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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

October 1, 2024

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This Saturday, [Art on the Avenue](#) returns to [Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray](#) for the 29th year! The family-friendly festival of art, music, food and more will occur from 10 AM until 6 PM on Saturday October 5th.

Throughout the month of October, we will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of the visit of the Marquis de Lafayette. [There will lectures, dinners and opportunities to learn more about this important Revolutionary War figure and his connections to Alexandria.](#)

[For the next few weeks, we will be continuing to celebrate Hispanic](#)

[Smoke Detector Installation Request](#)
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[Heritage Month, with events throughout the City to recognize the history, culture and impact of Alexandria's diverse Hispanic and Latino population.](#)

[We are now accepting applications for the City's Eco-City Academy!](#) This six-week program allows residents of our City to learn more about environmental policies and how to lead sustainability efforts throughout our City.

Saturday October 26th is National Drug Take Back Day. Safely dispose of any unneeded prescription or over-the-counter medications from 10 AM until 2 PM at:

- [Alexandria Police Department Headquarters](#)
- [Woodbine Rehabilitation](#)
- [Neighborhood Pharmacy](#)

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



Landmark Mall Hospital

Yesterday, [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 2021, the [Alexandria Industrial Development Authority \(IDA\)](#) closed on [the purchase of an 11-acre parcel on the site of the former Landmark Mall.](#) The purchase of this property was immediately followed by IDA's issuance of a 99-year ground lease of the property to [Inova Health System.](#)

After two decades of discussion about how to redevelop Landmark Mall, the City of Alexandria is finally redeveloping Landmark Mall!

[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.

The location, one of the largest sites inside the Beltway awaiting redevelopment, will see a billion dollars of new investment, including a new Level II trauma center, medical office buildings, residential, retail, parks, a new fire station replacing **Fire Station 208**, new committed affordable housing and a new transit hub anchoring the City's new bus rapid transit network, DASH and Metrobus.

This will not only revitalize a site that many had given up on, but will also provide a catalyst for redevelopment and enhancement throughout the West End of our City, anchored by our largest private-sector employer.

Despite over two decades of decline, it is not a mystery why we had been unable to spur redevelopment on this site in the past, It is a complicated site, with a complicated ownership structure requiring significant infrastructure investment.

Conquering those obstacles requires a unique partnership and financial arrangement. A local firm, **Foulger-Pratt** is leading a joint venture in partnership with **Howard Hughes Corporation**, the current owner of the mall site, and **Seritage Growth Properties**, the owner of the Sears site. They were able to bring **Inova Health System** into the arrangement to anchor this redevelopment.

We have finally assembled a partnership, financing and a plan to revitalize this site. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but this exciting partnership is making things happen on this site for the first time in decades. It is wonderful to see this vision come to fruition.



Bond Rating Renewed

At the beginning of September, I joined 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.

Last month, [S & P Global Ratings](#) and [Moody's Investor Services](#) both reaffirmed the City's bond ratings of AAA and aaa respectively. [The confirmation of these ratings, in advance of the issuance of new bonds, allows the City to access the lowest possible borrowing costs, saving the taxpayers millions over the life of our bonds.](#) These bonds will be used to finance the new George Mason Elementary School, the renovation of City Hall, the waterfront flood mitigation work and the infrastructure associated with redevelopment of the Landmark Mall site.

Shortly, the City will issue \$116.5 million of tax-exempt bonds using a competitive bidding process.

Much like individuals must have a credit check performed before acquiring a mortgage, a car loan, or a new credit card, the City must go before Standard & Poor's and Moody's to have the two organizations assess whether we are doing a good job managing the City's finances.

In May, the Council adopted [our 10 year Capital Improvement Program, covering fiscal years 2025 - 2034.](#) Over the 10 year period, the program calls for \$2.40 billion in capital investment throughout the City. Nearly 40% of this funding goes to City and School municipal facilities.

Our capital budget is funded primarily through a mix of debt and current year funding also known as "cash capital." Relating this to your home mortgage, the cash capital is the down payment. We also pay interest each year on the debt that was issued in previous years. Our 10 year plan is funded 55% from bonds and 45% from cash, from both local and other sources.

In issuing the City's rating, Moody's cited in their outlook that Alexandria "will maintain its strong financial position given growing revenues and conservative budgeting practices, and that the sizeable local economy will continue to expand and diversify."

S & P Global similarly cited Alexandria's "history of balanced financial operations, supported by growing revenues, conservative budgeting, pay-as-you-go capital spending, and the maintenance of very strong available reserves that are well above minimum levels outlined in the city's formalized reserve policy."

Over the past few years, I have pushed for new policies to make the City's balance sheet even stronger. **A decade ago, the Council unanimously adopted a new "cash capital" policy, which served to reduce debt levels and the risk of our borrowing.**

A little over 5 years ago, the Council approved amendments to our "Spendable Fund Balance," essentially expanding the amount of reserves we have available. This policy was recommended by the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee, and it has been specifically cited by the rating agencies in support of our ratings.

Alexandria is very conservative with our use of debt.

Arlington County limits its debt to 4% of its Fair Market Real Property Value. Both Fairfax and Prince William Counties limit their debt to 3%. **Alexandria's self-imposed limit is 2.5%, and this budget year we achieved 1.9%.**

The median for other similarly rated and sized jurisdictions is 2.42%.

Debt is a tool that allows us to balance the costs of large capital investments across the generations of Alexandria taxpayers that will benefit from them and to pay for our investments from the returns we reap from them.

It is important for us to maintain the careful stewardship that will protect our taxpayers and our City's infrastructure long into the future.



Time To Vote

Early voting for this November's General Election began last month. **Already, 3,283 Alexandrians have voted in-person, another 1,030 have returned mail ballots and another 10,948 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 has expansive 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 (next to City Hall).
2. **You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office (132 N. Royal Street), Monday - Friday.** This Saturday early voting will expand to weekends. **Three other locations will be available later this month.**
3. You can vote in person **at your precinct** on the General Election day of November 5th.

I'll see you at the polls!



Tourism Update

Last month, we had the annual meeting of **Visit Alexandria**, Alexandria's convention and visitors association. This is the annual opportunity to review the performance of the City's travel and hospitality industry.

Our travel and hospitality industry is thriving!

In 2019, we were celebrating a record \$867 million of visitor spending.

In 2020, that visitor spending dropped in half to \$445 million, as the pandemic ravaged our local economy.

In 2022, that visitor spending rebounded, reaching \$801 million.

In 2023, that visitor spending hit a new record: \$941 million. That is a growth of 17.6%, which is the fifth-highest growth rate of the 133 localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The consumption-based tax revenues (sales tax, dining tax and transient lodging {hotel} tax) went from \$66 million in Fiscal Year 2019 (July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019) to \$58 million in Fiscal Year 2020

and \$59 million in Fiscal Year 2021. In Fiscal Year 2024, we have broken a new record, with \$86 million of consumption tax revenues.

Our consumption-based tax revenue generates the equivalent of nearly 18 cents on the real estate tax rate. Said another way: If we did not generate these consumption-based taxes, our real estate tax rate of \$1.135 would have to be nearly \$1.315 to provide the same level of services we fund. Approximately 71% of these consumption tax revenues are paid by non-residents of our City.

It has been the creativity of business leaders around our City, the tireless work of their dedicated employees and the partnership with government that has led our local economy.

We still have work to do, but we have made considerable progress from the dark days of 2020. With the pandemic behind us, we can return to offense as we grow our local economy.



City Hall Renovation

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.



George Mason Elementary School

Earlier this year, **we officially opened the new Minnie Howard campus** of the Alexandria City High School. **You can watch the ribbon-cutting evening online.**

This new high school building is a 343,000 square foot facility and accommodates 1,600 students and community facilities, including a new indoor aquatic facility with regulation-length pool.

Last year, **[we opened the brand-new Douglas MacArthur Elementary School on Janney's Lane.](#)**

MacArthur is a 163,000 square foot building which replaced the old 62,000 square foot building, accommodates 850 students and is the first **[NetZero](#)** public building in Alexandria.

In July of 2021, **[City Council approved a request from our School Board to provide funding to support the ACPS purchase of 1703 N. Beauregard Street to be swing space for future rebuilds as well as eventually a permanent school.](#)** This building, an office building next to Ferdinand Day Elementary School, **[is now being retrofit so that it can be ready to host the students from George Mason Elementary when we begin rebuilding that school.](#)**

Now we are preparing to begin construction of the new George Mason Elementary. **[Tonight, the Alexandria City Public Schools will be holding a virtual community meeting](#)** to discuss the **[three design alternatives](#)** for the future of George Mason.

We are in the most significant era of new school construction in our City's history.

In May, City Council unanimously approved a 10-year capital improvement program for the Alexandria City Public Schools including \$379 million over the next decade. This provides the funding for both new and renovated facilities, as well as non-capacity infrastructure investments.

This 10-year Capital Program includes rebuilds of:

- Cora Kelly Elementary School
- George Mason Elementary School

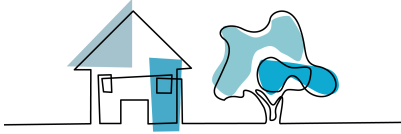
Seven years ago, ACPS opened the first "net-new" school building in nearly two decades with the **[opening of Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School on the West End.](#)** Over six years ago, ACPS **[opened the newly rebuilt Patrick Henry K-8 School.](#)** Both of these new buildings added badly needed capacity in areas of the City with rapidly growing enrollment.

Last month, the School Board also accepted **[a new Alternatives Analysis to determine the future of the K-8 model](#)** that is currently in use at Patrick Henry and Jefferson-Houston schools. With some of our most significant capacity challenges at the middle school level, determining the future configuration of middle school will be critical to addressing our enrollment challenges.

With the resources now in place, we must work collaboratively to ensure that these new facilities come to reality.

These long-term investments become critical to support the success of our students in the generations to come.

Community Health Assessment



We will be kicking-off a new Community Health Assessment to see where we are as a community, and help determine how we make Alexandria a healthier community in the future!. **Tonight at 6:30 PM, we will meet at Patrick Henry Recreation Center and you are invited to join us.**

Please **RSVP so that you can be a part of this important community conversation!**

You can also **complete a short survey** to assist in this important effort.

An Alexandrian that lives in the Beauregard Census tract, which is just west of 395, will die on average 5 years earlier than an Alexandrian who lives less than a mile east along Seminary Road in the Seminary Hill Census tract. Over half of the residents in Beauregard are black and foreign-born. Less than 5% of the residents in Seminary are black and less than 10% born in another country.

A black resident of Alexandria is 117% more likely to die before the age of 75 than white residents of our City.

These are provocative disparities that exist and persist due to generations of structural racism and inequities.

In 2019, just prior to the pandemic, the **City completed a Community Health Assessment** (CHA). The comprehensive report, created with partners throughout our community, provided an overview of public health conditions and disparities around our City.

While the report showed that overall Alexandria is a healthy community, it did indicate disparities in health conditions within the City, particularly relating to chronic illness. It is those chronic illnesses that contribute to the disparities in life expectancy.

The 2019 assessment led to the **Community Health Improvement Plan** (CHIP), which has led to intentional actions throughout City government to help all Alexandrians live longer.

As one example, the report indicated that the City's adult asthma hospitalization rate is the highest in the West End (Zip Code 22304), with 10 hospitalizations per 10,000 residents. Yet in Central Alexandria, residents experience only 2.9 hospitalizations per 10,000 residents.

Given how strongly correlated asthma and other respiratory illnesses are linked to housing conditions, our Health Department partnered with the National Center for Healthy Housing to [prepare a report detailing how we can promote healthier homes.](#)

With this factual basis, the Health Department worked to design interventions to help improve the health of homes, and reduce the impacts of these chronic illnesses. From this effort [the ALX Breathes program was born.](#)

As we begin this cycle again, we need your assistance! Please join us this evening!



Electric Vehicle Charging

Alexandria's [Energy and Climate Change Action Plan](#) calls for a 50% reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2030 and 100% reduction by 2050. To achieve reductions of this scale requires significant action. Specific to personal vehicles, by 2030, 50% of all personal vehicle sales will need to be electric and 100% of personal vehicles sales electric by 2050.

Three years ago, [the City Council approved our new Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Readiness Strategy.](#) Alexandria has higher electric vehicle adoption rates than the rest of our nation. Today, there are over 3,100 electric vehicles in Alexandria, with two-thirds of those vehicles on the East End of our City.

Studies show that 80% of electric vehicle owners charge their vehicles at home. But for many residents of our City who live in multi-family dwellings or properties without access to dedicated curb-space, that can be a challenge.

To help facilitate further electric vehicle deployment in Alexandria, the City is undertaking additional strategies.

[In June, the City Council voted to approve a franchise solicitation to award agreements to private firms to install electric vehicle charging infrastructure](#) at 27 different City facilities.

Last month, [the Council accepted 5 proposals and directed our staff to finalize franchise agreements with these bidders.](#)

Additionally, **the Council voted in June to apply for Federal funds under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, to fund public charging infrastructure and strategies designed to expand deployment.**

We are optimistic that these strategies will continue the rapid adoption of electric vehicles in our community.

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