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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

Mayor Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

June 1, 2020

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Fifty years ago last week, [Robin Gibson was murdered at the 7-11 at the corner of Commonwealth and Glebe in our City.](#)

The shooting and the miscarriage of justice that followed set off unrest in our community that carried over into the ensuing election and resulted in change in our community.

Yet a half-century later, a murder by a law-enforcement officer a thousand miles away has turned our attention again to the injustices that remain in our community. [Here are my thoughts as to how we move forward as a City.](#)

While we continue our struggle with our nation's original sin, a new crisis continues to face our community. While the COVID-19 outbreak has threatened the lives, well-being and financial stability of so many in our community, as we have at so many inflection points in our history, we will recover.

Two months ago, when I wrote you, 44 of our neighbors had tested positive for COVID-19. A month ago, 754 had tested positive. As of yesterday, 1,974 Alexandrians have tested positive for this virus. Sadly, 44 have lost their lives.

To the families of those who have been lost, you are in our thoughts during this time. I am hopeful that the support of our community for you can be felt during this isolating moment.

Yet, we have made progress:



[Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)

[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

Events/Updates

June 23rd Republican Primary

On Tuesday June 23rd, Virginia Republicans will hold a primary to choose their nominee for the United States Senate.

Given social distancing requirements, the City will not be able to open all polling places. As a result, we are strongly encouraging absentee voting for all voters wishing to participate in this primary.

[The sample ballot is available online.](#)

Voters seeking an absentee ballot [can apply online today.](#)

2020 Census

[So far 66% of Alexandrians have completed the Census questionnaire.](#)

The decennial census is vital for the City to capture a snapshot of our community and support efforts to achieve additional Federal funding in the future.

Please complete your questionnaire today!

ACPS Strategic Plan

Our School Board is working to develop a new Strategic Plan for our schools.

The [draft strategic plan](#) is now available online.

On Tuesday June 9th, the School Board will be

- COVID-19 testing has become widely available, with Alexandria leading the region and the Commonwealth with a high testing rate.
- Our hospitalization rates have remained low.
- Our hospital capacity has remained stable.
- Our positive testing rate continues to trend downwards.
- A week ago we held our largest testing initiative to date, with 2,980 residents being tested for COVID-19 at two sites in the City.

In April, [the Governor released his "Forward Virginia" blueprint](#), which lays out an approach to the easing of the current public health restrictions and details efforts to increase testing capacity and protective equipment. On Friday, we entered Phase 1, the first phase of that easing.

Yet, we are still not out of the woods. The City still has one of the higher infection rates and significant community spread.

[Please continue to support the ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund](#), which is [distributing money](#) into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created.

The latest updates will continue to be posted regularly on the [City's Coronavirus website](#).

[The Virginia Department of Health posts data daily online](#) regarding positive tests, hospitalizations and deaths.

The [Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association is posting daily updates regarding hospital capacity and capabilities](#).

Since the beginning of April, I have been doing a weekly Virtual Living Room Town Hall sessions to answer questions from the public regarding the City's on-going response. You can view the sessions from May online:

[May 7th Living Room Town Hall](#)

[May 14th Living Room Town Hall](#)

[May 21st Living Room Town Hall](#)

[May 28th Living Room Town Hall](#)

Please [join me at this link each Thursday evening at 8 PM to watch and participate live.](#)

Volunteers are needed throughout our community. [Please refer to Volunteer Alexandria for opportunities to give back to those in need.](#)

If you have any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that you can donate, [please submit information online.](#)

[In March, my colleagues and I worked to propose a list of emergency actions to support our residents, our businesses and our municipal finances.](#) These proposed actions are now either in place or in progress. Some are detailed below.

accepting public comment at 12:30 PM and 7:00 PM.

[You can sign-up to speak or submit your comments online today.](#)

Mulch, Delivered

Online leaf mulch delivery orders can be submitted starting today.

Mulch is available in a full or half truckload, and each delivery ranges from \$65 - \$130.

[Deliveries can be scheduled online.](#)

ARHA Voucher Waiting List Open

The Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) has opened their waiting list the Mainstream Voucher program.

[The applications are ONLY available today and tomorrow and they are available online.](#)

Parker Gray High School

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Parker-Gray High School.

The former school educated African-American students for decades in our City.

For both recognition and fundraising, a memorial sidewalk is being installed.

[To purchase a brick, you made do online!](#)

[The entire City Council thanks our community for pulling together during this crisis.](#)

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

Council Initiatives

The City Responds to COVID-19

[If you have the symptoms of being infected with COVID-19, the Coronavirus](#), which include coughing, a fever of over 100.4 F and shortness of breath, please contact your primary care physician for information on an exam and testing. If your physician is not available or you do not have a primary care physician, an [urgent care center](#), one of the [Inova Respiratory Health Centers](#) (now including a location in Old Town Alexandria), or the Inova Alexandria Hospital Emergency Department can assist you.

If you have questions about the outbreak that cannot be answered by your physician, the Alexandria Health Department has set up a hotline staffed during business hours at 703-746-4988. Additionally, the [Virginia Department of Health](#) has a hotline at 877-ASK-VDH3.

While 1,974 Alexandrians have been diagnosed with COVID-19, 9,356 tests (PCR) have been administered and 190 residents have been hospitalized.

Inova Alexandria hospital is currently operating with 313 beds, of which about 63% are currently being utilized. They are currently treating 41 COVID-19 patients, which is a reduction from recent numbers.

There are plans in place to construct a 500+ bed "surge" capacity hospital facility for Northern Virginia at the Dulles Expo Center, but at this point the Governor has not proceeded with that construction.

The Governor has issued two successive orders that impact our economy and our daily lives.

[The first was Executive Order 53](#), which imposed temporary restrictions on a variety of businesses, banned gatherings and schools for the remainder of the year. This order was extended for Northern Virginia until last week, and [has now been replaced by Executive Order 61 as the entire Commonwealth is now in Phase 1.](#)

[The second was Executive Order 55](#), which imposed a stay-at-home order. This remains in effect until June 10th.

[I have joined with my counterparts from throughout the region in supporting this order and asking our residents to stay home to slow the spread of this virus.](#)



The Alexandria Health Department is advising residents to practice social distancing by maintaining 6-feet of separation from any other person, [washing hands frequently with soap or hand sanitizer](#) and wearing a face covering whenever in public where social distancing might not be possible. This is not only to protect your health, but to protect the health of others.

The City has an extensive contact tracing effort underway, to ensure that all those who may have come into

contact with someone infected with COVID-19, are notified and take

appropriate precautions. The City's Medical Reserve Corps is seeking volunteers, both with and without medical training, to assist during this crisis. [You can sign-up on-line.](#)

On the 14th of March, the [City Council ratified the City Manager's declaration of a Local Emergency.](#) This expands City Government capabilities to respond to this challenge. That emergency remains in effect.

[The Alexandria City Public Schools \(ACPS\) are closed](#) and will remain closed through the end of the school year.

[ACPS has arranged food for ANY child 2-18 and ANY family who needs it.](#) Food pick-up is available from a variety of locations around the City.

[ACPS has set up "ACPS-At-Home" to provide details to students and families during this extended closure.](#) Our educators are doing an amazing job continuing to teach our students during this closure.

In April, [I sent a letter to all of the multi-family landlords in the City and asked that they be lenient on late rent payments and defer evictions during this time.](#) The impact of the on-going Virginia Judicial Emergency [declared by Virginia's Chief Justice](#) provides that evictions remain deferred for at least another week. .

Additionally, [I joined with my counterparts in other Northern Virginia jurisdictions to ask the Governor to delay evictions and implement flexibility into a variety of human service programs.](#)

The City is working quickly to assist businesses that have been hard hit by this crisis.

[Visit Alexandria launched "ALX At Home" to make it easier for residents to support shopping at Alexandria businesses.](#)

In March, [the Council approved a variety of business tax deferrals and fee waivers to assist businesses with cash flow challenges.](#)

[We have already suspended enforcement of a variety of regulations and laws to facilitate restaurant carry-out, delivery and hours, as well as sidewalk vending for restaurants and retailers.](#)

[Last week, the Council approved additional suspension of rules to allow expanded outdoor dining in parking spaces, parking lots, sidewalks, and other places.](#)

We worked with businesses across the City to implement new delivery and pick-up parking zones in front of their establishments.



In March, [I sent a letter to Governor Northam requesting further regulatory changes to allow restaurants to offer carry-out of mixed beverages during this time.](#) In April, [the Governor issued an order making this change.](#)

[Additional financing and support options are being made available for small businesses throughout the City.](#)

[The recently enacted Federal legislation provides additional supports for businesses that may require assistance.](#)

In March, [Comcast began providing free "Internet Essentials" service to low-income families for 60-days. Sign-up is available online.](#)

All of the utilities serving the City have suspended disconnects due to non-payment, including:

- [Alexandria Renew](#)
- [Dominion Virginia Power](#)
- [Virginia-American Water Company](#)
- [Washington Gas](#)
- [AT&T](#)
- [Verizon](#)
- [Comcast](#)

For those whose jobs have been impacted by the virus outbreak, [details are available from the Virginia Employment Commission](#) . The Federal CARES Act provided extended unemployment insurance, including coverage for workers who otherwise would not be eligible.

[Inova Blood Services has significant need for blood donations during this time. Schedule a donation today.](#)

[DASH is running all service for free, with boarding occurring using the rear door.](#)

[Metro has also made significant reductions to service and is reserving the system for "essential trips only."](#)

We [have cancelled many city meetings and events.](#)

All [activities and programs produced by the Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities have been cancelled](#) through June 22nd. [Facilities, playgrounds, and fenced areas are closed. Summer program registration is delayed indefinitely.](#) The Department [recently launched RPCA at Home to support residents during this time.](#) Last week, the [Department announced the schedule to reopen the impacted services](#) .

[The Alexandria Library has closed all of its branches indefinitely.](#) They [have announced their reopening plan as well.](#)

[Changes have been made to visitation and procedures at the Alexandria Jail by the Alexandria Sheriff's Office.](#)

[The City has suspended enforcement of a variety of parking regulations and rules.](#)

[The Governor has extended the validity of driver's licenses, identification cards and vehicle registrations that were scheduled to expire.](#)

[The City has suspended yard waste collection, bulk waste collection, compost collection and mulch deliveries.](#) The City is asking that all waste fit into cans to reduce waste and protect our employees. Starting last month, [the City is now providing a drop-off service for yard waste while curbside collection is suspended.](#) Additionally, we [have reopened the Hazardous Waste collection point.](#)

With a declared State Emergency declaration in effect, price gouging laws are in force right now across the Commonwealth. [Report suspected violations to the Virginia Attorney General's Office.](#)

Getting Alexandria Back To Business

It is still too early to take stock of the full economic impact of COVID-19 and the resulting public health restrictions, but it is safe to say that Alexandria businesses have suffered a devastating blow.

Alexandria small businesses, particularly those in the service economy, employ many of our residents who live dangerously close to poverty. Supporting these businesses helps us support our residents. In many cases, these residents are those who did not qualify for some of the Federal assistance that has been available recently.

Early in this crisis, the City [approved millions of dollars of tax deferrals](#) to provide Alexandria small businesses with the liquidity to assist them in surviving and later reopening.



We have worked with businesses to access Federal grants and lending. We have made a variety of regulatory changes to support the transition of our businesses to a "new normal."

As we now begin reopening, the City is launching [the Alexandria Back to Business Grant Program](#). This program, utilizing a portion of the City's Federal CARES Act funding, will provide grants to Alexandria businesses that have been impacted by COVID-19.

The grants, of up to \$20,000, are designed to support the investments that our businesses must make to adjust. Designed to fund the purchase of PPE, health and safety equipment, cleaning services, etc. Anything that helps ease a business' transition to this new environment will be considered for this program.

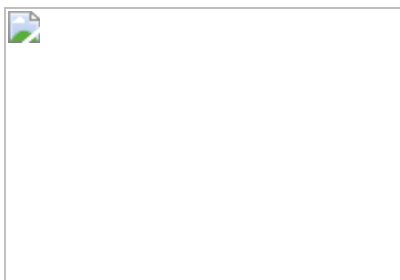
[In addition to these financial and regulatory efforts, the City recently launched ALX Promise.](#) This new program will recognize those businesses that have gone beyond the minimum standards to keep their customers and employees safe during this time. Watch for the logo around our City!

Ultimately, Alexandria needs our small businesses to survive. While we cannot solve the economic dislocation caused by this crisis, we are working to help our businesses change and thrive.

Emergency Rent Assistance Available

When the crisis started at the beginning of March, there were just a bit over 2,000 Alexandria residents who were unemployed. [During the ensuing 10 weeks, nearly 13,000 Alexandrians have filed as unemployed.](#)

With this precipitous increase in unemployment throughout our City, our residents have been faced with challenges in paying their rent.



While foreclosures have been deferred due to the closure of Virginia's courts, our residents who are out of work are incurring overdue rent, late fees and other expenses that will burden them even once they are able to go back to work.

Too many of our residents are facing the choice between complying with Stay at Home orders and other public health restrictions, and paying their rent.

While the City [has a variety of housing relief programs that have been in place](#), many for decades, these efforts are insufficiently scaled or structured for this crisis.

To address the challenge we are facing in this time, the [City has launched a new Emergency Rent Relief program.](#)

For eligible residents, who have had their employment impacted by this crisis and meet eligibility requirements, the City is provided up to

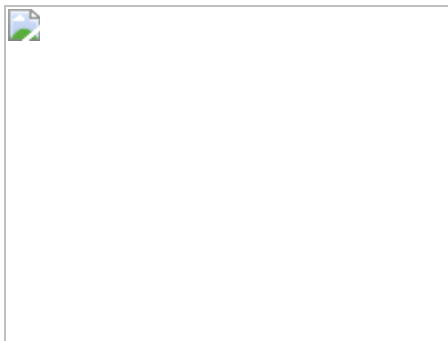
\$600/month, for up to 3 months to assist.

This will not solve all of the economic challenges that are impacting our residents, but we are hoping it will help keep residents afloat during this time.

Policing in Alexandria

At various points over the years, [I have written in this newsletter attempting to relate the national conversation on policing to our experiences in Alexandria.](#)

We have a highly skilled and diverse police force serving Alexandria.



The department is taking steps to improve the diversity of the workforce in future recruiting efforts. We are fortunate to have a skilled and professional Sheriff's Department with a sworn workforce that similarly represents our community's diversity.

Our officers participate in training aimed at de-escalation of volatile situations. We outfit our police officers with non-lethal force options to assist in the de-escalation of these incidents. Our officers have been trained in crisis intervention and the proper ways to address civil disobedience.

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

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

At the end of April, the City Council approved our FY 2021 - FY 2030 Capital Improvement Program. Included in that budget as a [placeholder was included within the CIP to fund the deployment of body-worn cameras for our police officers.](#) A new position in the Police Department this year will prepare for implementation of this effort.

The City has also worked to improve the transparency of data related to policing in Alexandria.

In 2017, [the City released a first of its kind external study and analysis of five years of Alexandria Police traffic citation data.](#) Conducted by the [Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University,](#) this effort looked at over 91,000 citations issued from 2011 - 2015.

In February of 2018, the City Council [adopted this procedure as policy to ensure that this type of accountability and analysis remains a practice in the future.](#)

Since that time, the analysis has been conducted annually, with the [2019 data released earlier this month.](#)

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

To ensure that the conversation does not end here, [our Police Chief Michael Brown has appointed a Community Advisory Team to advise](#)

[the Police Department on these issues.](#)

Our Police Department has gone beyond what most departments not under consent decrees have chosen to do proactively. This has been the result of community activism and leadership within the Department.

Yet we can never declare "victory," Every day, these efforts must continue as we work to provide a level of transparency that increases public confidence in the great work done by the men and women who serve and protect our community every day.

The CARES Act In Alexandria

The City of Alexandria may possibly receive up to \$27 million of the Commonwealth's allocation of [Federal CARES Act](#) funding. The City Council is developing plans to put that money to good work immediately to serve the residents and businesses of our community.

From the beginning of this crisis, it has been clear that the two levels of government, local and state, who are required to balance our budgets annually, could not address the immense financial need that has been created. Only the Federal Government could provide a sufficient amount of money to address some of these challenges.

In late March, [the President signed the CARES Act](#) which provides \$2 trillion to assist residents, businesses and government. With this legislation and the prospect of further legislation ahead, my focus has been to ensure that we leave no dollar on the table.

Our City government has worked to assist residents and businesses to access the various funds that have been made available for their benefit. The legislation also created a \$150 billion fund to assist state and local governments. Virginia will receive \$3.3 billion of these funds. Jurisdictions with a population of 500,000 or more go directly to the Federal government and the remainder is distributed by the applicable state government.

The United States Department of Treasury [has now released guidance detailing how the funds can be used.](#) While the City and other jurisdictions urged maximum flexibility from the Federal Government, the money the City will receive will be limited to:

- 1) Expenditures incurred as a result of the pandemic response.
- 2) Expenditures cannot already be in the City's budget (must be new spending)
- 3) The money must be utilized by the end of 2020

The City has urged the Governor to distribute the money on a per capita basis. [Last month, I wrote to the Secretary of Finance advancing that approach.](#)

The City [recently received notification of our first allocation of \\$13.9 million and the Council voted to allocate these funds last month.](#)

The City has already spent approximately \$5 million in expenses that we believe will be eligible for these funds. The remainder of the funds are expected to be allocated in these priority areas:

- Public health staffing and capabilities
- Food assistance
- Residential rent assistance
- Small business assistance

While we have expended significant amounts of money to address this crisis, the largest financial impact on the City has been the loss of revenue. These funds are not allowed to replace the revenue that

the City lost, but it will help us support the residents and businesses who are suffering during this time.

I am still optimistic that Federal policymakers will arrive on an approach that addresses the significant lost revenue that the City and other jurisdictions around our nation have experienced.

Host a Town Hall in Your Living Room!

As Mayor, I am continuing my regular series of Town Hall Meetings.

You supply the living room and a bunch of your friends and neighbors. I will supply the Mayor who will hopefully have 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

Inova Alexandria Hospital

[In 1962, then-Vice President Lyndon Johnson came to the corner of Seminary Road and Howard Street to preside over the opening of the new Alexandria Hospital of Seminary.](#)

While the hospital has gone through quite a bit of transition (and a few locations) since it's original founding in 1872, the facility on Seminary nears 60 years of serving our community.

We are fortunate to have excellent healthcare professionals serving



our community at Inova Alexandria Hospital, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, modernizing healthcare delivery in a growing community requires a modern hospital facility. Alexandria deserves such a facility.

Recently, Inova has been working to determine the future of

their real estate, including the Seminary facility. In my April newsletter, I wrote about the [newly announced Inova HealthPlex](#), which will be built in Oakville Triangle, across Richmond Highway from Potomac Yard.

Last week, [Inova announced a new hospital to be built in Springfield](#). Contained in that announcement was an update on the future of Inova Alexandria:

"As part of the ongoing eastern region assessment, Inova continues to review options for modernization of Inova Alexandria Hospital and is working with partners and city officials on options for the best path forward. All options, from renovating in place to relocation, are under evaluation. Additional information will be made available as this project develops."

Whether Inova decides to pursue a new Alexandria Hospital facility on their existing location or another location in the City, there are both opportunity and risks. The City continues to work with Inova to ensure a modern hospital facility to serve our community for generations to come.

King Street Pedestrian Zone

Almost 14 years ago, [the City spent a summer experimenting with a closure of King Street to vehicles on weekends](#). By giving the road space over to pedestrians, the City attempted to replicate numerous cities around the world who have created new vitality from asphalt.

Now, over a decade and a half later, a newly expanded Waterfront Park, with public art, active programming and adjacent businesses has created expanded visitation. [Councilman John Chapman and I proposed](#) that the City prepare a new recommendation for a pedestrian zone in the unit, 100-block and potentially 200-block of King Street in Old Town.

In response to this proposal, our staff brought a recommendation to the Alexandria Waterfront Commission and the Alexandria Transportation Commission for feedback and review.



[You can view the concepts and proposals online](#).

In March, [the Council endorsed a modified proposal that attempted to address a few competing concerns](#). But that proposal did not last long as the funding for implementation fell victim to the COVID-19-related budget reductions.

Yet, the moment may have met the proposal, at least temporarily. The crowding on the sidewalks in Old Town has made it difficult to safely socially distance. Additionally, the transition into Phase 1 of reopening has increased demand for outdoor dining options. To accommodate both, the City recently implemented a temporary closure of the 100-block of King.

This was not how we intended to pilot this concept, nor how anyone envisioned implemented it, but this will serve as a test of an idea whose time has come.

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