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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson*

March 1, 2023

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On Saturday, [the St. Patrick's Day Parade returns to the streets of Old Town](#), brought to our community by [The Ballyshanners](#). The parade steps off a little after noon and I'll see you there!

Yesterday, the City Manager presented his budget, which kicks-off the busiest period of the City Council calendar. [This Thursday, the City Manager will make a presentation of the budget to the community at 7PM at Beatley Library.](#)

We are still collecting input on the proposed [Regional Fair Housing Plan](#). On Sunday afternoon, [an online listening](#)

- [Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection](#)
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[session will be held](#) or written input can be submitted online.

If you would like 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



## Budget Proposal

Last night, the City Manager presented [his proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 \(July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024\)](#) and [his proposed Capital Improvement Program \(CIP\) for Fiscal Year 2024 through Fiscal Year 2033](#). This begins City Council's annual budget process, which will culminate in the adoption of the budget on May 3rd.

We would like your input on the proposed budget! In two weeks, the City Council will hold our public hearing on the proposed budget. The public hearing will be held on March 13th 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.

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).

[In November, the City Manager presented his initial outlook for the upcoming budget at our annual Council retreat](#). The current budget was built around some of the healthiest revenue growth we had seen in over fifteen years. This year, that revenue growth has been cut in half as growth in the real estate tax base has slowed.

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 6.79% per year. The work force in City Government grew from 2,229 Full Time Equivalent (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 Fiscal Year 2011 through the current fiscal year, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 3.64% per year.

The authorized work force in City Government is now at 2,765 FTEs, little above where we were nearly 15 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 \$881.1 million. This represents a 5.0% increase in spending versus the current approved budget, with over half of all new revenue from the real estate tax being proposed for support of the Alexandria City Public Schools operating budget.

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

- **Public Safety:** Funds the implementation of the new collective bargaining agreements for both our Police Department and Fire Department, including large compensation and staffing increases
- **Schools:** Fully funds the approved operating budget of the Alexandria City School Board, increasing the operating transfer by \$9.9 million
- **Infrastructure:** Commits new resources to support the infrastructure proposed as part of the Capital Improvement Program.
- **Employee Compensation:** The proposed budget funds merit and market-rate increases across City government.

Two years ago, 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. If the City Council adopts the City Manager's proposal, this will be the 7th straight year that the rate has remained the same or decreased.

With the impacts of average assessment increases included, this means the average single-family homeowner would pay \$490 more in 2023 than in 2022. The average condo owner would pay \$101 more in 2023 versus 2022.

In addition, the City Manager has proposed no increase in the annual Residential Refuse Fee of \$500, 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 \$86.44 for condos, \$129.65 for townhomes, \$308.70 for small single-family homes and \$515.53 for large single-family homes.

On March 14th, 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.

Starting tonight, the City Council [will meet weekly to review every aspect of the budget during topical budget worksessions](#). These sessions are open to the public and recorded.

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!](#)



## Landmark Inova Alexandria Hospital

Next Tuesday, the Alexandria Planning Commission will be hearing applications for the specific development approvals for Blocks A and Q for the redevelopment of the previous Landmark Mall site.



This approval is for the anchor of the Landmark redevelopment, **a new Inova Alexandria Hospital, a cancer center, a specialty care center, a parking garage and central plaza**. This portion of development will constitute over 1 million square feet of new development and is the anchor of this effort.

The Planning Commission will be accepting public testimony on these applications on Tuesday March 7th beginning at 7 PM. **Testimony is welcome in-person at City Hall or virtually.**

Assuming Planning Commission action, the City Council will accept public testimony and act on these applications at our public hearing on Saturday March 18th beginning at 9:30 AM.

Last year, Foulger-Pratt, the private development partner spearheading the redevelopment of Landmark Mall began **demolition on the existing site.**

Construction activity will be beginning shortly, **under the aggressive schedule they have presented to the community.**

In 2021, the **Alexandria Industrial Development Authority (IDA)** closed on **the purchase of an 11-acre parcel on the site of the former Landmark Mall**. The purchase of this property was immediately followed by IDA's issuance of a 99-year ground lease of the property to **Inova Health System**.

After two decades of discussion about how to redevelop Landmark Mall, the City of Alexandria is finally redeveloping Landmark Mall!

**In July of 2021, the City Council unanimously approved the plan to reshape the most significant redevelopment site in our City.**

**Long sought, this arrangement was named by the Washington Business Journal as the 2020 Real Estate Deal of the Year.**

Days before Christmas 2020, **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 60 years** on Seminary Road to a new modern facility on the site of Landmark Mall.

The location, 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.

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.

Over a year ago, the City Council unanimously approved [a master plan amendment and rezoning of the site of the existing Inova Alexandria Hospital](#). This land-use decision was the first legislative action required to bring this plan to reality.

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 have purchased 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.

We have finally assembled a partnership, financing and a plan to revitalize this site. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but this exciting partnership is making things happen on this site for the first time in decades. I look forward to now watching this vision come to fruition.



## West End City Hall

[Two and a half years ago, the City Council unanimously agreed to the purchase of 4850 Mark Center Drive to consolidate several City agencies currently located in 8 different facilities around the City.](#)

[Last month, the various agencies of the Department of Community and Human Services \(DCHS\) began moving into this facility,](#) recently named to honor my former colleague, [former Councilwoman Redella S. Pepper](#).

DCHS is one of the City's largest departments with over 600 full time equivalent employees, and a budget of over \$100 million. The department provides the critical safety net services that so many of our residents rely on at various points in their lives.

Prior to this move, DCHS, together with the City's Health Department occupy 210,000 square feet of space in 8 different facilities around the City. Most of the space is inadequate, aged, and not proximate to the residents it serves. Over half of DCHS clients are on the West End, yet two of our largest offices have been in the East End of the City.

As a result the City explored options to consolidate. Those efforts concluded at the end of 2018 with the City choosing [to consolidate DCHS and the Alexandria Health Department at 4850 Mark Center Drive](#). This building was previously owned and occupied by the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA). [A little over a year ago, IDA completed their move to a new location in Potomac Yard.](#)

This new location enables full consolidation of these two departments and improve service delivery for the residents served by these important services.

While the City and IDA had initially negotiated a 15 year lease, it included several points where the City could exercise the ability to purchase the building, which could save the City millions more in avoided lease payments.

The purchase option cost the City \$58.7 million. The negotiated lease is for 15 years (with an annual escalation), with the first year rent totaling a little over \$7 million. The purchase option will save the taxpayers of the City over \$18 million over the next 15 years.

Ultimately this consolidation will avoid greater costs, improve the effectiveness of services delivered and make those services more accessible to our residents.



## Real Estate Assessments

Last month, the City mailed 2023 assessment notices to each Alexandria property owner. You may [view your assessment online](#). Included online is information about comparable transactions that were used to calculate individual assessments.

Twenty two years ago, City Council 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.

In 2020, we began to transition from this very low-growth period. Over the past 4 years, we have seen uneven but more significant annual growth, averaging just over 4% each year.

This year, our overall real estate tax base grew by 3.81%. **This brings the City's real estate tax base to \$48.3 billion.** This is just slightly above the average growth that we have seen for the past decade. Of the \$1.78 billion increase in the real estate tax base this year, \$577.8 million, nearly a third, was from new construction. Between 2019 and 2023, \$2.44 billion of new development has been added to the tax rolls. At the current tax rate, those properties generate a little over \$27 million in annual real estate tax revenue, the equivalent of nearly 6 cents on the current real estate tax rate.

The cost of providing services varies by the type of development. At one extreme, for a hotel, for every tax dollar the City receives, only 7 cents is required to provide City services for that hotel. For a multi-family residential unit, for every dollar collected, 38 cents is required to provide services. All new development in the City provides a return to the City's General Fund.

Over 61% 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.

After a year of parity, we have returned to our recent trend with wide gaps in growth between the residential tax base and the commercial tax base. The residential tax base grew at 5.02% and the commercial tax base grew at 1.97%. The gap is even more pronounced than it might appear, as multi-family rental properties are considered "commercial" in Virginia. The value of office properties in Alexandria reduced by over 10% this year, adding to reductions of 6.5% in 2022 and 2021.

Alexandria had \$4.16 billion of office space in 2019. Today Alexandria's office space is worth \$3.5 billion. For much of the aged office space in our City, it is only the **possibility of conversion that is providing some floor for the valuations.**

On the residential side, the average assessed value for a single family home increased 4.58% to \$940,375. Of those properties, 91% of single family homes increased in value, 3% decreased, and 6% stayed the same.

The average assessed value for a condominium increased 3.48% to \$407,616. Of those properties, 69% of condominiums increased in value, 3% decreased, and 28% stayed the same.

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.



## Road Paving Plan Released

The City Manager's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024) continues a multi-year effort to address the condition of the City's roads. **The proposed budget includes \$5.1 million for this upcoming fiscal year (\$63.2 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 2022 survey rankings, that was just performed.

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.

Based on the current budget, **there are numerous roads that were funded previously and will be completed when we begin paving again in the Spring.**



If the currently proposed funding level is approved, we are scheduled to resurface the following roads next fiscal year (beginning July 1, 2023):

- Parkway Terrace from West Timber Branch Parkway to End
- Clyde Avenue from East Bellefonte Avenue to East Uhler Avenue
- Price Street from East Bellefonte Avenue to End
- West Mount Ida Avenue from Commonwealth Avenue to Russell Road
- East and West Del Ray Avenue from Russell Road to La Grande Avenue
- Sanford Avenue from West Dale Ray Avenue to End
- Ruffner Road from west Braddock to High Street
- West Timber Branch Parkway from Ruffner Road to Junior Street
- Cameron Station Boulevard from Duke Street to South Pickett Street
- Hermitage Court from King Street to End
- Green Street from South Patrick Street to South Lee Street
- Cloverway Drive from Dartmouth Road to Janneys Lane
- Robinson Court from Janneys Lane to End
- 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 Gailand Street to End
- Ormond Avenue from North Gailand Street to North Howard Street
- Sylvan Court from Trinity Drive to End
- Stevenson Avenue from South Whiting Street to Stulz Road
- North Stevenson Square from Stultz Road to End
- South Stevenson Square from Stultz Road to End
- Edison Street from West Reed Avenue to End
- North Clarens Street from Trinity Drive to End
- North Breckinridge Place from Lincolnia Road to End
- Oakville Street from Swann Avenue to Fannon Street
- Fannon Street from Richmond Highway End
- Juliana Place from North Pickett Street to End
- North Breckinridge Place from Lincolnia Road to End
- East and West Mason Avenue from Stonewall Road to End
- Roberts Lane from Duke Street to End
- East and West Uhler Avenue (Entire Length)
- North Pelham Street from Holmes Run Parkway to Taney Avenue
- North Terrill Street from Richenbacher Avenue to End

- North Vail Street from Richenbacher Avenue to End
- Fort Worth Avenue from Fort Williams Parkway to End (Fort Worth Place)

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

- 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
- 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

For Fiscal Year 2026 (July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026), we are scheduled to resurface the following roads:

- Calvert Avenue from Richmond Highway to Murrays Avenue
- Cloverway Drive from Janneys Lane to Dartmouth Road (Clovercrest Drive)
- Dearborn Place from Fort Williams Parkway to end
- Pryor Street from Richenbacher Avneue to Taney Avenue
- Regency from North Pryor to End
- Rhoades Place from North Pryor to End
- Peele Place from Taney Avenue from End
- Moore Place from Pullman Place to End
- Pullman Place from Cameron Mills Road to End
- Summit Avenue from Cameron Mill Road to Dogwood Drive
- Hillside Terrace from Crest Street to Valley Drive
- Louis Place from North Howard Street to End
- Hare Court from Louis Place to End
- Featherstone Place from Fortworth Avenue to End
- Hatton Court from Doris Drive to End/Partial Doris Drive (city limit)
- Hawthorne Avenue from Hatton Court to Holmes Run Parkway
- Holmes Run Parkway from North Chambliss to End
- Mill Road from Jamieson Avenue Eisenhower Avenue
- Peachtree Place from Gailand Street to End
- Rapidan Court from Polk Avenue to End
- Canterbury Lane from Trinity Drive to End (Chancel Place)
- Trinity Drive from Fort Williams Parkway to End
- North Fayette Street (600 Block) Concrete Restorations
- Fayette Street from Duke Street to End
- Kingston Avenue
- Kingston Place
- North Peyton Street
- Madison Street from West Street to End
- Oronoco Street from Earl Street to End
- Commonwealth Avenue from Mount Vernon Avenue to End
- Mount Vernon Avenue from West Glebe Road to the City Limit

- Business Center Drive
- East Abingdon Road
- West Abingdon Road
- Walleston Court

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



## Duke Street Transitway

We are working to make it safer, more efficient and desirable to move people along Duke Street and we want your input!

Last month, our staff brought the Council the findings of the resident advisory group that has been convened since early last year.

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

In July, the City Council will be considering near and long-term recommendations for how the bus rapid transit improvements can be configured in the various segments along Duke. Upon Council's action, this project will enter a new phase of planning and implementation as we re-imagine one of the most important corridors in our City.

A little over a decade 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" seven 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 (although not until 2024-2025), work begins to plan the implementation.**

Transit Corridor B, the Duke Street Transitway, will be the final corridor implemented. Nearly 2 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. I am optimistic as we work to bring these projects to reality.



## **Food Waste Collection**

Last year, when City Council approved our current 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 will add two new sites, with the Old Town North Market (901 N. Royal Street) opening recently and the Southern Towers market collection point opening this weekend (4901 Seminary Road).

Earlier this 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.



Four years ago, the City Council unanimously adopted the [WasteSmart Strategic Plan](#). This plan sought to chart a new course for trash and recycling services.

Waste removal is one of the most visible and traditional of local government services. A service that at one point simply involved a trash truck on a route picking up a resident's waste has now evolved into a complex portfolio of services.

Alexandria likes to recycle. We have consistently achieved one of the highest recycling rates in the Commonwealth. [In 2021, we increased our rate, recycling 53.4% of our municipal solid waste.](#)

[Recycling markets are now in crisis.](#)

[Four years ago, the City announced the implementation of one of the short-term tasks in the WasteSmart Strategic Plan. In partnership with Fairfax County and Arlington County, the City unveiled four new glass recycling drop-off locations. Each of the four locations is open 24 hours per day.](#) We later added a fifth in Arlandria in partnership with Mom's Organic Market.

[In later action, we joined our neighbors and removed glass from the single-stream curbside recycling collection.](#)

While the City provides curbside trash and recycling collection for a tad over 20,000 households, we also provide:

- Yard Waste Collection
- Leaf/brush collection
- Metal and appliances collection
- Spring Clean-Up
- Bulk Trash Pick-Up
- Electronic waste collection
- Recycling Drop-Off Centers
- Public Space Trash and Recycling
- Farmers Market Composting

Each of these services has evolved to address defined needs in our City, but each has associated policy choices. Several of these significant policy questions are now before us.

It is no accident that one of the chapters of the City's recently [adopted Environmental Action Plan Phase 1 update](#) is Solid Waste. Alexandria's handling of its solid waste is a core area of environmental stewardship.

Please let me know your thoughts on these important issues!

**Torpedo Factory**



Starting today, **[we are again accepting applications for resident artists to receive three-year studio leases at Alexandria's Torpedo Factory](#)**, our world-class art center on Alexandria's Waterfront. Applications are due by April 18th and will be awarded new leases beginning October 1st.

Last fall, **[26 artists began new three-year leases as artists at the Torpedo Factory](#)**. Fifteen of these artists joined 11 current studio artists and become part of Alexandria's internationally-recognized arts community.

**[Last year's process was the first of three annual jury processes to evaluate those interested in joining the Torpedo Factory as a studio artist and those who currently operate their studio at the arts center](#)**. The resident artists who participated in last year's process had most recently juried into the arts center between 1975 and 2003.

**[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.

**[Two years ago, the City Council endorsed an action plan for the future of the Torpedo Factory](#)**.

Our staff brought a few proposals for the future of the Torpedo Factory to stakeholders for input, and a year and a half ago these were brought to the City Council. **[You can review those proposals online](#)**.

At the end of 2021, 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 the December 2021 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 six 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.

## Old Town BID Returns

About six years ago, the City was caught up in a spirited community debate about whether we should create a proposed **Business Improvement District (BID)** for Old Town.

Opinions were varied. However, nearly all involved at that time agreed that our central business district was challenged.

After a community worksession and a lengthy public hearing, the Council took up the issue. **The Council voted unanimously to refine the proposed BID, distribute a proposed budget and set of performance metrics, and hold a vote of the impacted businesses to determine if there is sufficient support to proceed.**

Before that ever got off the ground, **the City Manager returned to the City Council with his recommendation that we not proceed with a vote of the affected businesses and instead shelve the effort to consider a BID.**

In the ensuing years, a lot changed. **We have seen considerable consolidation in the ownership of properties in Old Town.** But ultimately, the merits of the collective financing and governance enabled by a BID, have not gone away.

As such, there is a **new proposal of a Old Town Business Improvement Service District.** The proposal suggests different boundaries and a more modest budget, but similar priorities as previous iterations of this concept.

As with the last effort to create a BID, I feel as though the idea has merit, and if sufficient support could be generated within the business community, the City should facilitate its creation.

With less commercial activity **and new competition arriving every day,** inaction is a recipe for disaster for the businesses and the taxpayers of our City.

