

The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

Councilman Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

April 1, 2014

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Events/Updates

Learn more on the budget

In order to provide additional information on the proposed City Budget, the City Manager will be hosting a [public presentation of the budget](#).

This presentation is scheduled for Thursday April 3rd at 6:30 PM. It is being hosted at Beatley Library.

Spring Pothole Campaign

Welcome to spring! After a winter that felt as though it would never end, I can't be more excited to be past snow days and snowplows.

The Council is right in the middle of our budget process; easily the most intense portion of our schedule.

With the inevitable reductions in the amount of City, State and Federal resources to our non-profit community and the impacts this will have to some of the services provided to those most in need, it's critically important that those with means find a way to assist.

Last year, [Spring 2 Action](#) raised \$660,000 for Alexandria charities in one day. This year, the goal is even higher, and the need is greater in our community.

Please mark the date on your calendar and show your support for a few great Alexandria non-profits.

Please let me know how I can be of assistance. [Contact me anytime](#).

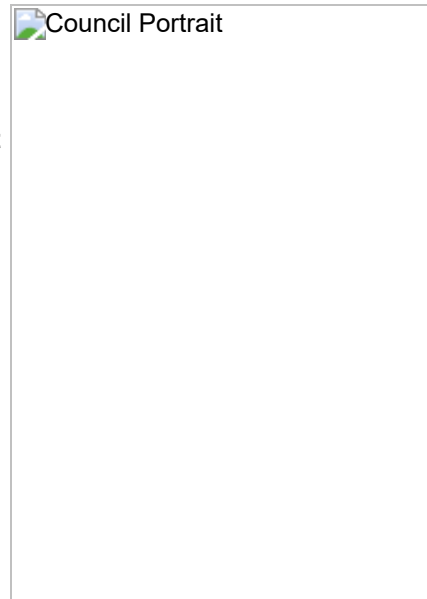
Council Initiatives

Budget Taking Shape

It has been a little over a month since the City Manager presented his proposed [FY 2015 Operating Budget](#) and his proposed FY 2015 - FY 2024 Capital Improvement Program.

The Council has engaged in a series of work sessions and public hearings as the community made their views known on a variety of aspects of the proposed budget.

As I discussed last month, while the real estate market shows modest growth, our consumption-based taxes are creating very anemic revenue growth overall. To produce an operating budget in



The winter that will not end has been brutal on the condition of the City's roads.

The City is now launching a Spring Pothole Campaign from now until the 21st.

[Please report any potholes to the City using Call Click Connect.](#)



Eisenhower West Survey

As the City gets underway in the Eisenhower West planning process, the City's community work-group is looking for additional ways to engage residents in the discussion.

In order to solicit additional ideas, there is a [survey](#) created for residents to offer their say.

The deadline is on Friday.

Spring Clean Up Continues

The next two Saturdays are the final two in the City's annual [Spring Clean Up](#).

This Saturday, the center section of the City [bounded by Braddock Road, Quaker Lane and Duke Street](#) will have their bulk and metal items collected.

Saturday the 12th will be the portion of the City west of [Quaker Lane](#).

Earth Day Returns

[Alexandria Earth Day](#) returns to Ben Brenman Park from 10AM until 2:00 PM on Saturday April 26th.

With activities for all ages, the event brings together our population in the cause

line with the Council's guidance requiring no increase in the real estate tax rate, the City Manager proposed significant and in many cases unpopular, reductions to spending.



The very first decision that the Council must make in any budget process is the "advertisement" of a real estate tax rate. Under the Code of Virginia, the Council must advertise the highest possible rate that it will consider. When it eventually adopts the budget on May 1st, the Council may choose a lower rate, but it cannot go higher.

On March 11th, the Council [voted 5-2 to advertise a half-cent increase in the real estate tax rate](#). I voted no. While I believe that there are important needs in our community (particularly in our schools) that this budget does not provide for, my view is that those needs can be addressed using the revenue available to us. You [can watch the City Council's discussion and vote online](#).

Last year, on average, single-family homeowners saw 3.6% assessment increases coupled with a 4% tax rate increase, resulting in a 7.5% tax increase. Our condo taxpayers had a 4% assessment increase with the 4% tax rate increase, creating an 8% tax increase.

This year, even without a tax rate increase, our single-family homeowners will pay 3.6% more and our condo homeowners 4.5% more due to assessment increases.

Late last year, we learned that as a region personal income in the DC area grew at the [LOWEST rate of any large metropolitan area in the country](#). Most dramatically, the wages paid to Federal civilian workers in the DC region decreased by a half percent. This is even more dramatic when you consider that for the previous decade, these wages increased by an AVERAGE rate of 6.8% per year.

Our residents are not seeing income growth, and I believe that the City's government should be cognizant of our residents' capacity to pay additional taxation. We need to make some difficult choices.

While last year we used the budget process to address long-deferred capital needs, I believe this budget is where we right-size our operating spending to the new trajectory of modest revenue growth.

If we miss this opportunity, we are signing the City up for more service cuts, and more tax increases in the near future.

Last year I wrote about my view that the City should evolve towards multi-year operating budgets. In a nod to that push, our City Manager has proposed that we instead construct a five-year financial plan. The five-year financial plan would not contain the rigor and detail of an actual multi-year budget, but it will give the City the long-term view that I believe is required.

The first step in this direction is the updated version of the [City's Forecast Scenarios](#). The bottom line of this forecasting effort is to suggest that even under a "medium growth" scenario, the City is heading for another \$13.2 million of cuts or revenue increases next year, and \$16.4 million the year after. This scenario assumes relatively healthy growth in tax revenues with modest increases in costs.

The next few weeks are critical in the development of the City's budget, as we continue to receive public input and begin to craft our amendments to the City Manager's proposed budget.

As individual members of the City Council explore areas of the budget, the City's Office of Management & Budget (OMB) prepare

of environmental sustainability.

Last Day of School Remains June 20

Despite the snow cancellations, the Alexandria City Public Schools [announced that no additional make-up time will be necessary.](#)

The last day of school will remain June 20.

written [Budget Memos](#) that detail specific areas. These documents are available for review on the City website and are a useful insight into the Council's budget process and deliberations.

If you wish to learn more, the City Manager will be presenting the budget to the community on Wednesday evening at 6:30 PM at Beatley Library.

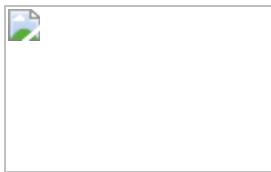
Please continue to [let me know your thoughts.](#)

Peace on the Waterfront

Over the past year, I have written many times about the City's efforts to implement the [approved Waterfront Small Area Plan](#). Specifically, the City has worked extensively to realize the vision of a waterfront that provides public access and expands accessible open space, as well as a waterfront protected from flood.

For decades, the City has been engaged in negotiations over the future of the [Old Dominion Boat Club](#) parking lot behind the existing Mai Thai Restaurant.

In June of 2013, the City made a formal [offer for settlement of the impasse](#). When that was not successful, in November the City Council voted to launch an intensive 90-day negotiation period designed to be a final effort to avoid the use of eminent domain.



The 90-day negotiation period employed the use of a mediator and ultimately concluded last month. The negotiations managed to develop two options acceptable to the City for consideration by Old Dominion Boat Club membership; a ["Stay in Place" option](#) and a [Move](#)

[option.](#)

In the end, [the membership of the Old Dominion Boat Club overwhelmingly voted](#) for the Move Option.

While there are many specific details, the deal provides the City with ownership of the existing Old Dominion Boat Club parking lot, as well as the Club itself for the use as a new park and for flood mitigation efforts.

In exchange the Old Dominion Boat Club will get the site of the old Beachcomber building at the base of Prince Street to build a new Club as well as \$5 million from the City to assist that effort.

Most importantly, this deal ends decades of litigation and allows the City and the Old Dominion Boat Club to rebuild a working relationship to work together for the betterment of our City and in particular, our precious waterfront.

Potomac Yard Metro: Back on Track

After some significant delay as the City navigates the Federal Environmental Impact Statement process, the effort to bring a new Metrorail station to Potomac Yard is back on track.

The process continues to evaluate [three alternatives](#) for the location of the station.

In March, the Council received a [revised schedule](#) for the remaining planning processes and the ultimate construction.

Under the revised schedule the draft Environmental Impact Statement will be released in the fall. Subsequent to that release and the public comment period, the Council will adopt our preferred location in January of next year.



With the site selected, the City would begin the design and construction, with a scheduled completion near the end of 2018.

The Council's decision to [prioritize new regionally generated transportation dollars for the Metro](#) reduces the risk of this project and makes it easier to advance during difficult budget times.

So much of our City's future economic growth depends on the successful completion of this station. We are pushing for a

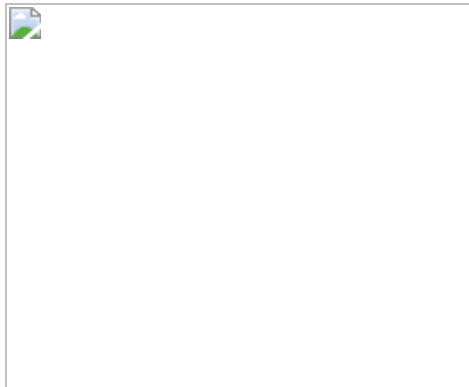
more expeditious completion of the planning efforts.

New DASH Route

The [City's DASH Bus system](#) celebrated its 30th Anniversary last month. In 30 years the system has grown significantly and now carries 4.2 million passengers a year with 79 buses.

With the adoption of the City's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the DASH system is working to expand.

In a few days, the DASH Board will be voting on the creation of a new cross-town route, the AT9.

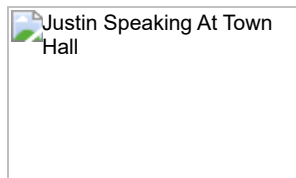


As proposed, this new route will provide connections from Potomac Yard to the new Washington Headquarters Service (WHS) building at Mark Center, by way of Parkfairfax, Shirlington, and much of the length of King Street.

The route, as proposed, will bring transit to new communities and create new connections for our population.

If approved, the route will begin operating in late June.

Host a Town Hall in Your Living Room!



My regular series of Town Hall Meetings are back!

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

Protecting the Safety of our City

During a budget process in a community such as ours, it can frequently be challenging to determine the relative merit of the many demands on City resources.

Only occasionally are the loudest voices emanating from those advocating for the most significant needs.

Yet ultimately, the most basic of responsibilities that a City has is the safety of our residents and the safety of those men and women who provide this protection for our residents.

In 2008 the City received an [after-action report on the City's response to a 2007 fire at Alexandria Knolls West](#). Six firefighters were injured during the response to this incident. One of them spent significant time in intensive care recovering.

The report provided a road-map for how the City might better protect the safety of our residents and the safety of those that ensure it. Since that time, the City has been engaged in a long-term effort to improve the capacity and safety of our Fire Department.

One of the most important recommendations was that the City bring the Alexandria Fire Department in line with our neighbors in providing a minimum staffing level of 4 firefighters to an apparatus. Our previous requirement was 3.

In 2010, the City successfully applied for a [SAFER grant](#) from the Federal government to provide initial funds to assist in hiring these additional firefighters.

These funds have allowed the City to increase spending on the Fire Department, and those Federal dollars have been matched by increased local expenditures.

Two years ago, the Council increased the Fire Department's budget by 9.6%. Last year, we increased it another 8.2%.

Part of this increase is due to increased staffing levels. Additionally, a [new Fire Station on the West End was constructed](#), to go along with one [opened in 2009 in Potomac Yard](#). Nine new apparatus were procured and placed in service, and [new investments in firefighter safety have continued](#).

Ultimately, this year's budget presented a series of quite unsavory choices. With the opening of the new West End station (Fire Station 210), the City Manager proposed a series of trade-offs within the Fire Department budget.

The proposed budget brings the City from 5 engines with the minimum four person staffing, to six engines meeting that staffing level.

The budget adds a new Medic Unit at Fire Station 210.

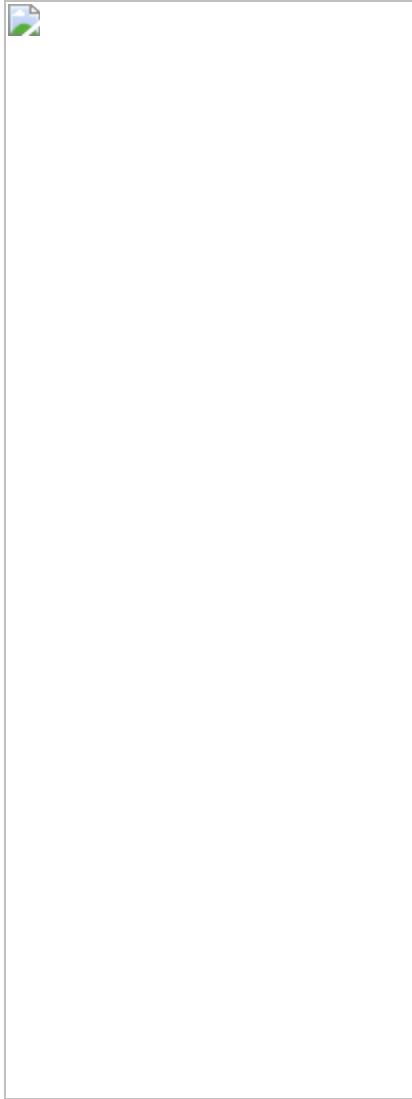
The budget adds a new IT/Records Management Systems position.

The budget continues the funding that the Council initiated last year for new Self-contained breathing apparatus.

On the reduction side, the proposed budget eliminated 10 vacant firefighter positions, 3 fire marshal positions, 2 emergency management positions, and the public information officer position.

In addition, the budget reallocates some resources by moving Engine 204 (one of the three apparatus at Fire Station 204) and our existing Peak time Medic unit to Fire Station 210 to provide the resources for the opening of that station.

While these trade-offs are not ideal, they are the recommendation of our Acting Fire Chief to utilize a limited supply of resources to protect



the entire City.

In the case of Engine 204, the Acting Fire Chief and the City Manager have recommended taking an engine unit that has consistently had some of the lowest volume of calls for service in the City, to an area where the existing engines have the highest volume of calls for service in the City.

The Council could ultimately decide to accept the City Manager's proposal, instead leave the newly constructed Fire Station 210 closed, or provide the necessary resources (~\$2.2 million) to open Fire Station 210 and leave Engine 204 in place.

This will continue to be a topic of significant discussion as we progress through the budget process and I would appreciate your further input.

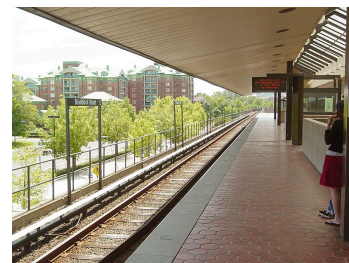
Braddock Road

In 2008, the City adopted the [Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan](#), a comprehensive plan for the area around the Braddock

Road Metro Station.

Central to the plan was a desire to create greater vitality, increase community amenities, and ensure that growth was well supported by transit.

One of the redevelopment sites in the Plan included the site of the Metro itself.



Metro has now [stepped forward to commence planning](#) of a redevelopment of the site. While there is still a long way to go, pursuing development adjacent to existing transit neatly aligns with our land-use, transportation and environmental visions of the future of our City.

There should be further announcements as Metro moves forward.

Oakville Triangle

The primarily industrial area [between Del Ray and Route 1 is known as Oakville Triangle](#). Today, the 13-acre tract has 28 tenants primarily consisting of light industrial uses.

The new purchaser, The Blackstone Group, has enlisted a design team to begin exploring ways to redevelop the property.

The Council [created a new citizen group](#)

to consider the possibility of a potential redevelopment. The City Manager will be making the appointments for the new group, and the applications are due at 5 PM on April 11th.

The [application](#) is available online.

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