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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by:*

*Councilman Justin M. Wilson*

Alexandria, Virginia

May 1, 2015

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Events/Updates

Voting Has Begun

April is always a busy month, and this one was no different.

[ACT For Alexandria](#) held their annual [Spring 2 Action](#) one day fundraiser. This year, thanks to the generosity of 9,431 unique donors, the campaign raised \$1,276,909 for Alexandria non-profits!

Alexandria played host to the [Environmental Protection Agency's National Sustainable Design Expo](#) in Oronoco Bay Park. This expo came to Alexandria after being displaced from the National Mall.

Our T. C. Williams Boys Track & Field team [returned to the prestigious Penn Relays](#), and again placed as the best in the United States.

The City Council concluded the process of hiring a Chief Executive for City Government, by [selecting Mark Jinks as our permanent City Manager](#).

Mark has been our acting City Manager since the beginning of the year, and I have every confidence that he will lead City government with energy and experience as we confront the challenges facing our community.

Please let me know how I can be of assistance. [Contact me anytime](#).

 Council Portrait

## Council Initiatives

On Tuesday June 9th, a Democratic Primary will be held to select nominees for Mayor and the member of the Virginia House of Delegates representing the 45th District (currently represented by Delegate Rob Krupicka).

[The deadline to register to vote in this primary is May 18th.](#)

[Absentee voting has already begun, both in-person and by mail.](#)

For those voters in the 45th House of Delegates District, [this is the Sample Ballot you will receive.](#)

For those voters in the 46th House of Delegate District, [this is the Sample Ballot you will receive.](#)

### **Spring Clean-Up Continues**

[Tomorrow and next Saturday will be the last two Spring Clean Up days in Alexandria.](#)

This is your opportunity to place bulky or metal items at the curb to be removed by the City's Resource Recovery division.

Please remember that hazardous materials will not be collected and [must be disposed of using the typical process.](#)

### **First Thursday Continues**

[The 2015 season of First Thursday in Del Ray continues Thursday on Mount Vernon Avenue.](#)

The monthly street party is from 6:00 - 8:30 PM on Thursday evening.

This month's theme is dogs! Grab your favorite canine and join the crowds on the Avenue in Del Ray.

### **Plan Your Neighborhood Parks**

After receiving input around the City last year, our Park

## **Proposed Budget Nears Landing**

[The budget that was presented by the City Manager in March](#) was a continuation of a pattern that has persisted for much of the last decade. Anemic revenue growth, coupled with significant pressure on the expenditure side, resulted in a budget that presented new cuts, but left many unmet needs.

While the [residential real estate market experienced some growth](#), our commercial real estate tax base was battered again, and consumption-based tax revenue was anemic at best.

The City Manager entered the process with little more than a half of a percent of new revenue. In the fall, when the City Council adopted guidance for the preparation of this budget, [we voted 4-3 to give the City Manager the authority to propose a tax rate increase](#). While the City Manager had that authority, [he chose not to exercise it](#).

Yet the City Manager worked to create additional revenues to help balance the budget. [New fee increases have been proposed](#). The proposed budget leverages new revenues from Potomac Yard development. The proposed budget also shifts the costs of some services from the General Fund to special funds generated by fees. In the end, the proposed budget relies on a paltry 1.7% increase in General Fund revenue.



As has been the case for much of the past decade, the budget also proposes significant reductions to ongoing City spending:

*A net reduction of 3.8 full time headcount equivalents. If approved, the City will have the smallest workforce in over a decade.*

*Elimination of a Deputy City Manager position*

*Elimination of a City Architect position*

*Renegotiation of the City's agreement with the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home*

*Reduction to Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA) advertising*

*Reduction of two part-time juvenile probation officer positions*

*Elimination of City funding of the Alexandria Law Library*

*Close Cora Kelly Recreation Center on holidays*

*Close William Ramsay Recreation Center on holidays and Sundays*

*Close Warwick Pool for the summer (renovation is now planned and funded in FY 2017)*

*Reduction of Chinquapin Recreation Center summer operating hours*

*Eliminate one refuse truck and two vacant driver positions*

*Full automation of the Union Street Parking Garage*

While reductions were necessary, the proposed budget does suggest new investments to core areas of City operations:

*To address rising student enrollment, \$6 million of new operating dollars are proposed for the Alexandria City Public Schools. While*

Planning staff have released [Draft Improvement Plans for our smaller Neighborhood Parks](#).

City Staff is now [collecting feedback on the draft plans using an online survey](#).

There will be three community meetings to collect additional input:

District 1: May 14, 7pm at Charles Houston Recreation Center

Includes: Montgomery Park, Powhatan Park, Lee Center

District 2: May 27, 7pm at Mount Vernon Recreation Center

Includes: Hume Springs Park, 3550 Commonwealth Ave, Landover Park, Goat Hill Park, Timberland Park, Hooffs Run Park & Greenway, Beach Park, Angel Park

District 3: June 4, 7pm at Patrick Henry Recreation Center

Includes: Lockett/Skate Park, Taney Ave Park, Ewald Park, Mulligan Park, Chambliss Park, Stevenson Park

## **Cinema Del Ray Returns!**

Thanks to the generosity of Realtor Jen Walker, Cinema Del Ray returns on Saturday May 16th.

The monthly free outdoor movie on the field next to Mount Vernon Recreation Center has become a summer tradition.

This month's movie is Big Hero 6 and it starts when it's dark enough!

## **City Mulch**

[City mulch is now available for pickup or delivery.](#)

On Monday through Friday from 7 AM until 3:30 PM, residents can pick up mulch

*this represents 55% of all new revenue available to the City, [it is still \\$3.2 million less than the request approved by the School Board.](#)*

*Over \$4 million of new resources to fund the City's obligations to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)*

*Over \$2 million to address long-standing pay inequities within the Alexandria Police Department*

*Expansion of Alexandria Fire Department career ladders*

*Funds to begin implementation of the City's recently adopted [Youth Master Plan](#).*

Early in our annual budget process, state law requires the Council to adopt a cap in the real estate tax rate that we might consider. Once the cap is adopted, the Council can ultimately lower the rate, but not increase it that year.

On March 17th, the Council [voted unanimously to adopt a cap of \\$1.043, which is the current rate](#). [The real estate rate will not increase this year](#), and any increases to City spending must be funded by alternate means.

Over the past two months, [the Council has asked a series of questions](#) designed to dig through every corner of the \$800+ million budget.

We have now reached the critical part of the budget process as the Council begins to formulate a consensus around changes that must be made. At this point in the process, the City Manager typically provides the Council with a series of revenue and expenditure re-estimates. These changes reflect new information learned since the budget was proposed.

Fortunately this year, [these changes have provided the Council with some additional breathing room](#) to address issues that have been raised by the public during the process.

The Council is trying a new system than has previously been used to manage the Add/Delete process. In the past, each individual member would submit a list of proposed "adds" with offset "deletes," and we would gather and attempt to reconcile each list.

The new process requires that all additions or deletions to the proposed budget have at least 3 identified supporters, staff analysis, and alignment with the City's Strategic Plan.

On Tuesday evening, the Council gathered to [review the proposed add/deletes that are pending](#), and reconciled that list into a potential consensus version to be discussed further. [You can watch that discussion online.](#)

At this point, the major items of consensus appear to be:

*An additional appropriation of \$1 million to the Alexandria City Public Schools (this narrows, but does not eliminate the gap between the School Board and City Manager's proposed budget).*

*Funding for the staffing necessary to provide fire suppression at the newly opened Fire Station 210 (more detail later in this newsletter)*

*Funding to integrate the Alexandria Law Library into the Alexandria Library*

*Restoration of a portion of the City's Transportation Improvement Program (utilizing a lower than expected WMATA subsidy request)*

*Providing some funding to support an existing community partnership to make improvements at Maury Elementary School*

at 4215 Eisenhower Avenue.

For \$50, the City will deliver. Call 703-746-HELP to schedule delivery.

### **Walk Through Alexandria Women's History**

[This Sunday, celebrate the City's history through the history of great women who have played such an important part of our past.](#)

At 1:30 PM, the Alexandria Women's History Guided Tour departs from Ramsay House at 221 King Street.

The one mile tour highlights the achievements of women in Alexandria history.

### **Real Estate Assessment Appeals Due June 1**

Any appeal of 2015 Real Estate Assessments must be filed by June 1 for hearing by the Board of Equalization.

The [form is available online](#) and can be submitted by mail.

### **Taste of Cinco de Mayo Tonight!**

From 6 until 9:30 this evening enjoy "Taste of Cinco de Mayo" at the Durant Recreation Center.

Celebrate Mexican culture through food, music and dance.

Tickets are \$10 per person, and \$20 per family at the door.

There may still be other changes as Council finalizes its decisions in advance of the May 7th budget adoption.

### **Ensuring a Safe Community**

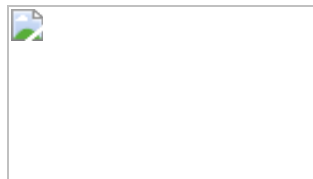
A decade ago, a [needs assessment indicated that longer response times](#) necessitated a new fire station on the West End of our City. With reconfiguration of the City's impound lot, plans advanced to build a new fire station, Fire Station 210, on Eisenhower Avenue.

The Council identified \$16 million of capital funds to construct the new station, and in Fiscal Year 2011, a contract was issued for construction of a new station with new training facilities.

With the station nearing completion, the City applied for a Federal grant in the fall of 2013 under the "[Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response](#)" (SAFER) program. The City has previously used SAFER to expand our Fire Department staffing.

The grant covers the salaries and benefits for new firefighters. However, after two years, the recipient is required to pick up and maintain the expenditure.

In January of 2014, the City was awarded a SAFER grant to cover the firefighters necessary to open Fire Station 210. At that time, the City Manager came to the Council indicating his decision to reject the grant due to the obligation of the "Maintenance of Effort" provisions, and the City's precarious long-term financial outlook.



Later that year, the City Manager provided a second recommendation for staffing the new fire station 210.

In this proposal, he proposed moving the Peak Medic Unit and the fire engine at Fire Station 204 (Powhatan Street) to Fire Station 210.

Understandably, the neighbors of Fire Station 204 opposed the move, and the [uncertainty about the public safety effects caused the Council to leave the fire engine in place](#). The medic unit did move and is now operating out of Fire Station 210.

In rejecting the City Manager's recommendation, Council did give direction that the Fire Station 210 fire suppression staffing would be included in the FY 2016 budget when it was proposed.

In the Fall last year, the City's new Fire Chief [came to the Council with an entirely new model](#) for cross-trained firefighter-medics. With the versatility offered by this new model, the Fire Chief believed the plan would allow staffing of Fire Station 210 this year.

Unfortunately, higher than expected retirements and less medics opting for cross-training led to slower implementation. That created the unfortunate situation of [Fire Station 210 opening with no fire suppression services available](#). While the station does have medic capacity, it will be the City's responsibility to ensure that the station has the appropriate fire suppression capacity.

While nothing is final until the budget is adopted, it does appear as if members of the Council are coalescing around a plan that would provide [overhire funding to support the staffing of this engine](#).

### **Potomac Yard Metro Moves Forward**

In 2008, along with then-Councilman Rob Krupicka, I proposed a new start to efforts to bring Metro to Potomac Yard. We included [language in the City's Transportation Master Plan](#) explicitly calling for a new station at Potomac Yard. We also tied the construction and funding of Metro to the development occurring in the Yard.

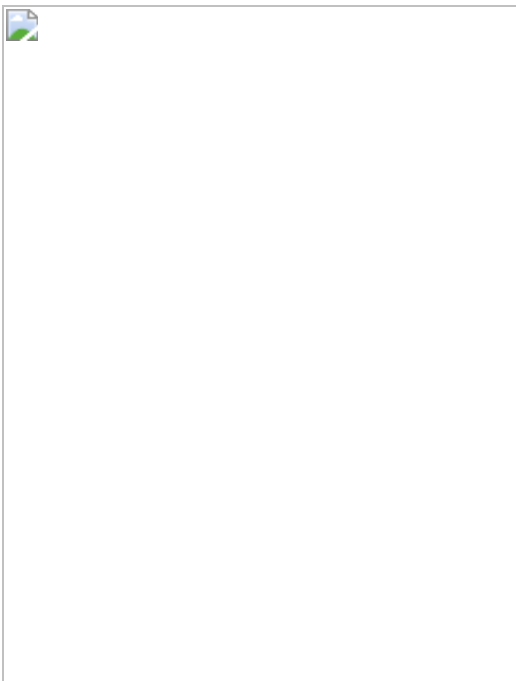
The result is [a funding plan for Potomac Yard Metro](#) that not only leverages the development activity in Potomac Yard, but also does so without requiring the contributions of taxpayers elsewhere in the City.

The largest environmental, [economic development](#) and transportation initiative in our City's history is being accomplished using [one of the most innovative funding mechanisms used anywhere in the country.](#) The funding package consists of a [special tax district](#), tax increment funding, [Northern Virginia Transportation Authority regional funding](#), [a Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Board loan](#), and a developer contribution. It is designed to use the development in Potomac Yard to pay for Metro in Potomac Yard, not the City's General Fund taxpayers.

A little over a month ago, the project took a gigantic step forward with the release of the

[Draft Environmental Impact Statement for public review and comment.](#)

The release of the draft statement, coordinated with the Federal Transit Administration, the National Park Service, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), kicked off a lively period of public input which leads up to the Council's adoption of our Locally Preferred



Alternative. The Council will be holding a Public Hearing on Saturday May 16th to solicit public input, and a special meeting on May 20th to make that selection.

Between now and the 20th, [the staff recommendation will be brought to several City advisory Boards and Commissions](#) for input. Input can still be [submitted via e-mail](#) prior to the 18th for inclusion in the EIS.

Of the options being considered by the EIS process, Alternate B is the option that has been seen as the most lucrative for the taxpayers of the City, due to its proximity to the concentration of development potential. However, construction of Alternative B would require the acquisition of a small portion of National Park Service land.

Last month, another large milestone was achieved as the City announced that it had received approval from the National Park Service on a "Net Benefits Agreement." Such an agreement is required for the National Park Service to transfer land to the City.

The agreement that was published provides for \$12 million of improvements to the adjacent National Park Service land. These improvements include expansion of the existing National Park Service land and improvements to both Dangerfield Island and the Mount Vernon trail. The City has also made a series of policy changes to address any potential impact.

[This coincided with the release of the Staff's recommendation for the locally preferred option, which is Alternative B.](#)

[This project will leverage the creation of up to 26,000 new jobs, and will bring up to \\$2 billion of new tax revenue to the City. It removes thousands of vehicles from one of the most crowded corridors in our City. It promotes the creation of the kind a walkable community our City has long desired in Potomac Yard.](#)

Once the Environmental Impact Statement process concludes with a Record of Decision, the construction efforts can commence.

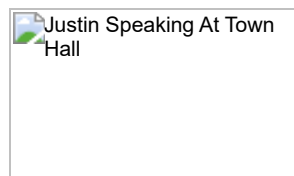
As the City focuses on efforts to erase the structural imbalance in our budget, the successful completion of this project is a key component in that effort.

### Host a Town Hall in Your Living Room!

My regular series of Town Hall Meetings continue!

You supply the living room and a bunch of your friends and neighbors. I will supply a member of the Alexandria City Council (me) with the answers to any of your questions about our City.

Just [drop us a line](#) and we'll get a Town Hall on the calendar! Thanks for the interest!



## Upcoming Issues

### Taking Broadband Matters into our Own Hands

A little over a year ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.

In [Chattanooga, Tennessee](#), a community of 170,000, a public electricity utility used hundreds of millions of dollars to build thousands of miles of underground fiber. In doing so, the utility enabled the residents and businesses of Chattanooga to receive the fastest Internet connectivity in our nation.

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

This is an issue that affects not only residents, but also our businesses and the ability of our community to attract commerce.

In 2009, the City made great strides in bringing Verizon FIOS to our City. Unfortunately, Verizon [made the decision](#) to cease any new deployments of FIOS nationally, and Alexandria was left out.

Last Tuesday, the [Council had a worksession to discuss the next steps](#) in expanding broadband in our community. The [Council's discussion can be watched online](#).

With the support of the Council our Staff will now be issuing an RFI (Request for Information) to gauge the interest of private partners in working with the City to create municipal infrastructure to support new broadband deployment.

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



The results of the RFI and a draft of the City's new broadband plan will come to the Council in the fall.

## Budgeting for Waste

At the end of 2013, [the Council exercised a long-term extension of our operating agreement for the Alexandria/Arlington Waste-to-Energy Facility](#). The facility, which takes trash from both Alexandria and Arlington, now has a long-term agreement through 2038, and the City has greater cost certainty.

Since that time, the City have returned some of the savings to those who pay the Residential Refuse Fee (charged only to those who receive City trash service) and used some of the savings to invest in new services. These funds were used to fund new street recycling cans around the City, and to create a [new farmers market food waste/compost program](#).

The proposed budget has two new funding initiatives associated with the reinvestment opportunities made available by the lower costs.

The proposed budget suggests that the City build on the success of the Farmers Market Compost project by creating a new Residential Food Waste

Composting pilot program for 2,500 residences. This pilot would collect curbside food waste for those residences.



Additionally, the proposed budget includes funding for

residential trash cans in Old Town. For a variety of reasons, Old Town homeowners are not issued the residential refuse containers that are issued to homeowners throughout the remainder of the City (despite the fact that these homeowners pay the same fee).

The proposed budget would provide funding for less than half of the necessary cans. Next year's budget would include the remaining funding, and the cans would be distributed to homeowners (who wish to receive them) in 2017.

## Working on the Railroad

One of the challenges of land-use planning in a community as dense as Alexandria is the presence and necessary accommodation of heavy industrial uses. This is particularly acute in our West End, and is a central focus of the on-going [Eisenhower West Small Area planning process](#).

While the [City's fight to prevent Norfolk Southern's Ethanol Transloading facility](#), from establishing next to a large residential area was ultimately unsuccessful due to Federal preemption, we continue efforts to mitigate this inappropriate use.

The City has provided input and suggestions into Federal and State rule making and legislative processes in the attempt to gain some safety protections for residential communities.

Unfortunately, we have also [received communication from Norfolk Southern on their intentions to increase the operations at the facility](#). While we have limited ability to prevent those expansion plans, [we are attempting to work with Norfolk Southern, to the extent possible, to mitigate those plans.](#)

Sometimes the issues with these types of heavy industrial uses are not always obvious. In 2009, the Council approved the [Landmark/Van Dorn Small Area Plan](#), which included the concept of a multi-modal bridge connecting the Van Dorn Metro Station with Pickett Street to improve accessibility of the existing Metro station.

The transportation planning for the actual location of that bridge has been under way in conjunction with our Eisenhower West work.

Unfortunately, last week Norfolk Southern notified the City that they would not permit that bridge to traverse over their railroad operations, thus precluding any of the City's alternatives.

While there will be some effort to arrive at an accommodation, it would appear this determination forces the City back to the drawing board on improved connectivity to the Metro station.

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