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Alexandria, Virginia

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The summer has arrived!

Last week the City Council began its recess, with our next legislative meeting scheduled for the beginning of September.

I had the honor of attending the T. C. Williams Class of 2018 graduation last month.

The 793 graduates comprise one of the largest classes in recent memory. Congrats to Valedictorian Jackson du Pont and Salutatorian Jonah Horowitz. Jackson will be continuing his studies at Yale University in the fall, and Jonah moves on to Amherst College.



[This is also a summer of transition in our schools. Dr. Lois Berlin concludes her interim period as our Superintendent. Today, Dr. Gregory Hutchings begins his tenure as our new Superintendent.](#)

We are grateful for Dr. Berlin's return to ACPS over the past year, and we are excited for Dr. Hutchings leadership for years to come!

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

Council Initiatives

High School Capacity

When Alexandria's students came back to school in the fall of 2009, [there were 2,233 students at T. C. Williams High School's King Street campus \(10th, 11th and 12th grades\) and 688 students at the Minnie](#)

[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

Events/Updates

The Campaign

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

Last month [I was successful in winning the Democratic nomination](#), and I will be on the ballot this November.

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

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

Alexandria Birthday Party Next Saturday

[The summer tradition continues as we celebrate in style Alexandria's 269th 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 "Old Guard" from Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall.

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

Complete Streets Feedback

As the City prepares to repave streets, we look to

[Howard campus](#) (9th grade). The combined 2,921 students across four grades was after several years of stagnant enrollment numbers.

When school started this past fall, [there were 3,949 students across the four grades at T. C. Williams High School](#). Not only is T. C. Williams High School [the largest four grade high school in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the next largest school has a thousand less students!](#)

The configuration of the future of high school capacity will be one of the most important issues that our City works through over the next few years. In approving the most recent 10-year Capital Improvement Program, [the School Board included \\$124 million spread over 3 years to address high school capacity](#). This is a portion of the overall capital funding that the City Council provided for the School Board in our most recently approved budget.

The Board's approved Capital Improvement Program assumes an opening of a new high school facility during Fiscal Year 2023 (begins July 1, 2022). With the money in place, we must now determine the location and configuration of that new capacity.

[The City's decision to allocate significant resources to high school capacity began several years ago with requests for resources to add classrooms to the Minnie Howard campus](#). Ultimately that request would have only been a stop-gap, as we would have spent tens of millions of dollars to add capacity to a building that was not intended for high school use and would not have resolved the capacity challenges.

With the funding now in place for a more comprehensive answer to high school capacity, [the School Board is now commencing a process to develop options and explore alternatives as to how high school capacity might be accommodated in the future](#).

The City Council and School Board recently [approved the second phase of the Long Range Educational Facilities Plan](#). This phase focused on high school and early childhood education facilities and provided a series of recommendations for addressing capacity challenges for both.

[The Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Facilities Investment Task Force included resources to address high school capacity in their recommendations, but paired the resources with policy recommendations.](#)

The residents of our City have offered a variety of ideas for how we might configure this additional capacity. [Some residents support a rebuild of Minnie Howard, with a transition from a 9th grade center to one that houses 9th and 10th grades](#). Others have suggested that additional capacity be built on the existing King Street campus: either the site of the existing



stadium, in conjunction with a rebuild of the Chinquapin Recreation Center or on the Chinquapin Park circle. Other residents have advocated a totally separate four-grade high school elsewhere in the City. Some have suggested that we obtain capacity outside of the King Street and Minnie Howard campuses for discrete programs (STEM Academy, International Academy, etc) to relieve pressure.

As we enter a new era of joint collaboration and investment in partnership with the Alexandria City Public Schools, this project will be a crucial test of our ability to work together and work to satisfy multiple municipal needs on a single site.

take the opportunity to improve safety at the same time.

[Please give us your feedback on several streets that are on the schedule for repaving, so that we can make our streets safer!](#)

Rosemont 4th of July

[After a short hiatus, the Rosemont Citizens Association is reviving the annual Independence Day celebration!](#)

This year the event gets underway at 10 AM on Wednesday at the Maury Elementary field.

Complete with a baby beauty contest, bike decorating contest, lots of food and more, this event is not to be missed!

Del Ray Music Festival!

[On Saturday July 14th, the Del Ray Music Festival returns!](#)

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) and the Bean Creative Stage (2200 Mount Vernon Avenue).

Seven Del Ray restaurants will host pop-up beer gardens along the Avenue.

I'll see you there!

Half Day Citizens Police Academy

The Alexandria Police Department is continuing the new "Half Day Summer Citizens Police Academy."

Building on the success of the 10 week Citizens Police Academy, this programs provides an abbreviated half-day session to learn about the inner workings of

While I do believe we must consider all options, I do begin the process skeptical [that sufficient property could be identified for a separate four-grade high school](#), and the equity issues arising from such an effort would not be insignificant.

This is a project that will serve the students of our City for a few generations to come, and the process must reflect the importance of the investment.

Please let me know your thoughts!

Making Plans

The City's Master Plan is made up of [18 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](#).

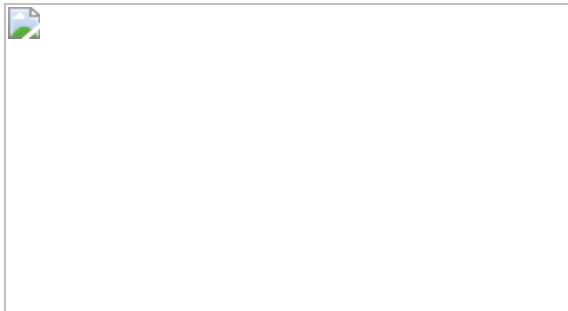
Seventeen years ago, the City Council adopted "[Plan for Planning](#)," a vision for how the community could proactively work to get ahead of development pressures and ensure that our community's vision would shape transition in our neighborhoods.

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.

Last month, the Council adopted our [Interdepartmental Planning Work Program](#), reflecting the planning efforts that will be accomplished in the near term.

Earlier this year, the Council concluded the [Old Town North Small Area Plan](#), a new vision for the area west of, and including, the existing power plant site.

As referenced later in this newsletter, later this year the Planning Commission and Council will take up the [Route 1 South Affordable Housing Strategy](#), a process that is underway with community meetings and a draft plan now available.



This year's work program will take on two significant planning processes, both of which are important efforts for our City's economic

future. This fall, we will be initiating a re-planning effort at the Landmark Mall site. In [my May newsletter](#), I provided an update on the efforts to accelerate Landmark Mall redevelopment. With one entity (Howard Hughes Corporation) now achieving full site control, this upcoming re-planning effort will facilitate a more comprehensive redevelopment of the site.

Next in line will be a planning process to consider revisions to the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan. Eisenhower East was the first of the "Plan for Planning" plans, and revisions are now necessary to reflect new realities in the market.

As we look ahead to the following year, the City will take on revisions to the Mount Vernon Avenue Plans (Del Ray and Arlandria) as well as discussions of an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance to facilitate a new market-based affordability option in our neighborhoods.

the Alexandria Police Department.

[Sign up online!](#)

Parkfairfax Turns 75!

Parkfairfax is celebrating its 75th anniversary!

[On Saturday July 14th, Parkfairfax will be holding a celebration with live music, cake and an outdoor screening of Casablanca.](#)

The event will be at Preston Road and Valley Drive beginning at 5:30 PM.

First Thursday Returns!

Thursday is the "First Thursday."

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

Compost!

In PARKnership with Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, Compost Alex and community volunteers bringing composting to City parks.

[Check out Compost Alex's online Fundraiser and make a contribution!](#)

Cinema Del Ray Returns!

Thanks to the generosity of Realtor Jen Walker, Cinema Del Ray returns on Saturday July 21st.

The monthly free outdoor movie on the field next to Mount Vernon Recreation Center has become a summer tradition.

[This month's movie is "Toy Story 3" and it starts when it's dark enough!](#) As a twist, this month the movie will be in Spanish with English subtitles.

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

Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home

A year and a half ago, I used a [write-up in this newsletter](#) to address concerns that I held about the City's future relationship with the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home.

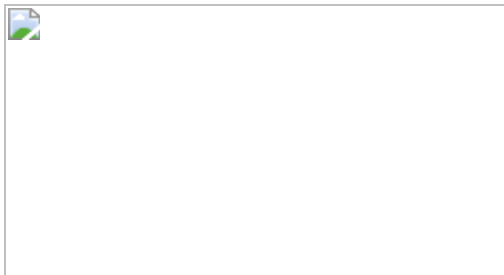
Along with Arlington County and the City of Falls Church, the City owns [the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home](#). Located in Alexandria, the facility has a capacity for 70 children who are awaiting disposition by the juvenile justice system and 10 children who have already received disposition. The home is run by a board with representatives from all three jurisdictions. [There is a school run there by the Alexandria City Public Schools](#).

[The City spends a little over a million dollars each year to contribute to the operation of this facility.](#) The latest data shows that half of the capacity is being utilized with a little over a third of the usage coming from Alexandria.

During recent budget cycles, [additional money has been requested to increase staffing to comply with the Prison Rape Elimination Act \(PREA\)](#). Council chose to defer decisions to allow a larger conversation about the future of the facility to occur. Do we have the ability to partner with other facilities or the state to provide these services?

This conversation the City is having is very much aligned with similar conversations around the Commonwealth.

Driven by lower populations of children committed to the state Juvenile Justice system as well as a desire for better outcomes, the state has worked to reduce capacity as well.



[The Department of Juvenile Justice closed a facility in Culpeper in 2014 and worked to close two larger facilities in the Richmond area.](#) The Department is currently [executing a "Transformation" plan to redirect resources and improve the outcomes for our children.](#)

The Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home has had a long-term arrangement with the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). This agency has been in the news quite a bit of late, and they have the responsibility to house and care for undocumented children. The relationship with ORR had been allowed to lapse early last year.

In the fall, the Board made the decision to renew the relationship with ORR and begin caring for these children at the Home.

Many of these children are said to have suffered trauma in their home nation, or in the journey to ours. I am not convinced that confinement in a secure detention facility is the right place for these children.

With this relationship with the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home ending, I would hope that ORR would find a more appropriate arrangement to protect these children.

I am also hopeful that the three jurisdictions can work together to chart a new future for this facility.

Robbing Peter to Pay Paul

About a year and a half ago, [I wrote in this newsletter about the challenges of funding transportation efforts in our City](#). Specifically, I wrote of the pressure that ever-growing funding demands for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) place on the remainder of our transportation initiatives.

During the 2018 General Assembly session, the legislators adopted legislation to provide Virginia's share of money to support the stabilization of WMATA. This is the long-sought "dedicated funding" for WMATA.

The legislation that was adopted was [a bill from Delegate Tim Hugo](#). This bill is decidedly imperfect, but it does acknowledge the important need to protect Metro as the linchpin of the region's economy.



The key flaw in this Metro funding legislation is that while it does come up with \$154 million of money for WMATA, [it does so by removing \\$100 million of Northern Virginia Transportation Authority \(NVTA\) resources](#). For

Alexandria, these funds are used primarily for transit initiatives, including Potomac Yard Metro, the [West End Transitway](#), and DASH Service expansions.

While the Governor offered amendments to try to correct this flaw, they were rejected in the House of Delegates.

With this legislation now enacted, NVTA has been called upon to do the difficult work of winnowing down the project list of what will be funded. [Unfortunately, the funding plan approved by the NVTA last month removes most of the funding from the West End Transitway and all of the funding from a request to improve bicycle and pedestrian trails.](#)

In addition to the funding impacts of the dedicated funding legislation, the legislation also imposed new restrictions on the operations of WMATA. Specifically, the legislation curtailed the role of the Alternate members of the WMATA Board. [The WMATA Board adopted these changes last week.](#)

Alexandria has historically been allocated an Alternate Director spot on the Board and in Board subcommittees. While there was definitely a need for reforms to the WMATA Board governance, I do not believe that this change will serve Alexandria or the rest of the region particularly well.

Individual General Assembly members have indicated that they will look to tweak the enacted legislation during the 2019 session. I'm hopeful that those efforts will be successful.

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

Route 1 Affordable Housing

In local government the decisions that City Council makes can be very important with significant implications. Sometimes the decisions we do not make can be equally important. Inaction is a decision.

While creating new affordable housing is especially challenging for our City, the preservation of affordable housing units that are ending their designated affordability periods, presents similar constraints.

In the southeast corner of our City, along Route 1, there are 319 affordable housing units that are for various reasons at risk. For 215 of the units, they are under [Project Based Voucher agreements](#) that are on the verge of expiring or have expired. For the remaining 104 units, they are market-rate affordable units that currently accept [Housing Choice Vouchers](#).

Inaction likely means the loss of these affordable units over time. In an attempt to devise proactive measures to maintain the affordability of the housing, the City applied for and received grant funding from the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) to launch the new [Route 1 South Housing Affordability Strategy planning effort](#).

This planning began last year, and is now nearing completion, with a final plan going to the Planning Commission and City Council in the fall.

Early last month, City staff [released the first draft of the plan documents](#). The basic premise of the proposed plan is to use additional density on the site, in partnership with private landowners, to replace the existing affordable housing.

Residents who have been participating in the process have [provided substantial comments and our staff have worked to address those comments](#) in future plan revisions.

A new version of the plan documents will be released shortly, and we'll be working in the fall to finalize this planning effort.

Surplus City Property

In 2007, a blue ribbon commission of residents and business leaders in Alexandria, formally known as the "Mayor's Economic Sustainability Work Group," [made their report to the City Council](#).

One component of their report related to City-owned properties. The report urged that the City create a good accounting of the property we own and dispose of properties that were no longer required to provide municipal services.

After adopting this recommendation, the City hired the national real estate firm Jones, Lang, Lasalle to perform such a review. The review looked at the full inventory of 300+ properties owned by the City. These properties ranged from tiny slivers of land that were completely inaccessible to large multi-block tracts.

The Jones, Lang, Lasalle review [led to a series of recommendations for the Council to pursue](#). They made specific recommendations of properties to dispose of. They also made recommendations of

properties that could be reused for other purposes.

In 2009, the Council adopted these recommendations and began to pursue disposition of the properties that were designated as surplus.

Last week, the City Council approved the sale of the last of the identified properties.

All of the properties are listed below with their disposition:

401 E. Braddock Road (corner of Braddock & Mount Vernon Avenue): This was sold in 2011 for \$280,500.

716 - 718 N. Columbus Street (former residential care home): This was sold in 2012 for \$662,000.

3600 Jefferson Davis Highway (corner of Jefferson Davis & Reed): This was transferred to AHC Inc. (an affordable housing non-profit) to support a new affordable housing development.

200 N. Royal Street (Elder Crafters): This was sold in 2013 for \$1,250,000.

509 N. St. Asaph Street (old Health Department building): This was sold in 2014 for \$5,230,000.

1505 Powhatan Street (corner of Powhatan & Slaters Lane): This was sold in 2014 for \$4,400,000.

0 Prince Street (Beachcomber Restaurant): This was exchanged in 2014 as part of the land swap with the Old Dominion Boat Club.

912, 916, 920 King Street (King at S. Patrick): Last week, [the City Council bundled these properties with 116 S. Henry Street \(an existing parking lot\) and bundled them for sale.](#)

[After a competitive solicitation, the City Council entered into a contingent agreement to sell the properties for \\$5.3 million.](#) This transaction required developer replacement of the existing public parking.

The net proceeds from the completed sales have generated over \$17 million of one-time funds that we have used to fund our Capital Improvement Program. Beyond that, these sales have taken properties that were non-taxable and placed them on the tax rolls, easing the tax burden on residents and business owners throughout our City.

Conversions of Commercial?

Last year, [I wrote about the potential economic crisis facing our City and our region if a severe form of Federal budget austerity were to take hold.](#) Just over a decade ago, we were facing a similar inflection point for our City's economy.

With job growth stalled and commercial development lagging, an ever-growing burden of the cost of government was falling upon our residential taxpayers.

Back then the City convened the Mayor's Economic Sustainability Work Group comprised of deeply experienced City residents to chart a new path to sustained economic growth. [The group provided a detailed report whose recommendations have become a checklist of policy reforms for the City to pursue.](#) In many policy areas, the recommendations reflected conventional wisdom. In some policy areas, they became conventional wisdom.

One such area related to the relative benefits of commercial development versus residential development. The report enshrined a desire to return to "50/50" balance in our tax base between



residential and commercial properties. The report warned against further conversion of commercial properties to residential uses. It even urged that the City explore ways to modify existing zoning to remove residential development rights to ensure that only commercial development occurred.

There is no question that commercial development provides a rich return for the taxpayers of this City. City [analysis shows that all commercial property uses provide a net positive return.](#)

For every dollar of tax revenue from a new hotel in the City, only 7 cents is required to provide services to that hotel. For every dollar of tax revenue from an office use, only 12 cents is required for services to that office use.

This benefit has become ingrained as orthodoxy for most in our City. Conversely it is also accepted as settled fact that residential development provides a net loss for the taxpayers.

Yet, is that true?

With office demand significantly diminished and residential demand still strong and durable, the pressure for landowners to forgo riskier commercial development and focus on residential development is strong.

[To examine the issue, the City and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership studied several office to residential conversions to determine how the taxpayers fared in the aftermath.](#)

The results of the study reversed several of the conclusions from a decade ago.

The Oronoco, [now a multi-family building on the City's waterfront was an office building when it was sold and converted to residential.](#) Sold for \$21 million, the property is now assessed at \$126 million after the conversion, more than covering any additional services required for the residents.

An office building at 4501 Ford Avenue on the West End had sat vacant for the better part of decade. [It was converted to a residential "live/work" concept.](#) It was assessed at \$20 million prior to the conversion. It is now assessed at \$55 million.

The data shows us that on the average for every tax dollar received from multi-family development, 38 cents is required to provide services. This estimate aligns very closely with our student generation rates. Whether children attend school from a property is a major determinant of the financial return.

[Last month the Council approved a conversion on the West End at 4401 Ford Avenue. This project will take an obsolete office building and allow a residential conversion.](#)

So where does this analysis leave us? This is arguably one of the most important land-use questions the City faces. Should the City allow commercially zoned property to remain underutilized or completely unused for decades, or pursue possible conversions to residential to ensure near-term economic growth?

If we are to allow conversion activity, should we also work to align land-use policies to shift incentives and dis-incentives that were codified in a very different market.

For me, I believe that this data shows that the City must be discerning. All residential development is not a net loser for the City taxpayers, but conversely, all of it is not a net winner.

We must continue to promote commercial development in areas that can support new development and redevelopment. Yet residential conversion is an option to address stubborn office vacancy, and done properly, it can help the City's bottom line and help us address housing affordability challenges.

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