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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

Vice Mayor Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

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On Tuesday, the City Council had its last meeting of the fiscal year. We now begin our recess for the summer.

As we begin the summer, we have the opportunity to recognize great accomplishments in our City.

[A few weeks ago, 667 T.C. Williams students](#) received the diplomas and will move on to the next phase of their lives.

The United States Secretary of Education, John B. King, was on hand to celebrate the accomplishments of the Class of 2016.

[Leading the way was valedictorian Laura Wilcox, and salutatorian Hannah Bates.](#) Both Laura and Hannah set the standard for the Class of 2016 and I have no doubt they will be successful in the future. Laura will continue her studies at Swarthmore this fall, and Hannah will head off to the University of Virginia.

[The City also marked a momentous occasion for another graduate of T. C. Williams High School. Chief Earl Cook of the Alexandria Police Department announced his retirement effective October 1st.](#)

Chief Cook will conclude a 37 year career with the Alexandria Police Department. After graduating from T. C. Williams as a member of the historic Titans football team and Duke University, Chief Cook returned to his hometown.



[Alexandria Health Department
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Events/Updates

Alexandria Birthday Party Next Saturday

[The summer tradition
continues as we celebrate
in style Alexandria's 267th
Birthday at Oronoco Bay
Park on the Waterfront.](#)

The festivities kick off at 6:30 PM with 9:30 PM fireworks accompanied by the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra, and the men and women of the United States Marine Corps from Quantico.

I will see you there and I look forward to serving you some cupcakes to help celebrate the City's birthday!

Drug Take Back

Do you have unwanted or expired prescription medications?

The Alexandria Sheriff's Department, in cooperation with the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria and The Neighborhood Pharmacy, will be conducting another "Drug Take Back" event.

[On Saturday, July 16th from 10 AM until 2 PM at The Neighborhood Pharmacy \(2204 Mount Vernon Avenue\), you may drop any of these medications that you might have.](#)

He has given a lifetime of service to our community, including his tenure as Chief since 2009. Alexandria is a safer place thanks to his work.

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

Council Initiatives

How Many Police Do We Need?

In April, [the Alexandria Police Department closed the books on 2015](#). The Department announced that in 2015, total Part 1 Crime (the most serious offenses) decreased by 2.4%. Overall, the City's Part 1 crime is at rates last seen during the 1960s. While there were increases in aggravated assaults, burglaries and larcenies decreased.

While Alexandria is certainly a city not immune to serious crime, the report showed that our community generally is a safe one. While the financial challenges of the past decade have battered nearly every service in City government, the City Councils have ensured that public safety funding is prioritized.

Today, the Alexandria Police Department has an authorized sworn force of 304 officers. Over a decade ago, in the FY 2006 budget, the authorized sworn strength was 316.

Look around the region, our neighbors vary in their staffing. [Arlington County today has 360 sworn officers](#) with a population of 216,700. [Fairfax County has 1,359 sworn officers](#) with a population of 1,116,246. [Prince William County has 660 sworn officers](#) with a population of 428,329.

With that rudimentary analysis, Alexandria at 153,511 residents has the highest sworn staffing ratio of our neighbors (per population).

How many is the right number? How many police officers do we need to keep our community safe?

To try to arrive at that number, the City contracted with the [International Association of the Chiefs of Police](#), which happens to be located here in Alexandria. The result of this engagement was [a comprehensive study on Alexandria Police Department staffing in the patrol and investigations areas](#).

Rather than simply looking at the City's population and geography and making comparisons to neighboring jurisdictions, the study instead examined a year's worth of data from the Police Department's Computer Aided Dispatch system. They examined how officers use their time and how that is different for the varied types of situations police officers address in our City.



This study made many significant recommendations, including:

- Increases in staffing within Patrol
- Increase community policing
- Reduce vacancies
- Change "Back-Up" unit response
- Re-evaluate specialized assignments

While these changes would likely be costly, the report also examines ways that these costs can be offset by reallocating resources within

The event is free and anonymous.

First Thursday Returns!

Next Thursday is the next "First Thursday" of the year!

[The Del Ray Business Association continues the tradition from 6 - 9 PM on Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray.](#)

This month's theme is "Red, White & Blue."

Tons of Trucks

[Back by popular demand! On Saturday July 16th, the City will hold our "Tons of Trucks" event at Chinguapin Park \(3210 King Street\) from 10 AM until 1 PM.](#)

This family event brings 30 different vehicles from 7 City departments, including a fire engine, police cars, front end loaders, dump trucks, buses and more!

Food truck vendors will be on hand. The event is \$5 each or \$15 for the entire family.

Sunday Library Hours Return

Fiscal Year 2017 began today. In adopting our Fiscal Year 2017 budget, the City Council included funding to restore Sunday hours to Burke, Duncan and Barrett libraries.

[Beginning next Sunday, the 10th, those three libraries will be open from 1 PM until 5 PM each Sunday. That will match the Sunday hours of Beatley Library.](#)

Please take the opportunity to enjoy the expanded availability of our great system of libraries.

Del Ray Music Festival!

[On Saturday July 23rd, the Del Ray Music Festival returns!](#)

the Department.

With the report now received, our Department will be evaluating each recommendation to determine how and if they will be implemented. This discussion will continue as a component of our upcoming budget process.

With the upcoming leadership change in the department, it will be important to organize and staff our police to be successful in keeping the residents and visitors of Alexandria safe.

Helping Small Businesses Succeed

A 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.

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.

[Last month, 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.](#)

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 a unpredictable process that introduces both cost and uncertainty to a nascent small business who can rarely avoid either.

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 conditions), 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.](#)

From 3 PM until 8 PM, music will take over the neighborhood. Admission is free. Performances will be on stages at Pat Miller Square (the location of the farmers market).

I'll see you there!

Waterfront Construction Meeting

[In April, I provided an update of the public space planning for the future of our waterfront.](#)

On Thursday July 6th, in the Sister Cities Room (Room 1101) of City Hall (301 King Street), the developer of Robinson Terminal South will be hosting a pre-construction meeting.

The meeting will begin at 6:30 PM, and provide details on the impact of the construction activities for what will become [Robinson Landing](#).

Water Quality

[In March, I provided an overview of our water quality.](#)

Since that time, the Alexandria City Public Schools, along with the Alexandria Health Department, and Virginia American Water Company have conducted an assessment of the presence of lead in water in our schools.

[After the assessment of each school in the system, it was determined that no school had lead that was above the level deemed "actionable" by the Environmental Protection Agency.](#)

Request a Bike Rack

Know a good place in the City where we should place a bike rack?

[Let us know!](#)

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

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.

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

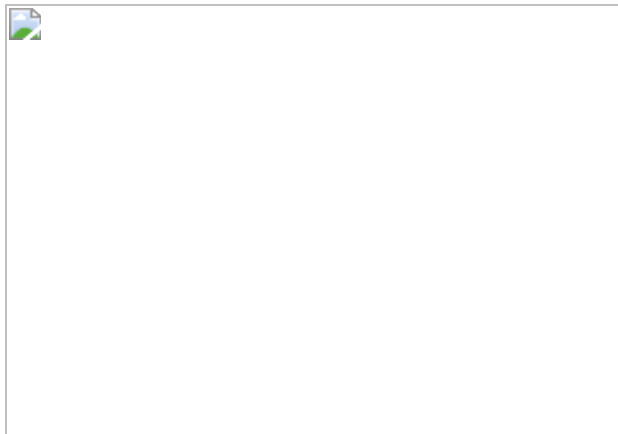
Where Do Your Tax Dollars Go?

I have now been a part of adopting six City budgets as a member of the Council. Each year, I try to find new ways to engage residents in the process, and increase understanding of budget priorities and trade-offs.

Last year, I worked with the staff in our City's Office of Management and Budget to create a new [Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#).

Modeled after the [Federal Taxpayer Receipt](#), this website will take the assessed value of your home and detail how much of your real estate tax is going to the various programs and services of City government.

Today marks the start of Fiscal Year 2017. Accordingly, we have updated the receipt to reflect the newly enacted budget. Give it a try and let me know how you like it!



Connecting With National Harbor

When the new Wilson Bridge opened nearly a decade ago, it concluded one of the largest infrastructure efforts ever undertaken.

[One of the key components in the project was the inclusion of capacity to allow transit service to traverse the bridge](#). While improving the capacity of one of the most important vehicle crossings was certainly the goal, [the City had long pushed](#) to ensure that transit capacity was a component of the project.

Yet today, there is no transit using the bridge to connect National Harbor and Alexandria.

Later this year, the [MGM National Harbor Casino](#) is preparing to open across the Potomac River. The new casino is a \$1.3 billion project projected to draw 9,000,000 visitors a year. This is roughly 2.5 times Alexandria's annual visitation.

In March, [the Council endorsed the recommendations of the City's MGM Readiness Task Force](#). One of the ideas considered, but not

Racks are installed on a seasonal basis and cannot be installed on private property.



Become A Police Officer

The Alexandria Police Department will be hosting exams to evaluate those who wish to become Alexandria Police Officers.

On Saturday, July 9th, the Department will host exams at 7 AM at 3600 Wheeler Avenue.

This is the first step in the hiring process. [Find out more details online!](#)

recommended initially (largely due to cost), was a transit connection. We now have that opportunity.

With the cooperation of the City, Prince George's County, Fairfax County, the Maryland Department of Transportation, the developer of National Harbor (The Peterson Companies), and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), a new Metrobus route has been proposed.



[The proposed NH2 route will run on 30 minute head-ways, beginning at 6 AM and ending at 1 AM, seven days a week.](#)

The route will connect downtown National Harbor, the new MGM Casino, the Oxon Hill Park-and-Ride with both Huntington Metro in Fairfax County and the King Street Metro in Alexandria.

This is initially proposed as a nine month pilot effort to be evaluated in the spring for permanency.

Last week, the Council endorsed this effort and allocated funding to support its operation. I am excited to see this new transit connection proposed and I look forward to its success.

Potomac Yard Metro Moves Forward

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

This past month, the City had achieved two major milestones in the effort to bring this station to reality. Last month, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the land-use applications for the construction of the station itself. [The Council scheduled a special meeting and adopted the approvals as recommended.](#)

Earlier in June, [the Final Environmental Impact Statement was completed.](#) With [the release of the full document,](#) a 30-day public review is under way and concludes on July 11th.

[In May of last year, 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.

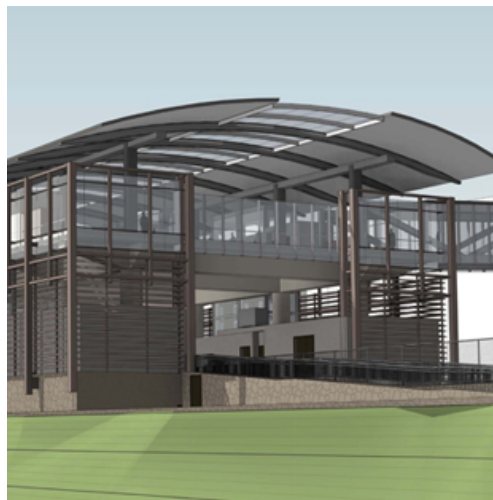
[Last year, the Board of Directors of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority \(WMATA\) approved the new station location and formally added the station to the system.](#)

[A few months ago, the Council approved revisions to 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.

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 today 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.

[The Potomac Yard Metro project will facilitate 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.](#)

Later this year, the Federal Record of Decision should be issued. 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.

Along with Councilman Smedberg, I serve as a member of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Group (PYMIG). [In September of last year, 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.](#)

In advance of the issuance of the procurement agreements next year, the City Council will finalize the mix of funding sources, as well as consider any changes.

Successful completion of this project is a key component in our efforts to promote a stronger economic future for our City. I am excited to see how far we have come.

Fund Balance Policy For Our Schools

In May, [the City Council adopted its budget](#) which included \$206.6 million of operating funds for the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS).

[By law, the City Council can appropriate this money in a lump sum, or in a few defined categories.](#) Most jurisdictions, including Alexandria, appropriate money to their school systems in a lump sum. By the Code, the School Board largely has authority for how those funds are then utilized. State law, as interpreted by courts throughout Virginia, [gives the School Board broad latitude on how they expend those funds.](#)

In 2013, there were a [few published reports](#) about "surplus" funds that materialized in the School Board's budget at the end of our shared fiscal year. While we plan for budget surpluses within both the City and the Schools (as a shortfall is not an option), I believe the situation pointed out the need for better communication to the community.



In an attempt to bring greater transparency to the process, I proposed the creation of a Fund Balance policy between the City and the School Board. The goal was to formalize our current practice to ensure shared understanding.

The result of this request was a new Fund Balance Policy that was adopted by the School Board in May and endorsed by the City Council that very same month.

[The adopted policy](#) allows ACPS to develop a conservative reserve, use a portion of their fund balance for the current fiscal year, a portion for the following fiscal year, and a portion for unforeseen shortfalls. Anything beyond those designated areas is utilized to fund capital efforts.

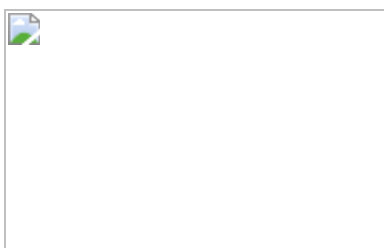
I am confident that this new policy will make both the City and ACPS budget processes even more transparent and understandable for the taxpayers who fund these important priorities.

Ready for SafeTrack

Once the crown jewel of the Washington, DC region, Metrorail is experiencing a very difficult time. While the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has numerous challenges, the most serious and pressing are related to safety.

Metro is a basic building block of our region's economy. If there is a perception that the system is unsafe, then that can be crippling to the region.

The new General Manager of WMATA, Paul Wiedefeld, is aggressively working to tackle these challenges. [WMATA finalized the Safe Track Plan, designed to concentrate three years of work into one year.](#)



Advancing this work requires expanded time when the system is not operating. To make this happen, extended weekend hours have been discontinued, new mid-day maintenance will occur, and most importantly, a series of "surges" will occur across the system.

There will be two "Safety Surges" this month that will directly impact Alexandria. [Safety Surge 3 will occur from July 5th through July 11th.](#) During this time, there will be no Metrorail service on the Blue and Yellow lines between Braddock Road and National Airport stations.

[Safety Surge 4 will occur from July 12th through July 18th.](#) During this time, there will be no Metrorail service on the Blue and Yellow lines between National Airport and Pentagon City.

[Working with WMATA, DASH, and other local partners, we have come up with a series of alternatives to assist Alexandria riders in their commutes.](#)

While I recognize how difficult these closures will be for our residents, I am hopeful that the result will be a safer Metro.

A New Landmark

Sixteen years ago, 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, those three properties are assessed at \$24 million, \$13.4 million, and \$10.6 million, respectively. They generate about \$500,000 in real estate tax today.

To make the situation even more severe, real estate tax is only a portion of the picture. The reduction in revenues for sales tax, dining tax, and other business taxes has also been dramatic at this site.

There is no clearer demonstration of the City's financial challenges than the predicament that currently faces Landmark Mall.

In 2009, the City Council approved the [Landmark/Van Dorn Small Area Plan](#). This plan laid out a comprehensive vision for the redevelopment of the entire corridor, including the properties on the existing Mall site.

The bankruptcy of one of the owners, unfavorable market conditions, and the complexity of the relationship between the three owners on the site resulted in little action for several years.

After taking over ownership of the mall site, The Howard Hughes Corporation [received approval by the Planning Commission and City Council in June of 2013 for a redevelopment of that site](#). A slower than expected leasing market has slowed that company's intentions to redevelop.

Last year, 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](#).

While nobody should be convinced until they see bulldozers knocking down the existing mall site, there is a lot going on. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but I believe we can be cautiously optimistic that it is finally coming together.

- [Mill Creek is now engaged to handle the residential portion of the redevelopment](#).
- There have been discussions between the City and Howard Hughes about potential public/private partnerships that will help spur the redevelopment.
- Sears created a new Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) to maximize value out of their remaining real estate. [The Landmark Mall Sears store property is now owned by the new REIT](#).
- Howard Hughes has aggressively marketed the future redevelopment to potential tenants, including many quality retail outlets.

The redevelopment of the Landmark Mall site has been a long time coming. I am optimistic that we are finally making real progress in this effort coming to reality.

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!

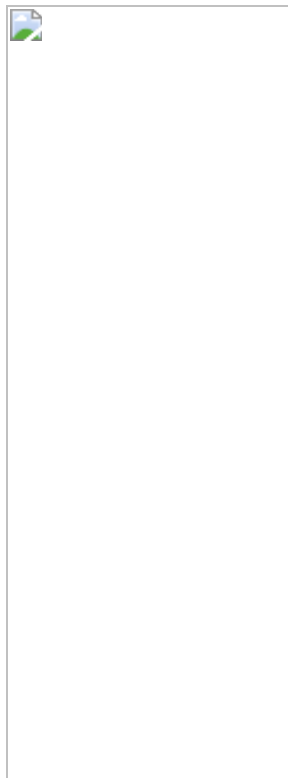
Upcoming Issues

The Future of Cameron Run

The [Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority](#) (NVRPA) was created in the late 1950s as a public land conservation agency serving our region.

Today, the NVRPA is jointly funded and owned by Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun County, as well as the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church.

[The authority today owns over 10,000 acres of land and serves the dual purpose of land conservancy and recreation agency with parks around the area.](#)



In Alexandria, NVRPA manages [Cameron Run Regional Park \(which is actually owned by the City of Alexandria\)](#), and owns and manages [Carlyle House in Old Town](#).

In full disclosure, during my 3.5 years off of City Council, I served as one of Alexandria's representatives on the NVRPA Board.

Cameron Run is a very active recreational park, with a wave pool, water slides, batting cages, etc. The property is very profitable for the authority and the [existing 40-year lease with the City expires in 2021](#).

Carlyle House is a historic site, with historical interpretation conducted by volunteers and NVRPA staff. NVRPA heavily subsidizes the operation of Carlyle House.

A few years ago, NVRPA came to Alexandria seeking to construct a new aquatics feature at Cameron Run. In order to finance the project, an extension to the lease was required.

Prior to the issuance of any new lease, the City's Park and Recreation Commission sought to explore alternative uses for the property, as well as address some issues with the existing use.

In the intervening time, the authority came to the City with a new proposal. [NVRPA obtained an option to purchase 517 Prince Street](#) in Old Town. [This historic property](#) operated a livery stable from 1772 - 1792 and has remained in the ownership of one family for 184 years. It is in remarkably good shape.

After some negotiation, a tentative agreement was negotiated to extend the lease at Cameron Run for 20 years (cancelling the existing lease). In exchange, NVRPA will purchase 517 Prince Street and operate it as a historic site similar to Carlyle House.

Last month, the Council held a public hearing on this proposal and ultimately directed our staff to come back this fall with a framework for how we might plan the future of the Cameron Run site.

While this likely ends the consideration of the purchase of the 517 Prince Street property, it does provide the City an opportunity to more clearly focus on the opportunities for the future of Cameron Run and work with NVRPA and other partners to bring that vision to reality.

Bidding on a BID

A few months ago, I wrote about the work of the City's Waterfront Commission. The Commission was working to determine the governance and funding for programming and improvements in the new public spaces on our waterfront.

[At the time, the committee had looked at a variety of different options to partner with private landowners and business owners to fund public improvements and programming for these important public spaces.](#)

This conversation has now merged with advocacy for the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) for Old Town. If the City Council were to authorize a BID, business owners in the district would pay a higher real estate tax rate. The additional revenue would support a new entity that would annually provide a budget to the City Council for approval.

This idea was pursued several years ago, but efforts ended when there was not sufficient support from the businesses who would ultimately pay the tax.

The idea is back again, with business community support.

[During the budget process, my colleague Councilman Chapman, successfully proposed allocating funding to study the idea more thoroughly.](#) This would provide a series of recommendations if the Council chooses to pursue implementation.

I believe that Business Improvement Districts have been very successful tools across the country. They help leverage private investment and encourage small business growth. I look forward to further consideration of this concept.

Ramsey Moves On

The most difficult issues on the City Council are when two valued policy areas end up in direct conflict with each other, forcing the Council to choose the one that is ultimately more important.

Since September, the Council has been facing such an issue. The potential redevelopment of the Ramsey Homes public housing development is such a conflict, pitting the City's commitment to historic preservation against the City's commitment to the creation and preservation of affordable housing. When you add concerns regarding density and open space to the mix, the situation becomes a volatile issue.

The [Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority \(ARHA\)](#) is an independent entity, separate from the City (although the Council does appoint its Board of Commissioners), that utilizes Federal funding from the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) to provide housing to low-income residents of Alexandria.

ARHA directly manages and controls 1,079 units of affordable housing. 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. This is approximately 4% of the City'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 utilized [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 in 2016, the Federal Government is forcing changes in public housing with its inaction. Today, HUD only funds 73% of every dollar 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 with the effects of sequestration, this is likely to get worse.

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

Over 30 years ago, the City Council adopted [Resolution 830](#), which required the replacement of any public housing unit that was displaced by redevelopment. In past redevelopment efforts, replacement units have been obtained and created throughout 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.

Today, under 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 have 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.

[One of the properties that ARHA removed from the RFP process was Ramsey Homes. Ramsey Homes, which includes 15 total public housing units, consists of four buildings on N. Patrick Street between Wythe and Pendleton Streets. ARHA made the decision to pursue redevelopment of Ramsey Homes independently without a partner using Virginia Housing Development Authority \(VHDA\) tax credits. ARHA initially pursued an application to build 60 units of](#)

affordable housing on the site. After consultations with City staff, they began pursuing an application for 53 units of affordable housing.

Ramsey Homes was constructed beginning in 1941 and acquired by the Federal Government for defense housing. Maps from the time describe it specifically as a home for African-Americans. In 1953, ARHA purchased the property and it has been operated as public housing since that time.

The property is not in good condition and requires significant renovation to meet current standards. There is consensus that without replacement or renovation, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will no longer provide financial support for the units in the near term.

Given that Ramsey Homes is in the Parker-Gray Historic District, any demolition applications are heard by the Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review (BAR). [In April of last year, the BAR heard the case and unanimously voted to deny the permit to demolish the existing homes.](#)

Obviously, without permission to demolish, the redevelopment could not proceed, and ARHA would either have had to renovate or close down Ramsey Homes.

As such, ARHA appealed the BAR's decision to the City Council. In September, the Council heard the case and voted to overturn the BAR by a vote of 5-2. In doing so, the Council requested that ARHA explore alternatives to full demolition.

Since that vote, litigation was filed challenging the Council's decision to allow demolition. Additionally, City staff analyzed the ARHA proposal, as well as an alternative with a few less units and some preservation.

In February, [ARHA came back to the City Council with their original proposal of 53 units.](#) The proposal consisted of a Development Special Use Permit, a rezoning, and a master plan amendment.

Under the City's Charter and Zoning Code, neighbors of the Ramsey property signed a petition protesting the potential rezoning. With the protest deemed valid, the City Council is required to have six votes in order to pass the amendment to the master plan.

The day before the hearing, ARHA requested deferral of the Development Special Use Permit, but still requested approval of the master plan amendment and the rezoning.

[In the end the master plan amendment passed 6-1, the rezoning passed 5-2 \(but failed to have the six votes required, and the Development Special Use Permit was deferred as requested.](#)

However, that was not the end of the story.

[As the dust settled on the vote,](#) my colleague Councilman Smedberg made a request at the next Council meeting to rescind the vote. That request passed unanimously, which essentially wipes the slate clean.

In March, the zoning and master plan amendment were back before the Council. This time, Council approved them both unanimously.

The ARHA Redevelopment Work Group, which I serve on along with Councilman Chapman, the ARHA Chair, the ARHA Vice Chair and the Planning Commission Chair, [has been working since that time to develop alternatives.](#)

[Earlier this week, the work group brought two scenarios to the Council: the original proposal and an alternative that preserved one of the four original buildings. The preservation of the one building](#)

[was funded using Federal Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\) funds.](#)

Faced with these alternatives, the Council instead proposed a third choice. [The unanimous Council ultimately decided that the preservation alternative was not advantageous and instead directed our staff to work with ARHA to prepare a new alternative that creates 52 new affordable housing units, a new plot of open space, and reorients the building on the site.](#)

[This has been a very unfortunate time for our City](#) and for the City Council. I'm excited that in the end we have coalesced around a proposal that satisfies many of the goals of our community.

Let me know your thoughts!

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