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The Council Connection
your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

November 1, 2024
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November marks the beginning of a very busy holiday season in Alexandria, with events throughout our City.

In less than a week, the Alexandria Film Festival returns! With a special kick-off screening on Sunday, the festival will screen over 60 films at locations throughout the City. Get your tickets today!

From November 13th through the 16th, the Friends of Duncan Library will bring back their Fall Book Sale! Join the Friends of Duncan Library to access the preview sale.

Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection
Smoke Detector Installation Request
Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator
License Your Dog or Cat
Report a Street Light Outage
Report a Traffic Signal Outage

The following weekend is the traditional start of the holiday season in Old Town, with the Holiday Tree Lighting in Market Square on Saturday November 23rd at 6 PM.

Thanksgiving brings the return of the 49th Annual Alexandria Turkey Trot, a 5-mile run through Del Ray and Rosemont with thousands of your friends and neighbors.

If you would like me 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

King Street Pedestrian Zone

Over 18 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.

Over 5 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.

Three years ago, **the City Council voted unanimously to make this closure permanent**. With this decision made, **we are working with the**

community to plan the permanent changes to this space.

Council extended the closure to the unit block of King Street, **connecting the pedestrian zone to our expanded Waterfront Park**.

This month, the Council will consider a pilot to extend the King Street pedestrian zone into the 200 block of King Street. In September, **Councilman Chapman and myself again proposed this expansion.** It was endorsed recently by the Alexandria Traffic and Parking Board.

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 expansion advance to improve the vitality of our "main street."

Expanding Health Care In Alexandria

Last month, **the City leadership gathered with our friends from Inova and broke ground on the new Inova Alexandria Hospital, on the site of Landmark Mall.**

With construction under way, the new comprehensive medical center should open in 2028.

In July of 2021, 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.

While the new hospital at Landmark is exciting, it is not the only significant new healthcare investment in Alexandria.

Yesterday, many of the same leaders gathered on the east end of our City **to cut the ribbon on the brand-new Inova Health Center -- Oakville.** This new state-of-the-art facility, which officially opens for business next week, includes a full-service emergency

department, outpatient surgery, diagnostic imaging, primary and specialty medical care, and more!

In Oakville Triangle, across Route 1 from Potomac Yard, this site was originally intended to be the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus. When plans for Virginia Tech moved across Route 1 to North Potomac Yard, the medical investment on this site became possible.

Together with Landmark Mall, Inova has made two large investments in new medical capacity for our City. Providing critical healthcare services to all ages is basic infrastructure for our community's future.

Speed Cameras

During the 2020 General Assembly session, both houses and the Governor came together on **legislation that allowed local governments to use photo speed monitoring enforcement** for the first time, in certain limited situations.

During our budget process in the Spring of 2022, I proposed that the City use this new authority to address speeding in school zones in our City.

A little over a year ago, **this new program went into effect on three roads**, covering four schools.

We have now completed **the evaluation of this new program**. This evaluation has shown:

- A reduction in speeding at nearly all times of day at all of the sites.
- An average of 4,800 citations (across all locations) per month.
- About 84% of the citations are issued to non-Alexandria residents.
- About 5% of drivers have been issued 3 or more citations.

During our last budget, the Council provided direction to expand the program. With the data from this evaluation, our staff is now working to recommend additional sites for that expansion.

Ultimately, the goal of this program is to reduce the volume of citations as drivers respect the speed limit in areas where students are frequently traversing the area as pedestrians. Slowing vehicle speed prevents crashes and reduces the severity of the crashes that occur.

Time To Vote

Last weekend, 4,135 Alexandrians voted early, at our 4 voting centers. Early voting for this November's General Election began in September and TOMORROW is the last day of early voting.

Through Wednesday, 28,586 Alexandrians have voted in-person, another 9,950 have returned mail ballots and another 4,302 ballots have been mailed to voters and await return.

This is an important election, as we will choose our President, our Vice President, one of our United States Senators, our representative in the United States House of Representatives, our Mayor, all 6 members of the Alexandria City Council, and all 9 members of the Alexandria School Board. There is also an amendment to Virginia's Constitution on the ballot.

You can view your sample ballot by School Board District:

District A (East End)

District B (Center of the City)

District C (West End)

On Tuesday November 5th, all City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM for the General Election.

If you are not registered to vote at your current address, **you can register or change your registration online today.** Virginia now allows **same-day voter registration**.

Virginia has expansive early voting, so voters have three choices to vote this November:

1. **You can request a ballot by mail online now**. While is now too late to request a ballot by mail, ballots that were received in the mail can be dropped 24/7 at the drop-box located in front of 132 N. Royal Street (next to City Hall) or at any polling place on Tuesday.
2. **You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office (132 N. Royal Street),** from 8 AM to 5 PM today or tomorrow. You can vote at Beatley Library from 1 PM until 5 PM today or 9 AM to 5 PM tomorrow. You can vote at either Minnie Howard School or George Washington Middle School from 9 AM to 5 PM tomorrow.
3. You can vote in person **at your precinct** on the General Election day of November 5th.

I'll see you at the polls!

MS4 Update

A year and a half ago, 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.**

Other projects completed by the City (drawing upon SLAF funding) included two major stormwater projects, the **Lake Cook Stormwater Management Retrofit Project** and **the Ben Brenman Pond Stormwater Management Retrofit Project**.

The Lake Cook project, was the beneficiary of $1.5 million of SLAF funding, and made significant improvements to better treat stormwater and enhance the natural resources at this location along Eisenhower Avenue.

The Ben Brenman Pond project, was the beneficiary of $1.75 million of SLAF funding, and made improvements to better filter pollutants and upgrade landscaping at this location in Cameron Station.

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.

With the elimination of the Taylor Run and Strawberrry Run projects, the City was required to identify offsets to meet our obligations. **Last month, Council voted to approve our Phase 3 Action Plan, the plan for the final 5-year permit cycle that will culminate in reaching our portion of the TMDL.**

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

To meet these obligations, we have planned several strategies including:

- Leveraging the stormwater `benefits of private development that will occur in the City, including Landmark Mall redevelopment and North Potomac Yard
- Lucky Run Stream Restoration
- Bi-Lateral Trading with Alexandria Renew Enterprises

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

While the collective action undertaken so far has improved water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, **it is clear that much more is required**. While this Phase 3 Action Plan will meet our obligations for this TMDL, it is clear that more will be required in the future of those who live around and rely upon this important watershed.

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

City Hall Renovation

Last month, we hosted a community meeting regarding the upcoming renovation of Alexandria's City Hall. You can **watch the meeting online**. You may also **review the slides from the presentation**.

In 1871, the Alexandria City Hall was largely destroyed in a fire. A local architect, Adolph Cluss, designed the new building that remains in use today. **While the building has been renovated and added to at various points, it is showing its age.**

Renovation has been planned and has been deferred several times due to more significant capital priorities. **We are now working to advance renovation of our City Hall, beginning in 2026 and concluding in 2028.**

To ensure that your voice is heard in this renovation effort, **we have conducted a series of community**

engagement meetings, with more to come later this month.

Please provide your feedback on the upcoming renovation as we plan the future of the seat of your municipal government.

Short-Term Rentals

Our City staff is preparing new regulations on short-term rentals and they would like public input before bringing their recommendations to the City Council early next year.

In August, our staff released an initial proposal and they received quite a bit of input from the community on what was proposed. **Based on that input, they have now provided revisions to the proposals**. You can also **watch a video presentation** of the new proposals.

There is now **a new survey seeking perspectives** on these revised proposals.

Today there are over 700 short-term rentals in the City of Alexandria. This comprises a little less than 1% of our housing stock. As defined by law, a short-term rental is a dwelling space that is rented for fewer than 30 consecutive days at a time. They have been popularized by AirBNB, VRBO, etc.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has struggled to arrive at the correct regulatory regime and provide Virginia's local governments with appropriate tools to address quality of life impacts.

During the 2017 General Assembly session, **legislation was enacted seeking to address these types of businesses**. The adopted legislation allowed local governments in Virginia to create a registry, requiring registration, imposition of a fee for registration, and fines for those who do not register.

With the law in effect, Alexandria **moved quickly to implement this new authority and today 460 short-term rentals are registered in the City**.

Shortly thereafter, **Alexandria became one of the first in Virginia to negotiate a tax collection agreement with AirBNB to allow them to collect and remit the appropriate taxes** from those short-term rentals operating within the City.

Today, short-term rentals constitute over a quarter of the transient lodging (hotel) tax revenue that the City receives. Last fiscal year, this portion totaled $3.3
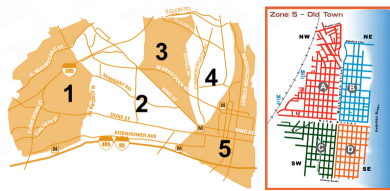
million from short-term rentals and so far in this fiscal year (which ended yesterday), we have collected $2.5 million from short-term rentals (through the end of March).

Yet, we do hear complaints from residents regarding the quality of life impacts of these short-term rentals. Since 2018, the City has received 33 calls to 311, citing concerns such as trash, noise, parties and parking. We have received 65 calls to Police during this same period, citing concerns regarding potential criminal activity. **There are also studies that cite the impact of short-term rentals on housing affordability.**

In May, **our City staff came to the Council to discuss to regulation of these uses** and how the City may adopt a more stringent regulatory structure to address these concerns. **You can watch the staff presentation and the City Council discussion (the presentation begins at the 25:00 point).**

With your input, our staff will engage with the community regarding further regulation, returning this fall with proposals for consideration by the City Council. **Let me know your thoughts!**

Leaf Collection

Alexandria's annual leaf collection began on Monday! 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, or Patrick Henry Recreation Centers.

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

Constant
Contact

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