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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

May 1, 2023

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Although wet and cold, we are halfway done with Spring! With the adoption of the budget this week, the City Council is closing out the busiest period of our calendar.

Last week, 8,265 donors donated nearly \$3 million to 187 Alexandria organizations all in one day as part of Spring2ACTion! This incredible generosity will benefit so many throughout our City. Thank you, Alexandria!

The Alexandria City Public Schools have commenced Kindergarten registration for the 2023 - 2024 school year. [The](#)

- [Alexandria Health Department](#)
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[process and required documentation is detailed online.](#)

The City is still accepting orders for leaf and wood mulch! We deliver. [Make your purchase online.](#)

If you would like to host a town hall in your neighborhood, [please drop me a line](#) and we'll get it on the calendar!

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

Initiatives and Updates



Potomac Yard Metro Opening!

Just a little over 55 years ago, [the original plan for Metro Rail was adopted.](#) That original plan called for a Metro Rail station just south of Potomac Yard, which was then an active railroad yard.

Three and a half years ago, [we gathered to break ground](#) on a Metro Rail station in Potomac Yard.

[In 19 days, on Friday May 19th, the Potomac Yard Metro Rail station will open for passengers.](#)

To say that this station has been a long time coming is an understatement. The arrival of Metro Rail to Potomac Yard is a testament to the tenacity of a legion of Alexandria residents who never gave up hope.

On the front page of the [Final Environmental Impact Statement](#) for the Potomac Yard Metro Station are the seals of four entities: Federal Transit Administration, Department of the Interior, WMATA and the City of Alexandria. Later in the report there is additional input from the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the National Capital Planning Commission.

The breadth of the entities involved clearly demonstrates the complexity of the project. This project is deeply complex and has been challenging to bring to reality for decades.

[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 \(over 30 years\). 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.

This will be the 98th station in the Metro Rail system and the second in-fill station that has been added. It will be one of the first rail stations in North America to receive LEED certification for the sustainability of the construction.

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 General Fund taxpayers.

The total project budget is \$370 million:

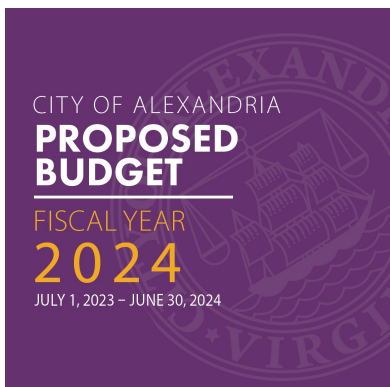
- \$250 million is being derived from tax revenues generated in Potomac Yard
- \$70 million is regional transportation revenues provided by the **Northern Virginia Transportation Authority**
- \$30 million was provided by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation to support the new southwest entrance
- \$20 million was provided as part of Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) to support the new southwest entrance

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.**

I will see you on the train on the 19th!

Budget Adoption

On Wednesday evening, the City Council will adopt our Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Program, which concludes our annual budget process. At the end of February, the City Manager presented **his proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024) and his proposed Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2024 through Fiscal Year 2033.**



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 21 different proposals submitted by individual councilmembers to be considered in this year's process.](#)

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 post-pandemic era, has resulted in significant adjustments as we prepare to conclude this process. Most of the unanticipated revenue derived from better than expected dining tax and hotel tax projections.

[The City Manager's adjustments ultimately provided a net increase in projected revenues of \\$2.2 million.](#) This did provide the City Council with some additional flexibility as we worked to conclude the 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 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).

Shortly after the presentation of the budget, state law requires that the City Council adopt a ceiling for the real estate tax rate that might be considered during the budget process. Once that rate is "advertised," the Council cannot adopt a rate that is higher, but may go lower.

Three years ago, the City Council was able to adopt the first reduction in the real estate tax rate in 15 years, bringing the rate from \$1.13 to \$1.11. This year, the City Manager has proposed maintaining the current \$1.11 rate. The City Council will be adopting the City Manager's proposal on Wednesday. This will be the 7th straight year that the rate has remained the same or decreased.

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

From 2002 until 2009 the City was enjoying the run-up in the residential real estate market. Our General Fund budget increased by an average of 6.79% per year. The work force in City Government grew from 2,229 Full Time 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 Fiscal Year 2011 through the current fiscal year, the General Fund budget increased by an average of 3.64% per year.

The authorized work force in City Government is now at 2,765 FTEs, little above where we were nearly 15 years ago. That's in spite of the fact that our population has grown significantly during that period of time.

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

It was in this context that the City Manager prepared and presented his budget. The City Manager's proposed General Fund Operating Budget is \$881.1 million. This represents a 5.0% increase in spending versus the current approved budget, with over half of all new revenue from the real estate tax being proposed for support of the Alexandria City Public Schools operating budget.

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

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

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

In addition, the City Manager has proposed no increase in the annual Residential Refuse Fee of \$500, which covers the costs of trash, recycling and yard waste collection (among other services). This fee is paid only by the 20,647 homeowners who receive City trash collection.

The stormwater utility fee is proposed to increase to address stormwater management and Chesapeake Bay clean-up mandates. This fee is paid by all property owners, including non-taxable properties. The new annual fee will be \$86.44 for condos, \$129.65 for townhomes, \$308.70 for small single-family homes and \$515.53 for large single-family homes.

In addition to 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 believe we have crafted a budget that is reflective of those collective values.

[Let me know your thoughts!](#)

Violent Crime

The last few weeks [have seen several shooting incidents throughout our City.](#) Residents are certainly justified to be concerned about these incidents. This violence has no place in our City.



Protecting the safety of our community is the most important obligation of local government. If our residents are not safe, nothing else matters.

Alexandria remains a safe community. In 2021, we saw an overall decrease in Part 1 crime, as our community recovered from the pandemic. This recovery came as the City was being served by the fewest number of police officers on the streets of our City in recent memory. This progress was the testament to the hard work of the Alexandria Police Department and the vigilance of our residents.

The City's violent crime remains 25% lower than we were 15 years ago. Our property crime remains 7% lower than 15 years ago. Yet, we cannot tolerate any crime in our community.

In March, the City Council received our 2022 crime statistics. This report contained good news and bad news for our community, and this report compels further action.

Part 1 crime is the most serious crime (homicides, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft). This year, the incidents of Part 1 crime in Alexandria increased 4.7% from last year. This increase was driven primarily by robberies, larcenies and auto theft. The City experienced a large drop in aggravated assault, to the lowest level in 4 years.

Part 2 crime are primarily "quality of life" infractions as well as incidents driven by enforcement activities. These incidents increased as well, with increases in Destruction/Vandalism, drug and narcotic offenses, driving under the influence and drunkenness.

While overall violent crimes decreased by over 12% versus 2021, we saw a doubling of crimes involving firearms, from 76 incidents to 152.

The underlying causes of the increases in violence (not just in Alexandria, but around the region and our nation) are so varied, that there is no single answer to this issue. However, the City is approaching this uptick in violence using multiple approaches:

- Restoring Police Staffing/Reducing Attrition
- Expanding "upstream" investments (family supports, mental/behavioral health, housing, re-entry programs, etc) proven to reduce violence
- Expanding community policing
- Continue advocacy for new laws in Washington and Richmond to slow the flow of dangerous firearms into our community

Our current budget, approved by the City Council a year ago, included new funding for a Special Investigations Unit focused on investigating those responsible for homicides, felony sex offenses and crimes driven by weapons. Over the past 18 months, this new unit has arrested 76 violent felons, a third of which were directly implicated in gun crimes.

We have continued to see mental health and behavioral health incidents driving emergency response. [The City's ACORP program](#), a co-response program pairing a sworn police officer with a mental health practitioner, has seen considerable success. Over the past year, ACORP handled 2,387 behavioral health calls. Only 2% of 911 calls that ACORP responded to resulted in an arrest and 17% resulted in an involuntary transport to a hospital. Nearly two-thirds of the ACORP calls were referred to community services.

In approving this year's budget, the City Council chose to build on this success by expanding ACORP by adding two new ACORP pairs, for a total of 3.

Last year the City hired the largest-ever class of new police officers entering the Academy. As those officers conclude their training, we will make large progress on some of the staffing challenges the Police Department has experienced for the past few years. Together with officers who are concluding training, this will result in a 15% increase in our available sworn police staffing in one year.

Coupled with new investments in preventative (upstream) investments, we can buck national and regional trends and reduce violence and property crimes in our City.

Our Police rely on information from the public. Please report anything that is out of the ordinary to 703-746-4444 or 911, as appropriate.



Quieting Helicopter Noise

One of the uniquely DC-area problems is the proliferation of noise in our neighborhoods due to helicopters.

Private, civilian helicopter traffic is impossible in the DC area, so nearly all helicopters in this region are performing a public service of some kind. Yet, the noise from these helicopters is still disruptive to the peace of our community.

Last year, [a new complaint website was launched to collect complaints about these helicopters](#). This site has served as a collection point for reports from residents who have been impacted.

With the leadership of Congressman Don Beyer, we now have new commitments from the Department of Defense, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Helicopter industry association to operate helicopters in ways not to generate excess noise.

This announcement is an important set of changes to reduce the amount of noise that permeates our communities. I am appreciative of Congressman Beyer's leadership in this area.



Forever Chemicals and Drinking Water

Last month, the City Council voted unanimously to provide written input to the Environmental Protection Agency supporting proposed regulation of "forever chemicals" in Alexandria's drinking water.

"Forever chemicals" is a grouping of chemicals formally known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). They have been used since the 1940s and are present in a wide array of consumer products and believed to be present in the bloodstream of hundreds of millions of Americans. There is an emerging body of scientific research that suggests that prolonged exposure to PFAS may have serious health impacts.

In March, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a National Primary Drinking Water Regulation (NPDWR) to regulate the presence of 6 of the PFAS in our drinking water. This proposed regulation would require public water systems to monitor for the presence of PFAS, report to the public the presence of PFAS and ultimately reduce the levels of PFAS in drinking water.

Alexandria remains one in a relatively small list of Virginia jurisdictions who have a private water utility. Virginia American Water Company (VAWC), a subsidiary of a large national company, provides the water supply to Alexandria's residents and businesses.

As a private utility, VAWC is subject to the authority of the State Corporation Commission (SCC) in Richmond.

Virginia-American Water Company has been measuring and reporting the levels of PFAS in our drinking water for several years. The current 2022 Water Quality Report that Virginia-American provided to our community shows that Alexandria's drinking water does have elevated levels of PFAS. In the case of four of those chemicals, the level of PFAS detected in Alexandria's drinking water would be actionable under the proposed EPA standards.

In addition to the proposed regulations, the recently-enacted Bipartisan Infrastructure Law **included the largest-ever investment in water systems in our nation's history**. The City will work with Virginia-American to make the improvements in technology and infrastructure to make Alexandria's drinking water safer for all of our residents.

The EPA is accepting public input on these proposed regulations through the end of the month. **Alexandria residents can provide input online**. Please show your support for these important new standards.



DCHS Consolidation

Almost three years ago, the City Council unanimously agreed to the purchase of 4850 Mark Center Drive to consolidate several City agencies currently located in 8 different facilities around the City.

Earlier this year, the various agencies of the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) began moving into this facility, recently named to honor my former colleague, **former Councilwoman Redella S. Pepper**.

Last week, **we gathered in front of the Redella S. "Del" Pepper Community Resource Center to cut the ribbon and formally open this beautiful new facility.**

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

While the consolidation of DCHS will improve service delivery for these important safety net services, we have also used this opportunity to make more City services available on the West End, including tax payments, the Clerk of the Court, the permit center and beyond!

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

As a result the City explored options to consolidate. Those efforts concluded at the end of 2018 with the City choosing **to consolidate DCHS and the**

Alexandria Heath Department at 4850 Mark Center Drive. This building was previously owned and occupied by the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA). **A little over a year ago, IDA completed their move to a new location in Potomac Yard.**

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

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

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

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



Zoning For Housing

This month, there will be two community meetings in our Zoning For Housing initiative. We are working to educate and collect community input on our effort to expand housing production and affordability as well as address past and current barriers to equitable housing access.

Both meetings will be hybrid, with the first meeting on Wednesday May 10th from 6 PM until 7:30 PM at Charles Beatley Central Library (5005 Duke Street) and the second meeting on Monday May 22nd from 6 PM until 8 PM at Lee Center (1108 Jefferson Street).

In March, the City kicked-off an acceleration of the Zoning for Housing work program. For the rest of this year, we will engage with residents to develop a package of specific land-use proposals in these areas:

- Single-Family Zoning
- Removal of Restrictive/Exclusionary barriers from the zoning code
- Bonus Height
- Expanded Transit-Oriented Growth
- Industrial Zones
- Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)
- **Inclusionary Zoning**
- Townhouse Zoning
- Property Conversions

- **Expansion of the Residential Multi-Family Zone (RMF)**

This is the most ambitious housing effort in the City's history and we want the voice of residents from throughout our community involved in this process.

You can watch my comments at the kick-off the last session, and leading into presentations from Richard and Leah Rothstein, **the authors of the forthcoming book, "Just Action,"** a follow-up to Richard Rothstein's seminal tome **"The Color of Law."**

All of the sessions **have been recorded and are viewable online.**

While this effort has a pair of motivations, a foundational acknowledgement is that for much of the 20th Century, **wide swaths of Alexandria housing was off-limits to Alexandrians that were not white.** That reality was enforced by a patchwork of ordinances, restrictive covenants, intimidation and lending practices that served to effectively segregate our City for generations. While de jure policies that explicitly enforced segregation **were made illegal long ago**, the legacy of these policies live on today. In fact, in recent years, **Alexandria has grown MORE segregated.** These realities are detailed in the **Draft Regional Fair Housing Plan** that I wrote about a few months ago.

The question before our community is what can be done about it. It was generations of intentional acts that led to our current reality. It will require intentional acts to change it.

As our City has grown more segregated, the lack of housing supply has left Alexandria inaccessible for low and moderate-income residents. It is those paired challenges that leave our City at a crossroads.

Yet, the City cannot raise and spend enough money to make an appreciable impact on this problem. The City's power to determine how land is used, our land-use authority, provides a critical tool to spur the creation and preservation of both committed affordable housing as well as market-rate housing. Said another way: building additional housing supply, whether committed as affordable housing or market-rate housing, helps address our housing affordability challenges and reverse generational impacts.

Somewhat inexplicably, local governments have been reluctant to use the single most effective tool to increase the supply of affordable housing: build more housing. The reluctance of local governments has been even more surprising giving that a supply-based approach has been the policy of the last three Presidential administrations, two Democrats and one

Republican. It's [the policy of our current Republican Governor](#). It has been the approach of the Sierra Club and the National Association of Home Builders. It has been the approach of the Brookings Institute, the Hoover Institution and even the Cato Institute.

[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-ever regional commitment to accelerate the development of housing supply as a means to address our affordability crisis.

These targets, while voluntary, 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.

[In March of 2020, the City Council became the third jurisdiction in the region to endorse these targets](#).

In 2013, while adopting our [Housing Master Plan](#), City Council had set an ambitious goal to create or preserve 2,000 affordable units by 2025. [We are on track to meet this goal](#).

With the adoption of the new COG housing targets, the City has committed to an additional 11,500 housing units, with 4,250 as committed affordable or workforce housing.

Over the last three years, the City has achieved the preservation or creation of [just about 1,000 units of committed affordable housing](#).

The housing non-profit HAND has begun an annual report to measure the work that each jurisdiction in the region is doing to achieve our commitments. HAND released the annual update of this measurement last month. [The HAND "Housing Indication Tool" report shows that Alexandria has made significant progress, with more work to do](#).

While there is a broad agreement in our community about the problem and the need to focus on solutions to our affordability challenges, bringing together agreement on the correct solutions to pursue is a little more challenging.

While the City's Housing Master Plan contains a variety of tools in our housing "toolbox," the options the City has are generally limited to:

1. Raising and Spending Tax Dollars: To develop and preserve housing as well as assist residents

in obtaining housing.

2. Using land-use policy (zoning) to create and preserve housing

There will be many opportunities for engagement throughout this process. The City will continue to seek creative partnerships, new land-use tools and innovative financing to preserve and create affordability in our City. I am pleased to see these efforts come to fruition.



Better Bus Network

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA or "Metro") recently released a "Draft Visionary Network" reflecting a rethinking of the Metro Bus network across the region. WMATA is now collecting input at meetings and electronically to get feedback on this attempt to provide more frequent, relevant and usable service.

For Alexandria, these changes are modest, as the City's DASH Transit Vision Study implemented many changes to both DASH and Metro Bus.

At the beginning of September of 2021, Alexandria implemented a new route structure for Alexandria's DASH bus system. Existing routes changed and new ways to get around our City were established. This was the most significant rethinking of our DASH route structure since 1984.

To coincide with the implementation of this new route structure, City Council unanimously approved my proposal for DASH to become the first transit system in the DC area to eliminate fares. Fare-free transit was estimated to expand ridership by an estimated 23%, bring riders back to transit following the pandemic, help achieve the City's environmental goals and disproportionately benefit our lower-income residents. With ridership depressed due to the pandemic, the initial cost to implement this change was dramatically reduced.

The City was awarded \$7.2 million in grant funding from the Commonwealth's Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP), which supported the first few years of this program.

At the end of last year, the Board of Directors that governs DASH accepted the first annual report covering this fare-free program.

This report showed:

- Average daily ridership doubled from August 2021 to August 2022, with large increases during

off-peak periods

- September 2022 has 380,000 boardings, making it DASH's single-highest ridership month since 2015
- Customer and employee feedback has been positive

In approving the current budget, the City Council included funding to improve the service on the current **DASH Line 30**. The expanded funding will extend all weekday peak trips from King Street Metro to Braddock Road Metro, which will provide 10 minute peak headways in Old Town. These enhancements will also extend all weekend trips from Landmark Mall to Van Dorn Metro, to provide 30 minute frequency on South Van Dorn Street, instead of the current 60 minute service. **These changes were implemented in October.**

The tool our City has used for decades to serve the transit needs of most of our neighborhoods has been the bus.

The Alexandria Transit Vision Plan was the City's effort to rethink our buses. At the end of 2019, **DASH approved this significant "re-imagination" of its route structure.**

The route structure approved has a short-term vision and a longer-term 2030 vision. This restructuring is designed to:

- Increase the number of Alexandrians near frequent transit (a bus or train arriving every 15 minutes or better) from 27% to 79%.
- Increase the number of jobs in Alexandria near frequent transit from 40% to 75%.
- Increase the number of jobs accessible by transit (within 45 minutes) to Alexandrians by 18%.
- Increase the number of residents in poverty near frequent transit from 29% to 89%.
- Increase the number of seniors near frequent transit from 23% to 74%.

Earlier this year, DASH celebrated 39 years of serving Alexandria. What started with 17 buses and served less than a million passengers, today serves over 4 million passengers with 85 buses. While new routes have been added, and existing routes tweaked at times, the basic construct of DASH's route network had largely been unchanged until the implementation of the new network.

Communities around our nation have done the difficult work of rethinking their bus route networks to improve frequency of service, reduce route duplication, and ultimately serve more riders. **Houston's overnight route network transformation helped spur growth in**

ridership at a time when transit ridership was dropping elsewhere.

Our effort is similar, designed to re-imagine our bus routes and ultimately increase ridership and route efficiency.

To provide a factual basis for this effort, a "Transit Choices Report" was developed. This report is a compendium of data on our existing transit network, designed to support this significant undertaking.

Free or not, passengers will not ride a bus unless it is going where they want to go when they want to go there. Increased taxpayer subsidy and more relevant and frequent bus service has made DASH a better mobility tool for our residents. It has also inspired other efforts around our region, as well as the WMATA Better Bus initiative.

This new network was an important step forward as we create a transit system that serves more of our community with more efficient and relevant service. So far, it looks like it's working. I am looking forward to WMATA replicating our success!



Stream Restoration

Last month, the City Council voted to formalize the return of two grants valued at just over \$3 million to the Commonwealth. These grants had been awarded through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF).

The City was awarded SLAF funding for three urban stream restoration projects: Taylor Run, Lucky Run and Strawberry Run.

These projects were intended to meet the City's obligations under the Federal Clean Water Act and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. The City holds an MS4 Permit (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System). The permit, issued by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, imposes a "pollution diet" on the City.

Just over a decade ago, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) made a historic commitment to the health of the Chesapeake Bay. With the establishment of the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), the EPA committed six states and the District of Columbia to significant reductions in pollutants across a 64,000 square-mile watershed.

The establishment of this TMDL imposed a "pollution diet" on the entire watershed, committing to reductions of nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment from flowing

into the Bay. To meet these ambitious goals, this TMDL was divided into smaller TMDLs for waterways and jurisdictions throughout the watershed.

We are in the second 5-year permit cycle that will culminate in reaching our portion of the TMDL.

By 2023, we have to meet 40% of the TMDL. By 2028, we must reach 100%.

After an assessment helped prioritize and assess the pollutant reduction opportunities, the City selected three projects to be submitted to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Each was awarded SLAF funding by the state.

The EPA has advanced stream restoration as a technique for the reduction of pollutants in the Bay. This technique involves repairing the human impacts on streams, with the goal of restoring these streams back to their natural states.

The Lucky Run Stream Restoration project received \$668,000 of SLAF funding and proposes to enhance the stream, re-introduce native plants, and improve the aesthetics of this area located in the shadow of Interstate 395 on the West End. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2017. **More information was presented to the community at a meeting in 2019.**

The Strawberry Run Stream Restoration project received \$800,000 of SLAF funding and proposes making natural stream restoration improvements in an area bounded by Fort Williams Parkway, Taft Avenue and Duke Street. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2018.

The Taylor Run Stream Restoration has received \$2.55 million of SLAF funding and proposes restoring the natural stream-bed and repairing a threatened sanitary sewer connection in an area near the Chinquapin Recreation Center. This project was unanimously approved by City Council to be submitted for funding in 2018. **At the end of January 2021, a community meeting was held to review changes and solicit community feedback.**

Together, these were very important environmental projects for our City.

At Taylor Run, in addition to protecting a sanitary sewer line running through the area, this project will result in 9% of our required Nitrogen reduction, 30% of our required Phosphorous reduction and 4% of our required sediment reduction.

At Lucky Run, this project will result in 9% of our required Nitrogen reduction, 26% of our required Phosphorous reduction and 57% of our required sediment reduction.

At Strawberry Run, this project will result in 10% of our required Nitrogen reduction, 34% of our required Phosphorous reduction and 14% of our required sediment reduction.

Yet the projects are controversial, with opposition from residents concerned about construction impacts, potential ecological impacts, accuracy of pollution reduction estimates, tree impacts, among other objections. While these types of projects are under way in hundreds of other communities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, similar controversy has erupted in other communities, including [Fairfax County](#) and [Arlington County](#).

Two years ago, [our staff provided an update on the City's Stream Restoration strategy](#). The was followed by a presentation by our Environmental Policy Commission, which has come out against stream restoration as a technique. [You can watch the full presentation and Council discussion beginning just after the 3:44:00 mark in the video](#).

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Council gave our staff direction to pause on the projects, do further measurements of all three, engage with the community and the Environmental Policy Commission on other alternatives and return to the City Council for further direction. Ultimately, the Lucky Run project is proceeding and the Taylor Run and Strawberry Run projects remain paused.

[The measurements were conducted and were received by the City and our Environmental Policy Commission at the end of 2021](#). These measurements show that the default formula provided by the Commonwealth's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to estimate pollutant reductions, over-estimates the pollutant reduction for these three projects, as expected. In the case of Taylor Run, our estimated pollutant reduction rate of \$15,000 per pound, will rise to \$50,000 per pound. For Lucky Run, it goes from \$7,000 per pound to \$72,000 and for Strawberry Run it goes from \$5,000 to \$20,000. If the City seeks to claim to the same pollution credits, using this method, it will now cost more.

While the Commonwealth has reiterated its support for the default calculations, this finding requires further review. To help us chart the next step, the City brought in the [Institute for Engagement & Negotiation \(IEN\) of the University of Virginia](#). IEN is serving as a neutral third-party to lead the definition of the path

forward. They have worked closely with our staff, community members and City boards and commissions to chart next steps.

This consensus-building exercise is now coming to a close, with the new recommendations coming to Council in the next month. Upon receipt of this report, the Council will now determine the feasibility and funding for the recommendations of this effort, now that \$3 million in grants from the state have been returned. I look forward to the findings of this report.

Meeting this commitment to the future of the Bay requires extensive, collective action across the watershed. Alexandria is working to do its part.

We will continue to work to determine the best approach as we move forward.

Abortion Access

A decade ago, the City of Fairfax adopted a zoning text amendment designed to make it more difficult for abortion providers to locate in their community. A few years later, the City of Manassas adopted a similar zoning amendment.

These two Northern Virginia jurisdictions, by selective use of their zoning authority, became part of a national movement to target access to abortion services by regulating the use out of existence.

Nearly a year ago, Justice Samuel Alito wrote for a majority of the United States Supreme Court, "The Constitution does not prohibit the citizens of each State from regulating or prohibiting abortion. The Court...returns that authority to the people and their elected representatives."

Shortly after the Dobbs v. Jackson decision, the City Council adopted a resolution that reaffirmed the City's support for access to legal abortion services, urged the General Assembly to maintain reproductive choice in Virginia, and asked our Planning Director to ensure that our zoning code would never be used as a weapon in an effort to prevent access to abortion services in our City.

Last month, upon the recommendation of our Planning Department and our Planning Commission, the City Council unanimously adopted a Zoning Text Amendment to make explicit that abortion providers shall be treated as other healthcare uses in our City.

This will ensure that legal abortion care services will continue to have a place in Alexandria.



Cut Through Traffic

A year and a half ago, the City Council finalized the latest update of our [Alexandria Mobility Plan](#). During the outreach phase of that update, one of the most consistent areas of input we received were concerns about the impacts of congestion on quality of life.

The data collection that was performed for the Central Alexandria Traffic Study revealed that relatively small number of residential streets were carrying inordinate amounts of "cut-through" traffic, mostly using those streets to access the Telegraph interchange with the Beltway.

In response to input from the Central Alexandria Study, the City implemented a variety of mitigation efforts to reduce neighborhood cut-through and work to keep heavy volumes of traffic on the highways and arterial roads.

As traffic volumes returned in the wake of the pandemic, it was clear that more was necessary.

After work with civic associations, our staff proposed new mitigation efforts to reduce some neighborhood cut-through traffic.

The first pilot was implemented in the first quarter of 2022 and changed light timings on Quaker and Duke, as well as on side streets, to focus traffic volumes on the arterial roads.

The second pilot began in August and limited access from West Taylor Run Parkway to Telegraph Road.

Our commitment during this pilot was to assess the impact, collect data and engage with the community to ensure these changes achieve the results they are designed to create.

Analysis of the traffic data proved compelling:

- Quaker Lane volume increased by 39%
- West Taylor Run Parkway volume decreased by 54%
- Cambridge Road volume decreased by 48%
- Yale Drive volume decreased by 76%
- Fort Williams Parkway volume decreased by 47%

With this success, our staff returned to our Traffic and Parking Board last month with a recommendation that this pilot become permanent.

I'm pleased to see this successful effort at improving the quality of life of our neighborhoods by focusing commuting traffic on the arterial roads of our City.

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