

# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by:*

*Councilman Justin M. Wilson*

Alexandria, Virginia

February 1, 2015

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## Events/Updates

### Citizens Police Academy

It's time to start the next class of the Citizens Police Academy.

[This acclaimed program is one of the Police](#)

**If you're a snow lover, this is a great time of year.**

**If you're a parent of children that you're hoping will be in school each day, this can be a frustrating time of year.**

**Whatever your perspective, Winter is here.**

**The City's [snow plow map is available online](#) and I encourage you to submit [Snow Reports](#) if you have challenges with snow removal.**

**Some of our residents must rely on the help of others during snow events.**

**[Please sign up to be a Snow Buddy](#) with Volunteer Alexandria and help our community look after all of our neighbors.**

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

 Council Portrait

## Council Initiatives

### Every Child Ready to Learn

On the day after Labor Day a little over 1,400 children started Kindergarten in the Alexandria City Public Schools. [At least 20% of those children had no formal Pre-K experience.](#)

While every child is different, most of those children started out academically behind their peers. [That deficit can have long-lasting impacts on educational attainment.](#)

Even among the remaining children who did have some Pre-K education, the quality of those experiences can vary.

Early childhood education is provided by an array of private and public providers, as well as significant non-profit partnerships. The

[Department's key public outreach efforts.](#)

[The class meets for 10 weeks each Wednesday, starting in March.](#)

[Sign up today!](#)

The deadline is February 28th.

### **Polling Place Changes**

The Alexandria Electoral Board is considering changes to two polling place, and the addition of a new precinct to accommodate growth.

[The Hermitage](#) is being proposed as a new voting location for St. James Church which is being redeveloped.

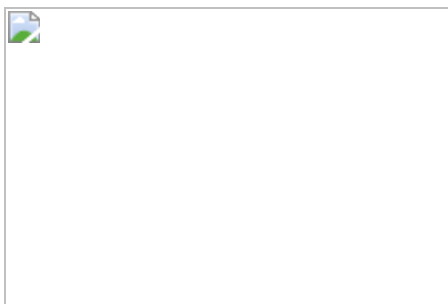
[Minnie Howard School](#) (or alternatively T. C. Williams High School) is being suggested as a replacement polling place for Chinquapin Recreation Center.

A new precinct has been proposed for the [Charles Houston Recreation Center](#). Some of the voters who currently vote at the [Fire Department Headquarters and the Durant Recreation Center would move to this new precinct](#).

The Electoral Board will be receiving comments on these proposals. The public hearing will be held on Wednesday February 4th at 7PM at their office at 132 N. Royal Street.

City invests more than \$14 million in educating our youngest children, with funds derived from federal, state and local sources.

However, there are an [array of programs that provide these services](#). Along with the Mayor, the School Board Chair and Vice Chair, I serve



on the City Council-School Board Subcommittee. In December, on the initiative of the Subcommittee, the City Council and School Board held a joint work session focused on the area of early childhood learning.

The meeting's focus for both the City Council and the School Board, was on the framework for advancing Kindergarten readiness proposed in the recently adopted [Youth Master Plan](#).

Without concrete actions, these types of joint meetings can be a waste. Fortunately on this issue, the Council and School Board left with a set of actions to make progress.

Of course, funding is always a challenge. The City, Alexandria City Public Schools and non-profits maintain waiting lists for many of the available early childhood services.

Yet even with new resources, we face the challenge of finding space to provide early childhood services. The two organizations will now integrate early childhood services into the [K-12 educational facilities planning work in the City](#).

We must ensure that we provide quality education from qualified educators. Our goal cannot simply be to provide ANY early childhood experience for our children. There are many ways to measure quality. As we identify resources our next steps include refining those measures and focusing our early childhood investment on quality programs that prepare our children for success.

The [Alexandria Community Trust, which has made Early Care and Education one of its core initiatives](#) will now be leading the Alexandria Early Care and Education Workgroup. This group will serve as the backbone for our framework implementation contained in the Youth Master Plan.

### **Potomac Yard Metro--A Model Project**

In 2008 then Councilman Rob Krupicka and I proposed a new start to efforts to bring Metro to Potomac Yard. We included [language in the City's Transportation Master Plan](#) explicitly calling for a new station at Potomac Yard. We also tied the construction and funding of Metro to the development occurring in the Yard.

The result is [a funding plan for Potomac Yard Metro](#) that not only leverages the development activity in Potomac Yard, but also does so without requiring the contributions of taxpayers elsewhere in the City.



The largest environmental, [economic development](#) and transportation initiative in our City's history is being accomplished using [one of the most innovative funding mechanisms used anywhere in the country](#).

This past month, the effort to bring Metro achieved another major milestone. The Governor announced the [Commonwealth](#)

## Windmill Hill Park Bulkhead Replacement

The first community meeting (rescheduled) for the long-awaited replacement of the [Windmill Hill Park Bulkhead](#) will be on Thursday, February 12th at 6:30 PM.

This meeting will be held in City Hall and will begin the process of shaping the goals, objectives and details of this important project.

## Help Grow Our Economy

The Alexandria Marketing Fund is a City fund to partner with companies and organizations doing the work to grow our City.

[Applications are now being accepted for the next set of grantees.](#)

Applications are due on Thursday and may be submitted online.

## More Cleaning Up On The River

On the site of the inactive NRG/GenOn/Mirant coal-fired power plant, two 25,000 gallon heating oil tanks were discovered to be leaking.

NRG [recently submitted a Corrective Action Plan](#) to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ).

[On Tuesday, February 3rd from 7 - 9 PM there will be a public meeting hosted by VDEQ to obtain public comments on this plan. The meeting will be held in City Hall in the Sister Cities Conference Room.](#)

## Four Mile Run

The City's [joint efforts to restore Four Mile Run continue with Arlington County, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission and our Federal partners.](#)

[Transportation Board's approval of a \\$50 million low cost loan to the City to assist in bringing this project to fruition.](#) This is a flexible funding source that will save the project significant dollars and reduce the reliance on City borrowing.

This loan came about through the hard work of our City Staff, the advocacy of our General Assembly delegation, and the leadership of my colleague Councilman Paul Smedberg.

[This project will leverage the creation of up to 26,000 new jobs, and bring up to \\$2 billion of new tax revenue to the City. It removes thousands of vehicles from one of the most crowded corridors in our City. It promotes the creation of the type of walkable community our City has long desired in Potomac Yard.](#)

This project is at a critical moment, and we still have more work to do. In the next few months, the City will be releasing the long awaited draft of the Environmental Impact Statement.

There will be a series of public meetings to collect feedback on the Statement. That effort will culminate in the Council's adoption of our preferred site.

Once the Environmental Impact Statement process concludes with a Record of Decision, the construction efforts can commence.

As the City focuses on efforts to erase the structural imbalance in our budget, the successful completion of this project is a key component in that effort.

## Less Redundancy, More Education Funding

The City Council-School Board Subcommittee is charged with the oversight of day to day policy interaction between City government and the Alexandria City Public Schools.

While two separate organizations, we share a commitment to the achievement of our kids. In a resource constrained environment, with rapidly increasing student enrollment, one method to redirect funds to our children's education is by reducing redundancy between the two organizations.

In 2007, the City and the Alexandria City Public Schools took a large step towards that goal. We [executed a Memorandum of Understanding so that the City's Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities would take on responsibility for outdoor maintenance of the grounds at school sites.](#) This change saved money and consolidated these functions in one area of City government.

Since that time, the two organizations have worked to achieve greater consolidation in a variety of other areas of the services we provide as well.

In 2005, the Council asked the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee (BFAAC) to recommend cost containment strategies for the City's health care benefits. I served on BFAAC at that time and one of our recommendations was to look at consolidation of City and Schools' health care plans.

The following year, BFAAC included language in its



The next update meeting will be held on Wednesday evening from 7:00 PM in Arlington at the Arlington County Parks Operations Building at 2700 S. Taylor Street.

### **Citizen Academy Returns**

The City's Citizen Academy is returning and now seeking applicants for its Spring session.

The nine week program runs from March 12th through May 7th, and includes orientation to many different City government functions.

[Apply online prior to Friday February 13th.](#)

[annual report to the Council](#) urging the full consolidation of the two healthcare plans.

It's taken almost decade, but the City and Schools, along with DASH Bus, are together requesting bids for a new healthcare plan. While it's too early to assess the savings, this provides great opportunity for savings in one of the most expensive and fast-growing areas of the City budget.

We have additional areas to explore. For instance, last year on my initiative, the [Virginia General Assembly adopted changes to the City Charter that allowed the City Attorney to additionally provide legal representation to the School Board](#). Many cities and counties in Virginia have this arrangement.

[While the School Board is still considering this option](#), I'm hopeful that we can move forward with this efficiency as well.

Following our budget process, the School Board and City Council will gather to discuss programming for after school and out-of-school time. This presents yet another area of greater cooperation between the two organizations.

### **An Alexandria For All**

As the real estate market made its ascent during the last decade, thousands of housing units that were affordable to residents under the area's median income became out of reach.

In Alexandria, that meant the loss of at least 10,000 units from rising prices. It made Alexandria out of reach for those modest income residents that have always had a place in our community.

To redress this, a little over a year ago, the City adopted its [Housing Master Plan](#). This document provided a toolbox of policy options to create new housing affordability in our community.

These tools are in full display in the City's recent partnership with [AHC, Inc](#). AHC is one of the nation's oldest and most respected non-profit affordable housing providers. They have developed 49 properties with over 6,500 units of affordable housing.

In January 2013, [the City Council approved Jackson Crossing on East Reed Avenue, AHC's first project in the City](#). When the building is completed at the end of this year, it will bring 78 units of housing affordable for those making 60% or less of the area median income.

Typical when providing affordable housing, [the financing of this project was very complex](#). In the case of Jackson Crossing, the City provided pre-development financing, a construction loan and the donation of a small parcel of land. The project also successfully competed for [Virginia Housing Development Authority \(VHDA\) Low Income Housing Tax Credits](#).

The approval of Jackson Crossing drew some controversy from policymakers due to AHC's plan to utilize a best practice: [unbundled parking](#). The plan to charge residents for any parking they might utilize was not only key to the financing of the project, but also provided an incentive to utilize planned and existing mass transit in the area.

This feature of the project [drew the opposition of two of my colleagues on the Council](#).

[Fast forward two years to last month. AHC was back again, with their second project in the City](#). This time, the deal was even more complex than their first.

[A church on Echols Avenue in the Alexandria's West End had agreed to sell their buildings to AHC for the construction of two new](#)

[buildings](#). The first building is to be a market-rate building of 132 units, with several amenities, including a private swimming pool for its residents. AHC has already negotiated with a separate private developer to build and sell the units in this building.

Profits from the sale of this market-rate building will be blended with a City loan, new VHDA tax credits, some additional City property, and



private financing to create a second building with 93 units of affordable housing. Half of the units will be affordable at 60% of area median income,

and the other half 50% of area median income.

Included in this affordable housing building is a new early childhood center through a partnership with the [Campagna Center](#). This new resource would be available to children from throughout the community regardless of income.

This project drew opposition from some members of the Council due to AHC's inability to commit to shared swimming pool access for residents of both buildings.

With the deadline for their tax credit application looming and uncertainty about how the financing of a community pool would affect financing of the market rate building they had agreed to sell, AHC was unable to make such a commitment at the City Council hearing.

Ultimately, the Council included language requesting that our Staff and the applicant work together to develop a shared access arrangement for the pool, and I'm hopeful that such an arrangement can be made.

With such a delicate balance of combined resources brought to bear, undermining any one could lead to collapse of the financing structure. These projects are never perfect, but frequently a series of compromises must be sought to maintain their viability and ensure affordability remains in our City.

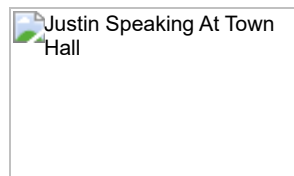
As a result of these two projects, 171 modest income families will make their homes in Alexandria.

### **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**

### **Reinventing a Region**

In a month our Acting City Manager will propose a budget to the City Council. As has unfortunately become the pattern in recent years,

that budget will contain a series of difficult reductions to City spending for community and the City Council consideration.

Inevitably, I will be asked to explain the necessity of these difficult choices given the seemingly ubiquitous new development occurring around the City.

In 2010, Federal spending in our region constituted 39.8% of our Gross Regional Product, including \$82.5 billion of procurement activities.

[In 2019, Federal spending in our region will constitute only 29.2% of our Gross Regional Production, including \\$68.6 billion of procurement.](#)

We have always been a "company town," and we have been fortunate to be dependent on a "company" that was largely immune to economic cycles.

Not only has that changed, but it has changed quickly. This change affects every aspect of Alexandria's economy, as it depresses real estate values, reduces retail sales, tourism revenues, etc.



[Average wages in the region have dropped for 3 straight years.](#)

[Job growth in the region has trailed nearly every other region in the nation.](#)

[Commercial vacancy rates in the region are at the highest point they have been in 25 years.](#)

The challenge for a community such as ours is that this is not a "cycle" that we just need to weather. It is clear that this is the new status quo for Federal spending. Alexandria must adjust.

We will spend the next few months in our annual exercise attempting to balance this year's budget. In the past that has usually resulted in a mix of revenue increases and expenditure reductions. Neither is a sustainable solution in the long-term.

Only by "peering around the corner," and building an economy based on new engines of growth will the City and our region continue to thrive as it has in the past.

I look forward to hearing your ideas for remaking Alexandria's economy.

### **Planning Ahead**

Last year I wrote about my desire for our City to move to multi-year operating budgets to better capture and account for the impacts of budgetary changes. In response, our budget staff proposed a new five year financial plan to accomplish the same result.

In December, the City released its first [Five Year Financial Plan](#).

Integral in this new plan is the long-term revenue and expenditure picture. This provides the City with a preview of the city spending and tax revenue, while enabling Council and Staff to account for the for the impact of proposed changes.

The good news is that we have a new tool with which to project the City's future financial picture.

The bad news is that we have a structural imbalance that is not going away anytime soon.

The plan shows a \$16.1 million shortfall for the upcoming FY 2016 budget. This shortfall is largely due to planned increases in City spending and continued stagnation of City revenues. Unfortunately, since the preparation of this plan, the picture has gotten worse.

While these numbers may again be revised prior to next month's budget presentation, our current projections are that revenue will grow by little more than a half of a percent next year.

Said another way, the City expects to have about \$4 million of new revenue in next year's budget. As a frame of reference, the following new spending initiatives will be competing for that \$4 million, and more:

The Alexandria City Public School Board has yet to adopt their budget, but [the Superintendent has proposed a budget](#) that requests an additional \$9.2 million from the City. Student enrollment is projected to grow 3.7% next year, and this request would constitute a 4.8% increase from the City.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA/Metro) [has tentatively requested an additional \\$4 million from the City.](#)

There [has been advocacy on behalf of resolving long-standing pay inequities within our Police Department.](#) "Fixes" for those issues vary, but will certainly be expensive.

There remain millions of dollars of unmet infrastructure needs within our capital budget.

Even without new initiatives or further shocks, we are facing one of the most challenging revenue environments since the depths of the Great Recession that occurred seven years ago.

The City continues to reach out for input in this upcoming process. [There will be two more public meetings to provide your feedback and ideas.](#) I hope to see you there.

Councilman Justin M. Wilson  
703.746.4500  
[justin.wilson@alexandriava.gov](mailto:justin.wilson@alexandriava.gov)  
[www.justin.net](http://www.justin.net)  
Alexandria City Hall  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314