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The Council Connection

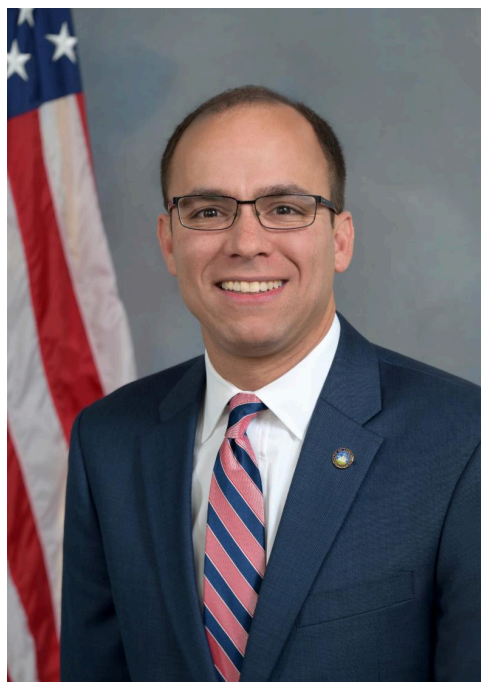
your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

November 1, 2021

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In This Month's Edition:

- Electricity Reliability
- Employee Compensation
- Vote Tomorrow
- Waterfront Flooding
- School Safety
- Freedom House
- Policing Review Board
- Torpedo Factory
- Leaf Collection
- City Manager Hiring
- Flood Gauges
- King Street



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](#)

In about 48 hours, the City Council will be fully into "transition" mode. Every 3 years, we have a phase where the new members are being oriented to the office they will soon assume, and those departing will be taking their final actions as members of the City Council.

Depending on tomorrow's results, for this transition, we will see at least 3 new members joining the body. That will be an infusion of new ideas, energy and focus. It is always an exciting time.

Next weekend, the City Council will hold our annual budget retreat. While we will be in the middle of transition, we cannot

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skip a beat. Council will adopt budget guidance for the City Manager later this month, which will be applied by our current City Manager and his successor in preparing the budget presented in February.

While we begin a budget that will not go into effect until July 1 of 2022, we are working to put a public health crisis from 2020 behind us.

In September, the City began administering COVID-19 vaccine boosters for [eligible residents of our City](#). So far, 11,024 Alexandria residents have received a booster vaccine.

You are now eligible for a booster if you received the Pfizer or Moderna COVID vaccine over 6 months ago, and you are:

- 65 or older
- Over 17 and living in a long-term setting
- Over 17 with an underlying medical condition
- Over 17 working or living in a high-risk setting

Additionally, if you had received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, as I did, over 2 months ago, you can receive a booster of any of the three vaccines on the market.

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

In September, [Governor Ralph Northam used part of his recurring pandemic updates to note that nearly 100% of Alexandrians aged 12 to 15 had been vaccinated, the highest such rate in the Commonwealth](#). It is in fact our youngest population, a population that has been eligible to be vaccinated for the shortest period of time, [that is now the most vaccinated portion of our community](#). Alexandria's middle and high schoolers are leading the way!

They will soon be joined by their younger brothers and sisters, as we expect formal approval for those aged 5 through 11 to be vaccinated. That should hopefully happen later this week,

allowing the City to begin vaccinated our younger children. [Details will be posted by the City once available.](#)

As of yesterday, 110,007 Alexandrians have received at least one vaccine dose, which is 77.3% of the eligible population of those 12 and older.

[Of those, 98,070 Alexandrians are now fully vaccinated.](#)

[ANYONE who is aged 12 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.](#)

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

Along with nearly every other place in our country, the City experienced a recent spike in new cases, largely fueled by the Delta variant and those remaining unvaccinated residents. While our cases went up, our hospitalizations and deaths did not increase, largely due to our very high vaccination rate.

When the Delta variant took hold, [the CDC issued new guidance recommending masks be worn in indoor spaces in communities where transmission is substantial or high.](#) Alexandria remains in the "[substantial](#)" level of transmission at this time.

With our students back in our schools, [the Alexandria City Public Schools is publishing school by school infection data on a weekly basis.](#)

[The City and the Alexandria City Public Schools have now implemented vaccine mandates for our respective staffs.](#)

While there has been much attention paid to the purported prevalence of "breakthrough" cases, it is important to focus on the data.

[As of a week ago, over 5.2 million Virginians have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Of those, 0.8% have developed a breakthrough COVID-19 infection. 0.029% have been hospitalized and 0.0093% have lost their life due to](#)

COVID-19. The vaccines work and they work quite well.

The ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund was re-branded as the **Alexandria Resilience Fund**, which is **distributing money** into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created. Please join me in supporting this fundraising effort.

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.

The **Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association is posting daily updates** regarding **hospital capacity and capabilities**.

I continue my monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings on the first Thursday of each month.

You can watch last month's Town Hall online. Due to scheduling constraints, we will be skipping November, but I'll be back at it in December.

Volunteers are needed throughout our community. **Please refer to Volunteer Alexandria for opportunities to give back to those in need.**

We are still actively recruiting volunteers to join our Alexandria Medical Reserve Corps. **Medical Reserve Corps** volunteers, both with and without medical training, have been critical to our efforts throughout this pandemic.

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

Initiatives and Updates



Keeping the Lights On

We rely on electricity. Our residents and businesses need electricity supply that is stable and predictable.

Unfortunately, for the past few years our residents and businesses have not received the type of service that we expect from Dominion Virginia Power.

Last month, **I filed a petition with the Virginia State Corporation Commission as part of Dominion's Triennial Review.** My petition requested that Dominion's allowed profit be reduced to account for the instability in Alexandria's electricity supply.

So far this year, our residents and businesses have experienced large-scale power outages on February 8th, April 30th, May 26th, June 11th, July 21st, August 10th, August 29th, September 1st, October 1st, October 2nd and again last weekend.

During 2020, our residents and businesses experienced large-scale power outages on April 13th, May 10th, June 16th, June 17th, July 7th, July 20th, July 22nd, August 2nd, August 8th, October 12th, October 17th, October 23rd, November 1st, November 2nd, November 19th and December 1st. That is unacceptable.

I have now written twice to the CEO of Dominion Energy expressing concerns on behalf of Alexandria's residents and businesses. While Dominion has been responsive, we have not seen the necessary action to resolve this instability. **In fact, the information Dominion has provided has validated our concerns, in that the data shows that outages are increasing and capital investment has remained flat.**

Our expectations of Dominion are clear:

1. A multi-year infrastructure investment plan to improve reliability of electricity service for the City of Alexandria, including appropriate exercise of all available authority under the **Grid Transformation and Security Act** to accelerate implementation
2. Improved transparency for customers relating to reliability data and recovery performance
3. An enhanced Service Level commitment for customer requests (street light repairs, property construction/renovation, municipal projects, etc)

The City has a long history of working with Dominion Virginia Power to improve reliability and it will be important to extend that partnership again.

Last month, Dominion again sent representatives to discuss these issues at our City Council meeting. While the dialogue continues, we will continue to work to achieve the type of increase in infrastructure investment in our City that will improve reliability.

Our residents and businesses expect reliable electricity. We will continue to work with Dominion and its regulators to make that reality.

City Employee Compensation

Local government is a people-intensive business. The services that residents of our City rely on every day are provided by a skilled and dedicated workforce. In a region such as ours, attracting and retaining such a workforce is a competitive business.

Fully 67% of the City's General Fund (not including schools and debt service) expenditures are personnel costs, including both salary and benefits. In this year's budget, that is \$231 million.

Balancing the level of compensation and benefits provided with the ability to attract and retain the best workforce is a challenge for the City.

For some of our employee groups, particularly in public safety, we are struggling to compete. With significant growth in hiring and in compensation among neighboring jurisdictions, the competition grows more acute each year. Given the substantial cost of training and the consistency of that training across the region, inability to retain these employees can be very costly for the taxpayers.

In 2018, to begin the process of meeting **the City's compensation philosophy**, the City Manager set aside \$1.5 million to address some of the pay inequities existing within the Police Department and Fire Department. The City Manager's plan was to allow this money to serve as seed money for a multi-year effort to address these issues.

It became clear during the budget process that the \$1.5 million was insufficient to address these issues. **Ultimately the Council approved a package that I proposed to set aside a total of \$3.6 million to address these public safety compensation challenges.**

In a competitive market place for talent, each action will of course have a reaction from neighboring jurisdictions competing for the same talent.

In the City Manager's budget proposal in the spring of 2020, released just before the pandemic was upon us, he included a variety of pay adjustments intended to keep pace with regional competition. As the scope of the pandemic became clear, the Council ultimately, determined that the tax increases proposed to fund the budget proposals would not be tenable. **Those pay adjustments were removed from the revised budget.**

The City, and nearly every other employer, is now facing one of the most challenging hiring market in a generation. That is exacerbated by some of the City's pay competitiveness challenges. This has created a staffing crunch in many areas of City government, but particularly in our public safety agencies.

In the budget Council approved earlier this year, we did work to begin to address some of these challenges. All City employees who are not at the end of the pay-scale (about 80%) qualify for a "merit increase" ranging from 2.3% to 5%. Funding those increases for all eligible City employees required an additional \$2.9 million this year.

The Council also chose to include a 1% bonus for all employees as appreciation for the significant work undertaken during the pandemic.

As the year has continued, it has become clear how much more challenging our employee attraction and retention issues have become.

While most of these challenges must wait to be addressed during an upcoming budget process, **the Council did vote last month to allocate surplus money from the previous fiscal year and a portion of our second tranche of American Rescue Plan funds to provide new funding to our employees.**

The package that the Council adopted included an extremely-rare mid-year 1.5% salary increase for all City employees, a \$3,000 bonus to all employees, and targeted increases for several positions in the Police, Fire and Sheriff's Departments.

While this mid-year effort was not designed to solve ALL of our compensation problems, it does make a statement reflecting our community's values as we head into the next year's budget process.

In recent years, the City has also made a variety of changes to employee benefits. This was in an attempt to mitigate the costs of employee compensation on the City's taxpayers.

One of the largest compensation costs is providing health care coverage to our employees and their families. Like most employers, we have seen very large increases in these costs over the past two decades. Today the City spends over \$25 million a year on healthcare for our employees and families.

Fifteen years ago, the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee made a series of recommendations to help mitigate these costs.

Many of those are in place today including premium cost sharing, self-funding (or self-insurance), and plan

design changes. These changes have saved the taxpayers millions of dollars each year, with minimal impact on employees. In fact, due to lower-than-expected health care spending from the City's self-insurance fund, the City was able to give City employees a "premium holiday" for three pay periods, thus increasing take-home pay.

In 2004, the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) required governments to account for their liability for the payment of healthcare benefits and retirement benefits (OPEB) during retirement. Previously, these costs were recognized and paid on a "pay as you go" basis.

Alexandria became one of the first jurisdictions to comply with this new standard and we created a trust fund to save dollars for these future obligations. The City's unfunded liability for this obligation is now \$50.7 million, a decrease of \$14.7 million from the previous year. This prudence protects taxpayers in the future from large unexpected obligations. It also protects employees from sudden benefit reductions due to an economic downturn. We are on track to fully pre-fund these obligations in 2028.

Most City employees (excluding most public safety) participate in the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), a state administered defined benefit pension plan. **The City implemented new cost-sharing for the VRS pension in 2012, with a five year implementation.** This effectively shifted a portion of the funding of the pension program from the City to employees.

In 2018, the City Manager proposed a change to the City's Supplemental Pension Plan. The City's Supplemental Pension Plan is an additional defined benefit pension plan that the City has had in place since 1970.

Previously members had a choice between accepting an annuity upon retirement and a lump-sum payment. The lump-sum payment is based on 30-year US Treasury bond rates, which has been decreasing for decades. As a result, the lump-sum payment was unduly lucrative compared to the annuity option. To protect the health of the fund and save money, the City Manager proposed a change to how the lump sum is calculated.

While the changes that have been made to benefits over the years have reduced the costs to taxpayers, there is recognition that we must continue to invest to attract and retain the employees who serve our community.

This weekend, as the Council gathers for our annual budget retreat, we will surely be discussing how

employee compensation and competitiveness will figure into our budget picture for the upcoming year.

Vote Tomorrow

Tomorrow is Election Day!

All City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM.

[Confirm your polling place online.](#)

[Saturday was the last day of early voting. So far 7,078 voters have returned ballots by mail, 16,668 voters have voted in person, and an additional 3,765 voters have received ballots by mail but have not yet returned them.](#)

Four years ago, we had 6,381 voters who voted early, so this is an enormous increase!

Mail ballots that have not been returned can be returned until 7 PM tomorrow evening using the drop-box that is at 132 N. Royal Street or dropped in one of the drop-boxes that will be located at every voting precinct tomorrow.

Tomorrow, Alexandria voters will elect a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, members of the Virginia House of Delegates, Alexandria Mayor, Alexandria Sheriff, Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney, all six members of the Alexandria City Council and all 9 members of the Alexandria City School Board.

[Sample ballots are available for your review online.](#)

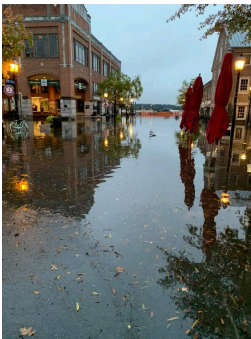
I'll see you at the polls!

Waterfront Flood Mitigation

Our Potomac River waterfront is the reason Alexandria exists as a community. **[The history of our waterfront](#)** is the history of Alexandria. It is what has brought people and commerce to our community for generations.

Only a few years ago, **[the future of our waterfront was the source of disagreement and vigorous debate.](#)** Today, it is the source of vitality, excitement and a place for all of those in our community to gather. Yet, we are just getting started.

Work remains on Robinson Terminal North and the expansion of the open space that has now replaced warehouses and derelict buildings that previously filled our waterfront.



On Friday afternoon and overnight Saturday morning, we were reminded of some of the unfinished work that remains, **as tidal waters closed several streets and businesses.**

Almost eight years ago, the City Council approved **Phase One of the Waterfront Landscape and Flood Mitigation Design.** This exciting design married the vision of the Olin Group and the input of hundreds of residents who participated in the planning efforts. It also received input from the **Art and History Report** to ensure our history is a key component of the future of our waterfront.

The City Council's approved Capital Improvement Program includes over \$100 million to accelerate the implementation of the infrastructure elements of the plan, specifically the flood mitigation. Yet, as this project has been planned, it has become obvious that the cost of what was originally envisioned will be quite a bit more than we have budgeted.

Faced with this mismatch of the City's plans and the available resources, the Council asked our staff to go back to the drawing board, determine new, more cost-effective, approaches to addressing the flooding issues on our waterfront and achieving the open space enhancements envisioned by the Plan.

Following extensive re-assessment, **our City Staff has returned with new concepts that would address waterfront flooding.** These alternatives will require weighing various trade-offs with costs, temporary impacts on existing parks, and planned park enhancements.

We are on the verge of realizing the vision for Alexandria's waterfront that so many shared. The economic vitality must be paired with flood resiliency to ensure our success.

Please **let me know your thoughts** on these concepts as we work to achieve the vision of a more vibrant and accessible waterfront for our City.

School Safety

In late August, our community was excited to see Alexandria's students return to school, full-time, 5-days a week. The experience of the past two school years has been heartbreaking, disruptive and tumultuous for our students.

Yet, **if you talk to any educator, administrator or support staff in any school in our country, they are full of anxiety** about how this return is faring.

In Alexandria, we invest in numerous supports of our students, from counseling, mental health services, mentoring, healthcare, and beyond. For a year and a half, our students were largely separated from those services.

Nearly two-thirds of Alexandria's public school students come from poverty and a third are learning English as their second language. We have a unique student population that requires a unique level of supports to ameliorate the impacts of poverty and ease language acclimation. Despite the best efforts of our educators, many of those services cannot be delivered effectively in a virtual format.

As students returned to classrooms, we have seen the impact of some of those gaps. Students were unaccustomed to the school environment and their skills to address the inevitable conflicts that arise, had atrophied.

Unfortunately, this significant transition 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 last year, 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 this 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 month, **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.

I believe that City Council's decision earlier this year, made by the Council without collaboration with our schools, served not to provide closure on a divisive issue, but unfortunately made the issue more volatile.

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.

Given the time, I believe we can arrive at the correct approach for our community.

Freedom House

Between 1828 and 1861, over 100,000 enslaved African-Americans passed through 1315 Duke Street in the City of Alexandria. This building was the headquarters for one of the largest domestic slave trading operations in our nation.

As of March of 2020, the City of Alexandria owns the building, having purchased it from the Northern Virginia Urban League to ensure the preservation of this important historic resource. While the purchase was **locally funded**, the Commonwealth's approved budget in 2020 included **\$2.4 million of state funding** to support the rehabilitation and development of the historic resources on the site.

In furtherance of this effort, the City commissioned a comprehensive Historic Structures Report (HSR) to formally document the history, plan future interpretation and prioritize rehabilitation. Last month, the firm commissioned to perform the study **formally presented their findings** and the **final report**.

Operating from a prominent location, this human trafficking operation brought enslaved African-Americans from the Chesapeake Bay area to a holding

pen surrounding the building, where they were then forced by foot or by ship to Natchez, Mississippi or New Orleans.

This property is a significant piece of Alexandria and our nation's history. The history depicted in the museum today, and the history yet to be unlocked in the building is a story that must be told. I believe we must work to ensure this history remains accessible to the public.

Additionally, fundraising efforts have begun immediately to support private interest in this important resource. **Please join me in donating to support this effort.**

I am excited about the opportunity that this acquisition presents for the City to better discover, interpret and educate the public on a vital part of American history.

Policing Review Board Applications

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. So far, the City Council has been focused in two areas:

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

In April, City Council held a Special Meeting specifically to review a new draft ordinance for the creation of an Independent Community Policing Review Board, make amendments and advertise the ordinance for public comment. Later that month, we unanimously approved this new panel.

We are now seeking applications for the Independent Community Policing Review Board that was created by City Council. **You may apply online and applications must be submitted by Friday November 12th.**

Before the end of last year, 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.**

In February, the City Council unanimously approved the creation of **the Alexandria Crisis Intervention Co-Responding Pilot Program.** This new program will pair

a dedicated 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 new program will provide residents in crisis with more specialized services to ensure safety of the individual in crisis and the community. At the end of September, **Council received an update on the implementation of this new program.**

We have a highly skilled and diverse police force serving Alexandria. The department is taking steps to improve the diversity of the workforce in future recruiting efforts. We are fortunate to have a skilled and professional Sheriff's Department with a sworn workforce that represents our community's diversity.

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.

In November, **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.** The proposed budget **included a comprehensive proposal for such a program, but it is not funded at this time.** Earlier this year, **Congressman Don Beyer secured initial Federal funding for the City to set up a pilot camera program.**

The City has also worked to improve the transparency of data related to policing in Alexandria.

In 2017, **the City released a first of its kind external study and analysis of five years of Alexandria Police traffic citation data.** Conducted by the **Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University,** this effort looked at over 91,000 citations issued from 2011 - 2015.

In February of 2018, the City Council **adopted this procedure as policy to ensure that this type of accountability and analysis remains a practice in the future.**

Since that time, the analysis has been conducted annually, with the [2019 data released last year](#). With [the adoption of new legislation during the most recent General Assembly session](#), our Police Department will work to modify data collection and reporting to comply with new mandates.

Yet we can never declare "victory," Every day, these efforts must continue as we work to provide a level of transparency that increases public confidence in the great work done by the men and women who serve and protect our community every day.



Torpedo Factory

[The Torpedo Factory Arts Center](#) is an iconic presence on the City's waterfront. Bringing a half million visitors into working artists galleries, the Factory is a economic development engine and unique arts resource for our community.

The City of Alexandria purchased the Factory from the United States Government in 1969. The Arts Center was opened in 1974 and has been a model for similar centers around country.

Yet for the past several years, the challenges of the Factory and the possible solutions to those challenges have been divisive.

[In February of this year, the City Council endorsed an action plan for the future of the Torpedo Factory.](#) In June, the City Council received [an update on the status of the engagement on that action plan](#).

As a result, our staff is now bringing a few proposals for the future of the Torpedo Factory to stakeholders for input, in preparation for a return to the City Council. [You can review those proposals online](#).

In 2009, the [City commissioned a study to review the Factory and the opportunities of the site](#). The result of the study was a series of organizational changes to the Factory. [Those led to the creation of a non-profit Board](#) to run the operations and leverage private resources to support the Factory.

With the lease nearing conclusion a several years ago, the Torpedo Factory Arts Center Board [commissioned another study to look at the strategic options available to the City and the Factory](#).

This report recommended more changes to the governance, the management, and vision of the Factory.

Candidly, the future of the Torpedo Factory has been studied to death. We have used the divisiveness of this issue as an excuse to avoid making a decision on its future. Unfortunately, inaction is a decision in and of itself.

My focus is on deriving a structure for the operation of the Factory that:

- expands the vitality of the Factory
- improves its financial sustainability
- improves its diversity
- ensures the success of Alexandria's premier arts destination long into the future.

I am confident that working together we can achieve these goals.

It has now been five years since the City took steps to provide stability by assuming caretaker leadership for the Factory. Since that time, the City provided leases to the existing artist tenants, and has been providing day to day management. It is now time to make a decision and create a sustainable structure for the governance of the Factory so that it can flourish in the future.

Ensuring the presence of a diversity of arts and artists in the Torpedo Factory Arts Center on our Waterfront is a priority of mine. I look forward to working with our community and various partners to see this vision to reality.

Leaf Collection

Alexandria's annual leaf collection begins today!
Check online to learn your collection date.

Leaf vacuuming will proceed to each of the designated zones beginning on the scheduled dates. Each zone will take several days to complete.

Additionally, the City is making up to 15 leaf bags available for each residential household. The bags can be picked up at City Hall, the City's self-service shed at the corner of Roth and Business Center Drive or at Charles Houston, Patrick Henry or Mount Vernon Recreation Centers.

These leaf bags can be placed out for collection on your regulation collection day.

City Manager Hiring Process

In June **we learned that our City Manager, Mark Jinks, will be retiring at the end of the year.** We will have the opportunity later this year to properly recognize Mark's dedicated and impactful service to our

City, but at the moment this leaves a significant task before the City Council. We must make the most important personnel decision in City government: selecting our Chief Executive Officer.

Three months ago, [the City Council formally launched a national search for our next City Manager.](#)

[We conducted a resident survey and presented the findings to the public.](#) Additionally, the City Council held a town hall meeting to get feedback from residents on the hiring process. [You can watch the meeting online.](#)

The Council will be conducting interviews and we will be constituting staff committees and a resident committee that will be conducting confidential interviews of the finalist.

Our goal is to have a new City Manager selected later this year so that we may have an appropriate transition.

Keeping Track Of Water

Last month, [I provided a comprehensive update](#) on the City Council's work to accelerate efforts to address chronic flooding issues, due to more frequent and more intense rain events.

During recent storm events, the divergence of rain intensity, even within the 15.5 square miles of Alexandria, has been defining. While the City has previously relied upon measurements at Washington National Airport (DCA), that has rarely matched the actual experience of Alexandria residents.

In an attempt to bring better "ground truth" to the discussion, the City has now worked to install 6 new rain gauges and 2 new streamflow gauges. [These gauges will now provide real-time data for members of the public to see what is actually occurring in our City.](#)

Please check out this new resource and let me know your thoughts!

100-Block of King

Fifteen years ago, [the City spent a summer experimenting with a closure of King Street to vehicles on weekends.](#) By giving the road space over to pedestrians, the City attempted to replicate numerous cities around the world who have created new vitality from asphalt.

Last month, **the City Council voted unanimously to make this closure permanent.**

Two and a half years ago, **Councilman John Chapman and I proposed** that the City prepare a new recommendation for a pedestrian zone in the unit, 100-block and potentially 200-block of King Street in Old Town. We suggested that with a newly expanded Waterfront Park, new public art, active programming and adjacent businesses, it was the ideal time to bring back this idea.

Our staff brought recommendations to the Alexandria Waterfront Commission and the Alexandria Transportation Commission for feedback and review.

As we neared a decision, the pandemic began and changed everything. Once the Commonwealth lifted the stay-at-home order and dining outdoors became possible, the closure of King Street not only became desirable, but it became essential to the survival of our businesses. It was quickly advanced as a pilot program.

The pedestrian zone on King Street became one of many adaptations the City implemented during COVID, including expanded outdoor dining, curbside loading zones, space for retail and recreation uses, and more.

I am excited to see this change become permanent for the vitality of our "main street."

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