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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

June 1, 2024

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On Monday, Memorial Day, the City held a ceremony at [the Alexandria War Memorial](#) in front of Alexandria Union Station. The memorial, dedicated shortly before the United States was drawn into World War II, [now includes a plaque to remember the 68 Alexandrians who were lost during the Vietnam War.](#)

Future plaques will be installed to remember those lost in World War II, the Korean War and more recent global conflicts. Thanks to the veteran service organizations that made this overdue recognition possible and a special tribute to the Gold Star families of Alexandria for their sacrifice.

- [Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)
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In a few hours, the [Class of 2024](#) will [walk across the stage and become graduates of Alexandria City High School](#). I look forward to joining them and wishing them congratulations as they head off into the world to do extraordinary things!

This afternoon, [we will celebrate the 7th annual LGBTQ+ Pride Fair in Market Square from 3 PM until 6 PM](#). Join the celebration!

Tomorrow, [the Alexandria-Caen Sister City Committee will continue their annual D-Day Commemoration](#). This year marks the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Held in Market Square starting at 1 PM, this event is a nod to our Sister City of Caen, France. Caen, in Normandy, was the location of fierce fighting in the days after the Allied D-Day landings.

On Friday June 21st and Saturday June 22nd, [the Portside in Old Town Summer Festival returns to our waterfront!](#) This free festival brings music, food, art, history and more! Port City Brewing Company will be serving their new IPA called ALX275, celebrating Alexandria's 275th birthday.

If you would like me to host a town hall in your neighborhood, [please drop me a line](#) and we'll get it on the calendar!

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

Initiatives and Updates



Minnie Howard School Opens

Last week, [we officially opened the new Minnie Howard campus](#) of the Alexandria City High School. [You can watch the ribbon-cutting evening online](#).

This new high school building is a 343,000 square feet facility and accommodates 1,600 students and community facilities, including a new indoor aquatic facility with regulation-length pool.

Less than a year ago, **we opened the brand-new Douglas MacArthur Elementary School on Janney's Lane.**

MacArthur is a 163,000 square foot building which replaced the old 62,000 square foot building, accommodates 850 students and is the first **NetZero** public building in Alexandria.

In July of 2021, **City Council approved a request from our School Board to provide funding to support the ACPS purchase of 1703 N. Beauregard Street to be swing space for future rebuilds as well as eventually a permanent school.** This building, an office building next to Ferdinand Day Elementary School, **is now being retrofit so that it can be ready to host the students from George Mason Elementary when we begin rebuilding that school.**

We are in the most significant era of new school construction in our City's history.

A month ago, City Council unanimously approved a 10-year capital improvement program for the Alexandria City Public Schools including \$379 million over the next decade. This provides the funding for both new and renovated facilities, as well as non-capacity infrastructure investments.

This 10-year Capital Program includes rebuilds of:

- Cora Kelly Elementary School
- George Mason Elementary School

Almost six years ago, ACPS opened the first "net-new" school building in nearly two decades with the **opening of Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School on the West End.** Over five years ago, ACPS **opened the newly rebuilt Patrick Henry K-8 School.** Both of these new buildings added badly needed capacity in areas of the City with rapidly growing enrollment.

This year, 16,071 students started in the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). That constitutes an increase of 594 students from the previous year and the second year of increasing enrollment in the aftermath of the pandemic.

As we return to student enrollment growth, we have seen enrollment increases in 15 of the last 17 years. During that period, ACPS added just under 6,000 additional students. The last time we approached having this **many children attending our schools was over 50 years ago in the early 1970s.**

The enrollment growth post-pandemic remains uneven. This year, we saw strong growth in middle school enrollment, tiny growth in high-school and a small drop in elementary enrollment.

Over eleven years ago, the City convened the Joint [Long Range Educational Facilities Work Group](#). The group was given the essential charge to understand our recent increase in student enrollment, better project enrollment growth in the future, and to decide what to do about it.

One of the products of this joint effort was a new enrollment projection methodology. This methodology uses the birth rate and corresponding Kindergarten capture rate, the cohort survival rate and the impacts of new development to project student enrollment each year. This methodology has been very accurate in predicting how our student enrollment will grow over the past decade.

The [April 2023 update of our enrollment projections](#) showed that without the impact of planned development and growth, school enrollment is expected to peak in two years and then slowly decline. When the impact of planned development is included, the enrollment is projected to dip, but later return to pre-pandemic levels within a decade.

We have also worked to understand where the enrollment is coming from. The type and age of housing is a significant determinant of the student generation rates. [Last June, we updated the student generation rates, by development type](#). This analysis showed some results that might be considered counterintuitive by some in our community:

- 73% of Alexandria's housing is over 30 years old
- 89% of students in the Alexandria City Public Schools live in housing that is over 30 years old
- Only 3% of ACPS students live in market-rate, multi-family housing that was built in the last 30 years
- A third of ACPS students live in low-rise apartments, with nearly all of that enrollment in apartments that are older than 30 years old

With the resources now in place, we must work collaboratively to ensure that these new facilities come to reality.

These long-term investments become critical to support the success of our students in the generations to come.



Tax Relief

Last year, 1,199 Alexandria homeowners received some form of tax relief on their real estate taxes. Of those, 643 received relief under our program benefitting homeowners who are [elderly or disabled](#).

The remainder **[participated in our relief programs for veterans and their families.](#)**

A little over \$9 million of the \$926 million operating budget approved by City Council a month ago is returned to the taxpayers in the form of this targeted tax relief for homeowners.

In approving this year's budget, the City Council approved an amendment proposed by Councilman Kirk McPike **[to expand the elderly and disabled relief program.](#)** This expansion will benefit an additional 253 homeowners, by lifting the income thresholds for those receiving full or partial relief.

For those **[who are eligible for relief under these programs, the application is available online.](#)**



Our Next Mayor & City Council

Early voting is well under way and Alexandria Democrats will be selecting their nominee to succeed me as Mayor and to serve on the next City Council. Alexandria Republicans will be using this primary to choose their nominee for the United States Senate. **[The sample ballot is now available.](#)**

[Already over 3,000 Alexandrians have participated in the Democratic Primary and over 360 Alexandrians have participated in the Republican Primary.](#)

The Democratic Primary for United States House of Representatives representing Alexandria was unopposed.

[Alexandria Republicans have chosen a party process to select their nominees for Mayor, City Council and United States House of Representatives.](#)

Due to **[legislation adopted by the General Assembly in 2021,](#)** Virginia's primary date has moved from the second Tuesday in June to the third Tuesday in June.

As such, on Tuesday June 18th, all City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM for the Democratic Primary.

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

1. **[You can request a ballot by mail online now.](#)** Ballots will be mailed upon request. The ballot

- can 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, Monday - Friday from 8 AM until 5 PM. **Saturday and Sunday voting will begin next weekend.**
 3. You can vote in person **at your precinct** on the Primary Day of June 18th.

I'll see you at the polls!



Airport Noise

It is the City's proximity to transportation infrastructure, especially Washington National Airport, that is one of the reasons that so many residents love living in Alexandria. Yet it is our proximity to the airport that also causes many residents consternation due to the noise from the aircraft activities.

Recent Congressional actions promise to exacerbate some of these existing noise issues.

In 2015, a new Community Working Group was created to organize input from the region to be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Yet the interests of the communities in our region are not always aligned when it comes to airport noise. Given the progress that was achieved for the communities that are north of the airport, three jurisdictions south of the airport, Fairfax County, Prince George's County and the City of Alexandria have joined forces to address noise issues specific to our area.

The three jurisdictions have hired Vianair Consulting to lead a 24-month study designed to provide input to the FAA administrative process.

We will have a community meeting later this month, and there is currently **an online survey seeking responses from Alexandrians.**

Congressman Beyer's office has been instrumental in working with the FAA to maintain progress in this discussion.

Residents can submit complaints about specific noise from airport operations online.

Making Duke Street Better



For much of this term, the Council has been focused on improving the safety and the function of Duke Street, one of our most significant arterial roads.

The focus of our efforts on Duke Street are divided into 5 key areas:

Duke Street Traffic Mitigation: To Reduce Congestion and Cut-Through Traffic

Smart Traffic Signals: To better manage traffic with technology

Duke Street at West Taylor Run: To improve access to the highway

Vision Zero: Reduce serious crashes

Duke Street Bus Rapid Transit: Enhance and improve bus service

The data collection that was performed for the Central Alexandria Traffic Study revealed that a relatively small number of residential streets were carrying inordinate amounts of "cut-through" traffic, mostly using those streets to access the Telegraph interchange with the Beltway.

In response to input from the Central Alexandria Study, the City implemented **a variety of mitigation efforts to reduce neighborhood cut-through and work to keep heavy volumes of traffic on the highways and arterial roads**.

As traffic volumes returned in the wake of the pandemic, it was clear that more was necessary.

After work with civic associations, **our staff proposed new mitigation efforts to reduce some neighborhood cut-through traffic**.

The **first pilot was implemented in the first quarter of 2022** and changed light timings on Quaker and Duke, as well as on side streets, to focus traffic volumes on the arterial roads.

The second pilot began in August of 2022 and limited access from West Taylor Run Parkway to Telegraph Road.

Our commitment during this pilot was to assess the impact, collect data and engage with the community to ensure these changes achieve the results they are designed to create.

Analysis of the traffic data proved compelling:

- Quaker Lane volume increased by 39%

- West Taylor Run Parkway volume decreased by 54%
- Cambridge Road volume decreased by 48%
- Yale Drive volume decreased by 76%
- Fort Williams Parkway volume decreased by 47%

With that success, last year those changes were made permanent.

Last month, our City staff **brought a proposal to our Traffic & Parking Board regarding the function of the service road from Moncure to West Taylor Run.** Ultimately, the Board endorsed a reconfiguration, making the service road one-way east of East Taylor Run to allow for the inclusion of new safety efforts and bicycle facilities.

From the transit perspective, a year ago, the City Council unanimously voted to endorse the recommendations of the Duke Street Transitway Advisory Group **for configuration of the enhanced bus service on the corridor.**

Council took this action after several hours of public testimony both for and against these recommendations. With Council's action, this project entered a new phase of planning, design and implementation as we re-imagine one of the most important corridors in our City.

The Advisory Group has made a long-term recommendation that bus service along the corridor should travel in center-running bus lanes with separate spaces for pedestrians and cyclists. This would be implemented over time as funding and redevelopment make this vision feasible.

In the near-term the Advisory Group has recommended that the busway be implemented today:

Segment 1: From Ripley to Jordan, with center-running bus lanes

Segment 2a: From Jordan to Wheeler, with buses running in mixed traffic

Segment 2b: From Wheeler to Roth, with a single direction center-running bus lane

Segment 3: From Roth to Callahan, with center-running and mixed traffic/curb running and mixed traffic

Since last year's Council action, our staff has worked to advance the engineering work designed to bring this transit enhancement to reality. **During those efforts, it was determined that the full construction of**

Segment 2b should be deferred until redevelopment occurs of the adjacent shopping center. In the near-term, smaller enhancements will occur to improve transit flow and safety.

Over 15 years ago, the City adopted its latest **Transportation Master Plan**. At the time, the plan was a significant transition in that it shifted from a plan focused on roads and vehicle traffic, to a plan that prioritized transit.

One of the most significant changes that came from the 2008 Master Plan was the designation of three transit corridors for high-capacity transit. The three corridors were Transit Corridor A, which was nominally north to south on Route 1 on the east end of the City, Transit Corridor B, which was intended as east to west on Duke Street and Transit Corridor C, which was north to south on the west end of the City using Van Dorn and Beauregard.

After the adoption of the 2008 Master Plan, **a community task force was assembled to provide some more details around the vision for each of the transit corridors.**

Transit Corridor A began service as "Metroway" nearly nine years ago, and was the region's first bus rapid transit service, providing service to Potomac Yard and Crystal City, which further enhancements planned.

Transit Corridor C, now called the "West End Transitway" will be the next to come to reality. The West End Transitway has now been awarded **\$73 million of State and Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) funds.**

The slower pace of redevelopment in the Beauregard corridor will necessitate multiple phases to implement this project. With funding now in place (not until 2024-2025), work begins to plan the implementation.

Transit Corridor B, the Duke Street Transitway, will be the final corridor implemented. Nearly 4 years ago, the City received \$75 million in regional funds from the NVTA to bring this new transit to reality.

High capacity transit provides our residents with alternatives to congestion and delay. Coupled with the other improvements on Duke, I am confident the important road will become a more usable, safe and efficient option for our entire community.



Expanding our Tree Canopy

To celebrate Alexandria's 275th birthday, we set out to plant 275 new trees in every part of our City! We started this effort on April 6th and last week we planted our 100th tree!. **You can track our progress online.**

As a dense urban community, Alexandria has long valued its tree canopy. Critical to our ecosystem and our quality of life, trees have been threatened as our City has grown and changed over the years.

Twenty years ago, the City Council appointed an Urban Forestry Steering Committee to help the City chart a different future for our City's trees. As they collected information, they learned that in 2001, the City's tree canopy covered 34% of the City. By 2007, that was down to 30%.

The committee's efforts led to the adoption of the **Urban Forestry Master Plan in 2009**, which included policies and procedures designed to bring our tree canopy coverage to 40% of our City.

Those efforts are working! From 2014 until 2018, thanks to the work of the City, private civic groups, landowners and other public entities, **Alexandria's tree canopy grew from 26.6 to 32.5%**. That is 569 acres of net tree canopy gain.

In fact, **recent analysis by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) showed that Alexandria has added more new tree canopy than ANY jurisdiction in Northern Virginia** and is second to Frederick County, Maryland for tree canopy increase, in the entire region!

The budget the City Council approved last month includes **funding to plant an average of 428 trees per year for the next few years and expanded efforts to maintain our existing tree canopy.**

Half of the City's tree canopy is on private residential properties. You can help the City by **planting native trees** on your property and **requesting new tree plantings on adjacent public property.** You can also **donate to our Living Landscape Fund.** Money raised in this fund is used to plant new trees throughout our City.

The City's analysis has also shown considerable inequities in tree canopy coverage around our City. Future City tree-planting efforts must focus on ensuring that every part of our City has the benefit of a green tree canopy.



King Street-Bradlee

After several months of community engagement, the City is now entering the conceptual design phase for a complicated area of our City. The area of King Street, between N. Quaker Lane and Menokin Drive straddles the City's border, is adjacent to a major shopping center and carries significant vehicle, transit, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. It's also an area with substandard infrastructure and stormwater needs.

Last month, City staff hosted a virtual presentation reviewing the input we have received **and sharing the preferred design alternative. You can watch the full presentation online and review the slides.**

This proposal will go to the Traffic & Parking Board this month and to the City Council later this year.

Please let us know your thoughts!



Food Waste

Two years ago, when City Council approved our budget, an amendment I proposed was included to expand the City's collection of food waste. My proposal funded both an expansion of **our existing Farmers' Market Composting program** and a new curbside collection program.

Our Farmers' Market composting program has added two new sites, the Old Town North Market (901 N. Royal Street) and the Southern Towers market collection point (4901 Seminary Road).

Last year, **we launched the new curbside collection program.** We are **now launching the second year of this program and we are accepting new registrations.**

These residents will receive a free start-up kit and 6 months of service for free. The City has contracted with **Compost Crew** to provide this service.

A year from now, residents can opt to continue the service with a monthly or annual fee.

Earlier last year, **the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that it has awarded the City additional funding to supplement local funds in expanding this new program.** These funds, drawn from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) are a portion of \$9.4 million distributed nationally to support compost and food waste reduction projects.

I am excited to see this program continue to grow. This is a program that will reduce waste and improve the

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environment. I hope you find it useful!



Solarize

Are you interested in harnessing solar power for your home?

[You can sign up to participate in Solarize Alexandria!](#)

Solarize Alexandria is a partnership between the City, the **[Northern Virginia Regional Commission](#)**, and **[LEAP](#)**.

The goal is to increase the deployment of solar power generation in our residential communities. In addition to reducing emissions and reducing your power bill, **[the City of Alexandria provides a real estate tax exemption for qualifying solar installations.](#)**

The program begins with a free assessment from the program installer. Sign up today!

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