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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by: Vice Mayor Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

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Welcome to Spring, as overdue as it is!

This is always the most intense time of the City Council calendar, but we are now wrapping up the budget process and sprinting to adjourning in late June.

But many big issues remain between now and then.

Late last month generous residents from around our City participated in ACT For Alexandria's Spring2ACTion.



The annual giving event brings together our community's legendary generosity with numerous non-profit organizations working to make our community a better place.

This year, the one-day campaign raised over \$1.7 million.

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

Council Initiatives

Budget Process Concludes

On Thursday evening the City Council will adopt our annual operating budget and the Capital Improvement Program for the next decade. For the first time time in many years we are not discussing large gaps in school funding, or significant service reductions. Yet there are many threats remaining.

From 2002 until 2009 the City was enjoying the run-up in the residential real estate market. Our General Fund budget increased

Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection

Smoke Detector Installation

Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator

License Your Dog or Cat

Report a Street Light Outage

Events/Updates

The Next Campaign

In November, I made a significant announcement about my political future: I announced that I will be running to be Alexandria's next Mayor.

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

If you have not been receiving my campaign updates and you wish to receive updates on this new campaign, please drop my campaign a line and we'll get you on the list for campaign updates.

Voting Has Started

On Tuesday June 12th the City's polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM.

The Republicans will be holding a primary to nominate a candidate for United States Senate. The sample ballot for the Republican primary is available online.

The Democrats will be holding a primary to choose a candidate for Mayor and 6 nominees for City Council. The sample ballot for the Democratic primary is available online.

Voters will be asked to choose which primary they wish to participate in.

The deadline to register to vote and participate in the upcoming primary is May 21st. You can register

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, 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 2018, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 3.4% per year. The work force in City Government is now proposed at 2,578 FTEs, 71 less than the peak a decade ago.

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, and everescalating funding challenges from Metro is impossible.

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 ongoing 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 February, the City Manager presented his proposed Fiscal Year 2019 budgets to the City Council and on Thursday we will conclude the process with the adoption of our budget.

Under current rates, projections are that we would experience an anemic 1.9% revenue growth. That would provide an additional \$14 million of new revenue available for both the operating and capital

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) is tentatively requesting an additional \$3.6 million of operating funds from Alexandria next year. This is to support existing operations and safety initiatives.

The School Board's proposed operating budget for the Alexandria City Public Schools has requested an additional \$10.9 million, about

5.1%, driven largely by enrollment increases and the planned opening of the new Ferdinand Day **Elementary**

employees with scheduled "merit"

School. **Providing City**

increases alone costs an additional \$5 million.

The combination of the increases for WMATA, our schools and our employees' scheduled merit increases depletes ALL of the new revenue available for this upcoming fiscal year.

In the fall, the City Council approved budget guidance that required the City Manager to present a budget that included no increase in the real estate tax rate of \$1.13. Pursuant to state law, the Council was required to "advertise" the highest tax rate that we might consider during this budget process. On March 14th, the Council voted unanimously to advertise the current rate of \$1.13. In adopting our budget, we can now choose a rate below the current rate, but no higher.

As a result, the City Manager was forced to make significant choices to present a balanced budget as required by law. The proposed general fund operating budget is \$742.3 million, an increase of 1.9%

You can also <u>look up your</u> <u>polling place online.</u>

Council Debates

As the Mayor and City Council are up for election this year, a series of debates have now been scheduled.

Community organizations have organized debates for the candidates for Mayor and City Council during this next several weeks.

Outdoor Experiential Learning Opportunities

The EDGE, George Mason University's Center for Outdoor Experiential Learning, is located on the Science and Technology Campus in Manassas, Virginia.

The Center provides handson experiential learning programs that offer thoughtprovoking, yet fun, team development activities.

Learning takes place on 35 low-elements and three high-elements, plus a variety of portable activities.

Programs are designed to meet the specific needs of each group.

Mulch, Delivered

Last month the City began mulch deliveries.

Mulch is available in a full or half truckload, and each delivery ranges from \$50 -\$100.

For the first time this year, deliveries can be scheduled online.

Real Estate Assessment Appeals Due June 1

Any appeal of 2018 Real Estate Assessments must be filed by June 1 for hearing by the Board of Equalization.

from Fiscal Year 2018. With \$4.3 million of reductions, the City government spending is itself only proposed to increase by 0.3%.

That restraint on the City side allowed the City Manager to propose full funding of the Alexandria City Public Schools Superintendent's requested operating transfer.

The City Manager has proposed 69% of the new revenue to go to the Alexandria City Public Schools, 22% to transit programs and only 7% to the remaining City budget.

For the past two years the City Council has directed significant new resources into our Capital Improvement Program to address decades of under-investment in our City's infrastructure.

The City Manager's proposed 10 year Capital Improvement Program continued the focus on expanding infrastructure investment. The 10 year plan proposes spending \$2.1 billion driven largely by \$453.8 million to address Sanitary Sewer projects, \$601 million for transportation projects including WMATA capital funding, \$438.1 million of funding for Alexandria City Public Schools capital projects, \$153 million for City facility needs and \$60 million for land acquisition for both City and ACPS facilities.

The City Manager has incorporated the recent recommendations of our Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Facility Investment Task Force in his proposed Capital Improvement Program. This group has assisted the Council in not only synthesizing the considerable facility investment for both the City and the Schools, but also making serious policy recommendations for the governance and implementation of this spending.

For the first time in quite a few years, the 10 year Capital Improvement Program adopted by the School Board and the funding for that 10 year program proposed by the City Manager are largely aligned. That is a significant milestone. The alignment is a testament to the difficult decisions made by City Council over the past two budgets, the work of the School Board to align to that new revenue picture, and the hard work of the Task Force.

Once the City Manager makes his budget proposal the budget becomes the City Council's to amend and finalize to its liking.

To inform that process, members of Council pose questions to our staff on details of the budget or proposals for changes. <u>You can review all of those questions and the answers online</u>.

At the conclusion of the budget process, City Council members make individual budget proposals for addition or deletion to the proposed budget. In order to keep the budget in balance, any additions must be offset by a deletion elsewhere, or additional revenue.

In order to be considered in the budget process, a proposed amendment must have the support of at least 3 members. In order to be considered as part of the final budget proposal voted on by Council, it generally requires the support of at least 4 members.

These are the budget additions and deletions that were considered by the City Council in this year's budget process.

These proposals were:

As discussed in last month's newsletter, I made a proposal to increase the \$1.5 million that the City Manager had set aside in the proposed budget to address Public Safety Recruitment and Retention. This proposal will increase the money available to address public safety compensation issues to \$3.6 million. This money will be used to fund recommendations of the Public Safety Work Group, a group of public safety workforce representatives.

The form is available online and can be submitted by mail.

Bike To Work Day

Friday, May 18th is Bike to Work Day across the region.

If it will be your first time biking to work or you're an old pro, sign up online today.

There will be five Alexandria "Pit Stop" locations, including Carlyle, Del Ray, Fairlington Centre, Old Town and Mark Center.

I'll see you there!

Memorial Day Jazz Festival

The 41st Annual Alexandria Memorial Day Jazz Festival returns!

Back on the waterfront at Waterfront Park (1 Prince Street), the festival starts at 1 PM on Monday, May

Don't miss this great, free event!

First Thursday

Thursday is "First Thursday" in Del Ray!

The Del Ray Business Association continues the tradition from 6 - 9 PM on Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray.

Host an Ace

The Alexandria Aces, Alexandria's own collegiate summer baseball team, plays at Frank Mann Field next to Cora Kelly Elementary School.

This summer, the Aces will be starting their 11th season affiliated with the Cal Ripken League.

As a non-profit organization, the team relies on host families

• My colleague Councilwoman Pepper made a proposal to restore a position in the City's Workforce Development Center that supported older adults.

- My colleague Councilman Chapman made a proposal that the City fully offset the greenhouse gas emissions from the City's electricity consumption by purchasing Renewable Energy Credits (RECs). The City currently offsets 19% of these emissions.
- My colleague Councilman Smedberg proposed placing the funding for a proposed Public/Private partnership position aside until the position can be better defined.
- My colleague Councilman Bailey and I had competing proposals for increasing funding for affordable housing development. Councilman Bailey's proposal was to increase the City's dining tax by 1% and dedicate it to affordable housing. In an attempt to seek a compromise between those who oppose the use of dedicated funding, but desire to increase funding for affordable housing, I proposed partially offsetting the increase in the dining tax with a decrease in the real estate tax rate of 0.6 cents (the existing affordable housing dedication. My proposal received the support of two of my colleagues and will not be part of the final budget package to voted on). I remain concerned about the use of dedicated funding in our budget. It is a bad practice and I cannot support its proliferation.

I am excited to conclude this process as we work to adopt a budget that is reflective of our values as a community.

Fire Department Staffing

We are now making new progress in aligning our Fire Department staffing with the recommendations of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

NFPA is an organization that promulgates standards and codes for usage by local governments. In 2001, the NFPA published a new standard that detailed the minimum staffing standards for fire apparatus. Today, Alexandria is the only jurisdiction in our region that maintains less than 4 person minimum staffing.

In the Fall of 2014, the City's then-new Fire Chief came to the Council with an entirely new model for cross-trained firefightermedics. This is the model in use in all of our neighboring jurisdictions.

By cross-training the existing single-mode medics, the belief was that we could achieve appropriate minimum staffing on all engines, ladders and the

rescue company in order to meet the NFPA standard.

While the new model has allowed the City to achieve appropriate minimum staffing on many of our fire engine companies, there are still apparatus remaining with minimum staffing not meeting the standard, largely due to staffing turnover.

In order to accelerate the City's efforts to achieve minimum staffing on each of our ladder trucks, the City has applied for a grant under the " Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response" (SAFER) program. We would use this grant to fund 9 new positions. The City has previously used SAFER to expand our Fire Department staffing.

throughout Alexandria to provide a room for players.

If you have a room to spare, sign up to be a host family this summer.

Cinema Del Ray Returns!

Thanks to the generosity of Realtor Jen Walker, Cinema Del Ray returns on Saturday May 19th.

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

This month's movie is "The Lion King" and it starts when it's dark enough!

A SAFER grant covers 75% of the costs of these positions in the first and second years, and 35% in the third year. At that point, the City becomes responsible for all of the costs going forward.

This is an important step forward to ensure that Alexandria's residents and their property are protected by fire suppression and emergency medical services which meet minimum standards.

Broadband Competion

Almost 5 years ago, I proposed that the City develop a broadband plan to bring true competition to Alexandria's broadband market.

It's been a long time coming, but the City is finally moving ahead on an effort to bring municipal fiber to our community. The City recently issued a contract to a firm to prepare documentation and planing for the remaining build-out activities.

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 and television. 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.

Almost 3 years ago, the City took a significant step forward in our



broadband options to Alexandria. The Council supported the idea of issuing 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.

The RFI was issued and we actively solicited those partnerships. We received 10 responses from potential private partners.

Concurrent with the FY 2017 budget process, the City completed the initial financial estimates for the first phase of the infrastructure buildout. 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.

In the fall of 2016, the Council unanimously took the next step in this important process, as we requested that the City Manager formally solicit for new providers to partner with the City.

The City is now taking two more important steps, as we solicit for private partners to complete the City's fiber backbone infrastructure, as well as working with other private partners to provide the "last mile" coverage to potentially connect residents and businesses.

One of the core components of the original proposal I made was that the City <u>adopt a "Dig Once" policy.</u> Essentially that's a policy that makes the City more efficient by leveraging existing underground infrastructure work to also make broadband infrastructure investments. 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.

As we now continue the City's municipal infrastructure build-out, we are putting that type of coordination into motion.

The City is in the process of implementing <u>an unrelated</u> <u>transportation project</u>, <u>Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)</u>. This effort provides for the installation of conduit and fiber connecting traffic signals along arterial roads to improve our traffic management and incident response. We will now be combining three phases of <u>our municipal fiber build work with this project. Doing so will save the taxpayers \$1.2 million and reduce the amount of community disruption required.</u>

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.

Making Arts Happen

With over 3,000 residents and nearly 10,000 employees, the area the City knows as "Old Town North" is already an important part of our City.

It is blessed with access to the Potomac River. It is fortunate to have two significant arts destinations, the The Art League and MetroStage. The area is accessible to a variety of transportation options. There is a large redevelopment opportunity on the site of the now-closed NRG power plant.

At the end of 2017, the City Council adopted the Old Town North Small Area Plan, which approved a vision for the future of this important area of our City. As future redevelopment occurs, the plan endeavored to introduce new vitality and improved community infrastructure.

One of the key areas of focus during the planning discussion was how to preserve the arts uses after redevelopment. Similar to our



rents, yet bring considerable value to our community.

During a check-in with Council during this plan process in 2016, I worked to challenge our Planning staff to identify land-use tools that work to provide developers the appropriate incentives to ensure that there is a place for arts uses in newly redeveloped properties.

The result of this discussion was a recommendation by our staff and the Planning Commission to create the "Old Town North Arts and Cultural District" and utilize a density bonus incentive to ensure a place for these arts uses after redevelopment.

The use of density bonus is the same tool we use for residential affordable housing, and this is the first time we are using it to preserve arts uses in this plan area.

Last month, immediately upon creation of this new district and the incentive tools, the City Council approved its first use. The Council approved a redevelopment of the existing Crowne Plaza hotel on North Fairfax Street.

In the approval, the <u>Council allowed up to 30% of bonus density in exchange for the inclusion of MetroStage in the newly redeveloped property.</u>

I am excited that this creative approach has led to the preservation of one of Alexandria's performing arts anchors. I am hopeful this tool will prove useful in the future!

Landmark Mall

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

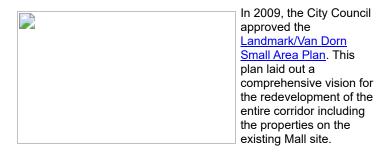
Eighteen years ago, when the ownership of the properties at Landmark Mall received their tax assessments from the City, the actual mall site was assessed at \$76.4 million. The Sears store was assessed at \$19.7 million. The Macy's store site was assessed at \$17 million.

At the City's tax rate in 2000, these three sites alone generated \$1.25 million in real estate tax.

Today, the three properties are assessed at \$24 million, \$13.4 million, and \$10.6 million, respectively. They generate about \$500,000 in real estate tax today, less than half of what it used to.

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

The City has taken a number of steps over the years to revitalize the site.



The bankruptcy of one of the owners, unfavorable market conditions, and the complexity of the relationship between the three owners on the site resulted in little action for several years.

In June 2013, after taking over ownership of the mall site, the Howard Hughes Corporation received approval by the Planning Commission and City Council for a redevelopment of their portion of the site. A slower than expected leasing market has slowed that company's intentions to redevelop.

In 2015, Howard Hughes Corporation was back at City Hall to apply for very minor amendments to the approval that was issued in 2013. These changes were approved by City Council in April of 2015.

While no one should be convinced until they see bulldozers knocking down the existing mall site, there is a lot going on, including some significant events earlier this year. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but I believe we can be cautiously optimistic that it is finally coming together.

- <u>Early last year, Macy's announced the closure of their store at</u>
 Landmark.
- The Howard Hughes Corporation later announced that it had purchased the Macy's store site.

- The Howard Hughes Corporation subsequently announced that the existing mall site is closing.
- Mill Creek is now engaged to handle the residential portion of the redevelopment.
- There have been discussions between the City and Howard Hughes about potential public/private partnerships that will help spur the redevelopment.
- Sears spun-off a new Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) in 2015 called Seritage Growth Properties to maximize value out of their remaining real estate. <u>The Landmark Mall Sears</u> store property is now owned by the new REIT.

One of the largest impediments to redevelopment has been the presence of three landowners on the site. We now have two landowners on the site and we are getting closer to having one landowner with full site control.

While that is good news, the shift from a modest redevelopment of only the mall site to a more comprehensive redevelopment means some more delays as new plans are submitted for a larger area.

In the City's Indepartmental Work Program, we have now included a new process beginning imminently to re-plan the site in a more comprehensive vision. That effort should conclude in the Winter of 2019.

During the interim period a tentative agreement between the Howard Hughes Corporation and <u>Carpenter's Shelter</u> to <u>temporarily house</u> the shelter at Landmark. <u>Carpenter's Shelter is redeveloping their existing shelter, expanding and creating new affordable housing on site in partnership with the Alexandria Housing Development <u>Corporation</u>.</u>

The shelter will be at Landmark for 18 - 24 months, at which time they will return to their new location on N. Henry Street.

The redevelopment of the Landmark Mall site has been a long time in coming to fruition. I am optimistic that we are finally making real progress in this effort.

Preserving Our History, Efficiency in Government

Our City government conducts many vital functions. It's important that they do so effectively and efficiently.

Alexandria has two historic preservation districts, the Old & Historic District and the Parker-Gray District. Both of these districts have a Board of Architectural Review (BAR) charged with preserving the historic fabric of each area.

The Old & Historic District and the BAR were created originally in 1946.

In 1984, there was an effort to expand the existing Old and Historic District to include the areas that are today part of the Parker-Gray District. While that was ultimately rejected, a decision was made to create a separate district with its own board.

Once the General Assembly took action, City Council appointed the first Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review in 1986.

Today, both boards are responsible for hearing applications for permits to demolish or certificates of appropriateness.

In 2011, the Parker-Gray Ad Hoc Design Guidelines Work Group was formed to streamline the approval process. expand the use of more modern materials, and reduce the fees.

This group agreed upon a series of <u>recommendations</u> that were adopted by the City Council in the Fall of 2013.



A consequence of those changes has been to shift many requests that required a full public hearing before the BAR, to be able to be approved administratively by City staff.

The meetings of the Parker-Gray BAR have reduced significantly in duration, and two meetings in the past year have been cancelled due to a lack of agenda items.

In an effort to reduce the impact on the City's staff, as well as improve the customer service for our property owners, my colleague Councilman Paul Smedberg and I jointly proposed combining the Old & Historic District and Parker-Gray Boards of Architectural Review into a consolidated Board of Architectural Review for both districts.

Last week the City Council voted 6-1 to initiate a Text Amendment to make this change. Our City staff will work with stakeholders, prepare a recommendation, and bring it to the Planning Commission and City Council for consideration.

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 <u>drop us a line</u> and we'll get a Town Hall on the calendar! Thanks for the interest!

Upcoming Issues

Potomac Yard Metro

For decades, the City has discussed, planned, and just plain hoped for a Metro Rail station at Potomac Yard. Now an award of a contract to build the station is expected in the middle of this year.

At the end of 2016, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), issued the pre-solicitation notice to hire the contractor to design, construct, test and commission the new Potomac Yard Metro station. The formal solicitation was released shortly thereafter, we are now closer than we have ever been to bringing Metro to Potomac Yard.

The procurement process remains under way. <u>Discussions with the bidders who are seeking the award have continued, including requests to reduce cost</u>. As the costs of materials and labor have increased dramatically in recent years, the budget for the overall project has had to increase.

In June of 2016, the City achieved two major milestones in the effort to bring this station to reality. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the land-use applications for the construction of the station itself. The Council scheduled a special meeting and adopted the approvals as recommended.



Also in June of 2016, the Final Environmental Impact Statement was completed.

It was three and a half years ago that the City Council

<u>unanimously adopted Alternative B as the site of the future Potomac Yard Metro station.</u>

In May of 2016, the Council approved revisions to the formal agreement between the City and the National Park Service. This agreement was necessary to select Alternative B, which requires the use of some National Park Service land. Implementing this agreement will expand National Park Service land, improve existing public spaces, and protect the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

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 <u>a funding plan for Potomac Yard Metro</u> that not only leverages the development activity in Potomac Yard, but also does so without requiring the contributions of General Fund taxpayers.

The largest environmental, <u>economic development</u>, and transportation initiative in our City's history is being accomplished using <u>one of the most innovative funding mechanisms used</u> anywhere in the country.

The funding package today consists of a <u>special tax district</u>, tax increment funding, <u>Northern Virginia Transportation Authority</u> regional funding, a <u>Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Board loan</u>, and a developer contribution. Council recently voted to remove one of the special tax districts if a portion of money from the proposed Dominion 230KV transmission line can be used to replace the resources.

The new schedule is for the station to open in late 2021/early 2022.

The Potomac Yard Metro project will facilitate 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 of walkable community our City has long desired in Potomac Yard.

Paving the Way For Safety

In adopting the Fiscal Year 2018 budget last year, the Council continued a multi-year effort of devoting new capital resources to a variety of deferred infrastructure projects.

One of the efforts that was increased was the City's road surfacing budget. This allowed for \$5.2 million to be directed to address road conditions around the City .

Please take the time to complete our survey on important planned paving efforts to ensure that we incorporate your perspective on these important roads .

The City has 560 lane miles of roads for which it is responsible. Periodically, our Transportation and Environmental



Services Department assesses every street in the City <u>assigning</u> each a Pavement Condition

Inventory (PCI) score. Based on that score and available resources, our paving plan for each year is formulated. The City recently

completed a new citywide survey which has prompted revisions to this schedule. Yet assessments continue and the schedule will be revised as needs dictate.

As the City undertakes paving, the City performs assessments to determine what safety initiatives can be undertaken in conjunction with the planned work. With several important roads planned, the City would like your input on the safety conditions.

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