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# **The Council Connection**

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

Alexandria, Virginia

October 1, 2018

#### In This Edition

**Council Initiatives** 

**Potomac Yard Metro** 

Where Do Your Tax Dollars Go?

**Medicaid Expansion** 

230KV Transmission Line Update

A New Public Hearing

Visitors to Alexandria

Host a Town Hall

Upcoming Issues: Rethinking the Bus, Cameron Run Park & TC Lights

#### **Quick Links**

E-Mail Me

Past Newsletters

City of Alexandria Website

Pay City Taxes Online

Review Real Estate
Assessments

Crime Mapping & Statistics

Call.Click.Connect (Submit Service Requests to City Agencies)

Board & Commission Vacancies

Alexandria Health Department Restaurant Inspections

Report Potholes

#### Welcome to Fall!

The City Council ended its recess last month and got back to work.

One of our first items of business was to address the vacancy in the office of City Attorney with the resignation of Jim Banks.

The City Council
unanimously named
Joanna Anderson,
currently the Deputy
City Attorney, as the
City's Acting City
Attorney.



I look forward to continuing to work with Joanna in this new role.

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

#### Council Initiatives

#### **Potomac Yard Metro**

Last month the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) announced the latest and most significant milestone in the the City's 4-decade long effort to bring a new metro station to Potomac Yard. WMATA announced the selection of Potomac Yard Constructors as the prime construction contractor.

Potomac Yard Constructors is a joint venture of <u>Halmar International</u> and <u>Schiavone Construction Company</u>. The bid was ranked the highest technically during the procurement process and had the lowest price. A week ago WMATA provided Potomac Yard Constructors with the formal "Notice to Proceed," and the formal design and construction of the new station has begun.

Schedule Child Safety Seat Inspection

Smoke Detector Installation Request

Real Estate Tax Receipt
Calculator

License Your Dog or Cat

Report a Street Light Outage

**Events/Updates** 

#### **Voting Has Started**

On November 6th,
Alexandria voters will
choose a United States
Senator, our representative
in Congress, our Mayor, our
City Council and our School
Board. They will also decide
the fate of two proposed
amendments to the Virginia
Constitution.

Sample ballots are now available for the election:

School Board District A

School Board District B

School Board District C

The deadline to <u>register to</u> <u>vote</u>, <u>or change your</u> <u>registration</u> is October 15th.

In-person and mail absentee balloting began last month.

In-person absentee balloting can be conducted from 8 AM until 5 PM Monday through Friday at 132 N. Royal Street in Old Town.

Requests for an absentee ballot to be delivered by mail can be submitted online now.

#### The Campaign

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

On the front page of the <u>Final Environmental Impact Statement</u> 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.



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.

For decades, the City has discussed, planned, and just plain hoped for a Metro Rail station at Potomac Yard.

In 2008, along with then-Councilman Rob Krupicka, I proposed a new start to efforts to bring Metro to Potomac Yard. We included language in the City's Transportation Master Plan explicitly calling for a new station at Potomac Yard. We also tied the construction and funding of Metro to the development occurring in the Yard.

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

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

The funding package today consists of a special tax district, tax increment funding, Northern Virginia Transportation Authority regional funding, a Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Board loan, and a developer contribution. Council did vote to remove one of the special tax districts if a portion of money from the proposed Dominion 230KV transmission line easement could be used to replace the resources. As detailed later in this newsletter, that transmission line is not currently proceeding, thus requiring further discussion later this year.

While the funding is generated by the City of Alexandria, the procurement agency is WMATA. It is being handled as a reimbursable project.

At the end of 2016, <u>WMATA issued the pre-solicitation notice to hire</u> the contractor to design, construct, test and commission the new <u>Potomac Yard Metro station</u>. The formal solicitation was released shortly thereafter.

As the sealed bids came back it became clear that the responses were significantly above the budget for the project.

At this point the City had a choice. The City could have cancelled the procurement, restarted the public process and modified the scope. We could have cancelled the project altogether. Ultimately, the City chose to explore ways to keep the project moving, and our staff

In June, <u>I was successful in winning the Democratic nomination</u>, and I will be on the ballot this November.

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

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

#### **Election Sticker Vote**

Before we can vote, we need to choose a good looking "I Voted" sticker!

In partnership with the Alexandria for the Arts, the Office of Voter Registration and Election is seeking your input on the new design for our stickers.

The poll concludes today.
Cast your vote now!

#### Art on the Avenue

The region's premier arts and music festival returns to Mount Vernon Avenue on Saturday!

From 10 AM until 6 PM, Del Ray will be filled with arts, food, music and 70,000 of your closest friends.

I'll see you there!

#### **Water Discovery Day**

Alexandria Renew
Enterprises is hosting their
second annual "Water
Discovery Day."

Hosted at Alexandria Renew's headquarters (1800 Limerick Street), this family event will be on Saturday October 13th from 10 AM until 2 PM.

The event includes tours, a rain barrel workshop, art and more!

Some events require advance registration, which can be accepted online.

worked with WMATA staff to make changes to the project scope within the existing procurement to bring the cost down.

Ultimately, the budget was increased to \$320 million and the southern mezzanine was proposed to be removed from the current plan.

I remain deeply disappointed to see the scope of the project change. I do believe that the design was a good one. Yet, the last thing this project needed was any further delay.

With the contractor now on board, they will work to design improved connectivity between the northern entrance and where the southern entrance would have been.

The new design will allow for the construction of the additional southern entrance at a later date, if the need is demonstrated and the funding established.

Along with Councilman Paul Smedberg, I represent the Council on the Potomac Yard Metro Implementation Group (PYMIG). This advisory committee met last week with the new construction team and offered feedback on the process and pending changes.

In December, the revised land-use approvals will come back to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval. In addition, there are a number of Federal and State approvals required, as well as modifications to our existing agreements with the National Park Service. Further public comment is invited through each of these processes.

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

#### Where Do Your Tax Dollars Go?

I have now been a part of adopting eight City budgets as a member of the Council. Each year, I try to find new ways to engage residents in the process, and increase understanding of budget priorities and trade-offs.

A few years ago, I worked with the staff in our City's Office of Management and Budget to create a new Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator.

Modeled after the <u>Federal Taxpayer Receipt</u>, this website will take the assessed value of your home and detail how much of your real estate tax is going to the various programs and services of City government.

July 1st marked the start of Fiscal Year 2019. Accordingly, we have updated the receipt to reflect the newly enacted budget. Give it a try and <u>let me know</u> how you like it!

#### **Medicaid Expansion**

During the 2018 General Assembly session, the most significant action was the conclusion in the Commonwealth's budget of an expansion of Medicaid under the Federal Affordable Care Act (ACA). The expansion extended healthcare coverage available to low-

income
residents. This
extension
would provide
coverage for
residents up to
138% of the
Federal poverty level.



#### Congressman Beyer's Annual Women's Conference

On Saturday October 13th, Congressman Don Beyer will be hosting his 4th Annual Women's Conference.

This year's conference will be held at George Mason University's Arlington campus from 8:30 AM until noon.

Registration is free and available online.

## Community Health Survey

The Alexandria Health Department is participating in a regional Community Health Assessment.

As part of that assessment, the Department is seeking community participation in a short online survey.

Click here to reach the survey, and thanks for your participation!

#### Free Flu Shots

On Saturday October 20th, the Alexandria Health Department will be hosting a free flu shot clinic.

The vaccinations are available for adults and children ages 6 months and up. No insurance required.

The clinic will be held Leonard "Chick" Armstrong Recreation Center (formerly Cora Kelly) at 25 W. Reed Avenue.

#### **WasteSmart Survey**

The City is working to develop a new strategic plan to guide solid waste management for the next two decades.

To support the planning for this effort, a short survey is being conducted to receive resident opinions on waste collection services. In Virginia, the expansion provided coverage to 400,000 additional Virginians. With 13% of Alexandria residents currently uninsured, there are approximately 5,900 Alexandrians who could benefit from this expansion.

In addition to the benefit to individual Alexandria residents, City government and the Alexandria City Public Schools are able to draw upon Medicaid resources. In 2017, the City government received \$3.2 million in reimbursements from Medicaid, and the Alexandria City Public Schools received another \$2 million.

The expansion goes into effect on January 1, 2019. The City is now working swiftly to ensure our readiness to enroll these newly eligible residents.

The expansion allocated an additional \$288,367 to the City in order to manage the administrative expenses of the additional enrollment. The City will be hiring 4 additional staff and working to restructure existing teams to address this influx.

The General Assembly's action will ensure that thousands of Alexandria residents will not be an illness away from financial ruin. It eases the burden on local taxpayers and improves the health of our community at large.

I look forward to the successful completion of this expansion.

#### 230 KV Transmission Line Proposal Shelved

About 4 years ago, <u>I wrote about Dominion Virginia Power's</u> proposal to construct a new 230 KV transmission line through the northeast corner of our City in order to alleviate forecasted deficiencies in the regional grid.

Just <u>last week Dominion notified the City that the proposal to construct this transmission line is no longer required</u> due to changes in the power supply around the state.

While it is a relief that this disruption will not occur, a substantial amount of City resources and volunteer time by those in our community has been expended exploring this idea.

In June of 2014, the <u>City formed a community group to begin</u> reviewing <u>Dominion Virginia Power's proposal</u> and offering feedback to the Council and directly to Dominion Virginia Power on their proposed routes.

The group concluded its work at the end of 2014 with a series of recommendations to the City Council, State Corporation Commission and Dominion Virginia Power.

As this process concluded, Dominion believed that the urgency behind the proposed transmission line had subsided. The process was then delayed for some time to allow them to further prepare their request.

The City reconvened the community group and a series of meetings were again held.

The group returned to the City Council in May of 2016 with a recommendation of the "least objectionable" routes as well as a request for opposition to any above ground route.

The Council adopted a resolution opposing any above ground routing, and identifying the "least objectionable" routes as ones that either:

- · Used the existing CSX railroad right of way
- · Used waterways, both Four Mile Run and the Potomac River

The survey is available online!

#### Car Tax Due On Friday

Payments for the Vehicle Personal Property Tax are due Thursday, October 5th.

There are many ways to pay online, in person, or by mail.

#### **Halloween Parade**

The 22nd Annual Del Ray Halloween parade returns to Mount Vernon Avenue on Sunday October 28th.

Free for all ages, the parade features prizes for the best decorated homes, strollers, businesses and pets.

It starts at 2 PM. I'll see you there!

#### **Backflow Preventers**

In some areas of the City, homeowners have periodically experienced sewer backflow into basements.

In addition to being quite unsanitary, this condition can cause significant damage to homes.

For property owners in designated areas, who have experienced these conditions in the past, the City has recently brought back a cost-sharing program to assist property owners in the purchase and installation of backflow preventers.

<u>Full details are available</u> online.

### GMU Center for the Arts

George Mason University's
Center for the Arts, with its
spacious 1,935-seat
Concert Hall, presents the
Great Performances at
Mason series, featuring
performances in classical
music, opera, dance,
theater, global music and

• Used the George Washington Parkway

All were deemed not viable or unlikely to be accepted by the State

Corporation Commission.

Dominion then formally notified the City that they would file with the State Corporation Commission.

Yet that did not happen.

In November of last year, Dominion returned to the City with another update. Given the unexpectedly extensive costs of utilizing the CSX railroad right of way, Dominion wanted the City to consider whether we could support their utilization of a route along or near Potomac Avenue. In exchange for this change, Dominion indicated a willingness to increase the compensation they would provide to the City from \$15 million to \$43.3 million given the much larger required right-of-way.

Of course, use of Potomac Avenue would potentially have severe adverse impacts to the City that need to be considered carefully.

To consider the potential trade-offs associated with such a change we again convened the community group. The group returned to City Council with a recommendation that we add Potomac Avenue to the list of acceptable routes.

In May of this year, the City Council affirmed that decision. You can watch Council's discussion online.

Last week Dominion's representatives returned to Council's Legislative meeting to discuss the withdrawal of this proposal. <u>You can also watch that presentation and the Council discussion online</u>.

As I mentioned during the discussion, I remain concerned that this proposal may return in the future, when the City is even less able to accommodate it. For the moment, however, I am relieved to see it die.

#### **Additional Public Hearing**

The work of the Alexandria City Council continues to evolve as the City changes. The Council officially meets three times a month, two Tuesday "legislative" meetings and one Saturday Public Hearing where we accept testimony from the public and take final action on items. Nearly every other day, there are community meetings, committees, commissions, etc.

The Council does not meet officially during July and August. For a part-time Council, this is a useful time for the members to reconnect with families, our "day" jobs, and sleep. It's also a time for our City staff to catch up on significant policy work that can be hampered by the pace required to prepare for Council meetings and respond to Council actions.

Yet, I do think we have reached the time where the Council should entertain the possibility of summer meetings.

In June of 2016, <u>I originally asked my colleagues to begin this</u> conversation.

<u>Last month, I formally proposed, along with the support of four of my colleagues, that we add a July Public Hearing in the summer of 2019.</u>

While it is has long been a quaint practice of the City to take July and August off, the current schedule comes at a cost.

dance, and popular music by world-renowned artists and ensembles.

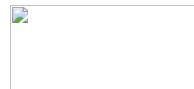
Performances by ensembles from the College of Visual and Performing Arts also take place at the center. For land-use applicants, if Council approval is required, failure to get on a June docket requires that an applicant wait until September. That delay can be dangerous for the viability of a small business.

The last minute rush to squeeze items into the docket before our break can also be troublesome.

We are also an anomaly. Alexandria is the only jurisdiction in Northern Virginia to take a 2 month summer recess.

We have recently made changes to improve the efficiency of our meetings. During the last Council term, at the suggestion of myself and Councilman Smedberg, we formalized the "Oral Report" process, to better organize individual members' reports from the

boards and commissions they serve on. We also changed the timing of our executive sessions; moving them before the open meetings, instead of after.



Previous Councils have limited the number of proclamations to make the meetings more efficient.

While these efforts have been helpful, I do believe more must be done. The length of our meetings now challenges members of the public to both participate and follow our proceedings. It limits the quality of our deliberations, and burns out our staff who must wait until the wee hours of the morning for their docket items to be addressed.

I believe we can better organize our dockets to focus our discussions on the matters that require Council deliberation and quickly dispatch with the pro forma work of the municipal corporation.

But I do believe those efforts can start with the addition of a 11th public hearing meeting. The Council did have a spirited conversation on this issue, and ultimately we voted unanimously to ask the City Manager to return shortly with a formal proposal for adoption by the Council.

#### **Bringing People to Alexandria**

In Fiscal Year 2018, <u>visitors to Alexandria spent \$826 million in our City.</u> That spending supports 6,546 jobs and provides \$27.4 million of tax revenue.

That equates to over 7 cents on our real estate tax. Tourism in our City essentially saves the average household \$616 per year.



The City achieved a 72.5% hotel occupancy (compared with a 65.5% national average) which has exceeded 70% for the fourth consecutive year.

Visit Alexandria is the City's public/private partnership to increase tourism. I serve as the Council's representative to their Board of Governors.

Yet our City cannot rest on its laurels. During difficult times, communities around our country and particularly our region are working to offer unique experiences to visitors.

With that in mind, Visit Alexandria will be focusing on implementing the King Street Corridor Initiative, designed to focus on

programming, beautification and marketing of our central business district. Portside in Old Town will be launched this year, featuring themed weekend events, all free to the public.

Non-residents account for 71% of the City's consumption-based taxes (sales, meals and lodging). Hosting visitors in our City not only allows us to show off our wonderful community, it is also great for our taxpayers!

### Host a Town Hall in Your Living Room!

My regular series of Town Hall Meetings continue!



You supply the living room and a bunch of your friends and neighbors. I will supply a member of the Alexandria City Council (me) with the answers to any of your questions about our City.

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

### **Upcoming Issues**

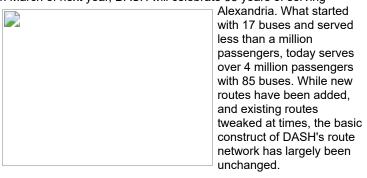
#### Rethinking the Bus

On an average weekday, about 14,500 people board Metrorail at one of our four stations (Braddock Road, King Street, Eisenhower Avenue and Van Dorn Street). It is certainly an important part of transportation in our City.

Yet our four Metrorail stations (soon to be five) serve only a small portion of our 15.5 square miles. On an average weekday, almost 24,000 people board a bus, either DASH or Metrobus.

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

In March of next year, DASH will celebrate 35 years of serving



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.

Alexandria is now undertaking a similar effort, designed to re-imagine our bus routes and ultimately increase ridership and route efficiency. The Alexandria Transit Vision Plan is the City's effort to rethink our buses. This effort commenced last week with a joint meeting of the Alexandria Transit Company Board of Directors and the City's Transportation Commission.

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.

This is an opportunity for the City to make transit more relevant and vital for more of our City's residents. To do so, we need your input. This month there will be two community workshops to educate and solicit input from our residents.

The first session will be on Tuesday October 16th from 7 PM until 9 PM at Durant Arts Center (1605 Cameron Street). The second session will be on Thursday October 18th from 7 PM until 9 PM at Tucker Elementary School (435 Ferdinand Day Drive).

Let me know your thoughts as we create a transit system that serves more of our community.

#### **Cameron Run**

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA, also known as NOVA Parks) was created in the late 1950s as a public land conservation agency serving our region.

Today, the NVRPA is jointly funded and owned by Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun Counties, as well as the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church.

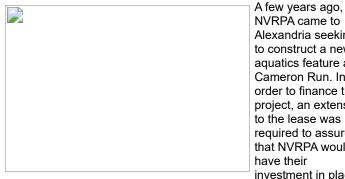
The authority today owns over 10,000 acres of land and serves the dual purpose of land conservancy and recreation agency with parks around the area.

In Alexandria, NVRPA manages Cameron Run Regional Park (which is actually owned by the City of Alexandria), and owns and manages Carlyle House in Old Town.

During my 3.5 years off of City Council, I served as one of Alexandria's representatives on the NVRPA Board.

Cameron Run is a very active recreational park, with a wave pool, water slides, batting cages, etc. The property is very profitable for the authority and the existing 40-year lease with the City expires in

Carlyle House is a historic site, with historical interpretation conducted by volunteers and NVRPA staff. NVRPA heavily subsidizes the operation of Carlyle House.



NVRPA came to Alexandria seeking to construct a new aquatics feature at Cameron Run. In order to finance the project, an extension to the lease was required to assure that NVRPA would have their investment in place

long enough to recoup their cost. Prior to the issuance of any new lease, the City's Park and Recreation Commission sought to explore alternative uses for the property, as well as address some issues with the existing use.

In the intervening time, the authority came to the City with a new proposal. NVRPA obtained an option to purchase 517 Prince Street in Old Town. This historic property operated a livery stable from 1772 - 1792 and has remained in the ownership of one family for 184 years. It is in remarkably good shape.

After some negotiation, a tentative agreement was reached to extend the lease at Cameron Run for 20 years (cancelling the existing lease). In exchange, NVRPA would have purchased 517 Prince Street and operate it as a historic site similar to Carlyle House.

In June of last year, the Council held a public hearing on this proposal and ultimately directed our staff to come back with a framework for how we might plan the future of the Cameron Run site.

That ended the consideration of NVRPA's purchase of 517 Prince Street. The City separately worked with the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation to purchase the property without any City funds.

Since that time, public engagement on the future of the Cameron Run site continued through the Parks and Recreation Commission. During that discussion, NVRPA also presented their own alternative proposal for expanded uses on the site.

The Commission <u>findings were presented to the City Council a little over a year ago</u>. With consultant partners, <u>the Commission analyzed many alternatives for the site</u>. Their recommendation is that the City move away from the existing water park use and determine how to bring more active, year-round recreation uses to the site.

The <u>City Manager utilized the Commission's recommendation to</u> make a specific proposal that we extend the existing lease for another 10 years, after which time the park will revert to <u>City control</u> and allow transition to alternate uses.

Upon receipt of this recommendation, the Council had a very spirited, but productive, conversation on the future of this park. <u>You can watch the discussion and staff presentation online</u>.

The Council worked to use the momentum of the Commission's work to endorse a future vision for Cameron Run. Our staff then went to work with NVRPA to evolve our relationship to fit that future vision of the site.

Ultimately, City staff brought <u>a draft term sheet</u>, agreed to by the NVRPA Board, to the Parks and Recreation Commission. With the Commission's endorsement, this term sheet will now come before the City Council later this month.

This draft agreement provides a 7.5 year extension, the introduction of new year-round uses on the site, new community aquatics use, and improvements to management of the site. Ultimately, this agreement provides a framework for a shared implementation of much more significant capital investments on the site as the lease extension concludes.

It has taken a while to arrive at this point, but I believe this framework is responsive to the significant community input we received on the future of this park. <u>Let me know your thoughts!</u>

#### **TC Lights**

The long-simmering controversy about whether the football field at our City's only public high school should be lighted will return to the forefront this month.

In the 1960s when T. C. Williams High School <u>was originally</u> <u>constructed, it has been suggested that there was a "deal" with the neighboring community to not have lighting for the school stadium.</u>

When the new T. C. Williams High School was approved by the City Council in 2004, the Council codified that condition and stated that permanent lighting was not allowed on athletic facilities on the property.

Thus, T. C. Williams is the only public high school in Northern Virginia without lighting at the football stadium.

In December of 2013, the School Board requested an amendment to the existing permit that allowed construction of the school. That amendment, which was approved by the City Council, allowed the construction of new lighted tennis courts on the property.

That amendment, however, retained the prohibition on athletic lighting throughout the remainder of the property.

The Alexandria City Public Schools are now pursuing a comprehensive overhaul of Parker-Gray Stadium. That effort would include numerous improvements, including new bathrooms, replacement of turf, enhancements to the track, a new scoreboard, a new concession stand, a new sound system and ultimately the inclusion of lighting.

The City's Planning and Zoning staff have concluded their analysis and recommended the matter for consideration by the Alexandria Planning Commission tomorrow evening at 7 PM at City Hall. The public is welcome to testify at this hearing.

If the Planning Commission makes a recommendation on the matter, it will be considered by the City Council on Saturday October 13th at our public hearing, which will begin at 9:30 AM. The public is again welcome to testify.

This issue certainly presents the delicate balance of protecting neighbors' quality of life with the need to have usable recreation spaces for our students and community. In a City as small as ours, it is difficult to justify open space that cannot be appropriately utilized due to a lack of lighting, as is the case at T. C. Williams.

I look forward to Council's consideration of this question.

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