

The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by:

Councilman Justin M. Wilson

Alexandria, Virginia

December 1, 2014

In This Edition

[Council Initiatives](#)

[Our Next Budget](#)

[Water Rates Going Up?](#)

[Grocery Stores](#)

[Waterfront Parks and Flood Mitigation](#)

[City Legislative Package](#)

[Host a Town Hall](#)

[Upcoming Issues: Parking & Oakville Triangle](#)

Quick Links

[E-Mail Me](#)

[City of Alexandria Website](#)

[Pay City Taxes Online](#)

[Review Real Estate Assessments](#)

[Board & Commission Vacancies](#)

[Alexandria Health Department Restaurant Inspections](#)

[Report a Street Light Outage](#)

Events/Updates

ACPS Needs Your Opinion

The Alexandria City Public Schools is working to craft a new five year Strategic Plan.

In order to build the new plan, they are actively soliciting the opinions of City residents.

Alexandria is an exciting place this time of year.

Last week, Thanksgiving began with the [39th Annual Alexandria Turkey Trot](#). While it was a bit chilly this year, it was exciting to see a new female course record broken, and one more year that I was able to hold on and outpace my son.

Friday night was the traditional beginning of the holiday season with the City's Tree Lighting in Market Square.

The following day was [Small Business Saturday](#) throughout the City, as Alexandrians flocked to our many small businesses and showed their support.

Next weekend, the [Scottish Christmas Walk](#) returns to the streets of Old Town.

There is no better time to enjoy our City.

My best wishes for a joyous holiday season to you and your family.

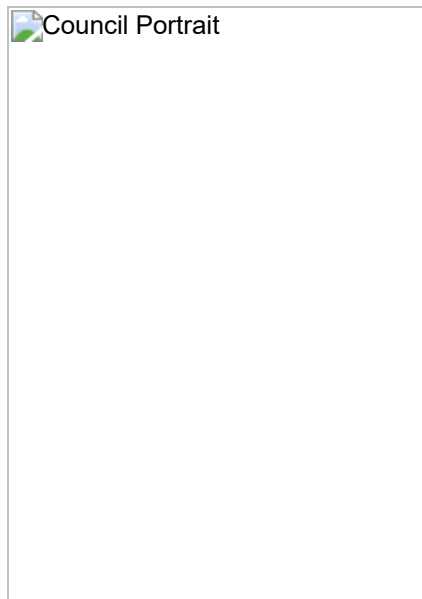
Please let me know how I can be of assistance. [Contact me anytime.](#)

Council Initiatives

Next Budget

Our current Vice President likes to quote his father in saying, "Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget and I'll tell you what you value."

There is no surer expression of a community's values than its budget, and no more important decision that Alexandria's City Council makes than the adoption of its annual budget.



From now until December 15th, [you can complete the survey online](#) to provide input to this very important process.

First Night Returns!

The best New Year's celebration around returns to Alexandria at the end of the month.

First Night Alexandria has a full agenda of exciting events for the whole family, culminating in fireworks on the River to ring in the New Year!

[Buy your tickets today.](#)

Discovering Alexandria Premieres Thursday

[The new WETA documentary, "Discovering Alexandria" premieres this Thursday at 8 PM.](#)

This segment begins to tell the history of Alexandria from the beginning.

[Set your DVR today!](#)

Holiday on the Avenue

[Del Ray kicks off the holiday season on Saturday with carols, cocoa, lights and Santa!](#)

The festivities begin at 6 PM at the Farmers Market location at Mount Vernon and Oxford.

Leaf Collection Continues

The City's leaf collection program continues into December.

[Leaf bags remain available and collection details are available online.](#)

Del Ray Artisans Holiday Market

[The 19th Annual Del Ray Artisans Holiday Market begins Friday evening and continues all month.](#)

Admission is free. The market features unique fine

Yet during its annual budget process, the City Council on average modifies no more than about 0.3% of the City Manager's proposed budget. That strongly suggests that the most important part of this process is the adoption of our budget guidance.

In the fall, the Council adopts a guidance resolution which provides directions to the City Manager as to how he or she must prepare the budget that is proposed to the Council.

Some years the Council is more prescriptive than others. Particularly in difficult years, the less flexibility the City Manager is given, the more difficult are the cuts required to propose a balanced budget.

Last year, the City Council adopted relatively restrictive guidance. While we allowed the City Manager to propose increased revenues from fees and fines, he was not allowed to propose an increase in the real estate tax or the personal property tax.

Furthermore, he was required to maintain or increase the level of cash commitment to the City's capital budget. Said another way, he could not increase the debt incurred for future capital expenditures in order to avoid more difficult decisions on the operating budget side. The result of last year's guidance was [a very tight budget that eliminated positions and made some significant service reductions to numerous City services.](#)

This year, Councilwoman Pepper and I were asked to draft the budget guidance for consideration by our colleagues. Faced with revenue projections that continued the pessimism of the past decade, the primary question before the Council was to define the level of cuts required.

Councilwoman Pepper and I recommended a [guidance resolution](#) with several key features:

- Continued scrutiny of each City service to determine its on-going value relative to the City's Strategic Plan
- A request that the City Manager continue progress aimed at addressing long-standing inequities in the City employee compensation structure.
- A maintenance of the existing cash commitment to our capital budget (no increases in planned borrowing).
- Appropriations to the Alexandria City Public Schools to support growth in student enrollment.
- Proposals for growth-oriented tax policy changes designed to promote small business growth. Any such proposals should be derived through the [recommendations of our recently concluded Business Tax Reform task force.](#)

The budget guidance typically directs the City Manager whether to include an increase to the real estate tax rate in his proposed budget. This is the most consequential lever in the guidance resolution. This is the one important area that remained up for debate and decision by the Council.

In my opinion, the City Manager should be directed to present a budget without an increase in the real estate rate. Should the Council wish to increase the rate once the budget has been presented, it becomes much easier to communicate those priorities to the taxpayers.

A majority of the Council, by a vote of 4-3, [felt differently and chose to give the City Manager the flexibility to propose a tax rate increase in his proposed budget.](#)

On March 3rd, the City Manager will propose his budget to the Council. At that point, it will be time to translate the values of our

arts and crafts from local artists.

The sales benefit both the Del Ray Artisans and the Alexandria Tutoring Consortium.

eNews Re-Launched

[The City's eNews system was re-launched and is now available for new users to sign up.](#)

The system provides regular e-mail updates on City events and occurrences across a variety of categories that you select.

Anyone who was previously registered on the old system is required to again sign up for the new system.

Child Safety Seat Inspections Get Easier

Last year, our Sheriff brought Child Safety Seat inspections back to Alexandria.

[Now the process has gotten even easier with a new web form to make your appointment.](#)

Thanks to our Sheriff for continuing his commitment to the safety of Alexandria's children.

community into a set of budget priorities. I look forward to your input in that process.

Down the Drain?

Alexandria remains one in a relatively small list of Virginia jurisdictions who have a private water utility. [Virginia American Water Company](#) (VAWC), a subsidiary of a large national company, provides water supply to Alexandria's residents and businesses.

As a private utility, VAWC is subject to the authority of the [State Corporation Commission](#) in Richmond. During the summer, VAWC [applied to the commission in order to create a new "Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Service Charge."](#)

As proposed, the new charge is to assist VAWC in collecting the resources to perform system-wide maintenance.

While the City certainly supports the maintenance efforts that are badly needed to protect our City's water supply, we do have concern about the mechanism.

As a result, the City has [filed with the Commission in opposition of VAWC's request](#). The City's

concern is that the change proposed by VAWC removes a significant "check" (the review by the State Corporation Commission) that exists to ensure the proper process is followed before rates are raised.

The comment period has closed, and the State Corporation Commission will be acting on this matter shortly.

Getting the Groceries

In June of 2013, I wrote about the challenges that the City was experiencing with the closure of two Giant Food stores, a Magruder's, and the temporary closure of the Bradlee Safeway.

The Alexandria Economic Development Partnership has been actively engaged in working to attract new grocery tenants to ensure that the City has an array of options.

In January, [a new Fresh Market replaced the Giant at Bradlee](#).

In the summer, a new [Global Market](#) replaced the Giant on Beauregard.

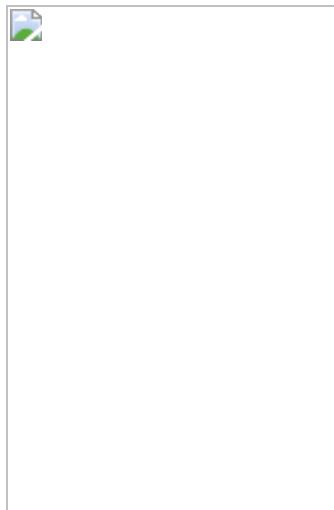
In October, [a new Harris Teeter opened in North Old Town](#).

On Friday, the [Safeway at Bradlee will have its long-awaited reopening](#).

The City also recently received word that [Aldi](#) would be replacing the Magruder's in Seminary Plaza.

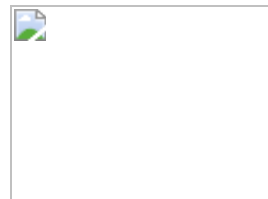
New Waterfront Parks and Flood Mitigation

In June, the Council approved the [Phase I Landscape and Flood Mitigation Plan](#) for our Old Town waterfront. The Olin Group concept, inspired by the approved Waterfront Plan and improved by the input of so many residents, brings to life the vision of a more active and sustainable waterfront.



In approving the concept, the Council asked our staff to return with an implementation schedule and funding plan.

[On Wednesday, this schedule and plan will be presented to the community at a Community Open House, to be held from 6 PM to 8 PM at Lee Center.](#)



Let me know your thoughts!

Our Voices in Richmond

Last month, [the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget notified jurisdictions around the Commonwealth of specifics around the recently adopted "local aid to state" program.](#)

In the case of Alexandria, [we were told that we had to wire \\$633,464 to Richmond](#) to help the General Assembly balance the Commonwealth's budget.

As I wrote last month, this is the continuation of a disturbing trend from Richmond. While local governments around the Commonwealth continue to make difficult service reductions and must go to cash-strapped residents and ask for more resources, the Commonwealth simply passes the buck to local governments.



It's into this difficult environment that our legislators will return to next month.

Depending on where in the City you live, you are represented by either Senators [Richard Saslaw](#), [Adam Ebbin](#) or [George Barker](#) in the State Senate. In the House of Delegates, you are represented by either Delegate [Charniele Herring](#) or [Rob Krupicka](#).

In January, they will head down to Richmond to represent our community. Traditionally, the City Council adopts a Legislative Package prior to the session.

In the package, we list individual legislative requests as well as specific issues that we wish to see either supported or opposed by the delegation.

In [our 2015 proposed legislative package](#), the Council reprises several themes from previous packages.

We ask that the Governor and the General Assembly refrain from additional hits to City finances, particularly as it relates to K-12 education, transportation and mental health.

We reiterate our support for an expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, an increase in the minimum wage and a full repeal of the Commonwealth's invalidated prohibition on marriage equality in the wake of the Supreme Court's affirmation of the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals action.

I made several specific additions to the package that we will consider at our next legislative meeting.

Last year one of the budget reductions in the adopted City budget, related to City funding for the [Alexandria Law Library](#). In addition to a City appropriation, the Alexandria Law Library receives funding from a fee assessed on each case that is filed. I have requested that Richmond grant local governments the authority to increase that fee.

Last month I wrote about the failure of the General Assembly to appropriately fund state agencies that serve the City. These namely include the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Clerk of Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, Clerk of the General District Court, Alexandria Health Department, Alexandria Court Services Unit, and the Alexandria Public Defender's Office.

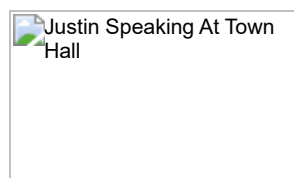
A consequence of this neglect has been the need of local taxpayers to cover the gap. Language is in the proposed package requesting that the General Assembly correct this issue.

Finally, the proposed package includes my suggested language in support of initiatives of a newly formed organization, [One Virginia 2021](#), which is striving to reform Virginia's redistricting and reapportionment process.

During difficult times like this, the annual General Assembly session can be a treacherous time for the City and its values. I'm hopeful Richmond will be supportive of our agenda this year.

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

How Much Parking Is Too Much?

The [Station at Potomac Yard](#) is widely regarded as a model project in the City. The combination of 65 units of affordable housing with a new City fire station has proven successful.

Yet, it's an area of the project that has been less successful and has generated more focus concern in City Hall.

When the project was constructed, the developer complied with the current City zoning ordinance specifying the required number of parking spaces. During construction 143 underground parking spaces were built. Of those 110 were designated for the residential uses in the building.

Now that the building has been occupied for several years, we have the ability to look at actual usage. What we found is that there are only 53 vehicles registered at the complex, and most evenings hardly more than 30 vehicles parked.

Why does this matter?

[Construction of parking is expensive](#). Some estimates would suggest a cost of \$20,000 to \$50,000 per space. That cost is paid by the developer, but can come at the expense of other civic priorities. If the developer is spending money on parking (that ultimately isn't

needed), they're not spending that money for more open space, park land, affordable housing, transportation, schools, etc.

With that challenge in mind, the City chose to initiate the [Parking Standards for New Development Study](#). This group has been hard at work developing alternatives to ensure that we "right-size" our parking.

Today, as potential new development is considered, the City issues "parking reductions" to account for the lower expected parking needs. Yet the process can be arbitrary and not well understood.

The group has not made their final recommendations yet, but they [have considered an array of solutions for the challenges presented](#) by this issue.

When the Planning Commission and City Council take up these recommendations early next year, I suspect they will include revisions to our parking requirements that more clearly recognize proximity to transit and the reality of human behavior.

A New Oakville Triangle?

In past months I have written about the [Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Corridor Planning process](#).

The Oakville Triangle largely consists of a light industrial area on the west side of Route 1 opposite to Potomac Yard. Last year, [the new owner of the 13 acre tract in the middle of the Triangle approached the City about the possibility of redeveloping the property](#).

In response to the request, the City convened a community workgroup and commenced a planning process for much of the west side of Route 1.

The potential for development in this area presents a variety of issues for consideration, including the future of light industrial space in our City, impacts on open space, connectivity, economic vitality, density, affordable housing, and many others. The workgroup process is designed to identify these issues and make recommendations to the Planning Commission and City Council.

Through the eight community meetings that have been held, all of these issues have been raised in various forms, but the issue consistently controversial has been the possibility of vehicular connectivity from the existing neighborhood into a newly redeveloped Oakville Triangle.

In advance of the last meeting, a [new connectivity matrix](#) was released showing that the City staff no longer supports exploring these east-west connectivity scenarios. That viewpoint was endorsed by the community workgroup.

Next week, as the process continues, the Council will be discussing the status of the Oakville Triangle process and providing additional direction to the staff.

On Wednesday, December 10th, the next community meeting will occur at Charles Houston Recreation Center (901 Wythe Street), with an open house from 6 PM - 7 PM and a meeting from 7 PM - 9 PM.

Councilman Justin M. Wilson
703.746.4500
justin.wilson@alexandriava.gov
www.justin.net
Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

