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your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

October 1, 2023

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The first draft of this newsletter assumed that I would be writing you a few hours after our Federal government experienced another lapse in appropriations, a government shutdown. This uniquely American example of political dysfunction would have put thousands of Alexandrians out of work with little idea of when they will receive their next paycheck.

Fortunately, that did not come to pass and both houses of the Congress passed a Continuing Resolution yesterday and the government remains open until November.

[License Your Dog or Cat](#)
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The City had prepared to [implement a variety of responses, designed to assist residents and businesses who will be impacted by this furlough](#). Let's hope we don't need to bring this plan back in November.

Last month, the City Council held a Town Hall meeting on our West End to address questions from residents and provide updates to the community. If you were unable to attend [you can watch the entire event online](#). Our next Town Hall meeting will be on Saturday October 21st.

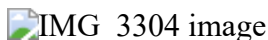
In less than a week, [Art on the Avenue returns to Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray](#) for the 28th year! The family-friendly festival of art, music, food and more will occur from 10 AM until 6 PM on Saturday October 7th.

For history buffs wishing to learn a little more about Alexandria's important place in our nation's history: [Lisa Guernsey and Jazmyne Owens from New America have prepared a video series delving into the history of the 1939 Alexandria Library Sit-In](#). This civil rights action occurred just over 84 years ago and became a model for non-violent protest actions across our nation.

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

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Zoning For Housing

A month ago, the City Council met with our Planning Commission and [formally received a set of proposals](#) designed to expand Alexandria's housing production, improve affordability and address past and current barriers to equitable housing access.

You can [watch the full joint work session, including our Planning Director's presentation online](#). Our staff has also prepared an estimate of the [net impacts](#)

of these proposals and the infrastructure requirements.

With the receipt of these proposals, we have entered a new phase of this community conversation. **We have announced several opportunities for residents to provide input over the next few months, with formal public hearings on the proposals before the Planning Commission and City Council in November, followed by a final vote of the Council the last week of November.** We need your voice in this discussion and I encourage your input!

In March, the City kicked-off an acceleration of the Zoning for Housing work program. We have worked all year to 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)**

The proposals made formally last month address each of these areas. Once the Planning Commission makes its recommendation, City Council will take action at the end of November.

This effort is prompted by an urgent reality: Alexandria has become largely inaccessible to those of low and moderate incomes.

In all likelihood, next year Alexandria's housing stock will reach a important, albeit largely psychological, milestone: The average single-family home in our City will be valued at \$1 million.

With two-third's of Virginia homeowners' mortgage rate under 4% and another third with a rate under 3%, low supply and astronomical sales prices has made homeownership all but impossible in Alexandria for anyone but the upper-middle class.

The average 1 bedroom apartment now rents for \$2,186 per month, requiring a salary of nearly \$90,000 to afford renting a small apartment in our City.

If you own a home on a fixed-rate mortgage, without adult children or aging parents in your lives, it can be

easy to ignore these realities and the corrosive impact on our community.

It is that benign neglect, coupled with policy inaction, that leads to a community that rapidly becomes inaccessible to the rich diversity of people who have made Alexandria their home for generations. That inaction stifles economic growth as employers hopelessly chase a workforce disappearing from our community.

At the end of August, our City staff hosted a fall-kick-off event to update the our community on new research and the input Alexandria residents have provided to this process. **You can watch the full session online.**

In June, the City Council met in a joint worksession with our Planning Commission to discuss the policies we will be considering.

You can watch the entire joint worksession, including the comments from both members of Council and members of the Planning Commission. It was an interesting dialogue.

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 our kick-off event earlier this year, and leading into presentations from Richard and Leah Rothstein, **the authors of the recently released 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. This plan **was formally received by the City Council last month.**

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 given 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 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**.

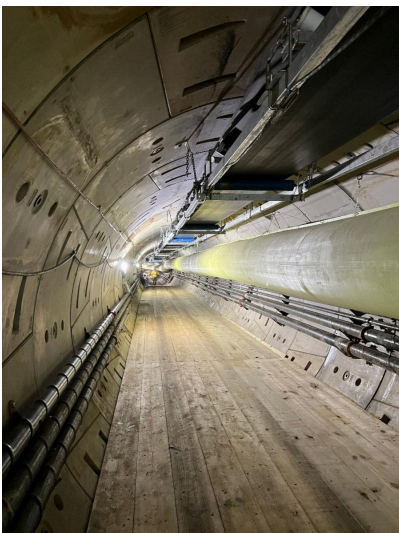
The housing non-profit HAND has begun an annual report to measure the work that each jurisdiction in the region is doing to achieve our commitments. HAND recently released the annual update of this measurement. **The HAND "Housing Indication Tool" report shows that Alexandria has made significant progress, 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. I look forward to your input as we conclude this latest reform effort.



Infrastructure Week

Last month, **we celebrated the opening of the new Douglas MacArthur Elementary School**. Just up the road, **a new Minnie Howard High School building is under construction and will open soon**. These two buildings join 3 other new schools that will be built over the next decade.

We opened **a new Metro Station at Potomac Yard in May**.

Alexandria Renew is completing the City's largest-ever infrastructure project, **a half-billion dollar investment in Old Town's Combined Sewer System**.

We've building **\$264 million worth of climate-resilient storm sewer infrastructure to reduce**

flooding. We're putting \$281 million into our public buildings, including **new fire stations** and a rehabilitation of City Hall.

Bus rapid transit is coming to **the West End** and the **center of our City**. We're **paving more lane miles of roads than we ever have**. We're funding our regional capital commitments, including Metro. We're investing \$158 million in our parks and recreation centers.

We're buying new fire apparatus, making investments in new affordable housing, and financing the acquisition of land for a new hospital at the Landmark Mall site.

This is the most significant era of infrastructure investment in Alexandria's modern history. We are making generational investments in the basic building blocks that will support our community for decades to come.

A little over 13 years ago, the City Council approved our first 10-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Up until that point, the City's CIP was a 6-year document.

That very first 10-year plan totaled \$707 million of planned investment. **The 10-year plan approved by City Council in May of this year calls for \$2.4 billion of investment in the City's infrastructure** over the next decade, an increase greater than three-fold.

Capital expenditures are the City's investment in our infrastructure. These investments can reduce operating costs, promote economic development and reduce the need for larger tax increases in the future.

Later this month, I will join our City Manager, our Finance Director, our Planning & Zoning Director, and City staff to make our annual presentation to the bond rating agencies in New York.

Our journey will be to seek renewal of the City's AAA/Aaa bond ratings. The confirmation of these ratings is required in advance of the issuance of new bonds, which will provide for the finance of 54% of the costs of our CIP. These ratings allow the City to access the lowest possible borrowing costs, saving the taxpayers millions over the life of our bonds.

Six years ago, the City stood at a crossroads. With a perfect storm of infrastructure needs for school, sewer, city facilities, transportation and recreation, **the Council chose to ask for significant sacrifice from our taxpayers in order to begin addressing a half-billion of deferred capital investments, particularly in our schools and other municipal facilities.**

Today, we stand in a very different situation. While we still have a long-way to go, we have the resources and plans in place to provide an infrastructure that will support the Alexandria of today and the community we will become in the future. We must continue our work to provide our residents with basic infrastructure worthy of their investment.



Funding Metro

Federal employees who rode Metrorail to commute to work generated \$100 million annually in revenue for Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) pre-pandemic. Today they generate \$32 million in revenue annually.

There are 95,000 fewer weekday bus and rail trips by Federal employees today compared to pre-pandemic. Viewed a different way: For each additional day per week Federal employees ride Metro, the system receives \$20 million of annual revenue.

While only a subset of the WMATA ridership base, the falloff in Federal employee ridership is emblematic of a larger structural post-pandemic ridership gap for the system.

On Tuesday April 4th, during Cherry Blossom season, the WMATA Metrorail system carried 426,000 riders. **This was the highest single day of ridership on Metrorail since the beginning of the pandemic.**

While it was exciting to reach this milestone, the excitement is tempered by the realization that in 2019, the AVERAGE ridership on Metrorail was 626,000 riders each day. Even with years of recovery, Metrorail's ridership remains only half of its pre-pandemic level.

I have written previously about the success of Alexandria's DASH bus, with the implementation of our new route network and the elimination of fares. **DASH was the first regional bus system to exceed pre-pandemic ridership, and now has hit all-time ridership records in each of the past few months.** Metrobus has also seen a similar recovery, as its ridership has reached 88% of pre-pandemic levels.

The stubborn gap between ridership of the region's core rail system and the region's bus systems is pronounced and depicts stark differences in the populations each mode is transporting. Metrorail, is the mode of choice for the region's white collar workforce. These workers worked from offices in Washington, DC prior to the pandemic, **and have remained in home offices in large numbers, more so than almost any other metropolitan area in the nation.**

Conversely, our bus systems are carrying the region's workers who must work outside the home, residents conducting non-commuting trips and students. Those trips have continued and grown in volume.

The region's transit services have historically been financed by fare revenues and taxpayer subsidy from the region's states and local governments. The City of Alexandria is contributing \$56.6 million of operating dollars this year to WMATA and \$16.6 million of capital contributions. During and after the pandemic, **Federal subsidies kept WMATA (and other transit agencies) afloat as ridership slowly recovered.**

The pandemic and its aftermath has coincided with an era of significant infrastructure investment for Metrorail, as the region addressed decades of deferred maintenance. That work has adversely impacted transit riders across the region. Most notably for Alexandria, this led to a significant shutdown in 2019 and again earlier this year. **Yet, Metrorail is recovering and is now running a higher level of service than at any point in its history.**

As the Federal revenues now disappear, a reckoning is afoot. Without the full recovery of Metrorail ridership, we cannot support transit service levels as we have.

Last week, **the WMATA staff presented a dire picture of the region's transit finance in the future,** as well as short-term options to buy more time for regional collaboration. A combination of relief that had been provided to the taxpayers of local jurisdictions during the pandemic, decreased fare revenue and the impact of inflation and collective bargaining agreements for WMATA's employees has left a \$750 million operating deficit going forward. **The size of this gap is such that WMATA cannot solve this on its own solely with fare increases and service reductions.** Doing so would devastate the system across the region. Yet, the local and state taxpayers are not equipped to come to WMATA's rescue either.

As such, addressing this financial gap will require collective action across the three state governments, its local jurisdictions (including Alexandria) and the Federal Government. **This type of conversation is one that is playing out around the nation,** but it will require a series of difficult decisions locally.

Transit is essential to our region's economy and our quality of life, but the financial model that has supported its existence for a generation is upside down. The work ahead requires defining a new model to sustain transit for another generation.



Time to Vote

Early voting for our November election has begun. So far [738 Alexandrians have cast their ballots in this important election.](#)

On November 7th, all 140 members of the General Assembly (40 members of the State Senate and 100 members of the House of Delegates) will be up for election. Alexandria voters will elect a member of the State Senate to represent the entire City and a member of the House of Delegates from one of three districts.

This will be the first election held in the new General Assembly districts. With the collapse last year of the brand new Virginia Redistricting Commission, the Virginia Supreme Court was called upon to determine the new boundaries for Congressional, State Senate and House of Delegates districts. After appointing two Special Masters, the Virginia Supreme Court [unanimously approved new districts.](#)

Alexandria will be entirely represented in the [39th State Senate District](#) and will be represented by three members of the House of Delegates, those elected from the [3rd District](#), the [4th District](#), and the [5th District](#).

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

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

Last year, Virginia introduced "no-excuse" early voting, so voters have three choices to vote this November:

1. [You can request a ballot by mail online now.](#)
The ballot can be mailed back or dropped 24/7 at the drop-box located in front of 132 N. Royal Street.
2. [You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office, Monday - Friday from 8 AM until 5 PM.](#) Saturdays and evenings, as well as the use of Beatley Library (5005 Duke Street) will begin in late October.
3. You can vote in person [at your precinct](#) on the General Election day of November 7th.

I'll see you at the polls!



Violent Crime

Exactly a month ago, [the Alexandria Police Department arrested an individual who was charged with the July murder that occurred in the 800 block of West Glebe Road.](#) A few weeks later, the [Police made an arrest for a homicide that occurred in the 2500 block of N. Van Dorn Street.](#) That arrest was followed by [the arrest of a fugitive from Wisconsin identified using license plate reader technology.](#)

These examples showcase the exemplary work, aided by technology resources, done by our Police Department to keep our community safe.

Yet, we are seeing a continuation of a disturbing uptick in violent crime that has been plaguing our City and our region. [In all 5 of the largest Northern Virginia jurisdictions, we are experiencing double-digit increases in the crime rate.](#)

Last week, the City Council engaged in an extensive dialogue with our Police Chief, our Sheriff, our Commonwealth's Attorney, our School Superintendent and the Director of our Court Services Unit to discuss the uptick in crime, our City's coordinated response and the work ahead. [You can watch this discussion at the 1:29:00 point in our meeting video.](#)

We will end this violence, but it requires the partnership and support of our community. [We need your help!](#)

Part 1 crime is the most serious crime (homicides, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft). In 2022, the incidents of Part 1 crime in Alexandria increased 4.7% from the previous 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.

At the halfway point of 2023, our Part 1 crime trends were deeply concerning:

- Robberies are up 49%
- Burglaries are up 17%
- Stolen automobiles are up 69%
- Larcenies are up 21%
- Aggravated assaults are up 53%

Overall Part 1 crime has increased nearly 28% from this period last year.

While Alexandria remains a safe community, this cycle of violence must be ended to maintain our quality of

life. That requires that we prevent crime where possible and ensure that those committing violence in our community face justice.

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

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

The Police Department has recently established a new Community Assistance Safety Team (CAST), a dedicated unit focusing resources on crime hotspots to disrupt violence. This team has already had success as they have been deployed making critical arrests and reducing incidents of crime in the areas of focus.

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.

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.



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\$500
PER MONTH

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Alexandria's Recurring Income for Success and Equity (ARISE) Project

ELIGIBLE RESIDENTS CAN APPLY ONLINE BETWEEN
OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 9, 2022.

Learn more at alexandriava.gov/ARISE

ARISE

Guaranteed Income Pilot

Last month, the City marked six months of ARISE, our guaranteed income pilot program. In December, the City began notifying 170 Alexandria residents who were randomly selected to participate in ARISE, our guaranteed income pilot program. **You can learn more about this pilot program on our site.** The City had received 4,149 applications for participation in this program.

With 6 months of experience, **we have already learned a bit about this program and its impacts.** The criteria of the program required that the participants be Alexandria residents with a household income at or below 50% of the Area Median Income. Those selected represent the broad diversity of our community and are drawn from every area of our City.

The average household size is 2.8 people, with a median household income of \$21,400 and an average age of 43. Two-thirds of the recipients are women.

So far, a quarter of the money provided has been used at grocery stores with another 12% used at restaurants and wholesale clubs. Participants are also using the money to pay rent and reduce debt.

We are using a research partner to perform vigorous analysis of the results of this effort to learn everything we can about the design of poverty alleviation.

A little over 52 years ago, **the New York Times ran an article reviewing the concept of a guaranteed basic income and featuring a guaranteed income program that then-President Nixon had brought to Congress.**

The program was championed by Donald Rumsfeld, who was at that time Nixon's Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Rumsfeld was assisted in managing this program by Richard Cheney.

The concept was relatively simple: what if we cut out the bureaucracy of public assistance programs and instead provided a guaranteed monthly income to lower-income populations, without any strings attached? It was driven at that time by a belief that in addition to being costly, the bureaucracy that had been developed to administer our public safety net programs was reducing efficacy of the programs themselves.

Fast forward a few decades, **and there is now a network of municipal governments around the nation experimenting with the concept.**

As Alexandria has joined this effort, the City Council approved the allocation of \$3 million from a portion of the City's American Rescue Plan money to create this program.

Ultimately, the goal of the effort is to improve the economic stability of lower-income families.

I am hopeful that the City can also glean lessons from this experiment to better guide how we administer other programs designed to alleviate poverty in the future.



Residential Parking Permit

In 1979, the City **created the Residential Parking Permit program**. For areas with high parking demand, the program allows residents to purchase permits that exempt their vehicles from some of the on-street parking regulations. **There are 12 of these districts in place today and there are over 9,000 vehicles in our City issued one of these permits.**

A little over 18 years ago, the City Manager at the time came to the City Council **with a recommendation that the City allow home healthcare workers and childcare workers, who were working for families in a Residential Parking Permit district, to be issued a permit**. When the request was considered, the City Council approved a pilot for home healthcare workers, but rejected the childcare proposal.

In 2008, the City Council voted to make the home healthcare program permanent. In doing so, they did ask for a proposal for childcare workers to come to Council, but the issue never returned.

Today, there are only 8 permits issued Citywide under the home healthcare program. For the parents who live in these districts and have in-home childcare, they are left with a few bad options, including disingenuous practices, leaving children unsupervised to rotate vehicles, etc. The City Code creates an inequity between home healthcare workers and childcare workers which cannot be justified.

As such, last month **I proposed to the City Council that we rectify this challenge by allowing childcare workers, serving families in a residential parking permit district, to access these permits.**

With the support of my colleagues, this proposal will now return to the Traffic & Parking Board and eventually City Council for formal consideration this fall.

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