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your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

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City Council returns from our summer recess this month. We start off with important land-use decisions, fiscal matters and more.

Last month marked a successful return to school for thousands of Alexandria students. I'm excited to see our students back in the classrooms and I wish them an exciting and fruitful year.

With our kids back in school the risk of crashes that involve students go up. Beginning the 18th of this month, the City's new school-zone speed cameras will begin issuing citations. [The new cameras will be installed at 4 school](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)
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[Locations](#). Slow down to keep our kids safe!

Next weekend, our 7th annual "Tons and Truck events returns for Chinquapin Park. [This event brings vehicles from the many City agencies and partners to the Park for families to enjoy!](#)

If you would like 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

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.

For several years, Alexandria has been on a journey to expand housing production and affordability as well as address past and current barriers to equitable housing access. On [Tuesday evening, the City Council and the Planning Commission will meet to formally receive the recommendations of our City staff for our ongoing Zoning For Housing initiative.](#)

With the receipt of these proposals, we will enter a new phase of this community conversation. **We have announced several opportunities for the community 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!

Earlier this week, 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.

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 Transi-Oriented Growth
- Industrial Zones
- Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)
- **Inclusionary Zoning**
- Townhouse Zoning
- Property Conversions
- **Expansion of the Residential Multi-Family Zone (RMF)**

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 the kick-off the last session, 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.

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 even 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.



New Flood Maps & Flood Insurance

On July 11th, FEMA provided the City with a [Letter of Final Determination](#) that implemented newly updated flood maps for our City. The new maps will become effective in January of 2024.

Roughly 20% of the City is mapped into a floodzone. [You can review the new maps online.](#)

In 2011, the City's flood zone maps were last updated, expanding the flood zones in Old Town, Rosemont and Arlandria. The expansion of these zones extended the number of property owners required to purchase policies from the Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as a condition of their mortgage.

Every property owner is eligible to purchase [FEMA Flood Insurance](#). While it is only required for those in higher-risk areas, given the unpredictability of flooding, the purchase of flood insurance is recommended.

The City participates in the [NFIP Community Rating System \(CRS\)](#). This program allows localities to be certified based on flood plain management practices. [The latest annual report detailing the City's participation in the program is now online.](#)

The lower the score a community receives, the larger the discount received by property owners who purchase flood insurance. [In 2013, the City became the first community in the Commonwealth of Virginia to receive a CRS score as low as 6.](#) That entitles Alexandria property owners to a 20% discount when purchasing flood insurance, among the highest discount level of any locality in Virginia.

Douglas MacArthur and Future Schools

Three years ago, [the City Council unanimously approved land-use modifications to allow the old Patrick Henry Elementary School building to be temporarily used a "swing-space"](#) to facilitate a rebuild of Douglas MacArthur Elementary School. [In September of 2020, the City Council unanimously approved the rebuild of MacArthur.](#)

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

This new 163,000 square foot building replaces the old 62,000 square foot building, accommodates 850 students and is the first [NetZero](#) public building in Alexandria.



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

In March of last year, we broke ground on a rebuild of Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School. This will be a new 350,000 square foot facility intended to house 1,600 students. **The construction is expected to take 2.5 years and will open for the opening of the 2024-2025 school year.**

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, will provide an opportunity for another adaptive reuse of an under-utilized building.

In May, City Council unanimously approved a 10-year capital improvement program for the Alexandria City Public Schools including \$367.2 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 or builds of:

- Cora Kelly Elementary School
- George Mason Elementary School
- Minnie Howard Campus of our High School
- Renovation of 1703 N. Beauregard

Five 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.** Almost five 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 year, 15,732 students started in the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). That constitutes an increase of 255 students from the previous year and the first increase of enrollment since the beginning of the pandemic.

As we return to student enrollment growth, we have seen enrollment increases in 14 of the last 16 years. During that period, ACPS added over 5,000 students. The last time we approached having this **many children attending our schools was over 50 years ago in the early 1970s.**

Last year, there was a clear divide emerging in the post-pandemic enrollment trends, as enrollment in our

high school (grades 9 - 12) continued to increase, while enrollment for elementary and middle school students dropped. This year, we saw strong growth in both elementary and high school, with a very small drop in middle school.

Over nine years ago, the City convened the Joint [Long Range Educational Facilities Work Group](#). The group was given the essential charge to understand our recent increase in student enrollment, better project enrollment growth in the future, and to decide what to do about it.

One of the products of this joint effort was a new enrollment projection methodology. This methodology uses the birth rate and corresponding Kindergarten capture rate, the cohort survival rate and the impacts of new development to project student enrollment each year. This methodology has been very accurate in predicting how our student enrollment will grow over the past decade.

The [April update of our enrollment projections](#) showed that without the impact of planned development and growth, school enrollment is expected to peak in two years and then slowly decline. When the impact of planned development is included, the enrollment is projected to dip, but later return to pre-pandemic levels within a decade.

We have also worked to understand where the enrollment is coming from. The type and age of housing is a significant determinant of the student generation rates. [Just last month, we updated the student generation rates, by development type](#). This analysis showed some results that might be considered counterintuitive by some in our community:

- 73% of Alexandria's housing is over 30 years old
- 89% of students in the Alexandria City Public Schools live in housing that is over 30 years old
- Only 3% of ACPS students live in market-rate, multi-family housing that was built in the last 30 years
- A third of ACPS students live in low-rise apartments, with nearly all of that enrollment in apartments that are older than 30 years old

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

While capacity will remain the focus of the investments we must make in our school facilities, we have seen far too many examples of the dangers of systemic under-investment in our school facilities. Returning our school facilities to a state of good repair while sustaining a preventative maintenance cycle must be a priority of

our collective investment. There can be no excuse for poorly maintained learning environments for our children.

While the pandemic paused a decade and a half of enrollment growth, it can be assumed that we are returning to our growth trend as our schools continue return to "normal." These long-term investments become critical to support the success of our students in the generations to come.



Time to Vote

Early voting for our November election will begin this month.

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.** Ballots will be mailed out this month, beginning 45 days prior to Election Day. 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 alternate locations will begin in 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!



Street Names

Last month, **the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission endorsed a list of new street names**, prioritizing those who are underrepresented on Alexandria street signs, particularly women and minorities. This list will go before the Alexandria Naming Committee when they meet on September 28th **as they determine which 3 streets will be renamed this year**.

Early in the morning of August 21, 1863, William Quantrill led a **Confederate guerilla group to attack Lawrence, Kansas**. After looting most of the businesses in the town, the guerilla group then executed nearly 200 men and boys in the town. Today, **Quantrell Avenue** on our West End is named in his honor.

On March 6, 1857, **Chief Justice Roger Taney wrote that African-Americans “are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race...”** These words were included in the majority opinion in the Dred Scott v. Sandford case before the United States Supreme Court. Today, **Taney Avenue is named in his honor, also on our West End**.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Confederate veterans came together to form the Ku Klux Klan, to perpetuate racial terror and “The Lost Cause.” **Chosen as the first “Grand Wizard” of this racial terror group was former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest**. Today, **Forrest Street is named in his honor in Del Ray**.

Unfortunately, these three examples are **replicated throughout our City**. Those who served on City Councils of the past used street naming policies as a form of permanent protest against the burgeoning civil rights movement and growing political power for African-Americans. As a symbol, these honors persist today, honoring virulent racists, many of whom took up arms against our nation. These honors are not defensible and should be removed.

In August of 2016, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names **presented its final report to the City Council**. This report recommended that the City proceed with a **renaming of Jefferson Davis Highway** and allow the typical City renaming process to handle renaming of other streets in our City.

Last year, the **City Council approved an updated Street Renaming procedure to allow for the submission of petitions for these renaming efforts**.

During the FY 23 budget process, our City staff **provided a detailing of the budgetary impacts that would accompany street renaming efforts and detailed a more methodical approach**.

While it is important to remove these inappropriate honors, it is also important to consider practical concerns as thousands of Alexandria residents live on these streets, numerous businesses operate on these streets and residents and visitors use these existing street names to navigate our community. As such, I believe a reasonable, yet deliberate pace of renaming these streets over time should be embarked upon.

Early this year, **my colleagues supported my proposal** to ask our Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC) to help us develop a list of people, places and things worthy of honor, particularly those names that draw attention to people and events of our history that have been frequently overlooked. With that list, the City's Naming Committee will go to work to assign new names to approximately 3 streets each year.

Honors and commemorations that seemed appropriate a century or even 40 years ago, may no longer be appropriate in a modern Alexandria. Our ability to reflect and change is a strength of our community.

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