



Mayor's State of the City 2012

Acknowledging the Past, Celebrating the Present, Preparing for the Future

Hello. I'm Bill Euille.

It's time to discuss the State of the City of Alexandria again: Time to acknowledge the past, celebrate the present, and prepare for the future.

Our City, 262 years strong, is poised to enter a great future.

A future built, as always, on the dedicated efforts of all of us working together as one Alexandria for a common goal--making our city a great place to live, work, and visit.

Together, we've laid the groundwork. In 2010, City Council presented the City's Strategic Plan, developed in collaboration with you, our community. The Strategic Plan serves as a guide to prepare for the future we envision for Alexandria. Now, through several new initiatives and activities, we continue to move forward to achieve the goals of that Plan.

The City recently welcomed new leadership when City Council appointed Rashad Young as City Manager. Rashad is an energetic consensus-builder who has dedicated his entire career to local government, and brings a fresh outlook, insight and ideas to the City. He's hit the ground running and has already implemented meaningful change in his first months here.

I'd also like to thank Bruce Johnson, who was Acting City Manager during our search for the new City Manager, and who continues to serve the city in his new role as Chief of Staff.

Alexandria is an extraordinary City. We are blessed with passionate, caring residents and a hardworking business community. We have an active, involved City Council; a financially strong government; and a dedicated, professional and hardworking City employee workforce.

Together, we've met several challenges in the last year and in recent months.

Many cities have suffered in the wake of the economic struggles our country has faced as federal, local and state budgets have shrunk. Alexandria has been fortunate; since Fiscal Year 2009, we've been able to address revenue shortfalls by making necessary cuts while maintaining essential core services.

The City's strong history of economic sustainability, backed by our longtime AAA bond ratings, will help see us through this uncertain period. Despite the slow economic recovery, I am confident we have the leadership and expertise, to continue guiding Alexandria through this economic challenge and into the future.

Guiding the Future

Standing here at the George Washington Masonic Memorial gives you a panoramic view of the city. This spectacular sight reminds me how we as City leaders look at the “big picture” in making decisions that affect Alexandria’s future.

As part of that “big picture,” the City Manager has adopted other changes to streamline city government. He has changed reporting and liaison relationships among the departments and City Manager’s staff to increase accountability and performance.

In February, the City Manager proposed a \$585.6 million General Fund Operating Budget for fiscal year 2013, that focuses on guidance set by the Strategic Plan, and the specific budget guidance provided by City Council last November. This budget maintains education, public safety, transportation, and public infrastructure without making major reductions in other services. The City Manager’s proposed budget closes a \$22.2 million funding gap, by cutting \$6.8 million from the budget, and leveraging a \$7.5 million revenue surplus from fiscal year 2012.

The Manager’s budget also underscores the City’s commitment to improved management through the creation of a new office that will focus on implementation of major development projects, such as the Waterfront, Potomac Yard, and Landmark. This new office will provide better departmental coordination, and will promote and manage the community engagement process.

The scope of the Internal Audit Office will also be expanded to assess management performance, examine issues affecting delivery of services and to focus on efficient and effective measures to improve departmental service delivery.

Through work sessions, public hearings, and countless discussions, City Council, the City Manager, and City Staff are working with the community to produce a budget that focuses on our strategic goals and core service needs, while continuing the City’s legacy of strong economic sustainability. City Council is scheduled to adopt the budget on May 7.

Planning the Future

Let's talk about economic development, planning, and growth--topics that stir passionate debates about our history and our future.

One of the challenges in moving forward as a city is planning for change that accommodates economic sustainability and growth, while maintaining the character and affordability of our community. It's a delicate balance.

Sometimes we don't agree. Sometimes there needs to be compromise. That was evident with the long debate that raged over the Waterfront Small Area Plan. But the one thing I think all Alexandrians can agree on is that such change is necessary to:

- Sustain the City's strong economic footing;
- maintain our competitiveness within the region;
- support a thriving business community;
- preserve present and future affordable housing;
- achieve environmental sustainability;
- increase jobs; and
- enhance the quality of life in Alexandria.

Take Landmark Mall.

Although the mall has recently seen some tough times, Landmark's main owner has advised the City they are ready to begin the planning and approval process for redevelopment of this site. The City's Landmark/Van Dorn plan envisions the redevelopment of Landmark Mall and the major parcels to the south as a lively, mixed-use town center for Alexandria's West End, incorporating retail, residential, office and hotel development and a number of urban parks and plazas. Something to revitalize our City's western gateway.

Over at Potomac Yard, the City's largest redevelopment project is taking shape. A new community is rising as construction is underway on townhomes, parks, and fields. It's exciting to see this new community, years in the making, rising from what was once a railroad yard.

And there are more exciting things to come. The new Potomac Yard Metro Station project is now undergoing the environmental review process, with three potential locations for the station under consideration.

Our small area plans for Eisenhower East, Arlandria, and Beauregard echo the same strategy used to bring about the Potomac Yard development. Working collaboratively with residents, developers, and with our partners, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, and the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, to increase economic development opportunities, manage development and growth, and ensure community needs are met.

Speaking of community needs, one of the questions I hear from residents most is, “What is Alexandria’s most important issue?”

I think it’s the lack of affordable housing options. Since 2000, we’ve been facing multiple challenges to housing:

- Dwindling resources at federal, state and local levels;
- declines in market affordable rentals and affordable homeownership opportunities; and
- turmoil in the housing finance markets.

In response, the City initiated the Housing Master Plan process in 2010 to establish a citywide vision to guide future development with the goals of preserving and enhancing Alexandria’s affordable housing opportunities, community diversity, and economic sustainability. The process, which has involved residents, community stakeholders and the City, is continuing, and we expect the Plan to be released in the near future for community consideration.

In addition, the proposed Beauregard Small Area Plan will use the City’s rezoning powers to include dedicated affordable and workforce housing units in future development.

Protecting Our Future

Mother Nature provided several challenges in 2011. Who'd have imagined Alexandria would be involved in three natural disasters within weeks of one another? First, a 5.8 earthquake struck in August, causing damage to some of our homes and historic structures--including City Hall and Gadsby's Tavern. Days later, Hurricane Irene hit Virginia, damaging trees, and causing power outages. While we were recovering from Irene, rain from Tropical Storm Lee came with flash flooding that required swift water rescues of several people by the Alexandria Fire Department. Hundreds of vehicles and businesses were damaged, but no one was hurt, thanks to our emergency preparations and our first responders. And thanks to all of you, who heeded warnings, prepared for these disasters, and helped others in need.

And most recently, we came together to honor Paramedic Joshua Weissman, who died on February 9 from injuries sustained while trying to rescue motorists from a car fire on I-395. Josh's funeral was not just a local event-it was a regional one. Alexandrians opened their hearts to his family, the Alexandria Fire Department, and the many firefighter and EMS units that visited our city to see a fallen brother laid to rest.

Our future investments in public safety include a new Fire Station, which will be located on Eisenhower Avenue and will provide enhanced response time in the City's West End, close proximity to the Norfolk Southern ethanol transloading facility--an area of much concern to residents in the community, and additional Fire Department classroom and training facilities.

The Fire Station is part of the City's Capital Improvement Program and funding for the new station is provided to complete the station in about 20 months.

I'm here with K-9 Officer Wuckovich and his partner Rocco. We're getting a little exercise in front of the new Police Headquarters on Wheeler Avenue. This new facility is part of our commitment to provide first responders with the tools and resources they need to keep the City safe.

It's also the home of the new Department of Emergency Communications and a state-of-the-art combined police/fire emergency communications center with a new 9-1-1 emergency system.

The dedication of our public safety workforce is reflected in their outstanding achievements and their commitment to serve and protect:

Last year, Alexandria experienced its lowest level of violent crime since 1966. Incidents of violent crime decreased by 1.6% or 58 offences and there was only one homicide. A major part of our success in reducing crime and improving the quality of life in neighborhoods lies in the excellent work of our Police Department, and strong partnerships with the community, Commonwealth's Attorney Office, and other City agencies.

Our Fire Department recruited 12 new firefighters, who have been assigned as the fourth person on four of the City's eight engine companies. This will allow the Fire Department to deploy more personnel and equipment to an incident faster than a three-person unit.

And the Sheriff's Office, in addition to operating the Adult Detention Center and providing court-related services and security, continues its proud tradition of administering programs for Alexandria's children, youth, families and seniors, and educational and rehabilitative programs for inmates.

On behalf of the City Council and our residents, many thanks to the men and women of our public safety departments, who help make Alexandria a stellar—and safe--place to live.

Moving into the Future

Transportation plays an important part in moving into the future.

Planning economically sustainable communities isn't complete without upgrading transit options to connect them, to ease traffic, and to preserve the environment.

The City's 2.2 cent real estate tax increase, adopted in 2011, is one step toward that goal, establishing financial support for projects addressing the City's increasing transportation needs.

This funding, combined with federal grants, has allowed the City to begin implementing a multi-faceted transit program that includes:

- The expansion of our free Trolley program, featuring five new hybrid trollies like this one, and 10 new hybrid buses for our regular DASH service fleet;
- grant-funded participation in the regional Capital Bikeshare network, which takes cars off roads, improves the environment, and provides a fun, healthful transit alternative for residents beginning this summer;
- traffic enhancements in the BRAC-133 area, combined with special Metro and DASH bus routes, transit incentives and police enforcement that have avoided predicted traffic congestion near the Mark Center facility; and
- connecting communities and easing traffic through planned future high-capacity transit corridors on Route 1, in the Beauregard Corridor, and in the Landmark/Van Dorn area.

Nurturing the Future

In Alexandria, we firmly believe supporting the development and education of our young people is a sound investment in the future. As proof of that commitment, in 2011 the City was named one of the Nation's 25 Best Communities for Young People by America's Promise--for the fourth time.

Alexandria was chosen for its array of programs and services in early childhood education, childhood obesity prevention, teen pregnancy and juvenile delinquency prevention, mentoring, youth development, and more.

The City's longtime support for young people entered a new phase this year, with the debut of the new Children, Youth & Family Collaborative Commission. The commission will advocate for Alexandria's children and youth and their families by promoting better services and best practices, and advising City Council, the School Board and City staff on policies affecting children, youth and families.

The City's financial support of the Alexandria City Public Schools is another investment. The City Manager's proposed budget allocates an additional \$5.8 million for our public schools. That's an increase of 3.3% from last year's approved budget. The School Board's request matches this amount.

Investing in our schools--and in our future leaders, workers and entrepreneurs--is critical to the economic development and security of our city.

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The Torpedo Factory is a testament to change. This building, once used to manufacture the weaponry that helped us win World War II, has been preserved for all to enjoy the work of local artists. It's a modern symbol of Alexandria's enduring distinction as a nationwide arts destination. It's part of the enduring legacy of this City, and part of our history.

Alexandria is blessed with a rich past. I often wonder what George Washington, who became an Alexandria town trustee in 1766, would think of our city today. I think he'd be pleased with the innovations, growth, and historic preservation of our City and the proud people who inhabit it.

But we must also look forward. Alexandria's history doesn't end with the Colonial era or the Civil War. We are living history and making history by working together to build a great city for generations to come. A great city with:

- Diverse communities and housing choices for people in all walks of life;
- a pedestrian- and bike-friendly community that offers parks, trails, and other diverse options for recreation;
- an Eco-City that treasures its natural resources and strives to protect them in all we do; and
- a caring community that strives to protect and advocate for the health and well-being of all.

Many thanks to my colleagues on City Council: Vice Mayor Kerry Donley, and Council members Frank Fannon, Alicia Hughes, Rob Krupicka, Del Pepper, and Paul Smedberg for their dedication and teamwork in guiding Alexandria into the future.

I'd like to thank our City employees for their hard work, professionalism and commitment, which has brought us through many challenging times.

And I'd like to thank you, our community, for your caring and involvement.

As we move forward, let us acknowledge our past, celebrate our present, and welcome the opportunities and challenges of the future.

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