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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

June 1, 2021

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In March of 2020, the Governor issued the first in a long series of executive orders imposing a variety of restrictions on businesses and residents to address the public health crisis we were facing as COVID-19 began its spread in Virginia.

On Friday morning, the last of those restrictions were removed.

While COVID-19 is not completely in our rearview mirror and we will continue to address its aftermath for years to come, this is a substantial accomplishment for our community and one that is testament to the sacrifice of our residents and businesses during this horrific time.

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On Friday, along with some wonderful students from the Alexandria City Public Schools, [we were honored to host President Joe Biden and Governor Ralph Northam at an Alexandria small business, Sportrock Climbing Center, to highlight this recovery and the work that we have all done together.](#)

[You can watch the President and Governor's remarks online.](#)

On Christmas Eve of last year, our Health Department vaccinated 251 healthcare workers. That small effort was the beginning of the largest vaccination effort in our City's history.

Thanks to an army of volunteers from the Alexandria Medical Reserve Corps, our Health Department staff, various other public employees, non-profit organizations and private community partners, as of yesterday, 82,690 Alexandrians have received at least one vaccine dose, which is over 60% of the eligible population of those 12 and older.

Of those, 64,618 are now fully vaccinated.

[In April, we marked a critical transition in our vaccination effort as we have now exhausted our waiting list and moved to open scheduling of vaccines.](#)

Last month, with Federal approval, the Pfizer vaccine became available for those aged 12 - 15. This means that ANYONE who is aged 12 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.

The City remains in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, but with real hope that we have reached the beginning of the end of this horrific experience:

- This week we surpassed 169,000 COVID tests performed in the City.
- Our COVID hospitalizations remain at all-time lows
- Our hospital capacity has remained stable.
- Our 7-day testing positivity rate peaked five months ago, reaching our highest point (13.3%) in over 6

months at the beginning of January. As of yesterday we are now at 2.5%, which is among our lowest points.

The ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund was re-branded as the Alexandria Resilience Fund, which is distributing money into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created. Please join me in supporting this fundraising effort.

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.

I continue my monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings on the first Thursday of each month.

You can watch last month's Town Hall online and please join me at this link on Thursday the 3rd 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.

We are still actively recruiting volunteers to join our Alexandria Medical Reserve Corps. Medical Reserve Corps volunteers, both with and without medical training, have been critical to our efforts throughout this pandemic.

Contact me anytime. Let me know how I can help.

Initiatives and Updates

Landmark Mall Redevelopment

Tonight, the Alexandria Planning Commission will hear public testimony and make a recommendation to the City Council on [a master plan amendment and rezoning of the site of the existing Inova Alexandria Hospital](#). This land-use decision is the first in a series of decisions necessary to bring to reality a long-awaited redevelopment of Landmark Mall and development of a new Inova Alexandria Hospital.

Days before Christmas, [the City joined with a few partners, some familiar and some new, to announce the future of the Landmark Mall site](#). The new development plan will move [Inova Alexandria Hospital](#) from its home for [the past 58 years](#) on Seminary Road to a new modern facility on the site of Landmark Mall.

The site, one of the largest sites inside the Beltway awaiting redevelopment, will see a billion dollars of new investment, including a new Level II trauma center, medical office buildings, residential, retail, parks, a new fire station replacing [Fire Station 208](#), new committed affordable housing and a new transit hub anchoring the City's new bus rapid transit network, DASH and Metrobus.

[Long sought, this arrangement was recently named by the Washington Business Journal as the 2020 Real Estate Deal of the Year.](#)

This will not only revitalize a site that many had given up on, but will also provide a catalyst for redevelopment and enhancement throughout the West End of our City.

If the Planning Commission makes a recommendation this evening, the application for the existing hospital site will come to City Council for final approval on Saturday June 19th. Later this month, the Planning Commission will then hear the land-use approvals for the Landmark Mall site. Those applications will come to City Council in July.

Despite over two decades of decline, it is not a mystery why we had been unable to spur redevelopment on this site in the past. It is a complicated site, with a complicated ownership structure requiring significant infrastructure investment.

Conquering those obstacles requires a unique partnership and financial arrangement. A local firm, [Foulger-Pratt](#) is leading a joint venture in partnership with [Howard Hughes Corporation](#), the current owner of the mall site, and [Seritage Growth Properties](#), the owner of the Sears site. They were able to bring [Inova Health System](#) into the arrangement to anchor this redevelopment.

The City will finance some of the infrastructure improvements required on the site and we will purchase the future hospital site to lease back to Inova. Inova's proceeds from selling their existing site on Seminary Road is financing their expenses related to the move.

Nearly 55 years ago, [then-Virginia Lieutenant Governor Mills Godwin Jr. \(later Virginia's 60th and 62nd Governor\) came to Alexandria to open Landmark Mall.](#) Today, the work to restore the Landmark Mall site to a productive use of real estate for our City is a top focus for our community.

In June 2013, after taking over ownership of the mall site, the Howard Hughes Corporation [received approval by the Planning Commission and City Council for a redevelopment of their portion of the site](#). A slower than expected leasing market slowed their intentions to redevelop.

In 2015, 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.](#)

[Sears spun-off a new Real Estate Investment Trust \(REIT\) in 2015 called Seritage Growth Properties to maximize value out of their remaining real estate. The Landmark Mall Sears store property is now owned by this REIT.](#)

[Early in 2017, Macy's announced the closure of their store at Landmark.](#)

[The Howard Hughes Corporation later announced that it had purchased the Macy's store site.](#)

[The Howard Hughes Corporation subsequently announced that the existing mall site is closing.](#)

[Almost two years ago, Council approved revisions to the Master Plan to advance a comprehensive redevelopment of the site.](#)

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

Two decades ago, when 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, the three properties are assessed at \$25.2 million, \$14 million, and \$12.6 million, respectively. They generate about \$500,000 in real estate tax today, less than half of what it used to be.

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

While no one should be convinced until they see bulldozers knocking down the existing mall site, we have finally assembled a partnership, financing and a plan to revitalize this site. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but I believe we can be cautiously optimistic that it is finally coming together with this exciting partnership.

Making Affordable Housing Happen

Last month, we welcomed 113 families [to "The Spire on the City's West End"](#). This new affordable housing development creates new committed housing stock for residents earning [30% to 60% of the Area Median Income](#) and will include 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units. You can [watch the ribbon-cutting event online](#).

This project was made possible due to a mission-driven faith community, [Episcopal Church of the Resurrection](#), which worked to share their land with those in need of housing in our community.

A little over a month ago, "The Lineage at North Patrick Street," the reborn Ramsey Homes, saw [new residents move in. Developed by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority \(ARHA\)](#), this new development provides a total of 52 new units, again serving residents at 30%, 50% and 60% of our area median income.

At the beginning of December, [Carpenter's Shelter](#) and the [Alexandria Housing Development Corporation \(AHDC\)](#) celebrated the opening of ["The Bloom."](#) This unique partnership with the City provides a replacement homeless shelter for Carpenter's and 97 units of committed affordable housing (including 10 units for former Carpenter's clients) just south of the Monroe Avenue Bridge on Route 1. You can [watch the ribbon-cutting event online](#).

Later that same day, [we broke ground](#) on "The Waypoint." [Wesley Housing, a non-profit housing developer](#) began construction of this new affordable housing project that will be constructed in partnership with the City and Fairlington Presbyterian Church. This project, will bring 81 new units of affordable housing

which will serve residents earning 30%, 50% and 60% of the area median income in our community.

All four of these development efforts were a continuation of the public/private partnerships that the City employs to create affordable housing. All four projects utilized City tax dollars and successfully competed for Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) administered by [Virginia Housing \(formerly the Virginia Housing Development Corporation\)](#).

In September, the City Council unanimously approved the extension of pre-development financing to AHDC and [Wesley Housing](#) to explore three other affordable housing development opportunities:

- A partnership with AHDC [to develop 400 committed affordable and workforce units in Arlandria at the corner of Glebe and Mount Vernon](#)
- A partnership with Wesley Housing [to develop 200 committed affordable units at Parcview on Holmes Run Parkway](#)
- A partnership with AHDC [to develop 40 ownership affordable housing units on Seminary Road next to Fire Station 206](#)

Each of these projects [is part of a pipeline of new affordable housing the City is working to create](#), using Federal and state financing tools, local funds and land-use policy.

[In September, the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments \(COG\) unanimously adopted new regional housing creation targets](#). This was the first regional commitment to accelerate the development of housing supply as a means to address our affordability crisis.

These targets, while voluntary, commit the City to the creation of additional units, with most of those units committed to be affordable for low to middle income households. To ensure that this housing creation does not exacerbate existing transportation challenges, most of this new housing must be located near job centers and high-capacity transportation infrastructure.

[In March, the City Council became the third jurisdiction in the region to endorse these targets](#).

In 2013, while adopting our [Housing Master Plan](#), City Council set an ambitious goal to create or preserve 2,000 affordable units by 2025. [We are on track to meet this goal](#).

With Council's unanimous adoption of the COG targets, we will increase our current target of 200 units per year to 325 affordable units per year.

I served on the COG Housing Strategy Group which developed these recommended targets, along with elected officials from Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. The groundwork for this effort was laid In September of 2018, when the Board of Directors of COG accepted a report that identified that 100,000 additional housing units will need to be constructed within the region just to meet expected job growth. That is 100,000 units BEYOND what is already planned to be developed.

The COG analysis focuses on the housing production required to meet the economic competitiveness and transportation efficiency goals for the region. Even with increased housing production at the levels recommended, it's unlikely to be sufficient supply to address affordability challenges.

The recent Amazon and Virginia Tech economic development announcements have stoked concerns regarding the impacts on affordability that may result throughout the region. While analysis shows the potential for impacts on affordability, in a region with over 3.3 million jobs, an additional 25,000 jobs entering the market over a decade is not likely to have a dramatic impact.

Yet these economic development "wins" have served to shine a light on an issue that has bedeviled our City and this region for decades. As the region's job supply has grown, the housing supply has not sufficiently grown to match.

While the paired announcement of Amazon and Virginia Tech presents risks for affordability in the region, it also provides some critical opportunities:

- For the first time ever, the Commonwealth included new housing investments in an economic development incentive package.
- In the aftermath of the announcement, Governor Northam proposed new investments in the Commonwealth's Housing Trust Fund as part of his package of amendments to the budget for the 2019 General Assembly session.
- There is some reason to believe that the Amazon/Virginia Tech investment will prompt new housing production, thus alleviating some of the crunch.

While the national media has highlighted the potential impact of this new growth on Arlandria and other vulnerable neighborhoods, the City working to conclude a long-planned effort to update our plans in Arlandria and Del Ray. Housing affordability, namely how to preserve the market-rate affordability remaining in Arlandria, will be a significant component of that process.

In response to requests by Council, our staff returned last month with revisions to our Interdepartmental Work Program to include a comprehensive review of zoning tools available to advance affordability. **The so-called "Zoning For Housing" effort is now moving forward with findings scheduled to come to Council and the Planning Commission over the next few years.**

In the next 2 years, this includes study of:

- **Inclusionary Zoning**
- Townhouse Zoning
- Property Conversions
- **Expansion of the Residential Multi-Family Zone (RMF)**
- **Expansion of Density Bonuses**
- Co-Housing/Rooming Houses

When the City attempts to address housing affordability, it is going up against powerful economic forces. Employing market-based solutions to these affordability challenges is where the City can be most effective.

In late 2015, **Jason Furman, then 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.

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.** Others have ascribed **even more nefarious motives to how zoning restrictions are**

applied. I wrote about the connections between **zoning and fair housing in my October newsletter**.

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

If Furman and other economists are to be believed, we in Alexandria have rarely 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 to protect the quality of life within our community. I would also suggest that we have done some things right in tweaking our current restrictions to improve affordability.

For instance, **in 2015, 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. **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.

In 2017, at the suggestion of Councilman Chapman and myself, **the City expanded our "density bonus" program for affordable housing**. The program essentially trades additional market density with landowners in exchange for new committed affordable housing.

As we work to implement the City's Housing Master Plan, the new COG Housing targets and advance our "Zoning for Housing" effort, we must seek to comprehend and be willing to address all of the factors that challenge affordability in the City. Amazon's arrival and Virginia Tech's expansion doesn't dramatically change the affordability challenge in our region, but it does perhaps give us the impetus to make the difficult decisions to address it.

Primary Day Next Week

Early voting is available every day this week until Saturday as **Alexandria Democrats are voting to**

choose their nominees for statewide, state and local offices.

Alexandria Republicans have chosen a local canvass and a state convention to select their nominees.

This November, Alexandria voters will elect a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, members of the Virginia House of Delegates, Alexandria Mayor, Alexandria Sheriff, Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney, all six members of the Alexandria City Council and all 9 members of the Alexandria City School Board.

On Tuesday June 8th, all City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM for the Democratic Primary.

The June 8th Primary will be used to select the Democratic nominees for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Alexandria Mayor, Alexandria City Council and the member of the Virginia House of Delegates representing the 45th District (the eastern end of Alexandria).

Last year, Virginia introduced "no-excuse" early voting, so voters have three choices to vote in the June primary:

1. Any ballot that was received by mail can still be mailed back or dropped 24/7 at the drop-box located in front of 132 N. Royal Street.
2. You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office, from 8 AM until 8 PM tomorrow and Wednesday. Friday and Saturday voting will be available from 8 AM until 5 PM. This Saturday is the last day of early voting!
3. You can vote in person **at your precinct** on the Primary Day of June 8th.

I'll see you at the polls!

Preventing Evictions

A little over a year ago, **I mailed a letter to all of the multi-family landlords** in our City requested that provide lenience and forbearance for their tenants, as the early economic events of the pandemic were beginning to challenge our most vulnerable residents.

Little did we know at that point that we were in for the long-haul in addressing the economic impacts of this crisis on our residents.

Shortly thereafter, we stood up Alexandria's Eviction Prevention Task Force, including City agencies, the Sheriff's Department, community organizations, non-

profits and others, with the central focus to keep our residents housed during this crisis.

Last month, **[we received a comprehensive report of these efforts and the results we have achieved.](#)**

From July of 2020 through April of 2021, there were 514 eviction judgements entered in the City, 1,128 evictions pursued but dropped or dismissed, 257 pending cases and 845 individuals who were assisted through our outreach at the courthouse.

The City has assisted 3,458 households with \$9.9 million of emergency rent and mortgage assistance. Our residents have received another \$7 million in rental assistance funds through the Virginia Rent Relief Program.

While most of these resources have come from local, state and Federal government sources, the City has also leaned heavily on the assistance of faith and non-profit partners, including Christ Episcopal, St. Paul's Episcopal, St. Vincent de Paul, Casa Chirilagua and ALIVE!

We have had landlords who have partnered with the City to keep their tenants housed and a General District Court that has been committed to assisting throughout this process.

While these efforts have not been perfect, the partnerships that have been developed, expanded and exercised have been absolutely crucial in keeping our residents housed and maintaining family stability during a horrific time for our community.

Partnering For Our Parks

Politicians of nearly every stripe extol the virtues of "Public/Private Partnerships," sometimes called "P3" for short. While the partnerships come in many flavors, it usually involves the blending of private and public resources to achieve a community good.

The City is seeking partnerships to beautify, conserve or enhance parks, gardens, trails or recreation centers. Matching grants for up to \$25,000 are available. **[Learn more and apply online.](#)** The deadline is June 25th.

[An amazing group of residents and organizations raised money to build the Miracle Field next to the Lee Recreation Center to help provide recreation opportunities for the special needs community.](#)

Residents in Arlandria are continuing **[to raise money to support Four Mile Run Park](#)**, and have used private donations to create the park plaza that hosts the **[Four](#)**

Mile Farmers and Artisan Market on recently acquired public space.

Residents and business leaders worked together to **raise significant resources to build the Alexandria Police Memorial**.

The Del Ray Citizens Association **sponsored park improvements in the pocket park at the corner of Commonwealth and E. Del Ray Avenue**, which was renamed the Judy Lowe Memorial Park.

Residents and businesses have partnered to make improvements at **Ewald Park**.

A few years ago, **we dedicated a brand new playground at Maury Elementary School**. The playground was the result of public money, donated money, donated services and the support of non-profit organizations.

Three and a half years ago, we dedicated a new teen center at Charles Houston Recreation Center. The center was the result of private fundraising, in-kind donations and countless volunteer hours.

Another group of residents worked to match City funds and raise money to light up basketball courts in Potomac Yard.

Faced with dwindling public resources, and enthusiastic Alexandrians seeking to take matters into their own hands, I asked that we create a consistent approach to City participation in these partnerships.

The result was the "PARKnership" program created by our Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Department.

The summary report from FY 2019 shows all of the good this effort has launched around our City.

Our City is fortunate to have residents willing to contribute sweat and resources to make our City a better place. I'm excited to see the City partner with them to make it happen.

New Campaign

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

In January, I did announce that I will be running for re-election as Mayor this year.

If you have not been receiving my campaign updates and you wish to receive information on this new

campaign, [please drop my campaign a line](#) and we'll get you on the list for the campaign.



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