

THE STATE OF THE CITY – 2010
MAYOR WILLIAM D. EUILLE
MARCH 20, 2010

I. Introduction

Welcome

Good morning, and welcome to members of City Council, residents, honored guests, and friends. Thank you for joining me here at this beautiful new facility, The Station at Potomac Yard, and allowing me the great privilege of reporting to you on the State of our City. I want to thank the Alexandria Fire Department for hosting this annual address here, in Fire Station 209, the first new fire station built in 30 years.

Now, I would like my colleagues on City Council to stand and be recognized for all of their outstanding work this year: Vice Mayor Kerry Donley; Council members Frank Fannon, Alicia Hughes, Rob Krupicka, Del Pepper, and Paul Smedberg; I also would like to recognize City Manager James Hartmann. Thank you all for your dedication and commitment to Alexandria and for your hard work to ensure that this city continues to move forward during these hard times.

Look around you. This new facility, which had its grand opening in November, is the first of its kind in the nation, combining a fire station, affordable and workforce housing, and retail in a single, mixed-use building. This state-of-the art, award-winning development, the result of a public-private partnership and community input, shows what can happen when the City, residents, and business work together. This building is also the forerunner of the future development that will take this area from its beginnings as a railroad yard to a thriving, vibrant community, a new place in our City, and I wanted you to experience it.

The past has a lot to teach us. I am reminded of a famous quote from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "What is past is prologue." That phrase, inscribed on the wall of the National Archives, is a reminder that history continually provides us with the lessons we need to move forward.

Behind Alexandria's historic past lie the actions of men, women, young people, government and businesses who, despite obstacles, worked together to make a difference.

Why? Because we are, indeed, a caring community.

That same great teamwork was evident in the response from our entire community to the record-breaking snowstorms of last month. The type of snow we experienced—nearly 40 inches from two storms--made this the snowiest winter in the region's history and echoed past weather events in Alexandria like the Knickerbocker Storm of 1922 and the Great Blizzard of 1899, which generated subzero temperatures and snowdrifts as high as 15 feet. In that storm, fire consumed two houses because firefighters were unable to immediately access a water supply.

During the "Snowpocalypse of 2010," Alexandrians pulled together to clear their own sidewalks, help their fellow neighbors, join businesses and communities in organized efforts to clear pathways around schools as City employees worked around the clock clearing snow from streets, and ensuring emergency vehicle access and pedestrian mobility. Residents served as our eyes and ears on the ground, letting the City know, through e-mail, telephone and social media, about our progress. Two homes that caught fire during the storm were saved—and many others were assured of safety—because our City crews, aided by residents, located and dug out fire hydrants.

If there was anything this wild winter taught us, it was that I need you, you need me--and that we need one another.

And at this time, I want, on behalf of myself and City Council, to thank all of you—City employees, residents, volunteers and businesses—for your amazing work during these historic storms. And I wish to especially thank certain members of our City crews who worked “in the trenches,” beyond the call. They are noteworthy for their individual efforts, but their actions are representative of the efforts of many others during the snow emergency. I’d like to ask them each to stand as I call their names and share their stories.

From the Department of General Services:

- Pelham Park, who worked 12-hour shifts for 14 days between the two storms. He performed various duties that included leading a team of contractors to shovel snow so that fire hydrants could be located by first responders and clearing the City’s 24-hour facilities so they could remain open and ultimately clearing the rest of the City buildings to get them reopened. These efforts allowed the Alexandria Fire Department to access to water to fight fires, and helped the City to restore operations.

From the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities:

- Walter Powell, Park Manager, who has been with the department about two and one-half years after working 20 years with the Police Department. During the snow event, Walter was responsible for coordinating the efforts to clear snow from more than 2,800 fire hydrants throughout the City. In total, Walter worked 12-hour shifts for 11 straight days.

And from the Department of Transportation and Environmental services, two employees who worked the 12-hour day shift for 14 days to clear the City's streets.

- Joseph Anthony, from the Maintenance Division and a 13-year veteran of the City, plowed snow from the hilly terrain on Quaker Lane, King Street, and streets near Janneys Lane. He assisted Code Inspectors who were stuck in the snow and plowed snow from icy streets around the Masonic Temple, being mindful of children and families who were out enjoying the snow.
- Keith Kehler, of the Maintenance Division, has been with the City 6 months. Keith plowed in the Orchard Park Terrace area, a hilly area filled with cul-de-sacs. One woman actually jumped up and down with excitement at his arrival; other residents were so happy that they offered him money, which he refused of course, saying, "I'm only doing my job." It's not surprising that Keith originally hails from Minnesota.

Let's give them and all of our City employees, a round of applause—thank you for your outstanding work!

II. The State of the City

Each year, when I report to you on the state of our City, we look back at the accomplishments that have brought us to this day and we look forward to what's on the horizon. This morning, I'd like to take us back, through images and stories from our past, to talk about the state of our City and the work we must all do to overcome some of the challenges that we face.

Budget/Economic Sustainability

The worst of the recession is over; however, for most of us, the pain of the economic downturn continues and the City is no exception. Largely because of falling real estate assessments and state aid cuts, Alexandria is currently in its most serious budget crisis in recent memory. However, our City has experienced economic turbulence throughout its history—and has recovered.

- There was the economic panic of 1819, which forced numbers of residents to mortgage their homes and businesses, and bankruptcies were rampant. However, by the mid-1820s, Alexandria came back, thanks to exporting and improved steam engine technology.
- In 1836, international tightening of credit caused a six-year depression as the land market collapsed. But Alexandria came back from that crisis, organizing The Orange and Alexandria Railroad in 1848, which helped transform the City into a major railroad hub.
- There were the 1860s, which began with prosperity and a robust business climate that turned to devastation in the aftermath of the Civil War. The City was left in a state of physical and economic chaos. Recovery was slow. But--Alexandria came back. From 1899 to 1915, the City grew as a manufacturing center, leading nearly every city in Virginia in increased production of goods. With the First World War, the U.S. Naval Torpedo Factory and Virginia Shipbuilding opened on our waterfront.

Time and time again, Alexandria came back. Today, we face many challenges—economic difficulties, a State budget shortfall, an education crisis, increased human services, health, and transportation issues, but we must follow the strength and courage of our forebears and work to overcome these difficulties, always moving forward.

Last year, I asked Alexandrians to view this economic climate as an opportunity to share and care for one another, to lift each other up to succeed. This year, I am asking you to continue reaching out to one another, because, our budget troubles will continue in FY 2011, and for some time after that. We are our brother's keeper.

On February 16, City Manager James Hartmann submitted his proposed Fiscal Year 2011 Budget to the City Council. The proposed budget includes a 3.5% spending decrease from what it would cost to maintain current City services and contains other reductions necessary to help close a \$44 million spending gap. This means services reduced last fiscal year will be reduced even further, or in some cases, eliminated. This proposed budget calls for the elimination of 67 funded employee positions. This is in addition to the 119 funded full and part-time positions eliminated in Fiscal Year 2010. These reductions would result in reduced service hours at some City facilities, and cuts to programs and services. Under this budget, City employees would have to bear a larger portion of their health care premiums, and there would be no cost of living increases.

In reviewing the proposed budget, City Council is considering raising the real estate tax up to 9 cents; however, in keeping with City Council's budget guidelines, this rate takes into account the estimated 5.5% decline in residential assessments during the past year. Additionally, the proposed budget presents several options for increased services, such as Citywide transportation improvements, infrastructure improvements addressing flooding and storm water pollution, and sanitary sewer capacity improvements, which would be funded by dedicated tax and fee increases, if it is adopted by Council on Tuesday, May 3.

No one wants higher taxes, particularly during a recession; however, it will likely be one of the means needed to help close this gap. Rest assured, we will make every effort to provide essential services; protect the public safety; protect the health and welfare of our

most vulnerable residents; and preserve our AAA bond ratings. We will also make every effort to deliver services efficiently and at the least possible cost to our taxpayers.

You can help us through your input and participation at our next public hearing on the tax rate on April 17; you can also provide us with your input online at [Alexandriava dot gov slash budget](http://Alexandriava.gov/slash/budget) and by email.

Since the beginning of the economic downturn, the City has been working to find ways to maintain and improve services to residents. City employees have worked harder, and smarter—with less resources—and have helped us develop innovative ways to improve services while saving money. And many changes have been made or are planned to improve efficiency and effectiveness in our government since the last time I spoke with you. Examples include

- The Multi-Agency Permit Center, which has improved customer service to residents and business by offering “one stop shopping” for same-day processing, plan review, and issuance of required City permits and licenses. The Center is a collaborative effort between the Fire Department’s Building and Fire Code Administration, Planning and Zoning, Transportation and Environmental Services, and Finance;
- The proposed consolidation of the Department of Human Services; Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse; and the Office on Women to better serve our most vulnerable residents, enhancing the client experience, removing inefficiencies and improving client outcomes; and

The implementation of an integrated system that will manage most business taxes assessed by the City in one system rather than the multiple, non-integrated systems used

previously. The system has been implemented for business license and business personal property taxes; other types of business taxes will be implemented later this year. As a result, business owners will be able to manage most of their taxes in one place.

The City is now working with new technologies, and has expanded its Web site and other online services to provide timely, cost-efficient ways to give residents the information they want, enhance customer service, and ensure governmental transparency:

- Connecting with residents and business through social media, providing interactive updates and messaging on Facebook and Twitter—a means of communication that proved, in conjunction with our Alexandria eNews service, extremely helpful in delivering emergency messages during our snowstorms;
- Providing in-depth coverage of special topics, like the City’s Waterfront planning process, Recovery Act grants, and City Council’s Strategic Planning process, on our Web site, Alexandria va dot gov. Some of these “special features” include interactive message boards, where the public may leave comments; and
- Giving residents a view of City financial activities through the Monthly Financial Report, also on our Web site. The Report provides a detailed view of the City's General Fund revenues and expenditures, compares revenues and expenditures to the same period in the previous fiscal year, and provides an assessment of the current economy.

And next month, the City will begin implementing a new system that will help streamline customer service requests across City government, whether they're received in person, over the phone, by mail, through the City's Web site, or with our new app for iPhones, BlackBerries, and other mobile devices.

I encourage you to visit Alexandria va dot gov, and learn how you can use these tools to stay informed.

The City continues to assist the business community, legislatively through the Small Business Zoning Program and by extending the validity period for administrative special use permits, and programmatically through efforts such as the Alexandria Marketing Fund and the portable sign program, assisting businesses located on streets adjacent to main retail streets. Information on these projects is available on the City's Web site. The City's Planning and Zoning Department is working with the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and the Alexandria Small Business Development Center to help the City's businesses gain access to the tools and resources they need for success. And together, we encourage visitors and residents to support local businesses through the Buy Alexandria campaign.

And of course, the City continues to apply for formula and competitive grants provided by federal stimulus funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. To date, the City has been awarded \$15.7 million in funding for Fiscal Years 2010-2011 for projects that provide job training to our residents, support our social safety net programs, invest in high capacity transit, and help make Alexandria more energy efficient, among other things. The City also was the first government in Virginia to take advantage of a 35% interest rate subsidy from the federal government through the Build America Bond provision of the legislation that will allow Alexandria to save \$13.2 million over the next 20 years on bonds sold last year. Finally, let me stress that the City has only applied for federal grants for things we need, and we have not made ongoing financial commitments we will have to pay for once federal stimulus funds are expended.

Then there's the backbone of economic sustainability—JOBS. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Alexandria has a low unemployment rate of less than 5%. However comforting that may be, behind that low rate are people who cannot make ends meet. People may not be able to feed their families. People who need to find work. If you are seeking employment, I encourage you to visit JobLink, the City's resource for job education, counseling and training for dislocated workers, recipients of public assistance, people with disabilities, and other special populations. JobLink also sponsors TeensWork! the Alexandria Youth Empowerment program, which provides job readiness training, and summer and year-round jobs for youth ages 14-21.

And there may be new jobs on the horizon, thanks to our nation's initiative to "go green" and our Eco-City Alexandria initiative. Last summer, I testified before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Clean Energy Jobs, Climate-Related Policies and Economic Growth on Alexandria's Eco-City initiative. Alexandria's economic growth is tied to our ability to effectively use green technologies to save money, reduce pollutants, and forestall climate change. And the City is working to create a green jobs training program to train residents to perform energy audits; weatherize homes and other buildings; and install solar, wind, geothermal and other clean renewable energy devices. Through the years, Alexandria adapted to meet economic challenges and technological changes. Our City's "industry" has changed through history: from seaport, top exporter of goods and industrial manufacturing center to a Mecca for research and development, technology, and professional service organizations and government agencies. And let's not forget our City's reputation as an internationally recognized business and travel destination. To maintain our economic strength and vitality, we must be flexible and respond proactively to changing technologies, economic realities, and future directions.

Over the last two years, we have implemented the recommendations in our Economic Sustainability Report, and we need to continue to do so in the future. This has meant that over the last few years, with new leadership, the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association has been reinvigorated, and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership is now reinventing itself to become a more effective economic advocate for the community.

Infrastructure, Community Development, and Housing

In the mid-20th century, heavy rains and severe storms caused Four Mile Run to over run its banks and flood Arlandria and Del Ray so often that the police department trained officers to operate a rescue boat. Flooding devastated the communities for several years, reaching their peak when flooding from Hurricane Eloise forced the closure of Cora Kelly School for several months in 1975. In the mid to late 1970s, the Army Corps of Engineers, with the support of Alexandria and other locations, executed a \$58 million flood control project at Four Mile Run that ended local flooding in Arlandria and Del Ray.

Reducing stormwater inflow and preventing sewer backups is still a concern to this day in parts of the city. A sanitary sewer master plan is currently under development to identify future infrastructure improvements to mitigate existing wet weather flows, accommodate future redevelopment and meet more stringent environmental requirements, with a first draft expected to come to City Council this spring.

Alexandria's population swelled from 33,500 in 1940 to more than 61,000 ten years later. Due to limited construction of new homes during the Depression, the need for housing for defense workers in wartime, and the increase in veterans and their young families

seeking homes after World War II, housing in the 1940s was in great demand. During that time, hundreds of new homes were built in developments that grew into vibrant communities: Yates Gardens, Lynhaven, Beverley Hills, and Parkfairfax; and homes built for defense workers, like Cameron Valley and Chinquapin Village, which after the war, served as public housing under the City's authority until they were demolished.

Today, the need for housing continues, and the City is responding, working with federal, state, and private sector organizations to place affordable home ownership within reach. A shining example is right here. Construction of The Station at Potomac Yard was completed last September, with 44 affordable and 20 workforce rental units. All of the affordable units have been rented, but there are workforce units still available, and I urge you to take a tour following my talk today.

The project would not have been possible without the support of Potomac Yard Development LLC, the partnership created by Centex and Pulte, who have now merged. In addition to donating 1.1 acres of land, Potomac Yard Development provided \$6.6 million for the construction of the fire station and \$7.5 million for the affordable and workforce housing. Potomac Yard Development also provided key support during the development approval phase of the project. The Virginia Housing Development Authority provided lending support and the project was awarded federal tax credit financing. The Alexandria Housing Development Corporation, a non-profit entity, was designated by the City to develop, finance, and operate the residential and retail portions of this project.

And there are other things the City is doing to address the challenge of providing affordable and workforce housing.

The City, along with the Alexandria Housing Development Corporation and Rebuilding Together Alexandria, leveraged nearly \$1 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program grant funds. These funds will be used to acquire, rehabilitate and sell foreclosed homes to qualified income-eligible first-time homebuyers. The first home completed under this program was sold in December 2009.

Our Office of Housing continues to work closely with the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority, or ARHA. Our Housing staff is supporting ARHA's 2010 Strategic Planning process and continues its efforts to identify and secure 16 replacement public housing units.

This year, construction is about to commence on Old Town Commons, a new development in the Parker-Gray Historic District that uses the award-winning Chatham Square model, mixing market rate, affordable, and public housing. Old Town Commons will feature 55 units of new housing in its first phase, with 379 units total for the entire development, which will eventually replace, in phases, the James Bland housing development.

The City's Affordable Housing Initiatives Work Group has completed its two-year study of City housing policies and programs and submitted its final recommendations to City Council. City Housing and Planning staff will soon begin a citywide Housing Master Plan process to maximize the production and preservation of public, affordable, and workforce housing. The first Housing Master Plan public meeting is on Thursday, April 1, at 7 p.m. at the Charles Houston Recreation Center. We hope you can join us.

Redevelopment, such as the urban renewal that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, helped Alexandria adapt to modern innovations, growth, and other changes. Today, new

developments in our City include completion of a new building at 1701 Duke Street, with 100,000 square feet of office and 15,000 square feet of retail in a key location near the King Street Metro Station; and the construction of the Washington Headquarters Service building, enabling WHS and a number of Department of Defense agencies to come to Mark Center. The new development, dubbed Base Realignment and Closure Project 133, will bring 6,400 new jobs to Alexandria when completed in 2011. As you know, we are very concerned about the development's potential effects on transportation in the Seminary Road/Beauregard community, and on the Winkler Botanical Preserve. The City Council is unanimous in its support for protecting the Preserve. City leaders, staff, and the BRAC-133 Advisory Group are committed to working with state and federal partners and the community on finding and implementing solutions to these transportation and environmental issues.

Transportation and Environment

Last year was a period of environmental breakthroughs for the City. City Council adopted Environmental Action Plan 2030, a road map toward environmental sustainability, with more than 350 recommendations spanning the next 20 years and beyond. The Plan is one of the first of its kind in our region. As a result of the Eco-City Alexandria initiative, the City received the highest certification for Virginia Municipal League's Go Green Government Challenge, and won the Virginia Sustainable Building Network Green Innovation Award for Most Sustainable Community Project.

Our beginning efforts toward fulfilling Environmental Action Plan 2030 include the purchase of seven hybrid buses for DASH (courtesy of a grant from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Air Management Association). We are using funding from a \$1.3 million Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant for developing conservation and

renewable energy projects, energy audits of City buildings, and LED traffic lights and streetlights. And the City has obtained funding for less polluting hybrid trolleys through Recovery Act funding administered by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The City also adopted a Green Building policy for multifamily and commercial buildings, and is moving toward building or retrofitting City buildings to green standards, too. The Charles Houston Recreation Center, T.C. Williams High School, the new DASH maintenance facility, and this very fire station were designed to meet LEED standards. And most recently, our Human Services building at 2525 Mt. Vernon Avenue achieved the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Silver certification under its Existing Buildings Rating System, through a public/private partnership between the City and Mt. Vernon Avenue LLC, who owns and manages the building.

Closely tied with the environment is transportation—always a heated subject in our community and our region. When the city realized that its reputation as a seaport was waning, industry turned from the sea to the rails, and Potomac Yard became a hub of great activity, but less so with the advent of the automobile and changing times.

Ironically, history is repeating itself: the future of this community may again be tied to the rails, this time, through the possible construction of a new Metrorail station serving Potomac Yard. The City is now working with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority; with stakeholder federal agencies, including the National Park Service and the Army Corps of Engineers; and with landowners on feasibility, design, environmental impact, financing, and related issues.

The City was awarded nearly \$9 million in grants from the U.S. Department of Transportation, one of which will support construction of an exclusive transitway in the median of Route 1 between Monroe Avenue and East Glebe Road. The grants are part of the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Program, established

through the Recovery Act. It's exciting to think that the area where we gather today, once a railroad yard will, in time, be transformed into the center of a new transit-oriented community.

Public Safety

Throughout our history, Alexandria has entrusted its safety to everyday heroes, who work to keep our City safe: our public safety officers. During the snowstorms in December and February, their presence on the street, behind the plows, at City facilities, and in the City's Emergency Operations Center ensured that emergency calls were answered, meals were delivered to shut-ins, that children were walked safely to school, and that we were all safe. It is yet another example of the skill and dedication they bring to their work every day.

Our public safety departments are history makers, too. Our public safety departments are history makers, too. Our Police Department made history last year with the promotion of the City's first African American police chief, Earl Cook. The City's crime rate is at a 46-year low, thanks to innovative, community-oriented programs that the Police Department has implemented. There's the Strategic Response System, or SRS, which uses strategic crime analysis to detect and respond to crime trends. SRS places officers on permanent beats where they get to know community members, and work together with them to find solutions to their concerns; and the Coffee with Cops program, where an officer visits different City neighborhoods, giving presentations on crime statistics and information on how to keep their homes and communities safe. And the Police Department is collaborating with our Mental Health Department to develop a Crisis Intervention Team program, designed to educate and prepare police officers who come into contact with people with mental illness.

The Sheriff's Office, in addition to its community service projects and the opening of a youth academy, continues to save the City money through its inmate work detail program, which saved the City \$205,000 in 2009, and is projected to save \$255,000 this year. The Sheriff Office's federal prisoner per-diem reimbursement contract, which calls for reimbursement of more than \$6 million annually, is on track to bring in an additional \$870,000 in reimbursement this year.

Our Fire Department received the Outstanding EMS Agency Award from the Northern Virginia EMS Council and the Bronze Award from *Fire Chief Magazine* for this beautiful facility. In addition to this new station, the City has included new and upgraded facilities in its proposed Capital Improvement Program. In FY 2011, the City will begin the design phase for a new fire station in the Eisenhower Valley. The new Fire Station 210 will include critically needed training facilities, and would allow for faster emergency response times in the Eisenhower Valley and surrounding communities.

Also up for renovation or replacement over the next decade is Fire Station 207 on Duke Street and Fire Station 203 on Seminary Road; expansion of Station 205 on Cameron Mills Road to include an added emergency medical unit, and continued updating and maintenance repairs to the City's existing fire stations.

Our public safety officers are also working proactively to ensure that services are delivered seamlessly during this time of financial uncertainty. At the request of the City Manager, leaders in our public safety departments began working together to restructure and consolidate the City's emergency communications operations into a new single department. Emergency communications employees, including both police and fire communications staff, will be consolidated into a joint communications center in the future.

Health/Human Services

The world's health was rocked by the emergence of the H1N1 flu—a pandemic that had the possibility of echoing the horrors of the worldwide influenza pandemic of 1918. The outbreak of that time killed more than 15,000 people in Virginia. So when the City was faced with H1N1, we responded using a Unified Command system, led by the Alexandria Health Department, Alexandria City Public Schools, Police and Fire/EMS, Emergency Management, in coordination with hospitals, physicians, businesses and the community. Under oversight of the City Manager, collaborators launched outreach and education activities, held public vaccination clinics, developed plans for vaccinations in schools, and developed strategies for reaching vulnerable populations. The City has provided vaccinations to more than 9,000 school aged children—the third highest number in Virginia, and to more than 8,000 people in mass clinics and at Health Department locations.

Have you been vaccinated? If not, why wait? Staff from the Health Department are providing vaccinations here—so there's no excuse.

The Health Department, in collaboration with the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, jump-started the Smoke-Free Alexandria initiative encouraging smoke-free restaurants, work places, homes and cars. Over the last few years, the Health Department worked with the restaurant industry to voluntarily provide smoke-free dining to City patrons. By the time the statewide restaurant smoking ban went into effect in December 2009, nearly all of Alexandria restaurants had voluntarily gone smoke free.

In January, First Lady Michelle Obama launched her National Childhood Obesity Initiative at the Alexandria YMCA. Her advocacy for reducing childhood obesity through

education; promoting physical activity and increasing access to fresh and healthy food; and promoting local policies that encourage healthy eating and active living, is reflective of a program that is currently underway in our City.

Thanks to a \$40,000 grant from the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the ACHIEVE Planning Team of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria has developed, and is implementing, a community action plan for reducing early childhood obesity. This two-year plan was developed with information from focus groups with toddler parents and service providers, surveys of WIC parents, surveys of early childcare directors, a GIS mapping project of nutrition and recreation spaces, and a policy and environment evaluation created by the CDC. The Planning Team is working with policy and grassroots leaders across the city to implement and sustain policy, systems, and environmental changes to create healthier lifestyles, including more nutritional eating habits and equal access to fresh food and safe recreation spaces for Alexandria's children.

[PHOTO: Cheerleaders] Our efforts to achieve a healthier Alexandria are not just limited to children; last year, I launched the “Let’s Get Healthy, Alexandria” initiative to improve health and fitness for all Alexandrians. Over the next year, the Partnership will be sponsor community events geared to getting Alexandrians active and energized about fitness and nutrition. I challenge you to take the first step in becoming healthier today--to make better food choices: to increase physical activities; and to enjoy the many resources around us--recreation centers, activities, trails, and parks.

Arts, Recreation and Parks

Cities are more than just bricks and mortar; there are the elements of Alexandria that have blessed us with a wonderful standard of living since its founding. Things like a quiet stroll in Founder's Park. Fresh fruit and vegetables from one of the City's farmers' markets; a beautiful object acquired at an arts festival; or watching a child's eyes light up when Santa arrives at the Holiday Tree Lighting. It's all available through one of the many programs, activities and properties managed by our Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, one of 88 nationally accredited agencies. The City has something for everyone, from the new Soft Play Room at Chinguapin Park Recreation Center, where little ones can play safely; summer and holiday concerts and festivals; a fabulous Film Festival; and our beautiful parks. This year, we dedicated the new John Carlyle Square Park, the result of another successful public-private partnership. The park features eco-friendly construction materials made from post-consumer recycled products, recycled glass pavers, and fountains that recycle and reuse water.

And we continue to look forward to the future: an Urban Forestry Plan, approved by Council last year, will ensure the preservation of the City's tree canopy; and the City's newly acquired property on Commonwealth Avenue represents our continued commitment to implementation of the City's Open Space Master Plan.

Alexandria's Waterfront, stretching along the Potomac River from Hunting Creek in the south to Daingerfield Island in the north, is one of the City's most treasured resources. The City embarked on a planning process to enhance the character of the Waterfront and make it a more attractive, accessible and enticing destination for both residents and visitors. For the last year, community members have participated in forums, topical meetings, tours, and charrettes to determine the vision for a new Waterfront. Our Planning Department is now developing a concept plan, based on participant input gathered from these activities. The concept plan will be released in the spring, with a

draft master plan anticipated for completion in the early summer. You can still be a part of this process. The waterfront belongs to all one of us and we urge everyone to participate—visit [Alexandria va dot gov slash waterfront](http://Alexandria.va.gov/waterfront); or “friend” the Alexandria Waterfront Facebook page to learn more.

Speaking of treasures, our own Fort Ward, one of the nation’s best preserved Civil War fort sites, will be a focal point of the Civil War Sesquicentennial, which begins in 2011. Fort Ward is just one of the many treasures whose history is currently being researched and better understood, protected, and preserved by the Office of Historic Alexandria, curator of our City’s historic legacy. Their work enables us to fully appreciate the triumphs and trials of those who built this city, upon whose shoulders we stand.

I encourage all of you to celebrate the City by supporting these activities and venues, which give our city life a richness that few municipalities enjoy.

Education & Youth

The “good old days,” weren’t always good for Alexandria’s children—in the early 20th century, many of Alexandria’s youth were exploited as laborers in places like the Old Dominion Glass Company on North Fairfax Street. Today, Alexandria is a caring, nurturing community for youth, nationally recognized for programs that provide support to children and families from early childhood into young adulthood. Our libraries and recreation programs provide a variety of activities for kids, and their parents, too. We support regional gang prevention efforts, and provide activities that help our youth to make responsible, informed choices. Scholarship programs, supported by community and businesses, provide a means to educational opportunities. In Alexandria, we believe that it does take a village—city and community, together-- to raise our children.

We place a high value on education in this City, and it shows. Alexandria City Public Schools students have shown gains in SAT reading and math scores. The percentage of minority students taking the SAT has increased 68%, a level higher than state and national averages. The Schools, fully dedicated to the goal of “building bridges to excellence and higher student achievement,” have developed a budget that reflects that goal. The budget adds elementary and middle-school teachers, supports an early childhood education initiative and exemplary programs, and does not cut programs. However, there are challenges: enrollment has increased over 13% over the past three years, and is expected to rise; benefit costs have increased; the use of Recovery Act funding has been curtailed because the state will use some of those funds to offset basic aid.

In the City Manager’s proposed budget, the operating budget transfer to the Alexandria City Public Schools would increase by 2.0%, or \$3.3 million from last year’s approved budget. The City-managed part of the budget increases 0.2%, or \$0.8 million. However, even with the increase, the Schools will receive less City money in FY 2011 compared to FY 2009.

It is clear that the Schools can’t do it alone: they need our support to overcome these challenges and continue to provide our children with the education they need to succeed. Now, more than ever, Alexandria needs to come together, as one, to help our Schools.

Recently, we have all read or heard that T.C. Williams High School has been classified as a persistently lowest-achieving school, based on reading and math scores by “all students,” when compared to Title 1 Eligible Schools across Virginia.

This is certainly not a reputation to be proud of, and it will take a lot of hard work to remove this label. Since its opening in 1965, T.C. Williams has been a successful model, both nationally and internationally. “Titan Pride and Achievement” has always been the school’s mantra, as many students attend and graduate from many of the nation’s top colleges and universities; and have become scientists, doctors, lawyers, educators, athletes, entrepreneurs, public safety officials, military and yes, even politicians.

[Pause/Reflect]

As Mayor, I am committed to leading the effort to make our only public senior high school (and all schools, both public and private) the best. I will continue to work with my Council colleagues, Superintendent of Schools, School Board, parents and students, teachers, faith leaders, and business leaders to make this become a reality.

Also, all of you have a role to play. Working together, and by turning a crisis into an opportunity, we can “UNITE” to ensure that every child succeeds, and that our school system promotes community and cultural enhancements; expands mentoring initiatives; advocates for educational change to meet today’s needs; and challenges and motivates students to achieve--and to be empowered.

This is about **all** our children. This is our school system, we must own it, and stand together in moving forward. I know we can do this. Alexandria has had an awful lot to be proud of, and thankful for, for more than 260 years.

Can we do it? You bet we can. Are you with me? Say “YES.”

One way you can say “yes” is to be a mentor. Thanks to support from the Recovery Act, the Alexandria Mentoring Partnership is growing in its capacity to reach more mentors

for the City's youth. The Mentoring Partnership has expanded its partnership with the Alexandria City Public Schools to support Superintendent Morton Sherman's goal that all of Alexandria's students have a mentor, particularly those identified as "at risk."

I challenge you to become a champion for our children. Like the spirit that motivated parents, friends and neighbors to shovel school sidewalks, we need the community's support in order for our children, our educators, and our schools to rise above these current crises.

III. Alexandria's Future

Join me as we glimpse at Alexandria's great future. Now, I want you to turn to your neighbor on your right, then to your left, shake their hand, and say hello—I know this may seem a little strange, but bear with me. [*Pause as they do it*]

My friends and fellow Alexandrians, you have met the future—because the future is you. It is all of us. The future of our City is in all our hands. The City has been tested and tried through the years, but Alexandrians—residents, government, and businesses—adapted, regrouped and recovered. As a result, our City has rightfully earned its present reputation as a jewel on the Potomac, with green open spaces, and a beautiful waterfront. It is an entrepreneurial enclave with an unparalleled standard of living, and a rich, diverse history. This is the legacy that we've been given, and we must pay it forward.

Now is not the time to be a spectator. Participate! I urge you to get involved, if you haven't already, in our public meetings, community forums, on Facebook, Twitter, and on our Web site. Attend our yearly Citizen's Academy and learn more about how City government works. Apply to serve on a board or commission.

Help shape the future of our Waterfront by learning more—and joining community meetings and activities. Or, follow the City Council as it makes progress on developing a Strategic Plan for the City’s future. The Strategic Planning process, which was launched last year, is an effort by City Council to move the City forward in realizing the goals of the community—and we need your help in putting together this plan, which has goals that effecting every part of our lives. Become part of that progress by providing input at meetings or online, and spreading the word to others about the plan.

Volunteer to help City agencies and community nonprofits through Volunteer Alexandria, which will hold its annual Spring for Alexandria Community Service Day on April 30. And please, when you get your Census form, fill it out and return it, so that the City’s numbers may be adequately counted and receive funding for critical projects. It’s simple: just remember the Census is “10 questions, 10 minutes, every 10 years.” We have folks from our Census Complete Count Committee here to help you to learn more. And the City is looking forward to the future of citizen participation, entering into an exciting partnership with ACT for Alexandria on the development and implementation of the ACTion Alexandria Network, a Web 2.0 network where Alexandrians may engage and interact on civic matters, especially in the human services arena. The network, designed to better engage residents in civic problem solving and increase philanthropy to local nonprofits and others, is an innovative way to mutually benefit the City, human service agencies, philanthropy, and the community.

And while you are here, take a tour of this fire station and residences and see the power of a public-private partnership. Tell your friends about it, too.

Right now, there are so many ways to be part of the spirit that will enable Alexandria rise above the challenges we face today, and help us uncover the opportunities that will take this City into the future.

Your participation and your passion for this City are critical to shaping our future. That is why I know that in working together, we cannot fail.

And as the Irish say, “There are fish in the sea better than have ever been caught.” I invite each of you to get your fishing pole and start fishing—you never know what you may catch. For I believe, as renowned newspaper editor, author, and politician William Allen White wrote, “I am not afraid of tomorrow, because I have seen yesterday and I love today.”

Thank you, and may God bless you all.

[Pause for at least 10 seconds]

MAYOR EUILLE: Thank you. Now, please come join us on tours of this wonderful facility, which will begin in **a few minutes**. In addition to the H1N1 vaccinations, Census information, and Volunteer Alexandria, **visit the other tables around the room from Housing; The Station at Potomac Yard; the Fire Department and the Community Emergency Response Team; and the Office of Historic Alexandria, which brought us the wonderful historical images we’ve seen today**. And, please stop by the Google 4 Alexandria table and learn how you can help us win Google Fiber for Communities, which could bring the City access to Internet speeds 100 times faster than what we have today. Again, we invite you to get involved!