners can apply for a credit of up to 50% against their annual Stormwater Utility Fee](#). Please apply online to receive reductions for the efforts you are taking to improve stormwater handling.

In June of 2018, [property owners in Alexandria paid a Stormwater Utility Fee for the first time ever](#). The creation of this fee was driven by the need for additional revenue to comply with [the City's MS4 Permit](#). [The permit reflects Alexandria's obligations to reduce pollutants contained in storm run-off which makes](#)

its way to the Chesapeake Bay and other waterways.

Today the fee supports **nearly half of a billion dollars of infrastructure, maintenance and operating expenses for water quality and water quantity initiatives over the next decade.**

Last year, the City Council unanimously adopted **an ordinance to again increase our Stormwater Utility Fee,** to further expand the resources available for investments in our storm sewer infrastructure. This increase will mean a condo owner paid \$82.32 annually, a townhouse owner \$123.48 annually, a small single-family homeowner \$294 annually and a large single-family homeowner \$490.98 annually.

While the purpose of the fee is to raise revenues for these important initiatives, the fee is structured in a manner that is designed to incentivize property owners to take actions that will protect stormwater quality and reducing flooding impacts. As such, the City created a credit structure to reduce the fee for property owners taking these actions.

Faced with evidence last year that the credits were being rarely received by property owners, the City Council recently **approved a new credit manual** to expand the credits available, make the credits last longer and reduce the paperwork required.

When property owners implement best practices to benefit our stormwater systems, it helps the community as a whole. Please make sure you obtain credits for these important efforts.

Changing Street Names

Early in the morning of August 21, 1863, William Quantrill led a **Confederate guerilla group to attack Lawrence, Kansas.** After looting most of the businesses in the town, the guerilla group then executed nearly 200 men and boys in the town. Today, **Quantrell Avenue** on our West End is named in his honor.

On March 6, 1857, **Chief Justice Roger Taney wrote that African-Americans “are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race...”** These words were included in the majority opinion in the Dred Scott v. Sandford case



before the United States Supreme Court. Today, [Taney Avenue is named in his honor, also on our West End.](#)

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Confederate veterans came together to form the Ku Klux Klan, to perpetuate racial terror and "The Lost Cause." [Chosen as the first "Grand Wizard" of this racial terror group was former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest.](#) Today, [Forrest Street is named in his honor in Del Ray.](#)

Unfortunately, these three examples are [replicated throughout our City.](#) Those who served on City Councils of the past used street naming policies as a form of permanent protest against the burgeoning civil rights movement and growing political power for African-Americans. As a symbol, these honors persist today, honoring virulent racists, many of whom took up arms against our nation. These honors are not defensible and should be removed.

In August of 2016, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names [presented its final report to the City Council.](#) This report recommended that the City proceed with a [renaming of Jefferson Davis Highway](#) and allow the typical City renaming process to handle renaming of other streets in our City.

Last year, the [City Council approved an updated Street Renaming procedure to allow for the submission of petitions for these renaming efforts.](#)

During the FY 23 budget process, our City staff [provided a detailing of the budgetary impacts that would accompany street renaming efforts and detailed a more methodical approach.](#)

While it is important to remove these inappropriate honors, it is also important to consider practical concerns as thousands of Alexandria residents live on these streets, numerous businesses operate on these streets and residents and visitors use these existing street names to navigate our community. As such, I believe a reasonable, yet deliberate pace of renaming these streets over time should be embarked upon.

Last month, [my colleagues supported my proposal](#) to ask our Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC) to help us develop a list of people, places and things worthy of honor, particularly those names that draw attention to people and events of our history that have been frequently overlooked. With that list, the City's Naming Committee will go to work to assign new names to approximately 3 streets each year.

Honors and commemorations that seemed appropriate a century or even 40 years ago, may no longer be appropriate in a modern Alexandria. Our ability to reflect and change is a strength of our community.

A Cleaner Potomac River



A year and a half ago, we gathered where Pendleton Street meets the Potomac River and celebrated the groundbreaking of the largest infrastructure project in Alexandria's history. For decades, the combination of stormwater and sanitary sewage has overwhelmed portions of the Combined Sewer System that serves a 540-acre area in Old Town. This combination results in this mixture ending up in the Potomac River and other waterways. Soon, this will end.

Starting this month at the site of that groundbreaking, an impact hammer will begin pile-driving that will occur during the week, between 9 AM and 6 PM. This noisy activity will last through May.

Two and a half years ago, the Alexandria Renew Enterprises Board of Directors, the governing body of Alexandria's sewer authority, approved the issuance of \$454.4 million contract to Traylor/Shea. This joint-venture will complete the final design and construct the tunnel network that will address overflows into the Potomac River from the combined sewer system that serves Old Town.

The construction work is occurring primarily at 4 sites, the three outfall locations and the location of the Alexandria Renew treatment facility.

The star of this show is our 380-ton Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM). The TBM is 15 feet wide and can excavate enough soil to fill 3 dump-trucks in 15 minutes. We call her "Hazel" and she is hard at work under ground in our City.

Five years ago, the General Assembly enacted legislation that required the City to address remediation of our Combined Sewer System by July 1, 2025. The City is on schedule to meet this mandate.

With remediation expected to require nearly a half billion dollars, the City requested funding from Commonwealth coffers to assist in this challenge. The City has now received over \$140 million of commitments from the Commonwealth thanks to the support of Former Governor Northam, and our General Assembly delegation, specifically Senator Saslaw.

A year and a half ago, the former Governor announced an additional allocation from the

[Commonwealth's American Rescue Plan dollars to support this project.](#)

The budget signed by Governor Youngkin last year included a final \$40 million state payment to support this project.

This is a significant investment in the cleanliness of our water ways. As a community, we will need to be patient with this significant construction work, but the legacy of cleaner water will benefit generations to come.



Planning Work Program

The City's Master Plan is made up of [20 Small Area Plans](#) and several Citywide sub-plans (Transportation, Housing, Open Space, etc). This is how the City meets [the obligations of state law to adopt and update a comprehensive plan.](#)

Over 21 years ago, the City Council adopted ["Plan for Planning,"](#) a vision for how the community could proactively work to get ahead of development pressures and ensure that our community's vision would shape transition in our neighborhoods.

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

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

Last month, the Council received the draft of our [Interdepartmental Planning Work Program](#), reflecting the planning efforts that will be accomplished in the near term. The final program for the year will be adopted by the City Council once we have approved the budget later in the Spring.

While the program consists of many initiatives of all sizes, this year's work program will focus on significant planning efforts, including:

- [Alexandria West Plan update](#): A community-led process to adopt a new land-use plan for a large swath of our West End.
- Zoning for Housing: A comprehensive package of zoning reforms to address policies that were intended to perpetuate segregation and

exclusion, as well as those that hinder the creation of adequate supplies of affordable housing.

- Vision Plan: A community engagement to determine how we incorporate the priorities of our residents in our Master Plan.
- Duke Street: A community-led process to adopt revisions to our land-use plan for areas along the Duke Street corridor.

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

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