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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

May 1, 2022

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In This Month's Edition:

- Budget Adoption
- Landmark Mall
- Vote This Month
- Housing
- Policing in Alexandria
- Power Plant
Redevelopment
- Public Housing
Redevelopment
- Bridges to Arlington
- Car Tax Relief



Quick Links

- [E-Mail Me](#)
- [Past Newsletters](#)
- [City of Alexandria Website](#)
- [Pay City Taxes Online](#)
- [Review Real Estate Assessments](#)
- [Crime Mapping & Statistics](#)
- [Alex 311](#) (Submit Service Requests to City Agencies)
- [Board & Commission Vacancies](#)
- [Real-Time Traffic Data](#)

Last week, Spring2ACTion returned for the 12th straight year. This year, 7,655 donors donated over \$2.6 million to the Alexandria non-profit organizations addressing critical need throughout our City.

Thank you!

There have been new developments in our efforts to address COVID-19.

Alexandria's case numbers and testing positivity rate have increased modestly again, but hospitalizations and deaths have remained low over the past month.

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[Report Potholes](#)
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[Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)
[Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#)
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In February, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) released a [new tool to gauge a community's COVID risk](#) and assess the need for mitigation strategies going forward.

Based on this new tool, Alexandria's risk recently went up to "medium," due to the higher volume of new cases.

While it is not 2020, or even 2021 again, [high-risk individuals should continue to take reasonable precautions to protect themselves and their family.](#)

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

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

[For those 50 or older, or immunocompromised, you are now eligible for a second booster if you are more than 4 months since your last one.](#)

Additionally, if you received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and booster over 4 months ago, you may now received a booster of either Moderna or Pfizer.

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

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

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

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

The latest updates will continue to be posted regularly on the [City's Coronavirus website](#).

[The Virginia Department of Health posts data daily online](#) regarding positive tests, hospitalizations and deaths.

After two years of doing virtual town-hall meetings, including weekly sessions during most of 2020, I am moving back to in-person, "Living Room Town Hall" meetings. 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 Adoption

On Wednesday evening, [the City Council will conclude this year's budget process with the final adoption of our budget](#).

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).

Last week, the City Council held our "Preliminary Add/Delete" worksession. This is where most of the "sausage-making" work of budgeting is completed, as City Council worked to decide what would be in and what would be out of the budget we are poised to adopt. [You can watch this full session online](#).

Per the Council's budget rules, budget modifications must have the support of at least 3 members to be considered during this process. [There were 24 different proposals submitted by individual councilmembers to be considered in this year's process](#).

The City Council did emerge from last week's session with a [potential consensus version of amendments](#). Barring any late-breaking developments this week, this

will be the budget scenario adopted on Wednesday evening.

The budget is being built around some of the healthiest revenue growth we have seen in over fifteen years, but also with numerous deferred investments awaiting tax dollars.

In February, the City Manager presented **his proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023) and his proposed Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2023 through Fiscal Year 2032.**

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

While the Council voted to advertise a rate of \$1.115, **leaving the possibility of a half-cent increase for consideration**, given recent deliberations, Council is anticipated to adopt the current rate for another year. **That means 2022 will be the 6th straight year without a real estate tax rate increase in Alexandria.**

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

Given the amount of time between the proposal of the budget (February) and the adoption of the budget (May), the assumptions used to build the budget can change. Usually a few weeks prior to the adoption, the City Manager provides a series of "Technical Adjustments" reflecting further refinement of revenue estimates and expenditure expectations, as well as correction of any errors. Oftentimes, these adjustments are nominal.

This year, conservative forecasting prompted by the uncertainty of the pandemic, has resulted in a very significant series of adjustments as we prepare to conclude this process. **The City Manager's adjustments ultimately provided a net increase in projected revenues of \$7 million.** This did provide the City Council with some additional flexibility as we worked to conclude the process.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In addition, the City Manager has proposed no increase in the annual Residential Refuse Fee of \$484.22 (City Council is likely to approve an amendment to raise the fee to \$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 \$82.32 for condos, \$123.48 for townhomes, \$294 for small single-family homes and \$490.99 for large single-family homes.

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

There is no more important process than the adoption of our annual budget. The budget is a reflection of the values of our community and I have appreciated the input of our residents to ensure that we craft a budget that is reflective of those collective values.

Let me know your thoughts!

Breaking Ground At Landmark Mall

Late last year, 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.**

Last week, Foulger-Pratt, the private development partner, **provided an update on the progress.** In less than two weeks, **demolition will formally begin on the existing site and construction will follow!**

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

In July, 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.

In June, 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 will purchase 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.

Nearly 57 years ago, **then-Virginia Lieutenant Governor Mills Godwin Jr. (later Virginia's 60th and 62nd Governor) came to Alexandria to open Landmark Mall**. Today, the work to restore the Landmark Mall site to a productive use of real estate for our City is a top focus for our community.

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 slowed their 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.](#)

[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. The Landmark Mall Sears store property is now owned by this REIT.](#)

[Early in 2017, Macy's announced the closure of their store at 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.](#)

[Over three years ago, Council approved revisions to the Master Plan to advance a comprehensive redevelopment of the site.](#)

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.



Voting Starts This Month

Early voting begins on Friday and [Alexandria Democrats can vote to choose their nominee for the United States House of Representatives.](#)

[Alexandria Republicans have chosen a party process to select their nominee.](#)

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

As such, on Tuesday June 21st, all City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM for the Democratic Primary.

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

1. [You can request a ballot by mail online now.](#) Ballots will be mailed upon request. The ballot can be mailed back or dropped 24/7 at the drop-box located in front of 132 N. Royal Street.

2. You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office, Monday - Friday from 8 AM until 5 PM. Saturday and Sunday voting will be available in June.
3. You can vote in person **at your precinct** on the Primary Day of June 21st.

I'll see you at the polls!

Housing For Alexandria

In September of 2019, the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) unanimously adopted new regional housing creation targets. This was the first regional commitment to accelerate the development of housing supply as a means to address our region's affordability crisis.

I served on the COG Housing Strategy Group which developed these recommended targets, along with elected officials from Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. The groundwork for this effort was laid In September of 2018, when the Board of Directors of COG **accepted a report that identified that 100,000 additional housing units will need to be constructed within the region just to meet expected job growth.** That is 100,000 units BEYOND what is already planned to be developed.

These targets commit the City to the creation of additional units, with most of those units committed to be affordable for low to middle income households. To ensure that this housing creation does not exacerbate existing transportation challenges, most of this new housing must be located near job centers and high-capacity transportation infrastructure.

A little over 2 years ago, the City Council became the third jurisdiction in the region to endorse these targets.

HAND, a regional housing non-profit has created its "Housing Indicator Tool" to hold jurisdictions accountable. **They recently released the latest update for Alexandria,** showing that Alexandria is meeting our regional housing commitments, including the creation of 325 committed affordable units per year.

The COG analysis focuses on the housing production required to meet the economic competitiveness and transportation efficiency goals for the region. Even with increased housing production at the levels recommended, it's unlikely to be supply sufficient enough to address affordability challenges.

The recent Amazon and Virginia Tech economic development announcements have stoked concerns regarding the impacts on affordability that may result throughout the region. While analysis shows the potential for impacts on affordability, **in a region with over 3.3 million jobs**, an additional 25,000 jobs entering the market over a decade is not likely to have a dramatic impact.

Yet these economic development "wins" have served to shine a light on an issue that has bedeviled our City and this region for decades. As **the region's job supply has grown, the housing supply has not sufficiently grown to match**.

While **the national media** has highlighted the potential impact of this new growth on Arlandria and other vulnerable neighborhoods, the City began this year by adopting **the long-awaited Arlandria-Chirilagua Small Area Plan**. Housing affordability, specifically strategies to preserve market-rate affordability and create new, deeply affordable, housing units is a focus of this new plan.

Acknowledging that the City's land-use authority is its most effective tool for the creation and preservation of affordable housing, the City launched a comprehensive review of zoning tools available to advance affordability. **The so-called "Zoning For Housing" effort is now moving quickly with findings scheduled to come to Council and the Planning Commission over the next few years.**

This effort has already led to new policies on:

- **Accessory Dwelling Units**
- **Co-Living Homes**

Last month, **our staff held the first community meeting relating to new proposals relating to Bonus Height for the creation of new affordable housing.**

When the City attempts to address housing affordability, it is going up against powerful economic forces. Employing market-based solutions to these affordability challenges is where the City can be most effective.

Over the last three years, the City has achieved the preservation or creation of **just about 1,000 units of committed affordable housing**. The last few months have been very busy on this effort:

- In January, the City Council unanimously approved a proposal by the **Alexandria Housing Development Corporation (AHDC) to develop 475 committed affordable and workforce units in Arlandria at the corner of Glebe and Mount Vernon**. This is the site of a former Safeway grocery store and an office building bought by the

City 2 decades ago, demolished and used as a parking lot as an interim use.

- In December, the City Council unanimously approved [a separate proposal by AHDC to develop 36 affordable homeownership units \(31 townhomes and 5 condominiums\)](#) and 3 flats to be operated by Sheltered Homes of Alexandria for 12 residents. This project is located on Seminary Road just east of the City's Fire Station.
- In February, City Council approved a proposal by another housing non-profit, [Wesley Housing Development Corporation, to build 373 committed affordable housing units at Parcview on Holmes Run Parkway.](#)
- In January, [Wesley Housing used resources from Amazon's Housing Equity Fund and a loan from Housing Partnership Fund, to purchase 66 private units in Arlandria and preserve them as affordable, with future redevelopment plans to come.](#)

[The pipeline of housing projects between now and 2030](#) places Alexandria well-equipped to meet our goals.

[Let me know your thoughts!](#)



Policing in Alexandria

Last month, the City Manager travelled to the headquarters of the Alexandria Police Department to publicly announce that Don Hayes, who had been acting as our Police Chief for several months, [would now become the permanent Chief of the Alexandria Police Department.](#) Chief Hayes is an experienced, dedicated and committed leader for our Police Department, and he will do great things in the role.

Chief Hayes enters his new position at a crossroads for policing and a period of enormous change for Alexandria's Police Department.

- Not unlike police departments around the region and the nation, [Alexandria has struggled to attract and retain police officers to the profession.](#)
- In the wake of well-publicized crimes, mistakes and excesses by law enforcement around the nation, the public perception of the role policing should play has evolved.
- Violent crime has increased, nationally and locally.

We have a highly skilled and diverse police force serving Alexandria. In a period of change for policing, Alexandria has continued as a national leader.

Our officers participate in training aimed at de-escalation of volatile situations. We outfit our police officers with non-lethal force options to assist in the de-escalation of these incidents. Our officers have been trained in crisis intervention and the proper ways to address civil disobedience.

We have officers that participate in [training designed to address implicit bias in policing](#).

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, our [Police Department](#) and our [Sheriff's Department](#) provided summaries of use of force guidelines, procedures and practices for public review and comment.

At various points over the years, [I have written in this newsletter attempting to relate the national conversation on policing to our experiences in Alexandria](#).

While the national discussion is instructive, Alexandria must engage in this reform conversation using the facts and experiences of our residents with the public safety personnel that serve our community. The City Council has been focused in two areas:

- Refining Civilian Oversight
- Reducing the Burden on Police (alternative response techniques)

At the end of 2020, the City Council received the [initial feedback from our staff on Council efforts to explore alternative response techniques, focused on efforts to use non-police response for quality-of-life complaints, homelessness, behavioral health crisis, intoxication and beyond](#).

Last September, the City launched [the Alexandria Crisis Intervention Co-Responding \(ACORP\) Pilot Program](#). This program pairs a behavioral health clinician with a trained behavioral health police officer to respond to calls for service regarding residents in need of behavioral health crisis intervention. This program provides residents in crisis with more specialized services to ensure safety of the individual in crisis and the community.

Shortly after the launch of ACORP, [the City Council received an update on the implementation and success of this new program](#). The City Manager's proposed budget includes funding for a second ACORP team, and the City Council will likely add funding for a third team in the budget with adopt this week.

A year ago, the City Council worked to refine civilian oversight, [with the creation of an Independent](#)

Community Policing Review Board. At the end of last year, the Council appointed the new members of this board, and they are now working to get organized, draft bylaws and prepare for their important role.

In November of 2020, **our staff brought to the Council a study on the costs for implementing a body-worn camera program for the City's public safety agencies**. While there has been support on the Council to implement such a program, the funding required has been difficult to prioritize.

With a more modest implementation plan, and Federal dollars advanced by Congressman Beyer, the City is now moving ahead to implement this important transparency and accountability measure.

The City Manager's proposed budget also included five additional positions within the Police Department focused **specifically on weapons violations, to continue the progress the City has made in quelling a spike in firearm-fueled violent crime**. These new resources will also serve to reduce the strain that these incidents have had on our limited patrol staffing.

Finally, the City Council has worked to move beyond the divisiveness of a controversial policy question for our City.

The significant transition of returning our students to classrooms full-time in the fall also coincided with another change, the removal of **Alexandria Police Department School Resource Officers (SRO)** from our middle schools and our high school. Since the mid-1990s, Alexandria has been fortunate to have dedicated SROs that work in our schools to build community relationships and provide a support for our students, the faculty and support staff.

Our community has been engaged in debate about the appropriateness of the SRO program for a few years. **There is a national movement working to remove police from school environments.**

Ultimately, our School Board took up this issue, and they voted 6-3 to retain the SRO program, but with **substantial revisions to the Memorandum of Understanding that governs the program.**

During City Council's budget process earlier last year, **a majority of the City Council voted 4-3 to remove the funding for the SROs, thus ending the program.** I did not support this removal.

Last fall, **the City Council voted 4-3 to return SROs to our schools for the remainder of the school**

year while we considered potential alternatives and other changes to the program in the future.

This entire discussion has been a dismaying one for our community. If we have learned anything from the national conversation over the last few years, it is that there are radically different perceptions about police and policing among our residents. That has been painfully evident in Alexandria's SRO discussion.

There have been concerns voiced about criminalization of youth misbehavior and premature involvement of youth in the criminal justice system, particularly among youth of color. There is national data to support those concerns. These concerns cannot be dismissed.

Yet, we also must hear the voices of parents and educators who are concerned about the safety of our schools. During this school year, we have had at least two students involved in shootings and a student attempt to bring a loaded firearm into our high school. These concerns cannot be easily dismissed either.

We CAN devise an Alexandria approach to keeping our students, educators and support staff safe, while also ensuring that our students can learn free of perceived intimidation. I am hopeful that we will use this moment to step back, have a collaborative process involving students, educators, support staff, parents, and law enforcement, to determine an Alexandria approach to this issue.

The budget package that Council is set to approve this week includes a proposal I have made to appropriate the funding for the School Resource Officers to the Police Department's budget, to separate the policy question of the physical assignment for the officers, from the budget question of whether they should be funded.

The Alexandria City Public Schools have created a School Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) Advisory Group to help pull together a new consensus on the partnership between schools and law enforcement. [Applications are being accepted through tomorrow for this group. You may apply online.](#)

These efforts must continue as we work to provide the resources and a level of transparency that supports public confidence in the great work done by the men and women who serve and protect our community every day.

Power Plant Redevelopment

Two decades ago, persistent resident activists, led by Elizabeth Chimento and Poul Hertel, began questioning

the health impacts of the coal-fired **Potomac River Generating Station, which began operation on Alexandria's waterfront in 1949.**

Eventually, they got the support of the City government, and through years of work, led by my former colleagues Paul Smedberg and Del Pepper, the plant shut down for good almost a decade ago.

Now, it's time for what is next.

Hilco Redevelopment Partners, a national entity specializing in the redevelopment of aged industrial sites, **took control of the property with plans to see redevelopment to fruition.**

Hilco **has made concept plan submissions** and they are preparing to come to the Planning Commission and City Council in June and July.

On Thursday May 12th at 6:30 PM, Hilco will be hosting their 10th community meeting to provide updates on their plans and obtain feedback from the community. **You are invited to sign-up to participate!**

With the closure of the station, this site became one of the higher priority sites for redevelopment in the City. As the City's focus on the waterfront has led to new public access, increased open space and new economic vitality, the power plant site is a critical missing piece as we work to ensure the connection of the northern end of the waterfront.

Fortunately, Hilco is welcomed to Alexandria with an adopted community vision to guide them. In 2017, City Council approved **the Old Town North Small Area Plan**. This planning document codified a redevelopment vision for the 20-acre power plant site and the area surrounding it.

With the progress of this planning, I am excited to see an ideal partner for the City to turn this former industrial polluter into the **sustainable uses of the City's future!**



Public Housing Redevelopment

Over 40 years ago, the City Council adopted **Resolution 830**, which committed the City to "one for one" replacement of any public housing unit that was destroyed by redevelopment.

As of three years ago, Resolution 830 is no more, replaced by Resolution 2876. The new resolution, endorsed by the City and our public housing authority Board, modernizes the City's commitment to preservation for a new generation of challenges.

Making the commitment stated in Resolution 830 is rather easy. Actually achieving that replacement, in an environment of dwindling Federal resources and rapidly-appreciating property values, is extraordinarily difficult.

That difficulty was again demonstrated by [the announcement nearly four years ago that the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority \(ARHA\) and its private development partner could not come to terms to move forward with the redevelopment of the Andrew Adkins development.](#) While not unexpected given the challenges of this project, this was a terribly disappointing turn of events that delayed redevelopment efforts by multiple years.

The future state of Resolution 830 and the future of the Andrew Adkins redevelopment effort are linked. The very same factors that prompted a review of Resolution 830 are challenging the feasibility of redeveloping the existing Andrew Adkins.

After a few years of reset after the failure of Andrew Adkins, ARHA is now proceeding with the [redevelopment of Samuel Madden](#) and a future [redevelopment of Ladrey and the ARHA headquarters site.](#) In both, the goal will be the replacement of the existing public housing with new, modern housing units, as well as the expansion of the affordable and market-rate units on the sites.

The [Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority \(ARHA\)](#) is an independent entity, with a City Council-appointed Board, but separate from the City, that utilizes Federal funding from the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) to provide housing to low-income residents of Alexandria.

ARHA directly manages and controls 1,079 units of affordable housing. In addition, ARHA manages the City's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, which utilizes Federal funding to provide assistance for another 1,906 low-income families to reside in privately-owned housing units. Together, this is approximately 4% of the City's overall housing stock.

At the federal level, we have seen dramatic changes in how public housing is managed and developed. In the past, the Federal Government had been a proactive participant in bringing about the redevelopment of public housing. This was demonstrated in Alexandria when the City used [HOPE VI funding](#) to redevelop 100 units of Public Housing into [Chatham Square](#). This mixed-income development incorporated both market-rate and public housing.

With aging properties sitting on valuable land, ARHA must look at the highest and best use of its land to

preserve housing for low-income residents in our City.

In 2008, the City Council adopted the [Braddock East Master Plan](#), which called for redevelopment of several aging public housing properties. By allowing additional density near existing transit, it was designed to encourage private partnership in the redevelopment of this housing.

Aligned with this Plan, James Bland Homes [have become Old Town Commons](#). This redevelopment activity has proven successful in providing a sustainable model for mixed-income housing in our City.

This is a significant undertaking and we will have a historic opportunity to partner with the private sector and provide new housing for a variety of income levels near existing transit in our City. This effort will also provide financial stability for ARHA in the face of continued change at the Federal level.



Bridges to Arlington

Last week, [Arlington County announced the further deterioration of the West Glebe bridge](#), which separates the Alexandria and Arlington. As a result, the bridge will now be closing completely for vehicle traffic next Monday, the 9th. It will remain closed until the bridge is rebuilt.

Alexandria and Arlington have five bridges that connect vehicular traffic between the two jurisdictions, all along Four Mile Run:

- West Glebe Road bridge
- Arlington Ridge Road bridge
- Shirlington Road bridge
- Route 1 bridge
- Potomac Avenue bridge

In the case of the [West Glebe Road](#) and [Arlington Ridge Road](#) bridges, there are considerable needs. Both bridges were built in the mid-1950s and recent inspections by Arlington County showed that they have large deficiencies. Restrictions on their use are now in place.

At a meeting in March, [Arlington provided updates on both projects](#).

Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) records show that the West Glebe, Arlington Ridge and Shirlington Road bridges are Arlington County's responsibility and the Route 1 and Potomac Avenue bridges are the City of Alexandria's.

Past bridge work has been split between the jurisdictions, but those agreements have never been formalized. With the West Glebe bridge requiring \$10 million - \$14 million of work and the Arlington Ridge bridge requiring \$23 million - \$28 million of work, these arrangements are not insignificant.

Through some negotiation between the two jurisdictions, we were able to enter into a new agreement providing for future cost-sharing of all 5 bridges, for maintenance and eventual replacement.

This new arrangement provides that the two jurisdictions will split the costs of the immediate work required to the West Glebe and Arlington Ridge bridges, 50-50.

Going forward, any work on bridges between the two jurisdictions will be split 67%/33%, with the jurisdiction recognized by VDOT as primarily responsible shouldering the larger portion.

This new arrangement ensures that these bridges will be kept in a state of good repair in the future, and clarifies the financial responsibility for doing so. I look forward to both impacted bridges being returned to service as quickly as possible.



Car Tax Relief

Alexandria's second-largest General Fund revenue is the vehicle personal property tax. As a local tax assessed on vehicle owners annually, based on an assessed value, there is perhaps no tax more hated in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In 1998, **the Virginia General Assembly adopted the Personal Property Tax Relief Act**, which was to begin a process of phasing out the tax altogether, by providing an ever-growing appropriation of state money to local governments until the tax was eliminated.

When state revenues did not materialize in the way the Commonwealth had anticipated, the appropriations to local government were capped and the tax remained in place, albeit at a much lower level. Today, Alexandria receives an annual appropriation of \$23.5 million from the Commonwealth. **In our Fiscal Year 2021, we collected \$36.5 million from vehicle owners, to provide for a total of \$60 million of total General Fund revenue.**

Almost 15 years ago, during my first stint on the City Council, I proposed that the City consider eliminating the windshield decal used to enforce payment of the vehicle Personal Property Tax.

In 2019, **the City Council voted unanimously to finally end the requirement to display the decal.**

Later, the City Council eliminated the Vehicle Registration Fee (formerly the "decal fee"). That fee had been \$33 and brought in \$3.85 million of revenue to the City before it was eliminated.

Now, the City Council is grappling with a challenging aberration in this revenue source. Under normal circumstances, the valuations of vehicles do not increase. In 2018 and 2019, only about 1% of Alexandria's registered vehicles increased in value.

Yet, **the pandemic has caused chaos in the used car market place.** Last year, many Alexandrians saw increases in the value of their cars. This year, this phenomenon was projected to continue, as the City Manager's proposed budget assumed an 8.5% increase in revenues.

Since the City Manager proposed his budget, jurisdictions across the region, including Alexandria, are learning that this year's increase is expected to be much higher than anticipated, leading to an unexpected, one-time windfall. **Current estimates are that vehicle values will increase by an average of 26% for 87% of vehicles in the City.** This is extraordinary.

To protect taxpayers, the City Council is poised to approve a proposal from the City Manager that will provide one-time relief for vehicle owners.

The proposal would:

- Assess only 78.8% of the Fair Market Value of vehicles
- Provide no 2022 tax for vehicles assessed at \$5,000 or less, and lesser amounts of relief for cars valued higher.

This proposal provides all vehicle owners with tax relief, while reserving the greatest relief to vehicles with the lowest valuations.

It is hopeful that the used car market will get back to normal next year.

