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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

Councilman Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

January 1, 2016

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Happy New Year!

A few hours ago, a new Council term commenced.

Allison Silberberg is now our new Mayor and we have added Councilman Willie Bailey.

I am excited to tackle the issues before us.

[On Monday evening at 7 PM, the seven of us will take the oath of office in the auditorium at T. C. Williams High School.](#)



I hope you can join us for both the installation and the reception that follows.

In addition to the administration of our oaths, the City Council will elect the Vice Mayor and designate Council representation to a variety of City Boards, Commissions and regional bodies.

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

Council Initiatives

Housing Affordability, Are We The Problem?

Despite being just a short trip across the Potomac River, it's rare to see Federal policymakers directly engaged in the day to day challenges that face us in local government.

[Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)

[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

Events/Updates

Presidential Primary Absentee Voting

The Virginia Democratic and Republican parties will be holding their Presidential Primaries on Tuesday, March 1, 2016.

[Three candidates have qualified for the Democratic Primary ballot and 13 candidates have qualified for the Republican Primary ballot.](#)

[Absentee voting begins on January 15th by mail and in person.](#)

Applications for absentee ballots can now be made by mail, online or in person. However, ballots will not be mailed until the 15th.

Get Ready for Kindergarten

If you have a child who will be starting Kindergarten in the Alexandria City Public Schools this fall, a series of open houses are being scheduled for you!

[Find your local school using the zone locator.](#)

[Each school has events scheduled at a different time.](#) If your school does not have a scheduled date, contact your school directly.

Patrick Henry Process Continues

[The community process to build the new Patrick Henry School and Recreation Center is underway.](#)

The City and Schools recently constituted a community group which has

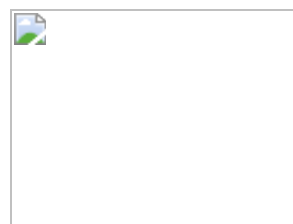
In late November, [Jason Furman, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers](#), made a speech that drew a direct connection between one of the most challenging issues for us in Alexandria, to one of the most challenging issues facing our nation.

In doing so, he laid the blame for these challenges squarely at the feet of local policymakers.

[In this speech, Mr. Furman addressed the large and growing challenges of housing affordability in communities. He connected those challenges with growing income inequality around our country.](#) But most relevant to us in Alexandria, he assigned blame for a lack of housing affordability on local zoning restrictions.

Said another way, our limitations and restrictions on development have driven the cost of housing to unaffordable levels, thus exacerbating income inequality. [He even traces the impact of these restrictions to reductions in employment.](#)

Furman writes "Zoning restrictions--be they in the form of minimum lot sizes, off-street parking requirements, height limits, prohibitions on multifamily housing, or lengthy permitting processes--are supply constraints. Basic economic theory predicts--and many empirical studies confirm--that housing markets in which supply cannot keep up with demand will see housing prices rise."



Some have even [suggested that removal of some local authority over land use can help address the affordability issue.](#)

All this leads us to the fundamental question about whether Alexandria's efforts to address affordability are helping, hurting or having no effect.

Up until now, our discussions on affordable housing have focused [on funding questions, debates about the impacts of individual projects, and the contention between affordability and other City priorities.](#) We adopted the [Housing Master Plan](#), which gave the community a series of tools with which to tackle the challenges of affordability.

Yet, if Furman and other economists are to be believed, we in Alexandria have never tackled the fundamental root of housing affordability. Most of our efforts are aimed at creating or preserving housing that will ultimately be in the public domain or under nominal public control. However, it is through our zoning authority that we can truly impact housing affordability in privately owned housing.

Obviously zoning restrictions have a place and serve a need for our community. I would also suggest that we have done some things right.

[Last year, the City Council adopted new parking standards for multi-family housing.](#) By rightsizing parking, we significantly reduced the cost of construction for multi-family residential development, provided new incentives for the use of transit, and freed up resources for alternate community investments.

However, these new standards went even farther, by providing steeper parking incentives for restricted affordable housing units. [In doing so, the City essentially adopted our largest financial incentive for the creation of new affordable housing,](#) while also reducing the overall cost of private housing development.

The City has aggressively utilized our land-use authority to

- limit density
- increase open space

already held the first meeting on December 9th.

The presentation from the meeting was recorded and [is available for review online.](#)

New School Board

[This Thursday, the new Alexandria School Board will take the oath of office.](#)

The installation ceremony will take place at 6:30 PM in the T. C. Williams High School Auditorium.

Congratulations to new School Board members Hal Cardwell, Veronica Nolan, Margaret Lorber, Cindy Anderson, and Ramee Gentry.

They join returning members Karen Graf, Chris Lewis, Ronnie Campbell, and Bill Campbell.

I look forward to collaborating with the new Board as we work to ensure the success of every child.

Confederate Memorials & Street Names

[The Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names was created by the City Council in September.](#)

The Committee was now had its membership constituted and will hold its first meeting on Wednesday January 27, 2016 at 7 PM.

The meeting will be held in the Sister Cities Conference Room at City Hall.

Celebrate Community 5K/1K

On Sunday, January 17th at 9AM, the Agudas Achim Congregation will host the 2nd Annual Celebrate Community 5K/1K race.

The race will begin and end at the US Patent & Trademark Office on Eisenhower Avenue.

- create new retail
- improve architecture
- improve transportation infrastructure
- preserve historic structures
- develop new public facilities
- create affordable housing
- improve basic infrastructure
- improve public art
- and more

At some point, the question becomes whether those efforts are ultimately self-defeating; particularly as it relates to housing affordability?

My view is that we must first comprehensively inventory and assess the City's land use requirements. Once we understand the full scope and cost of the City's requirements, we can appropriately prioritize the impact moving forward.

As we work to implement the City's Housing Master Plan, we must comprehend all of the factors that challenge affordability in the City. [Let me know your thoughts!](#)

Fire Station 210 Fully Staffed

A decade ago, a [needs assessment indicated that longer emergency response times](#) necessitated a new fire station on the West End of our City. With reconfiguration of the City's impound lot, plans advanced to build a new fire station, numbered 210, on Eisenhower Avenue.

The Council identified \$16 million of capital funds to construct the new station and in Fiscal Year 2011, a contract was issued for construction of a new station with new training facilities.

In the fall of 2013, with the station nearing completion, the City applied for a Federal grant under the "[Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response](#)" (SAFER) program. The City had previously used SAFER to expand our Fire Department staffing.

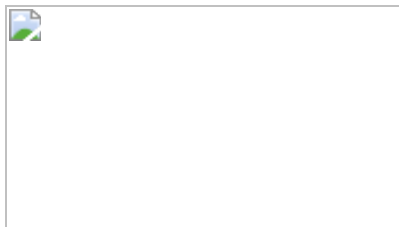
The grant covers the salaries and benefits for new firefighters. However, after two years, the recipient is required to pick up and maintain the expenditure, a so-called "Maintenance of Effort" provision.

In January 2014, the City was awarded a SAFER grant to cover the firefighters necessary to open Fire Station 210. At that time, the City Manager came to the Council indicating his decision to reject the grant due to the obligation of the "Maintenance of Effort" provisions, and the City's precarious long-term financial outlook.

Later that year, the City Manager provided a second recommendation for staffing the new Fire Station 210. In this proposal, he proposed moving the Peak Medic Unit and the fire engine at Fire Station 204 (Powhatan Street) to Fire Station 210.

Understandably, the neighbors of Fire Station 204 opposed the move, and the [uncertainty about the public safety effects caused Council to leave the fire engine in place.](#) The medic unit did move and operated out of the newly opened Fire Station 210.

In rejecting the City Manager's recommendation, Council did give direction that the Fire Station 210 fire suppression staffing would be included in the FY 2016 budget when it was proposed.



This year, the race will benefit [ALIVE](#) and collect food for ALIVE's Emergency Food Distribution.

[Registration is available online.](#)

In the fall of 2014, the City's then new Fire Chief [came to the Council with an entirely new model](#) for cross-trained firefighter/medics. With the versatility offered by this new model, the Fire Chief believed the plan would allow staffing of Fire Station 210 last year.

Unfortunately, higher than expected retirements and less medics opting for cross-training led to slower implementation of this plan. That created the unfortunate situation of [Fire Station 210 opening with no fire suppression services available](#).

In adopting last year's budget, the Council coalesced around a plan that provided [overhire funding to support the staffing of the engine at Fire Station 210](#).

[Last month on December 5th, the 24/7, four member Basic Life Support \(BLS\) engine company became operational at Fire Station 210](#). At the same time, the Fire Chief made the decision to move an EMS Supervisor with Advanced Life Support (ALS) capability to the station. The foam suppression unit, which has previously been stored at Fire Station 209 in Potomac Yard was now moved to Fire Station 210 to be closer to the Norfolk Southern ethanol transloading facility.

Based on analysis of the call volume since the medic unit was placed at Fire Station 210, the existing unit was also moved to Fire Station 203 on Cameron Mills Road, where it is most needed.

I am pleased that we now have the appropriate public safety capability in place at Fire Station 210, and I am confident that the men and women of the unit will protect the safety of their neighbors for years to come.

Data Drives Good Decisions

Providing accountable results to the residents of Alexandria for their tax investment is an obligation of government. To support that accountability, government must have good data. We have now made another large step forward as we work to better collect more relevant data to measure how we provide City services.

[Nearly a decade ago, then City Manager Jim Hartmann introduced the Managing for Results Initiative, known as "MFRI."](#) MFRI categorized our City services into programs and activities that could be measured and reported. The budget format was then revised so that the proposed budget aligned expenditures to those programs and activities. This allowed the City to measure the performance and efficiency of services during the annual budget process.

The previous City Manager, Rashad Young then created the Office of Performance and Accountability (OPA). OPA was designed as an internal consultancy to implement performance improvement and efficiency throughout city government operations.

[We have now taken the next step, as OPA has unveiled the first draft of our regular Performance Reports.](#) These reports cover each of the service areas of the City's Strategic Plan. They provide the performance and quality measures that are expected of City departments, while assisting the Council and City management to make good, data-driven decisions about those services.

[In addition, the Alexandria City Public Schools \(ACPS\) has unveiled a similar performance accountability system called iDashboard.](#) ACPS provides a consolidated dashboard of its key performance indicators to allow parents and community members easy access to this data.

While identifying the metrics to measure the services we provide is an important innovation, we have a long way to go. We must improve the quality of our data, increase the frequency of when it is reported,

and use the data to make better decisions about how we allocate resources. I look forward to continued progress in this area.

New Broadband Infrastructure for Our City

In July, the City took a significant step forward in our efforts to bring new broadband options to Alexandria. As I wrote in May, the Council had supported the idea of issuing an Request for Information (RFI). This RFI would solicit concepts from the private sector for partnership with the City in expanding broadband options, availability, and capabilities.

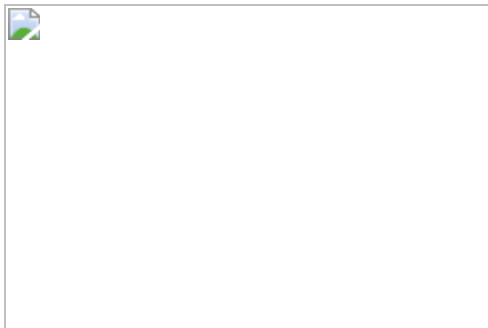
In July, [the RFI was issued and we actively solicited those partnerships](#). The deadline for responses was September 3rd and we received 10 responses from potential private partners.

Last month, [we received the latest update in this effort](#). The City's existing agreement for connectivity between City facilities expires in the fall. Filling the data communications need for City agencies will help provide a framework for satisfying our community's broadband needs. Early this year, the City will issue a Request For Proposal (RFP) to address public needs and use that process to move to the community broadband discussion. You can [watch the Staff presentation and Council discussion online](#).

[About two years ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.](#)

In [Chattanooga, Tennessee, a community of 170,000, a public electricity utility used hundreds of millions of dollars to build thousands of miles of underground fiber](#). In doing so, the utility enabled the residents and businesses of Chattanooga to receive the fastest Internet connectivity in our nation.

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 that company, technological innovation and reliability thrives on competition.



This is an issue that affects not only residents, but also our businesses and the ability of our community to attract commerce.

In 2009, the City made great strides in bringing Verizon FIOS to our City. [Unfortunately, Verizon made the decision to cease any new deployments of FIOS nationally](#) and Alexandria was left out.

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

Potomac Yard Metro: Signed, But Not Yet Sealed, and Not Yet Delivered.

For decades, the City has discussed, planned, and just plain hoped for a Metro Rail station at Potomac Yard.

In May, the City Council [unanimously adopted Alternative B](#) as the site of the future Potomac Yard Metro station. We have now moved

from discussing Metro at Potomac Yard, to designing and building Metro at Potomac Yard.

[Late last month, the Board of Directors of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority \(WMATA\) approved the new station location and formally added the station to the system.](#)

Earlier last month, the Council [approved the formal agreement between the City and the National Park Service](#).



This agreement was necessary to select Alternative B, which requires the use of some National Park Service land. Implementing this agreement will expand National Park Service land, improve existing public spaces, and protect the Memorial Parkway.

We'd like your input on the design themes for the new station. Use [AlexEngage to give us your opinion](#).

In 2008, along with then-Councilman Rob Krupicka, I proposed a new start to efforts to bring Metro to Potomac Yard. We included [language in the City's Transportation Master Plan](#) explicitly calling for a new station at Potomac Yard. We also tied the construction and funding of Metro to the development occurring in the Yard.

The result is [a funding plan for Potomac Yard Metro](#) that not only leverages the development activity in Potomac Yard, but also does so without requiring the contributions of General Fund taxpayers.

The largest environmental, [economic development](#), and transportation initiative in our City's history is being accomplished using [one of the most innovative funding mechanisms used anywhere in the country.](#)

The funding package consists of two [special tax districts](#), tax increment funding, [Northern Virginia Transportation Authority regional funding](#), [a Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Board loan](#), and a developer contribution.

It is designed to use the development in Potomac Yard to pay for Metro in Potomac Yard, not the City's General Fund taxpayers.

In October the City Council approved [the Oakville Triangle and Corridor Vision Plan](#). This laid out a new framework for the development of a 19 acre parcel of property just across Route 1 from Potomac Yard.

In approving this plan, I asked that the Council consider the possibility of including this land area in one of the special tax districts that have been created to fund a portion of the Metro project. [Inclusion of the Oakville Triangle property in this district can generate just over \\$700,000 by 2025, and \\$9.6 million by 2035.](#)

The Planning Commission will consider this change next week, and it will come to the City Council later this month, when we consider whether to approve the zoning for the overall Oakville Triangle plan.

[The Potomac Yard Metro project will leverage the creation of up to 26,000 new jobs and will bring up to \\$2 billion of new tax revenue to the City. It removes thousands of vehicles from one of the most crowded corridors in our City. It promotes the creation of the kind of walkable community our City has long desired in Potomac Yard.](#)

Once the Environmental Impact Statement process concludes with a Record of Decision, the construction efforts can commence. The Record of Decision is the formal federal document that outlines all of the agreed upon mitigation to any potential impacts that will result from the project.

I serve as a member of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Group (PYMIG). [In September, the group received the latest schedule for the station construction, reflecting the beginning of the Design/Build procurement process next summer, with a station opening in early 2020.](#)

As the City focuses on efforts to erase the structural imbalance in our budget, the successful completion of this project is a key component in that effort.

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!

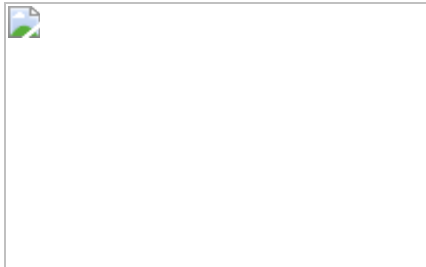
Upcoming Issues

Schools of the Future

In many ways the adoption of our annual budget is actually the adoption of two budgets, our operating budget for the upcoming fiscal year, and the adoption of our Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

This year, we are adopting an operating budget for Fiscal Year 2017, which begins July 1, 2016 and concludes June 30, 2017. We are also adopting a CIP for Fiscal Years 2017 through 2026.

As I wrote about last month, we are working as a city to address a chronic under investment in our infrastructure. Nowhere is that under investment more apparent than in our schools. While crumbling infrastructure would be bad enough, the challenge is exacerbated by rapidly growing enrollment.



The School Board adopts an operating budget and a CIP that serves as a request for funding to the City Council. [This year, as a process improvement, the School Board has adopted their CIP earlier than usual. It was adopted in the middle of last month.](#)

[Attempting to meet the challenge of growing enrollment, the proposed CIP by retrofits leased space on the West End to expand elementary school capacity. It works to meet the needs of our early learners by creating a new early childhood learning center in collaboration with private partners.](#)

It includes new modular classrooms at Polk Elementary, a rebuild of Douglas MacArthur Elementary, a modernization of Cora Kelly Elementary, a rebuild of George Mason Elementary, classroom expansions at Minnie Howard School, and a new specialized secondary academy in leased space.

The Board has proposed an ambitious plan to address the significant challenges that we are facing. It is creative, and I certainly support

the general direction. Yet the plan has a very steep price tag at a very challenging time.

In the next fiscal year alone, there is a \$12.5 million gap between what the City included in our CIP for this year and what the School Board has requested. Over the next five years, that gap is \$78.8 million.

Bridging a gap of that size will not be an insignificant undertaking for both the City Council and School Board. While the Council and Board have made good progress in narrowing the gap over the past few years, ultimately some very difficult decisions await us. A penny on the City's real estate tax rate in the current fiscal year was roughly \$3.6 million. Increases in debt must be very judicious, given the impacts this can have on debt service.

[Let me know what thoughts you have as we approach these decisions.](#)

Subdivisions are Divisive

As in most communities, [property throughout Alexandria is classified by a series of zones.](#) Each of the zones have certain rights and restrictions that the landowner possesses along with the property. Plots of land are also divided in lots, which depending on the size, characteristics and zoning give the landowner certain rights.

City Council is typically a policy making body. But there are a few situations where the Council is thrust into a ministerial role, where we must apply a law in a literal form. The ability of landowners to subdivide a lot is one of those situations. Lately this has been an area of growing controversy for our community and the Council.

An application to subdivide is a simple request, to take an existing lot and make it two or more lots by shifting and adding property lines. Once application is made by a property owner, the Department of Planning and Zoning will make a recommendation to the Planning Commission, and the Planning Commission [will apply the City's subdivision ordinance](#) and decide whether to allow the subdivision. The Planning Commission's decision can then be appealed to the City Council by those unhappy with what the decision might be.

A little over a decade ago, the owner of a property on N. Latham Street applied to the City to subdivide a property so that he could build two homes where there was one. The staff supported the application, albeit with some conditions. The Planning Commission heard the case and decided instead to deny approval of the subdivision due to concerns about how the subdivision would change the character of the neighborhood.

[The applicant then appealed to the City Council. The Council heard the appeal and unanimously upheld the Planning Commission's denial of the application.](#)

At this point, the applicant appealed to Circuit Court. On motions the Circuit Court initially ruled in part for the landowner in saying that the City could not consider the future structure that could be built in deciding whether to approve or deny the subdivision. At trial the Circuit Court ruled in favor of the City on the remainder of the dispute.

Yet, the applicant appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court. [After hearing the case, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled against the City.](#) The case, the so-called "Seymour" case, has changed how the City views these subdivision applications and sharply limited the analysis.

[Faced with continued pressure from infill residential development, and concerns about "mansionization" in our neighborhoods, the City](#)

[created an Infill Task Force that made a series of changes to give the City new tools to address these challenges](#)

Yet, these difficult cases continue. [Last month, the Council heard an appeal of the Planning Commission's approval of a subdivision on Vassar Road.](#) In this case, the application again divided the neighborhood, and the conflict centered on whether the criteria for subdivision were met.

[In this case, the appeal was denied by the Council, which upheld the Planning Commission's decision to grant the subdivision.](#)

As I said when I voted to deny the appeal, it is my view that this area of the City's zoning code needs more work. If we are to both comply with Virginia law and provide our property owners with the protection they are requesting, we need to adopt an ordinance that is more straightforward and predictable.

That will not be an easy undertaking.

Neighborhood Parks

The City has been underway with a community effort to create new plans for the future of our parks. Last year, the Council adopted [the Citywide Parks Plan for our larger parks.](#)

Upon the conclusion of the Citywide plan, we began the process to plan our Neighborhood Parks, which range from a half an acre up to 10 acres.

That process is now nearing conclusion. The [draft plan is being circulated for consideration by the Parks and Recreation Commission and later the City Council.](#)

While these plans are ambitious and will take many years to fund and execute, it is important to adopt a framework for improvements to these critical public spaces. [Let me know your thoughts on the draft plans.](#)

Exciting Finds on the Waterfront

A key component of the approved Waterfront Small Area Plan was the [Alexandria Waterfront History Plan.](#) The History Plan documented the rich history of the waterfront and laid out a framework for inclusion of that history in the next phase of Alexandria's waterfront.

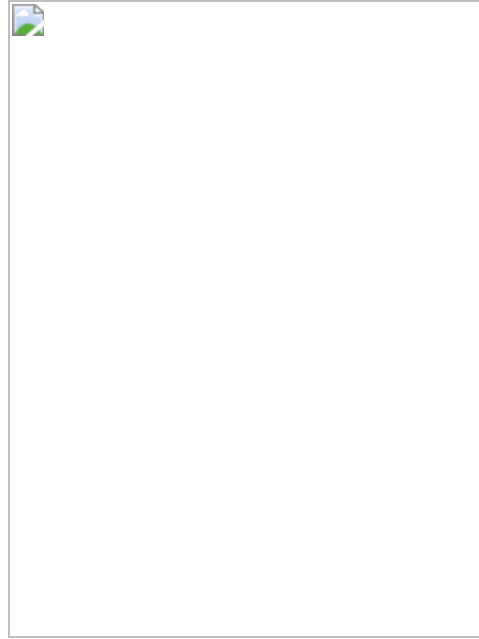
Central to that plan was an archaeological plan to ensure that the landowners of the three waterfront development sites engaged professionals to assist in the reclamation of history that might be found during excavation efforts.

With the development work at 220 S. Union Street underway to create the [new Indigo Hotel,](#) the efforts have yielded exciting findings from Alexandria's history.

Most recently, excavations have yielded a ship's hull, which appears to have been buried during the late 18th Century. That is in addition to the previous find of a 1755 warehouse that was built at the behest of the Trustees of Alexandria.

The City has engaged professionals from around the region to assist with the excavation, analysis, and conservation of these finds.

It is expected that additional waterfront development work will yield other exciting reminders of our history.



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