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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

Vice Mayor Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

September 1, 2018

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The summer is officially over! On Tuesday the students of the Alexandria City Public Schools head back to the classroom.

For the first time in nearly two decades, we will be opening a new school. Ferdinand Day Elementary School will be opening its doors for the first time and welcoming about 600 students.

This adaptive reuse of a vacant office building is a creative way to quickly bring new school capacity online in an area of the City where it is most needed.

The City recently learned that our City Attorney, James Banks, will be leaving the City after nearly a decade of service. Jim has been a zealous advocate for the City government and its residents. We will miss him!

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

Council Initiatives

Student Achievement

On Tuesday, I will drop off my kids for 8th grade and 5th grade in the Alexandria City Public Schools. With their hard work, great educators in the classroom and our efforts at home, my kids will meet success. That's typically the measure most parents hope for.

Whether we like it or not, our schools, our kids, and our educators will ultimately have their success each year measured by

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 Starts This Month

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 register to vote, or change your registration is October 15th.

In-person and mail absentee balloting will begin later this month on September 21st.

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, I made a significant announcement about my political future: I announced that I am

standardized tests. In our case, the battery of tests we call the Standards of Learning (SOL) is how we measure that success.

With the release of the SOL testing results for the Alexandria City Public Schools last month, we see a mixed bag of results across the system.

Two years ago at this time we were celebrating modest increases and the narrowing of the achievement gap for students of color, students with limited financial means, and students with limited English proficiency.

This year, the progress is uneven with bright spots in some areas, and regression in others. Across the Commonwealth scores saw slight dips in all categories.

Alexandria continues to have good schools, filled with dedicated, creative, and hard-working educators that inspire our children everyday.

However, we cannot be satisfied with the fact that we have children who are not achieving in our schools.

There are certainly plausible explanations. Alexandria maintains the highest percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced lunches in Northern Virginia, with a rate double or triple that of our neighbors in Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William counties. There is ample data to suggest that poverty is one of the most significant impacts on academic achievement.

Of that peer group of jurisdictions, Alexandria has the highest percentage of English Language Learners with just over 31% of our students arriving with limited English proficiency. Again, this presents another set of challenges to student performance.

It should not be ignored that the four jurisdictions with the highest pass rates, Falls Church City, and Arlington, Loudoun and Fairfax Counties, are also the four jurisdictions with the lowest rate of Free and Reduced lunch recipients in the region. The very same variation exists within our City, with the highest test scores in our City being posted by schools with the lowest rates of Free and Reduced lunch recipients.

Yet there are school systems around the country that have excelled in educating children challenged by poor backgrounds or limited English proficiency.

The variation in test scores within our city show that there are schools in Alexandria that have even excelled in educating these children.

As a member of the City Council, it can be easy to make the case that this is an issue for our School Board. There is no question that the Board, which was elected to lead our schools, has an enormous responsibility for ensuring our students' success.

That being said, our children are in school for 32.5 hours a week. What they experience in the other 135.5 hours of each week (as well as the five to six years before they enter our schools) has a dramatic impact on their achievement.

We cannot ignore the significant role that the City government plays in the success of our children.

Many of our children receive pre-school, day care, after-school and summer camp from City government. They may access programs

running to be Alexandria's next Mayor.

In June, I was successful in winning the Democratic nomination, 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.

ParkMobile Comes to Alexandria!

Beginning today, ParkMobile will be supporting approximately 1,200 parking spaces, replacing the existing Pango system.

West End Parks Community Meeting

The City will be hosting a community meeting to discuss the maintenance and management of Ben Brenman Park and Armistead Booth parks.

This meeting will occur on Thursday September 13th from 6:30 PM until 8 PM at the Alexandria Police Department Headquarters at 3600 Wheeler Avenue.

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

from our Health Department, our Recreation Department, our Court Services Unit, or some of the many non-profit organizations that receive City funding.

The children may live in public housing units owned and operated by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority or in affordable housing units created or supported by the City.

Throughout the past three years, the Council and School Board have been working collaboratively to improve coordination and delivery of early childhood services and after-school services. These two areas are currently provided in partnership with existing public and private providers and provide us with a great opportunity to improve the success of our children.

This is part of the rationale behind our effort to adopt our Youth Master Plan. A coordinated approach tailored to each child, utilizing all of the resources available within our City will best equip us to reach every child.

The wealth of a student's family should not dictate academic achievement. We have more work to do in order to achieve that goal.

Summer School

In approving the City's budget for Fiscal Year 2019, which began on July 1, the Council made significant new investments in capital infrastructure.

One of the largest areas of that new investment was for capital investment in our schools. The Council's adopted Capital Improvement Program included $474.4 million of investment over the next 10 years including $68.3 million in this fiscal year alone.

While much of the planned capital investment will go to make large

scale capacity investments, we cannot lose sight of the important maintenance that is required in existing facilities.

With students occupying these facilities during the school year, the summer is the time to address these importance maintenance efforts.
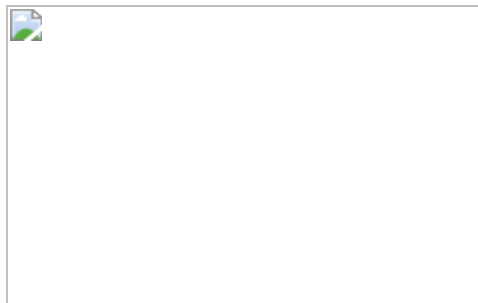
As the summer is now concluding, the Education Facilities Department of the Alexandria City Public Schools is now completing an aggressive schedule of work throughout the system.

With better alignment in the long-term facility vision of the City and the Schools, these maintenance activities can be better prioritized and executed.

I look forward to continuing our investment in this basic infrastructure work to maintain the learning environment for our children.

SAFER For a Safer Alexandria

We are now making new progress in aligning our Fire Department staffing with the recommendations of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

installation of backflow preventers.

[Full details are available online.](#)

West End Candidates Forum

A coalition of West End civic groups has come together to organize a candidate forum for the City Council campaign.

[The forum will be held on Saturday September 22nd from 2 PM until 4 PM at the William Ramsay School (5700 Sanger Avenue).](#)

Transportation & Environmental Services Open House

The City's Department of Transportation and Environmental Services will be hosting their second annual Open House.

This family friendly event will provide an opportunity to see City vehicles up close, and learn more about important City services.

[The event will be on Saturday September 8th from 10 AM until 1:30 PM at 2900 Business Center Drive.](#)

Africa Fest

On Saturday September 8th from noon until 5 PM, the City will host Africa FEST at the Ramsay Recreation Center (5650 Sanger Avenue).

[This event will celebrate African heritage through dance, music, cultural activities and food.](#)

Kayak Cleanups at Four Mile Run

Join the Four Mile Run Conservatory Foundation on the water to collect litter along the streambanks of Four Mile Run throughout September and October.

[RSVP online](#) to reserve one of the limited number of

NFPA is an organization that promulgates standards and codes for usage by local governments.   In 2001, the NFPA [published a new standard that detailed the minimum staffing standards for fire apparatus](#). Today, Alexandria is the only jurisdiction in our region that maintains less than 4 person minimum staffing.

In the Fall of 2014, the City's then-new Fire Chief [came to the Council with an entirely new model](#) for cross-trained firefighter-medics. This is the model in use in all of our neighboring jurisdictions.

By cross-training the existing single-mode medics, the belief was that we could achieve appropriate minimum staffing on all engines, ladders and the rescue company in order to meet the NFPA standard.

[The new model has allowed the City to achieve appropriate minimum staffing on many of our fire engine companies.](#) Yet, due to staffing turnover, there are still apparatus falling short of our staffing goals.

In order to accelerate the City's efforts to achieve minimum staffing on each of our ladder trucks, the City applied for a grant under the "[Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response" (SAFER) program](#) .

[Last week the City was notified that it had been awarded this grant](#). We will use this grant to fund 9 new positions. The City has previously used SAFER to expand our Fire Department staffing.

A SAFER grant covers 75% of the costs of these positions in the first and second years, and 35% in the third year. At that point, the City becomes responsible for all of the costs going forward.

This is an important step forward to ensure that Alexandria's residents and their property are protected by fire suppression and emergency medical services which meet minimum standards.
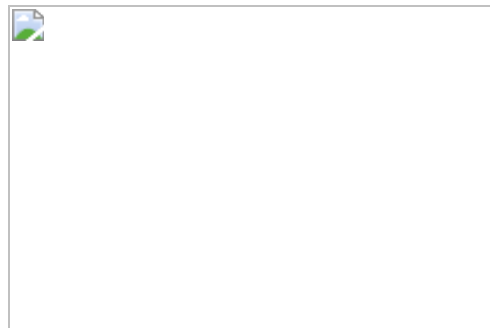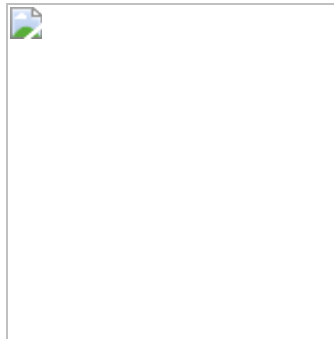
Improving King Street Metro

[As it has been for generations](#), the area at the top of King Street in Old Town, bounded by King, Callahan, Diagonal, and Duke is a focal point of transportation in our City.

In addition to Amtrak and Virginia Railway Express operating out of Alexandria's Union Station, MetroRail, MetroBus, DASH, the King Street Trolley, Capital Bikeshare, taxis, carsharing, private vehicles, private bicycles and a variety of shuttle buses all operate out of the adjacent King Street-Old Town Metro station.

With the growth of many of these modes of transportation as well as significant increases in pedestrian traffic, the area is constrained and frequently unsafe.

Over a decade ago, the City began exploring efforts to improve the capacity and safety of the station property. In 2012 the City Council approved a new plan for the site. With funding challenges, some scope modifications, and the procurement process of the Washington

kayaks or to volunteer with one of your own craft.

Land-based helpers are also needed!

See the Four Mile Run Conservatory website for more information about these #CleanStreamExtreme initiatives and other events.

Run! Geek! Run!

The Run! Geek! Run! 5K race returns to the streets of Alexandria on Sunday September 23rd.

This year, the race will benefit the Alexandria Seaport Foundation.

Sign-up online!

Beatley Book Sale

Support Beatley Library by shopping for hardbacks, paperbacks, children's books, DVDs and CDs.

The Sale will be from the 12th to the 16th of this month. Full details are available online!

Walk for Pre-K

On Saturday September 22nd, the Child and Family Network Center will be hosting a "Relay for Pre-K" 3 mile walk to benefit their early childhood education programs.

Information is available online including registration!

First Thursday Returns!

Thursday is the "First Thursday."

The Del Ray Business Association continues the tradition from 6 - 9 PM on Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray.

Cinema Del Ray Returns!

Thanks to the generosity of Realtor Jen Walker, Cinema

Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), the project was not ultimately approved by the WMATA Board until 2017.

The effort to reconfigure the King Street station is finally underway. When completed, the project will provide additional capacity for transit operations, improved pedestrian safety, and flexibility for future growth.

There will be disruption as this work occurs. The initial phase, beginning this month, will conclude in the Winter of 2020. During this first phase temporary areas for bus traffic and pedestrian access will be designated.

Our staff will explore opportunities to accelerate this work during next summer's planned Alexandria Metro station work.

This is an important project to improve access to transit at our busiest hub. I look forward to seeing this project conclude.

Master Plan Implementation

The City's Master Plan is made up of 18 Small Area Plans and several Citywide sub-plans (Transportation, Housing, Open Space, etc). This is how the City meets the obligations of state law to adopt and update a comprehensive plan.

Seventeen years ago, the City Council adopted "Plan for Planning," a vision for how the community could proactively work to get ahead of development pressures and ensure that our community's vision would shape transition in our neighborhoods.

Since that time, the City has been revising and modernizing these Small Area Plans, working intensely with different neighborhoods around the City to adopt a vision for the future of our community.

But no plan is worth the effort if the City will not implement what was planned. Over the past several years the City has worked to improve our efforts to implement plans and policy goals in a variety of areas. To provide accountability for those efforts, the City recently published a report detailing the status of implementation of the most significant City planning initiatives.

Before our recess, the Council adopted our Interdepartmental Planning Work Program, reflecting the planning efforts that will be accomplished in the near term.

Earlier this year, the Council concluded the Old Town North Small Area Plan, a new vision for the area west of, and including, the existing power plant site.

This month this year the Planning Commission and Council will take up the Route 1 South Affordable Housing Strategy, designed to preserve affordable housing at risk of loss.

This year's work program will take on two significant planning processes, both of which are important efforts for our City's economic future. This fall, we will be initiating a re-planning effort at the Landmark Mall site. In my May newsletter, I provided an update on the efforts to accelerate Landmark Mall redevelopment. With one

Del Ray returns on Saturday September 15th.

The monthly free outdoor movie on the field next to Mount Vernon Recreation Center has become a summer tradition.

This month's movie is "Coco" and it starts when it's dark enough!

entity (Howard Hughes Corporation) essentially achieving full site control, this upcoming re-planning effort will facilitate a more comprehensive redevelopment of the site.

Next in line will be a planning process to consider revisions to the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan. Eisenhower East was the first of the "Plan for Planning" plans, and revisions are now necessary to reflect new realities in the market.

As we look ahead to the following year, the City will take on revisions to the Mount Vernon Avenue Plans (Del Ray and Arlandria) as well as discussions of an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance to facilitate a new market-based affordability option in our neighborhoods.

I am excited to see these neighborhood planning efforts moving forward! I look forward to your input.

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 drop us a line and we'll get a Town Hall on the calendar! Thanks for the interest!

Upcoming Issues

Stormwater Utility Credits

In June of this year, property owners in Alexandria paid a Stormwater Fee for the first time.

The City has significant obligations to protect waterways from polluted storm water. The City's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Program (MS4) Program spells out specific pollutant reductions that the City must meet over a 15 year time period, in accordance with our stormwater permits.

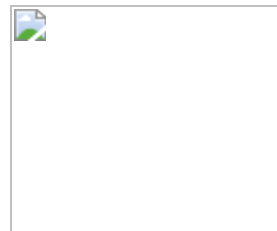There are a variety of ways the City can meet these obligations. Redevelopment can help, in that it can convert impervious surfaces into areas that can handle stormwater. For example, a residential project in the Eisenhower Valley that was approved by Council in 2013 has created a new pond. That pond **alone** will account for a substantial portion of our pollutant reduction obligations from its construction until this year. Such projects can also become a desirable amenity (this one was recognized with a Beautification Award).

In the end, meeting these obligations will be expensive. Current estimates have the costs at $65 - $100 million dollars over the next 15 years, including $33 million over the next five years.

In 2008, the City Council appointed a citizen group to review the costs and funding mechanisms available to address the City's responsibilities. In the spring of 2010, one of the City's previous City Managers proposed the creation of a Stormwater Utility Fee to fund these obligations.

As proposed in 2010, the fee would apply to all property owners (regardless of their taxable status) and be assessed based on the

impervious surfaces on their property. Essentially the fee would be structured to be a user fee for the City's stormwater handling.

In adopting the budget in 2010, the Council instead chose to simply raise the real estate tax and dedicate a portion (a half cent) of the rate to stormwater projects. Essentially, the decision was to fund stormwater management based on the value of properties rather than the amount of stormwater runoff they create.

That funding proved insufficient to cover the City's obligations. Ultimately, to address our obligations, annual spending will need to rise to $6.67 million per year. To address this mandate in later years, the annual spending will need to be even higher.

In [December of 2014, the Council first discussed these obligations and the possibility of using a Stormwater Utility Fee](#) instead of the previous real estate tax dedication.

Alternatively, the Council could have increased the real estate tax dedication to continue funding these costs using that mechanism.

[In February of 2016, the Council again reviewed this issue and gave our staff the direction to pursue a Stormwater Utility Fee in lieu of the previous real estate tax dedication.](#)

With the new Stormwater Utility Fee, the cost burden has shifted. Residential fee-payers now pay 37% of the stormwater costs and non-residential fee-payers pay 63% of these costs.

For many property owners, this will reduce their cost. This also requires non-taxable property owners (places of worship and non-profit properties primarily) to cover their impacts on the City's stormwater system.

The fee is assessed on the impact the property has on stormwater runoff in the City as opposed to simply the valuation of the property.

For residential properties, our staff devised a relatively simple tier structure with 4 tiers (Condo, Townhouse, Typical Single Family and Large Single Family) for different types of residential properties. For non-residential properties, a calculation based on impervious areas on a property has been implemented.

City staff will also propose a series of available credits for fee-payers based on actions property owners can take to reduce their impact on the City's stormwater system. [The non-residential credit structures was implemented this year](#). We are now working to implement the residential credit structure in 2019.

This month our staff will be holding two community meetings to solicit input on the proposed credit structure for residential property owners. These meetings will review the [Best Management Practices (BMP) for stormwater management](#), and solicit input prior to bringing the credit policy to the City Council this fall.

The first community meeting will be on Thursday September 6th at City Hall at 7:00 PM.

The second community meeting will be on Thursday September 13th at the Burke Library at 7:00 PM.

Two New Affordable Housing Initiatives

Affordable housing efforts in Alexandria must involve a combination of offense and defense. We seek to both create new affordable housing and preserve what we already have.

Later this month, Wesley Housing Development Corporation, an affordable-housing non-profit, will be hosting a community meeting to present the latest versions of plans to create a new affordable housing project behind the Fairlington Presbyterian Church on King Street.

While the City did extend pre-development financing last year to explore the feasibility of this project, the land-use applications for this project will be considered by the Planning Commission and the City Council in November.

While creating new affordable housing is especially challenging for our City, the preservation of affordable housing units that are ending their designated affordability periods, presents similar constraints.

In the southeast corner of our City, along Route 1, there are 319 affordable housing units that, for various reasons, are at risk. For 215 of the units, they are under Project Based Voucher agreements that are on the verge of expiring or have expired. For the remaining 104 units, they are market-rate affordable units that currently accept Housing Choice Vouchers.

Inaction likely means the loss of these affordable units over time. In an attempt to devise proactive measures to maintain the affordability of the housing, the City applied for and received grant funding from the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) to launch the new Route 1 South Housing Affordability Strategy planning effort.

This planning began last year, and is now nearing completion. The proposed plan goes to the Planning Commission for consideration on Tuesday. If the plan is approved by the Commission, it will come to City Council at our Saturday September 15th Public Hearing.

Let me know your thoughts!

Employee Compensation

Local government is a people-intensive business. The services that residents of our City rely on every day are provided by a skilled and dedicated workforce. In a region such as ours, attracting and retaining such a workforce is a competitive business.
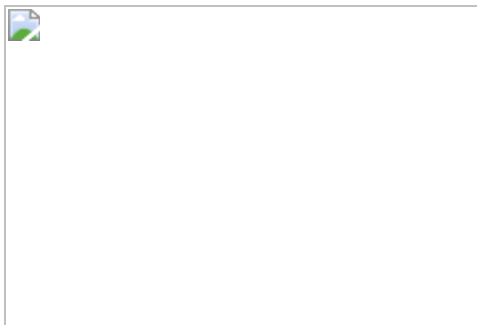
Fully 67% of the City's General Fund (not including schools and debt service) expenditures are personnel costs. including both salary and benefits. In this year's budget, that is $228 million.

All City employees who are not at the end of the pay-scale qualify for a "merit increase" ranging from 2.3% to 5%. Funding those increases for all eligible City employees requires an additional $5 million this year, over a third of all available new revenue at current tax rates.

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

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

One of the largest compensation costs is providing health care coverage to our employees and their families. Like most employers, we have seen very large increases in these costs over the past two

decades. Today the City spends nearly $25 million a year on healthcare for our employees and families.

[Over a decade ago, the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee made a series of recommendations to help mitigate these costs](). Many of those are in place today including premium cost sharing, self-funding (or self-insurance), and plan design changes. These changes have saved the taxpayers millions of dollars each year, with minimal impact on employees.

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

[Alexandria became one of the first jurisdictions to comply with this new standard]() and we created a trust fund to save dollars for these future obligations. The City's unfunded liability for this obligation is now $57.7 million, a decrease of $10.7 million from the previous year. This prudence protects taxpayers in the future from large unexpected obligations. It also protects employees from sudden benefit reductions due to an economic downturn.

[In 2009, the City eliminated life insurance for retirees](). That one benefit alone consumed a third of our retirement benefit obligations.

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

[In last year's proposed budget, the City Manager proposed a change to the City's Supplemental Pension Plan](). The City's Supplemental Pension Plan is an additional defined benefit pension plan that the City has had in place since 1970.

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

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

In the City's adopted budget, the Council approved the City's Manager's proposal for new funding to increase the lowest hourly wage of any City employee to match a "living wage" of $15 per hour. To support those City employees beginning or expanding their families, the City Manager's proposed budget has included funding for 6 weeks of paid parental leave for eligible employees.

[Yet for some of our employee groups, particularly in public safety, we are struggling to compete](). With significant growth in hiring and in compensation among neighboring jurisdictions, the competition

grows more acute each year. Given the substantial cost of training and the consistency of that training across the region, inability to retain these employees can be very costly for the taxpayers.

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

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

At our first legislative meeting of this month, the City Manager will make his recommendation as to how these funds should be allocated among the impacted employee groups. These resources mark an important investment in the public employees that protect the safety of our residents.

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