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your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

March 1, 2022

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In This Month's Edition:

- Budget Presentation
- Broadband
- Road Paving
- Real Estate Assessments
- Investing in our Workforce
- King Street Pedestrian Zone
- American Rescue Plan
- Collective Bargaining
- General Assembly Update
- Climate Change
- Torpedo Factory
- Public Health



Quick Links

[E-Mail Me](#)

[Past Newsletters](#)

[City of Alexandria Website](#)

[Pay City Taxes Online](#)

[Review Real Estate Assessments](#)

[Crime Mapping & Statistics](#)

[Alex 311](#) (Submit Service Requests to City Agencies)

[Board & Commission Vacancies](#)

Almost two years ago, the same day that the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, [the City announced its first case of the Coronavirus.](#)

Since that day, we have weathered nearly 30,000 documented COVID cases in our City. Over 700 of those cases have required hospitalization.

Sadly, [we have lost 184 of our neighbors to this horrible virus.](#)

We have also seen so many of our fellow Alexandrians lose their livelihoods, their

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[Alexandria Health Department
Restaurant Inspections](#)
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Inspection](#)
[Smoke Detector Installation
Request](#)
[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)
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homes and their ability to provide food to themselves and their family.

Through these two difficult years, we have seen something else. We have seen our community come together to help neighbors they knew and many that they have never met.

We have seen our brave healthcare workers and public health employees risk everything to keep our community safe. We have seen dedicated public servants ceaselessly serve our community, even at risk to themselves and their families. We have seen the essential workers keeping our supermarkets open, our restaurants functioning, our pharmacies and retailers available, our hospitals cleaned and our public transit running.

At a time where our community needed heroes, heroes have emerged from every corner of our City.

While the newest variant hit our City particularly hard, its impact has receded. Nearly 80% of our City's eligible population has been fully vaccinated and over a third have received a booster. It is now time to turn the corner.

Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a new tool to gauge a community's COVID risk and assess the need for mitigation strategies going forward.

Based on this new tool, Alexandria's risk is "low." While this does not mean that COVID is behind us, it does mean that for most residents, we can return to normal life, while taking reasonable precautions for high-risk individuals.

We will continue to work to vaccinate every resident in our City. ANYONE who is aged 5 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.

If you are 16 or older and received the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna or the single dose of Johnson & Johnson you are eligible for a booster dose.

For more information or to sign-up for a booster dose, [please head to our vaccine website](#).

For those who have already been vaccinated, [you may now download your vaccination record from the Virginia Department of Health](#).

COVID testing is [widely available throughout our City](#). Additionally, if you have not requested your 4 free at-home test kits from the Federal government, [you can request it online today](#).

The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) continues mitigations and efforts to prevent significant spread of the virus within our schools. [Parents can register for free in-school testing](#).

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.

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

[You can watch February's Town Hall online](#). Join us [Thursday evening at 8PM](#) for my [March Town Hall](#).

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

Initiatives and Updates



Budget Presentation

Last month, the City Manager presented [his proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2023 \(July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023\)](#) and [his proposed Capital Improvement Program \(CIP\) for Fiscal Year 2023 through Fiscal Year 2032](#). This begins City Council's annual budget process, which will culminate in the adoption of the budget on May 4th.

We would like your input on the proposed budget! On Monday, the City Council will hold our public hearing on the proposed budget. The public hearing will be held on

March 7th beginning at 5:30 PM. **If you wish to address the Council on the proposed budget, you can sign-up to speak online.** You can address the Council in-person at City Hall or virtually on zoom.

You can watch the City Manager's presentation of the budget to the public, which was recorded shortly after the presentation to the City Council.

The most important decision the City Council makes each year is the adoption of the annual operating budget and capital improvement program. The operating budget generally funds the on-going costs of government (primarily personnel), while the capital budget funds one-time expenditures that provide the community with an asset (new schools, new roads, new playing fields, transit buses, etc).

The budget is being built around some of the healthiest revenue growth we have seen in over fifteen years, but also with numerous deferred investments awaiting tax dollars. **In November, our previous City Manager presented his initial outlook for the upcoming budget at our annual Council retreat.**

From 2002 until 2009 the City was enjoying the run-up in the residential real estate market. Our General Fund budget increased by an average of 6.5% per year. The work force in City Government grew from 2,229 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) to 2,660 FTEs during that period.

In Fiscal Year 2010, a little over a decade ago, the bottom fell out as the Great Recession took hold. The City adopted its first negative budget in at least 40 years, reducing spending from Fiscal Year 2009 to 2010 by over 2%. From 2010 to 2020, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 3.2% per year.

The budget that Council adopted two years ago, at the beginning of the COVID crisis, shrunk spending 1.6% from the previous year. Last year, as we began to return to normal, the budget we adopted grew spending by 2.3%.

The authorized work force in City Government is now at 2,700 FTEs, essentially what it was 13 years ago. That's in spite of the fact that our population has grown significantly during that period of time.

Sustaining an average budget growth of 3% per year with 4% annual student enrollment growth, employee healthcare costs increasing far above rates of inflation, long-deferred infrastructure needs, ever-escalating funding challenges from Metro and a hyper-competitive market for municipal employees is impossible.

It was in this context that the City Manager prepared and presented his budget. The City Manager's proposed General Fund Operating Budget is \$829.9 million. This represents a 7.7% increase in spending versus the current approved budget, yet only 3.7% over the original budget that was proposed by the City Manager two years ago, just before the pandemic began.

Every budget has a "story." The City Manager's proposed budget:

- Invests significant new money in employee compensation, with over \$22.8 million proposed to add to employee compensation and benefits
- Invests in new staffing capacity, with 52 new FTE (over half of which are in Public Safety agencies) proposed to be added to the City workforce
- Fully-funds the approved Operating and Capital budgets of the Alexandria City Public Schools, totaling over \$12.7 million for an increased operating transfer and debt service for ACPS capital projects
- Commits new resources to support the infrastructure proposed as part of the Capital Improvement Program.

Last year, the City Council was able to adopt the first reduction in the real estate tax rate in 15 years, bringing the rate from \$1.13 to \$1.11. This year, the City Manager has proposed maintaining the current \$1.11 rate.

With the impacts of average assessment increases included, this means the average single-family homeowner would pay \$601 more in 2022 than in 2021. The average condo owner would pay \$120 more in 2022 versus 2021.

In addition, the City Manager has proposed no increase in the annual Residential Refuse Fee of \$484.22, which covers the costs of trash, recycling and yard waste collection (among other services). This fee is paid only by the 20,647 homeowners who receive City trash collection.

The stormwater utility fee is proposed to increase to address stormwater management and Chesapeake Bay clean-up mandates. This fee is paid by all property owners, including non-taxable properties. The new annual fee will be \$82.32 for condos, \$123.48 for townhomes, \$294 for small single-family homes and \$490.99 for large single-family homes.

A week from today, City Council must make the first big decision of this year's budget process. State law requires that the Council vote to "advertise" a tax rate. The rate that the Council chooses to advertise becomes

the ceiling for the Council during the budget process. We can adopt a lower rate, but we can go no higher.

In addition the budget documents linked above, **all questions asked by members of Council during the process are posted, along with answers, online for the public to review.** Any request to change the proposed budget must be initiated with a budget question, so it is a good window into the thoughts of your elected representatives.

There is no more important process than the adoption of our annual budget. The budget is a reflection of the values of our community and I look forward to working with our residents and my colleagues to craft a budget that is reflective of those collective values.

Let me know your thoughts!

Broadband Update

In January, **the City announced that we have received four proposals from vendors seeking to offer competitive broadband services for our community.** This is a major step in our multi-year effort to bring broadband competition to Alexandria.

The four bidders who have responded to this solicitation are:

- **Lumos Telephone LLC**
- **NATC Tower Company**
- **Shenandoah Cable Television, LLC (Shentel)**
- **Ting Fiber, Inc.**

The City Council voted unanimously to accept all four proposals and our staff has been working to negotiate franchise agreements with all four firms.

Last week, the City Council **unanimously advanced franchise agreements with two of the firms, Ting and Lumos,** and we will be considering final passage of franchise agreements for both on Saturday March 12th at our public hearing. Public testimony is welcome on this important proposal.

Last year, City Council gathered on Eisenhower Avenue to have a **formal groundbreaking for the build of our municipal fiber network.** Construction is **now occurring at 5 different locations in the City.**

Over 8 years ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to help bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.

It has taken far too long, but the City is finally moving ahead on an effort to bring new broadband capacity to



our community.

Over a year ago, the City issued a revised solicitation to select a vendor to construct a municipal fiber network to serve City and School facilities around our community. Earlier last year, a contract was awarded to Jones Utilities Construction, Inc to perform this work.

Over 7 years ago, the City issued a Request for Information (RFI). This RFI solicited concepts from the private sector for partnership with the City in expanding broadband options, availability, and capabilities. We received 10 responses from potential private partners and those responses shaped the approach the City is now taking.

For years, Alexandria has sought new private investment in broadband infrastructure. For most of our residents, we have one company providing Internet connectivity and television. Regardless of the performance of incumbent providers, technological innovation and reliability thrives on competition.

This is an issue that impacts not only residents but also our businesses and the ability of our community to attract new investment.

Concurrent with the FY 2017 budget process, the City completed the initial financial estimates for the first phase of the infrastructure build-out. The plan is designed to replace the City's existing connectivity agreement for City facilities with a City-owned fiber network.

By leveraging E-Rate funding from the FCC, achieving operating savings from the costs of the existing agreement, and the potential for private leases of our infrastructure, the effort may be able to pay for itself.

One of the core components of the original proposal I made was that the City adopt a "Dig Once" policy. Essentially that's a policy that makes the City more efficient by leveraging existing underground infrastructure work to add conduit and other infrastructure at the same time. With hundreds of millions of dollars of sewer and transportation work scheduled over the next decade, we should sequence and combine that work to be the most efficient.

This is an exciting project and one that gives the City the best chance to leverage its assets to bring new broadband services to our residents and businesses.

Road Paving



The City Manager's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023) continues a multi-year effort to address the condition of the City's roads. **The proposed budget includes \$7.1 million for this upcoming fiscal year (\$63.4 million for the next decade) to pave miles of roads around our City.**

The City has 561 lane miles of roads for which it is responsible. Every 3 years, our Transportation and Environmental Services Department assesses every street in the City **assigning each a Pavement Condition Inventory (PCI) score.** Based on that score and available resources, our paving plan for each year is formulated. This year's schedule is based on the 2019 survey rankings. The City will be performing a new assessment this year.

While the PCI score informs the schedule, our staff must also coordinate these investments with utility work planned by private and public entities, as well as other projects.

If the currently proposed funding level is approved, we are scheduled to resurface the following roads next fiscal year (beginning July 1, 2022):

- Eisenhower Avenue Concrete from 1000' W of Cameron Park Place to Lake Cook Entrance
- Gibbon Street from South Payne Street to South Union Street
- Griffith Place from Fort Williams Parkway to End
- John Carlyle Street from Eisenhower Avenue to Duke Street
- North Dearing Street from King Street to End
- Sanger Avenue from North Van Dorn Street to End
- Quantrell Ave from Lincolnia Road to Beauregard Street
- Templeton Place from Fort Williams Parkway to End
- Bennett Street from Saylor Place to End
- Sterling Avenue from North Quaker Lane to End
- Tower Court from South Whiting Street to End
- Florence Drive from West Glebe Road to End
- Four Mile Road from Mount Vernon Avenue to Florence Drive
- West Caton Avenue from Sanford Street to Commonwealth Avenue
- Reinekers Lane from Diagonal Road to Duke Street
- Albany Avenue from King Street to End
- Arell Court from Duke Street to End
- Calhoun Avenue from North Rosser Street to End
- Chelsea Court from Fort Williams Parkway to End

- Clermont Avenue from Eisenhower Avenue to End
- Cockrell Street from Duke Street to End
- Coventry Lane from North Quaker Lane to End
- East and West Oak Street from Mount Vernon Avenue to Russell Road
- East Uhler Avenue from Mount Avenue to Commonwealth Avenue
- Englehardt Lane from Jamieson Avenue to End
- Farrington Avenue from South Van Dorn Street to the City Limit
- Saylor Place Entire Length
- Garden Drive, Usher Drive, Vermont Avenue
- South 28th Street from King Street to End
- Palmer Place from Polk Avenue to End
- Pender Court from Palmer Place to End
- Hancock Avenue from West Braddock Road to End
- Key Drive from Francis Hammond Parkway to End (Roan Lane)
- Jackson Place from Woodland Terrace to Tyler Place
- Valley Drive from Preston Road to West Braddock Road
- Lasalle Avenue from North Pickett to Juliana Place
- Longview Drive from Duke Street to End
- Loyola Avenue from North Howard Street to Stonebridge Road
- Mark Center Drive from Seminary Road to North Beauregard Street (Mark Center Avenue)
- Maris Avenue from North Van Dorn Street
- Beverley Drive from Valley Drive to Washington Circle
- Moss Place from Fort Worth Avenue to End
- Notabene Drive from Old Dominion Boulevard to Four Mile Road
- North Quaker Lane from Duke Street to West Braddock Road
- Pommander Walk Street from Franklin Street to South Union Street
- North Frost Street from Lawrence Street to Seminary Road
- Potomac Greens Drive from Slaters Lane
- Pine Street from Russell Road to Holly Street
- Queen Street from North West Street to North Union Street
- Raleigh Avenue Entire Length
- Richmarr Place from North Latham Street to End
- Rosecrest Avenue from West Custis Avenue to Russell Road
- South Floyd from Duke Street to Wheeler Avenue
- Sunset Drive from King Street to Commonwealth Avenue
- Surry Place from North Latham Street to End
- Suter Street from Earl Street to End
- Sweeley Street from Duke Street to Colvin Street

- Talbot Place from North Pegram Street to Prospect Place
- Edsall Road from South Van Dorn to Cameron Station Blvd
- Jamieson Avenue from Andrew's Lane to End
- West and East Glendale Avenues from Leslie Avenue to West Timber Branch Parkway
- Vasser Road from Cambridge to End (Vasser Place)

For Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024), we are scheduled to resurface the following roads:

- Duke Street from Dulany Street to South Patrick Street
- South Washington Street from I-395 to Duke Street
- North Washington Street from Cameron Street to First Street
- King Street from Janney's Lane to Dangerfield Road
- Hermitage Court from King Street to End
- Green Street from South Patrick Street to South Lee Street
- Cloverway Drive from Dartmouth Road to Janney's Lane
- Holland Street from Duke to Eisenhower Avenue
- Dale Street from Edison Street to End
- Oakley Place from East Timber Branch Parkway to End
- Orleans Place from North Gaillard Street to End
- Ormond Avenue from North Gaillard Street to North Howard Street
- Sylvan Court from Trinity Drive to End
- Stevenson Avenue from South Whiting Street to Stulz Road
- North Stevenson Square
- South Stevenson Square
- Edison Street from West Reed Avenue to End
- North Clarens Street from Trinity Drive to End
- North Breckinridge Place from Lincolnia Road to End
- Murrays Avenue from Swann Avenue to Calvert Avenue
- Oakville Street from Swann Avenue to Fannon Street
- Fannon Street from Richmond Highway End
- Juliana Place from North Pickett Street to End
- East and West Mason Avenue from Stonewall Road to End

For Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025), we are scheduled to resurface the following roads:

- Jamieson Avenue from South West Street to Mill Road
- West Timber Branch Parkway from Ruffner Road to Junior Street

- Seay Street from Longview Drive to End
- Viewpoint Road from Longview Drive to End
- Emerson Avenue from John Carlyle Street to Holland Lane
- Wilkes Street from South Patrick Street to End
- Mayer Place from Allison Street to End
- Juniper Place from North Jordan Street to End
- Milan Drive from West Glebe Road to Four Mile Road
- West Windsor Avenue from Russell Road to Commonwealth Avenue
- Herbert Street from Commonwealth Avenue to Mount Vernon Avenue
- Manning Street from Commonwealth Avenue to Clifford Avenue
- North and South Lee Street Entire Length
- North Garland Street from Fort Worth Avenue to End
- Sharp Place from Saint Stephens Road to End
- Vicar Lane from Bishop Lane to End
- Adams Avenue from Newton Street to Mount Vernon Avenue
- Newton Street from East Braddock Road to East Luray Avenue
- Gunston Road from Valley Drive to Valley Drive
- Elizabeth Lane from Eisenhower Avenue to Courthouse Square
- Metro Road from Eisenhower Avenue to South Van Dorn Street
- Boyle Street from Buchanan Street to End
- Second Street from Colonial Avenue Drive to North Fairfax Street
- Laird Place from Manor Road to Tennessee Avenue
- Stovall Street from Eisenhower Avenue to Mill Road
- South Bragg Street from City limit to End
- Ford Avenue from North Hampton Drive to End
- Banks Place from North Morgan Street to End
- Franklin Street from South Union Street to South Payne Street
- Commerce Street from South Fayette Street to South West Street
- Fern Street from North Quaker Lane to Osage Street
- North Imboden Street from North Howard to Raleigh Street
- Sanford Street from West Mount Ida to West Del Ray
- Price Street from East Bellefonte Avenue to Cliff Street
- Ballenger Avenue from Holland Lane to Courthouse Square
- South Royal Street from Gibbons Street to Queen Street
- Slaters Lane from Richmond Highway to End
- Portner Road from Slaters Lane to End
- Portner Place

I'm hopeful we can continue (and hopefully increase) these investments in this very basic infrastructure.



Real Estate Assessments

Last month, the City mailed 2022 assessment notices to each property owner and you may [view valuations online](#). Included online is information about comparable transactions that were used to calculate individual assessments.

Twenty two years ago, the City Council of Alexandria received its assessment report from our City Assessor. The City Council learned that between 1999 and 2000, the City's real estate tax base grew by a little over 9%. For the next 6 years, annual tax base growth never went below double digits, as the City AVERAGED 15.3% ANNUAL tax base growth between 1999 and 2006. This was an unprecedented appreciation in our tax base.

From 2006 to 2007, the City's real estate tax base grew by just a little over 4%. For the next 12 years, annual growth in the tax base never again reached 4%. From 2008 until 2019, the City's tax base grew annually by an average of 1.47%. There were two years during this period where the tax base actually shrunk.

This year, our overall real estate tax base grew by 6.24%. [This brings the City's real estate tax base to \\$46.6 billion](#). This is the largest increase in our real estate tax base in over 15 years. Of the \$2.8 billion increase in the real estate tax base this year, \$857.6 million, nearly a third, was from new construction. Between 2018 and 2022, \$2.16 billion of new development has been added to the tax rolls. At the current tax rate, those properties generate nearly \$24 million in annual real estate tax revenue, the equivalent of over 5 cents on the current real estate tax rate.

Over 63% of the costs of Alexandria's government come from residential and commercial real estate taxes. As such, the announcement of our annual real estate tax assessments is the most important indicator for the upcoming budget process.

This year, for the first time in a while, both the residential and commercial tax bases are following a similar growth trajectory. The residential tax base grew at 6.91% and the commercial tax base grew at 5.34%.

The average assessed value for a single family home increased 6.44% to \$896,176. Of those properties, 97% of single family homes increased in value, 1% decreased, and 2% stayed the same.

The average assessed value for a condominium increased 2.81% to \$387,597. Of those properties, 65% of condominiums increased in value, 6% decreased, and 2% stayed the same.

While overall commercial assessments experienced growth, there were ups and downs. Industrial properties led the way with 15.4% growth. Multi-family rental buildings, which count as commercial properties, saw 10.3% assessment growth. Yet the pandemic continued to hurt both hotels and office space, as they lost 12.2% and 6.5% of their values, respectively.

If you have concerns about your assessments, you have multiple options to have the assessment reviewed. First, contact the Real Estate Assessment office at 703-746-4646. Our staff is happy to discuss your specific assessment.

The City **also has a variety of tax relief programs available for eligible property owners.**

Until March 15th, a resident can submit a request to have assessments reviewed for modification by the City Staff. **Those requests can be submitted online.**

If the review process does not yield a satisfactory result, an appeal can be filed to be heard before the City's Board of Equalization and Assessment Review. Those requests must be filed prior to June 1st.



Investing In Our City Workforce

Local government is a people-intensive business. The services that residents of our City rely on every day are provided by a skilled and dedicated workforce. In a region such as ours, attracting and retaining such a workforce is a competitive business.

Fully 68% of the City's General Fund (not including schools and debt service) expenditures are personnel costs, including both salary and benefits. In this year's budget, that is \$254 million. The proposed budget suggests spending over \$22.8 million of new revenue in City employee compensation and benefits

Balancing the level of compensation and benefits provided with the ability to attract and retain the best workforce is a challenge for the City.

For some of our employee groups, particularly in public safety, we are struggling to compete. With significant growth in hiring and in compensation among neighboring jurisdictions, the competition grows more acute each year. Given the substantial cost of training and the consistency of that training across the region,

inability to retain these employees can be very costly for the taxpayers.

In 2018, to begin the process of meeting **the City's compensation philosophy**, the City Manager set aside \$1.5 million to address some of the pay inequities existing within the Police Department and Fire Department. The City Manager's plan was to allow this money to serve as seed money for a multi-year effort to address these issues.

It became clear during the budget process that the \$1.5 million was insufficient to address these issues. **Ultimately the Council approved a package that I proposed to set aside a total of \$3.6 million to address these public safety compensation challenges.**

In a competitive marketplace for talent, each action will of course have a reaction from neighboring jurisdictions competing for the same talent.

In the previous City Manager's budget proposal in the spring of 2020, released just before the pandemic was upon us, he included a variety of pay adjustments intended to keep pace with regional competition. As the scope of the pandemic became clear, the Council ultimately determined that the tax increases proposed to fund the budget proposals would not be tenable. **Those pay adjustments were removed from the revised budget.**

The City, and nearly every other employer, is now facing one of the most challenging hiring markets in a generation. That is exacerbated by some of the City's pay competitiveness challenges. This has created a staffing crunch in many areas of City government, but particularly in our public safety agencies.

In the budget Council approved last year, we did work to begin to address some of these challenges. All City employees who are not at the end of the pay-scale (about 80%) qualify for a "merit increase" ranging from 2.3% to 5%. Funding those increases for all eligible City employees required an additional \$2.9 million last year.

The Council also chose to include a 1% bonus for all employees as appreciation for the significant work undertaken during the pandemic.

As the year continued, it became clear how much more challenging our employee attraction and retention issues had become.

While typically the Council makes budget decisions during our annual budget process, **the Council did vote in the fall to allocate surplus money from the previous fiscal year and a portion of our second**

tranche of American Rescue Plan funds to provide new compensation to our employees.

The package that the Council adopted included an extremely-rare mid-year 1.5% salary increase for all City employees, a \$3,000 bonus to all employees, and targeted increases for several positions in the Police, Fire and Sheriff's Departments.

The City Manager's proposed budget now includes new compensation initiatives:

- A merit increase (2.8% - 5%) for all eligible employees (80% of the total workforce)
- A 4% market rate adjustment to all General Schedule City employees
- A 5% market rate adjustment for all Police and Sheriff employees
- A 6% market rate adjustment for all Fire Department employees
- Increased funding for healthcare premiums, which are growing 12-15% depending on the plans selected
- The full-year cost of the 1.5% increase provided last fiscal year

In recent years, the City has also made a variety of changes to employee benefits. This was in an attempt to mitigate the costs of employee compensation on the City's taxpayers.

One of the largest compensation costs is providing health care coverage to our employees and their families. Like most employers, we have seen very large increases in these costs over the past two decades. Today the City spends over \$30 million a year on healthcare for our employees and families.

Fifteen years ago, the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee made a series of recommendations to help mitigate these costs.

Many of those are in place today including premium cost sharing, self-funding (or self-insurance), and plan design changes. These changes have saved the taxpayers millions of dollars each year, with minimal impact on employees. In fact, due to lower-than-expected health care spending from the City's self-insurance fund, the City was able to give City employees a "premium holiday" for three pay periods last year, thus increasing take-home pay.

In 2004, the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) required governments to account for their liability for the payment of healthcare benefits and retirement benefits (OPEB) during retirement. Previously, these costs were recognized and paid on a "pay as you go" basis.

Alexandria became one of the first jurisdictions to comply with this new standard and we created a trust fund to save dollars for these future obligations. The City's unfunded liability for this obligation is now \$24.3 million, a decrease of \$26.3 million from the previous year. This prudence protects taxpayers in the future from large unexpected obligations. It also protects employees from sudden benefit reductions due to an economic downturn. These obligations are now 89.1% funded and we are on track to fully pre-fund these obligations in 2028.

Most City employees (excluding most public safety) participate in the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), a state administered defined benefit pension plan. **The City implemented new cost-sharing for the VRS pension in 2012, with a five year implementation.** This effectively shifted a portion of the funding of the pension program from the City to employees.

In 2018, the City Manager proposed a change to the City's Supplemental Pension Plan. The City's Supplemental Pension Plan is an additional defined benefit pension plan that the City has had in place since 1970.

Previously members had a choice between accepting an annuity upon retirement and a lump-sum payment. The lump-sum payment is based on 30-year US Treasury bond rates, which has been decreasing for decades. As a result, the lump-sum payment was unduly lucrative compared to the annuity option. To protect the health of the fund and save money, the City Manager proposed a change to how the lump sum is calculated.

While the changes that have been made to benefits over the years have reduced the costs to taxpayers, there is recognition that we must continue to invest to attract and retain the employees who serve our community.

As Council continues to discuss the proposed budget, we will surely be discussing how employee compensation and competitiveness will figure into our budget picture for the upcoming year.



King Street Pedestrian Zone

Fifteen 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.

Almost three years ago, **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. We suggested that with a newly expanded Waterfront Park, new public art, active programming and adjacent businesses, it was the ideal time to bring back this idea.

Our staff brought recommendations to the Alexandria Waterfront Commission and the Alexandria Transportation Commission for feedback and review.

As we neared a decision, the pandemic began and changed everything. Once the Commonwealth lifted the stay-at-home order and dining outdoors became possible, the closure of King Street not only became desirable, but it became essential to the survival of our businesses. It was quickly advanced as a pilot program.

At the end of the year, **the City Council voted unanimously to make this closure permanent**. With this decision made, **we are working to plan the permanent changes**.

This month, the Council will consider a pilot to extend the closure to the unit block of King Street, **connecting the pedestrian zone to our expanded Waterfront Park**.

The pedestrian zone on King Street became one of many adaptations the City implemented during COVID, including expanded outdoor dining, curbside loading zones, space for retail and recreation uses, and more.

I am excited to see these changes to improve the vitality of our "main street."

American Rescue Plan Update

Last summer, the City Council unanimously adopted Alexandria's plan to allocate the first tranche of \$29.8 million, from the City's allocation in the American Rescue Plan.

Last month the City Council received **another update on the status of implementing each of the projects that have been funded**.

The City has expended a little over \$1.5 million of the initial tranche, with large spending anticipated for this quarter.

In his proposed budget, the City Manager **has proposed an allocation for the second tranche of money, which will be received by the City in May**. Of the \$29.8 million in the second tranche, \$8.7 million was



already pre-allocated by City Council for emergent needs, including the one-time employee bonuses mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, and another \$8.7 million is proposed to remain un-allocated for future use.

A year ago, President Biden **signed the American Rescue Plan into law**. This sprawling and comprehensive piece of legislation provides significant resources to Alexandria's residents, our businesses, our schools and our local government.

After surveying the community, we received an enormous amount of ideas and concepts for how Alexandria could best deploy these resources to improve our City.

Alexandria's government will receive a total of \$59.4 million from the legislation, divided into two allotments, one that was received in May and the other to be received in May of 2022. All funds must be spent by December 31, 2024.

Beyond what the City will receive, the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) will receive \$34.8 million from this legislation. This is in addition to the \$15 million ACPS received from the **Federal legislation that was enacted before the end of last year**.

The American Rescue Plan included three criteria for how the local government funds may be used:

- To respond to the public health emergency with respect to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality
- For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue of such metropolitan city, nonentitlement unit of government or county due to such emergency
- To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

The Treasury Department released **an "Interim Final Rule," which ultimately provides detailed (151 pages!) guidance to localities as to how we can expend these dollars**.

This is a "once in a generation" infusion of money for Alexandria's City government and our school system. We must ensure that we not only spend every penny that the Federal government has provided to our community, but we also must use these resources wisely and to the long-term benefit of our community.

I believe we should continue to use this money to create sustainable structures that will not only help us recover, but benefit the City for decades to come. Furthermore, given the substantial resources that ACPS, the Commonwealth and many Federal programs will be receiving, I believe that Alexandria's expenditure of these combined resources should be closely coordinated to ensure the maximum benefit for our community.

In May of last year, the Governor and the leadership of the State Senate and House of Delegates **announced shared priorities for the expenditure of \$4.3 billion that the Commonwealth will be receiving directly from this legislation.** The Governor called the General Assembly back into **a special session in the summer to enact these priorities.**

While we continue our focus on the resources that will be directly appropriated to our local government, we must also commit resources to ensuring that each of our residents and our businesses avail themselves of portions of the legislation that might benefit them. The Rescue Plan is a large piece of legislation and our government can assist our residents and businesses in navigating its complexity.

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.

As we put COVID-19 behind us, the hardship faced by our residents and businesses will continue for a while to come. The City will continue to find ways to provide the support required. I am hopeful we will take this opportunity to use these resources to wisely shape our future.



Collective Bargaining Returns

Just over 45 years ago, **the Virginia Supreme Court invalidated the collective bargaining rights of public sector employees in Virginia.** At that time, 19 Virginia jurisdictions, including the City of Alexandria had some form of collective bargaining with public sector employees.

With votes that occurred last month, Alexandria has become the first jurisdiction in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 45 years to recognize unions as exclusive representatives of groups of our employees.

Under **legislation adopted by the Virginia General Assembly two years ago**, localities in Virginia can again allow their employees to collectively bargain on the conditions of their employment.

Last year, **the City Council adopted a complex, but comprehensive ordinance, to set the framework for this new relationship**.

Included in this ordinance are the possible organization of 5 distinct employee groups:

- Police
- Fire and Emergency Services
- Labor and Trades
- Professional
- Administrative and Technical

In order for a union to be recognized as the exclusive bargaining representative of a distinct group, the employees must vote.

In the case of our employees that provide Fire and Emergency services, the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 2141 worked to organize the group. In the election held last month, of the 239 eligible employees, 163 employees voted for the IAFF, and 1 employee voted for no representation, so the IAFF is now the exclusive representative for these employees.

In the case of our employees with the Police Department, there were two unions vying to represent this group. The Southern States Police Benevolent Association (SSPBA) received 102 votes of the 279 employees eligible. The International Union of Police Association, Local 5 (IUPA) received 89 votes. Thus, the SSPBA will be the exclusive representative for these employees.

The right to **collectively bargain is a core human right enshrined in the United National Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.

As we return to this process, I look forward to a constructive relationship with the organizations that our public-sector employees have voted to represent them.



General Assembly Nears Finish Line

Two months ago in this newsletter, I wrote a preview of the upcoming General Assembly session and I noted that with divided government, the only legislation likely to make it to the Governor's desk for signature, will be changes that enjoy bipartisan support.

Now, with two weeks left in the General Assembly session, we have seen divided government in action, as

the House of Delegates has quickly dispatched any controversial legislation that has made it over from the State Senate, and the State Senate has returned the favor.

Yet, the adoption of a new biennial budget for the Commonwealth is something the sides must agree on. **Governor Northam proposed his outgoing budget last month, relying on one of the rosiest financial pictures for the Commonwealth in its history.** That financial picture has only improved, as Governor Youngkin recently notified the General Assembly of **\$1.25 billion more in the state coffers than had been anticipated.**

The House of Delegates and State Senate have now adopted their versions of the Commonwealth's budget. As might be anticipated, **these budgets present two very different perspectives on how to expend state tax dollars.**

For the City, our key financial priorities are best represented in the Senate budget, as they include money to support the **City's River Renew** (Combined Sewer remediation) project and repairs for the **Douglass Memorial Cemetery.**

Every year, the City Council adopts a Legislative Package for the upcoming General Assembly session. While the state government is certainly a significant financial supporter of the City's budget, Richmond also sets a legal environment that affects how we provide services to our residents.

Along with Councilman Kirk McPike, I serve on the City's Legislative Committee, which recommends the Legislative Package each year to our colleagues.

This year, we have again chosen to prepare a "Statement of Legislative Principles" and a "Statement of Legislative Priorities." Given the breadth of legislation likely to be filed, and potentially enacted, we felt it more appropriate to weigh in on the broader themes that we wished to see addressed on behalf of the City in the upcoming session. We formally adopted this package in December.

Yet we do have specific asks within the legislative priorities, including:

- Funding and Authority For Infrastructure Investments
- Protecting and Expansion of Local Authority and Funding
- Projecting our most vulnerable residents
- Promoting Access, Equity and Equality
- Combating climate change and promoting clean energy

We have included a specific list of legislative asks to support our efforts to address inland flooding, including efforts to regulate the stormwater impacts of smaller infill development and ensure new state resources to support the necessary infrastructure investments. We have included requests for increased regulation of Dominion Virginia Power, funding for abandoned cemeteries, broadband investments and efforts to support building safety.

In an attempt to seek common ground, [I had provided a letter on behalf of Alexandria to the Governor-Elect in December laying out areas where I believe we can agree, work together and achieve good results for our shared constituents.](#)

The City is now represented in the State Senate by [Senator Richard Saslaw](#), [Senator George Barker](#), and [Senator Adam Ebbin](#). In the House of Delegates, the City is represented by [Delegate Charniele Herring](#) and [Elizabeth Bennett-Parker](#).

After the session, on Saturday March 19th, Senator Ebbin and Delegate Bennett-Parker will be hosting a virtual town hall to update residents on the actions taken during the session. [You can sign-up to participate online.](#)

Yet, even the composition of our delegation is facing dramatic change. With the collapse last year of the brand new Virginia Redistricting Commission, the Virginia Supreme Court was called upon to determine the new boundaries for Congressional, State Senate and House of Delegates districts. [After appointing two Special Masters, the Virginia Supreme Court unanimously approved new districts last year.](#)

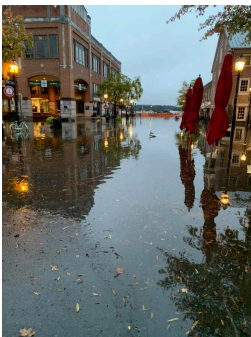
Alexandria will continue to be in the [8th Congressional District](#), will be entirely represented in the [39th State Senate District](#) and will be represented by three members of the House of Delegates, those elected from the [3rd District](#), the [4th District](#), and the [5th District](#).

While it will change soon, [click here to determine who represents you today.](#)

Climate Action

Tonight, at 7 PM, the City's [Energy and Climate Change Task Force](#) will be holding their second workshop. You [can sign-up online to be a part.](#) This group is designed to turn our Environmental Action Plan into concrete steps the City can take to make progress.

[Yesterday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change again sounded the alarm.](#) Their report gives



the world very little time to take meaningful action to mitigate catastrophic impacts of rising temperatures.

Here in Alexandria, we have already seen the dire impacts of a warming planet, as flooding and other storm damage gives us a preview of the decades to come. The geopolitical events of the past few days remind us of the non-environmental rationales for de-emphasizing fossil-fuel energy.

Just last month, [a new study](#) has shown the impacts of climate change on accelerating sea-level rise, [an impact that places our City in significant peril](#).

While the Federal government was largely disengaged from international efforts to address climate change, that is now changing. With or without Federal leadership, Alexandria is continuing to take meaningful climate action.

It was over two years ago that the City Council adopted the [latest update of our Environmental Action Plan](#) . This ambitious plan does not commit or appropriate money, but it does set the strategic direction to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Expand Open Space
- Reduce water pollution
- Reduce vehicle miles traveled
- Reduce ozone

To be successful, this work necessarily involves the public and private sector and will ultimately require a state government fully committed to the cause.

The [City released a comprehensive report of the accomplishments achieved during 2020](#), including reductions in GHG emissions, new programs to make commercial buildings more sustainable, transportation initiatives, new green building standards, expanded recycling, and more.

In April of last year, [the City Council approved our new Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Readiness Strategy](#). Earlier last year, the Council approved the City's [first Alternative Fuel Fleet Policy to accelerate the City's deployment of these vehicles](#).

[DASH recently added its first electric buses to its fleet](#). They are now serving our City on scheduled routes.

In 2020, the Council [unanimously approved our new Green Building Policy](#). This new policy reflects the collaboration of a [Task Force](#) that met for several months to arrive at this new direction.

While the Green Building Policy will ensure that new development is built in a sustainable manner, to make progress, we must address existing structures.

Two years ago, the City Council voted 5-2 **to create a C-PACE program in Alexandria**. A C-PACE program will allow commercial property owners to make improvements to reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and sustainability, financed by repayments collected as part of the property's real estate tax payment.

The City has again partnered with the **Northern Virginia Regional Commission to bring back Solarize Alexandria**. This program partners with residential property owners to conduct assessments on the feasibility of solar power installations.

Buildings account for 39% of total energy use, 68% of electricity consumption and 38% of all carbon dioxide emissions. When buildings are built efficiently, redevelopment can be a powerful force to reduce our energy demands and improve our environment.

Led by an incredibly motivated and knowledgeable group of residents, the City vaulted to the lead among local governments by adopting the **Eco-City Charter** over a decade ago. The charter defined a comprehensive vision for our City to improve environmental sustainability.

The Eco-City Charter then led the City to adopt the **Environmental Action Plan**. The plan laid out specific actions the City should undertake. It detailed how we should measure success and it began to define the next phase of our Eco-City evolution.

In 2009, the **City Council adopted Alexandria's first Green Building Policy**. The policy laid out a series of expectations of the development community, including **LEED Silver for non-residential development and LEED Certified for residential development**. The policy included flexibility so that developers could utilize other standards to ensure environmental sustainability of their development.

Meeting the standard requires a myriad of different techniques. Simply put, green building reduces the energy and water usage of buildings, while creating more livable homes and better spaces for work.

Since the adoption of the policy, 95% of the development constructed or under construction has met this policy. This equates to about 10 million square feet of green building.

Yet a lot has changed in the ten years since the approval of this policy. Green building strategies have

gone from being a novelty and luxury to being a market standard.

The new policy proposes to raise the bar, with all private development being requested to meet a LEED Silver standard, and all public development being required to meet a LEED Gold standard. In addition to LEED, the proposed policy also allows for alternate certification options, including [Green Globes](#) and [Earthcraft](#), with a process for use of alternate standards.

While the task force supported the notion that public construction activity to lead the way in sustainability, there was some disagreement as to whether LEED Gold was sufficient or whether the City should set [Net-Zero construction](#) as the goal. Ultimately Council chose to set Net Zero as the goal for public facility construction. MacArthur Elementary School, which is now under construction, will be our first Net Zero building. It will be followed by the recently-approved Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School.

Constrained budgets make it more challenging for our City to continue its leadership in sustainability practices, but we can and should work to lead the region in this policy area. These efforts are critical given recent Federal policy changes, but are also good for our economy and our quality of life. I look forward to working to see them to reality.



Torpedo Factory

Beginning today, [the Torpedo Factory is looking for world-class artists to be apply for three-year studio leases!](#) With a deadline of April 19th, this is a unique opportunity to become part of Alexandria's internationally-recognized arts community.

[The Torpedo Factory Arts Center](#) is an iconic presence on the City's waterfront. Bringing a half million visitors into working artists galleries, the Factory is a economic development engine and unique arts resource for our community.

The City of Alexandria purchased the Factory from the United States Government in 1969. The Arts Center was opened in 1974 and has been a model for similar centers around country.

Yet for the past several years, the challenges of the Factory and the possible solutions to those challenges have been divisive.

[In February of last year, the City Council endorsed an action plan for the future of the Torpedo](#)

Factory. In June, the City Council received **an update on the status of the engagement on that action plan.**

Our staff brought a few proposals for the future of the Torpedo Factory to stakeholders for input, and last month brought those proposals to the City Council. **You can review those proposals online.**

At the end of last year, the City Council **unanimously endorsed a framework of principles for next steps for the Torpedo Factory that I proposed to my colleagues.**

These principles call for an entirely new structure to strategically manage the Torpedo Factory and the many new arts assets that the City is bringing to reality as part of the **Old Town North Arts District.**

You can watch Council's discussion **beginning at the 1:56:00 mark in the video from December's Legislative Meeting.**

Alexandria is an arts destination, but that destination is broader than one building. I am excited that Council has now endorsed this vision to expand our commitment to arts real estate in our City, with the Torpedo Factory as a focal point of that expansion.

This discussion has gone on for a while. In 2009, the **City commissioned a study to review the Factory and the opportunities of the site.** The result of the study was a series of organizational changes to the Factory. **Those led to the creation of a non-profit Board** to run the operations and leverage private resources to support the Factory.

With the lease nearing conclusion a several years ago, the Torpedo Factory Arts Center Board **commissioned another study to look at the strategic options available to the City and the Factory.**

This report recommended more changes to the governance, the management, and vision of the Factory.

Candidly, the future of the Torpedo Factory has been studied to death. We have used the divisiveness of this issue as an excuse to avoid making a decision on its future. Unfortunately, inaction is a decision in and of itself.

My focus is on deriving a structure for the operation of the Factory that:

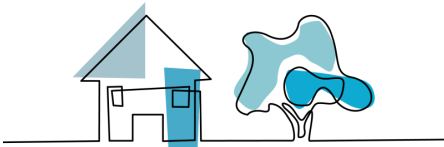
- expands the vitality of the Factory
- improves its financial sustainability
- improves its diversity
- ensures the success of Alexandria's premier arts destination long into the future.

I am confident that working together we can achieve these goals.

It has now been five years since the City took steps to provide stability by assuming caretaker leadership for the Factory. Since that time, the City provided leases to the existing artist tenants, and has been providing day to day management. I am pleased we are now making decisions and creating a sustainable structure for the governance of the Factory so that it can flourish in the future.

Ensuring the presence of a diversity of arts and artists in the Torpedo Factory Arts Center on our Waterfront is a priority of mine. I look forward to working with our community and various partners to bring this vision to reality.

Breathing Easier



The Alexandria Health Department is looking for a pilot group of residents with asthma or COPD who are interested in participating in an air cleaning evaluation program. Participants will receive gift cards and a portable air filter. **Eligible participants can sign-up today!**

Respiratory illness, like asthma, is one of the health conditions where Alexandria sees significant disparities around our community. Residents in the West End of our City, in the 22304 zip code, have the highest rate of adult asthma hospitalizations (10 per 10,000 population). Residents in the central part of our City have the lowest rate (2.9 per 10,000 population).

This pilot effort is one of the City's approaches to narrowing these disparities.

In 2019 our **Community Health Assessment** drew on a variety of data from throughout our City to gauge the health of our residents.

The document itself reminded us that there are real and significant disparities in health around our community. The uncomfortable realities revealed by the report are that socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, national origin, education and even a resident's zip code can predict, among many other factors:

- Life Expectancy
- Access to healthcare, including mental health services
- Hospitalization rates
- Experiences with chronic conditions
- Cancer outcomes
- Fitness levels and obesity rates

- Access to healthy food

Yet the purpose of the assessment was not simply to identify these disparities, but instead actively seek ways to ameliorate them. Fortunately we know how to address these disparities. In nearly every plan the City has, from land-use plans, to park plans, to pedestrian and bicycle safety plans, to early childhood initiatives, school nutrition efforts, mental health reforms, etc, we are working to narrow these disparities.

In June of last year, the Alexandria Health Department released our [Community Health Improvement Plan](#), designed to identify actions we can take to address these disparities.

While preparing and presenting this plan is a significant step forward for our community, we must now ensure that the plan turns to action and is not left on the shelf.

There will be more opportunities for community involvement as we work to bring the plan to reality. [Check the project website for details!](#)

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