

2021

## CANDIDATE PROFILE

### Darryl Nirenberg runs for council

**Republican candidate focuses on creating districts, 'common sense government'**

BY OLIVIA ANDERSON

Darryl Nirenberg is a man with a plan. Not only does the Republican City Council candidate have grand aspirations for the future of Alexandria, he said he also has concrete strategies for how he'd get them done if elected to office in the Nov. 2 general election.

"Over the past several years, we've seen our city government lose its focus, proposing divisive policies that will transform our city," Nirenberg said. "More and more, we're all left scratching our heads thinking, 'What are they thinking?' So I'm running because I think it's time to turn the page and bring some common sense government to our city."

Nirenberg said his campaign is predicated on addressing quality of life issues, eliminating the one-party political control that has existed for more than a decade in the city and advocating for neighborhood representation through the formation of districts or wards.

Nirenberg laid out specific solutions to address these quality of life issues in the city, which range from rolling back council's recent decision to eliminate school resource officers to

SEE **NIRENBERG**

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**DARRYL NIRENBERG**

## School Board approves vaccine mandate

**Employees, student athletes must provide proof of vaccination status**

BY OLIVIA ANDERSON

The School Board passed a mandate at its Sept. 23 meeting that requires staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine barring medical or

religious exemptions. It also approved the requirement that student athletes participating in winter and spring sports provide proof of vaccination in order to train.

Staff must provide documentation of their completed COVID-19 vaccination status by Nov. 15. Those who fail to do so may be fired or

required to take leave without pay.

Employees who "satisfactorily" establish valid medical or religious exemptions will have to participate in weekly testing, but staff did not specify what constitutes a satisfactory exemption.

SEE **MANDATE**

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## River Farm's future still murky

**AHS board remains deadlocked about potential sale to NOVA Parks**

BY CODY MELLO-KLEIN

When the American Horticultural Society put the historic River Farm property that serves as its headquarters up for sale in September 2020, the community was shocked. Suddenly, the future of the Potomac River-side site once owned by George Washington, a site that residents had long enjoyed access to, was up in the air.

Since that time, the property, which was originally listed at \$32.9 million, has sat on the open real estate market and at the center of an ongoing drama involving a bitterly divided board, investigations into the board from two attorneys general and widespread communi-



PHOTO/CODY MELLO-KLEIN

The historic River Farm property has been on the real estate market since September 2020.

ty uproar. Yet with the AHS board's most recent vote on Sunday, the future of the site seems as nebulous as ever.

The AHS board entered into negotiations with the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, or NOVA Parks, in May, after NOVA Parks submitted an offer that would have resulted in

the regional park authority overseeing the property. During a meeting on Sunday, the board, which is deadlocked with five members opposing the NOVA Parks sale and five members in support, did not approve the offer.

SEE **RIVER FARM**

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## INSIDE

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## WEEKLY BRIEFING



COURTESY PHOTO

From left to right: Alexandria Mayor Justin Wilson, USSFCU Board Chair Jay Moore, honoree and USSFCU Board Emeritus Bertie H. Bowman and USSFCU President and CEO Timothy L. Anderson.

## USSFCU cuts ribbon on new HQ

The United States Senate Federal Credit Union celebrated the opening of its flagship HQ branch in Alexandria with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The building, formerly home to the National Industries for the Blind, is located across the street from the Braddock Place Metro Station at 1310 Braddock Place and

is nicknamed the Bertie Bowman Building.

Bowman is a Capitol Hill staffer for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and, with 46 years at the Senate Federal Credit Union, its longest serving board member.

Bowman started with the credit union in 1966 as a member of the Credit

Committee and joined the Board of Directors in 1975. He helped steer the USSFCU from a few million in assets to over \$1 billion.

Attendees to the Sept. 23 ceremony included Mayor Justin Wilson and Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Joe Haggerty.

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## First council forum slated for Oct. 6

A series of forums are scheduled so that candidates for Alexandria's mayor, City Council and School Board, all of which are contested elections with multiple candidates for each post, can answer questions from residents on the issues facing Alexandria.

The Seminary Road Civic Association will hold two question and answer forums for the nine candidates running for City Council and the two candidates running for mayor. The first of these

forums takes place on Oct. 6 from 7 to 9 p.m. and will include all candidates for City Council. The second SRCA forum will be held on Oct. 19 from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. and will be between incumbent Mayor Justin Wilson and challenger Annetta Catchings. Both forums will be held on Zoom.

For the Zoom link to the Oct. 6 webinar, visit SRCA's website homepage at: [www.seminaryridge.net](http://www.seminaryridge.net).

In addition, there will be a mayoral debate on Oct. 9 hosted by the League of

Women Voters and one on Oct. 13 hosted by the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations. There is another forum for City Council candidates on Oct. 9, hosted by the League of Women Voters. Three more forums are scheduled for School Board candidates: tonight by the Alexandria Democratic Committee Disability Caucus, Oct. 10 by the League of Women Voters and Oct. 13 by the Alexandria PTA Council.

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## WEEKLY BRIEFING



PHOTO/DENISE DUNBAR

Residents at the SRO rally on Tuesday speak with Councilor John Chapman.

## Group rallies at city hall for SROs

A group of parents and grandparents gathered in front of city hall on Tuesday to protest the recent vote by City Council to remove police officers, also referred to as school resource officers, from Alexandria City High

School and the city's junior high schools.

The parents confronted Councilor John Chapman as he entered city hall for Tuesday's legislative meeting. Chapman was one of four council members, along with

Cane Aguirre, Vice Mayor Elizabeth Bennett-Parker and Mo Seifeldein, to vote for removal of the SROs. Only Chapman and Aguirre are running for re-election to City Council in November.

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## APD investigates crash in Old Town

The Alexandria Police Department is investigating a crash between a motorcycle and a vehicle in Old Town on Sept. 24, according to a news release.

The crash occurred at the intersection of Diagonal and Daingerfield roads

around 4 p.m.

The motorcyclist was taken to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries while the driver of the vehicle remained on the scene, according to the release.

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## Police investigate Landmark homicide

The Alexandria Police Department is investigating a homicide that occurred on Saturday in the 100 block of South Van Dorn Street, according to a news release.

Officers received a call at about 7:45 p.m. for reports of a stabbing inside the BJ's Wholesale Club. They discovered an adult male with trauma to the upper body who was pronounced dead at the scene.

The adult male suspect

remained at the scene until police arrived and was taken into custody. The victim, Abiy Zemene, 29, of Silver Spring, Maryland, and suspect, Rakibul Fakir, 33, of Alexandria, knew each other, according to the release.

The investigation is active, according to APD. Anyone with information is encouraged to contact Detective C. Escobar at 703-746-4444.

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## Indie filmmaker David Ashton featured on Speak Easy podcast

This month, Alexandria Times Editor Cody Mello-Klein welcomed David Ashton, an independent filmmaker based in Northern Virginia, to the Times' podcast, Speak Easy.

Although Ashton has worked on a few features and short films, Alexandria film fans likely know him most for "The Legacy Sessions," the film that earned him the Audience Award at the 2020 Alexandria Film

Festival. Ashton talks about the process behind making "The Legacy Sessions," the films that inspired him to start writing and directing and the challenges of independent filmmaking.

Listen to the episode, which goes live today, on Spotify, Audible and Apple Podcasts, or visit the Times' website at <https://alextimes.com/2021/04/speak-easy/>.

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## CANDIDATE PROFILE

### NIRENBERG

FROM | 1

returning Seminary Road to four lanes of traffic instead of two and preventing future road diets. Nirenberg also said he would aim to prevent co-location of housing on school grounds, preserve green spaces and fund public safety.

"These policies aren't divisive or partisan; they're consistent with the long-term tradition of Alexandria, our community," Nirenberg said. "... They're just common sense and after all, potholes are not red or blue – they just need to be filled."

The only Republican running for City Council, Nirenberg said that even though he does not view the issues facing the city as partisan, his party affiliation is necessary to bring a diverse

lens to council. He faces a slate of six Democrats and two independents.

"There is a growing recognition that 100% one party rule over time is just unhealthy and that there's a need for checks and balances," Nirenberg said. "Plus, keep in mind, there are six Democrats running. I am the only Republican. So it will be a Democratic board. The question is: Do we believe that diverse voices lead to better choices? I'm finding that most voters, independents and Democrats included, would agree."

Nirenberg, who resides in the Northridge neighborhood, developed his comprehensive list of ideas for Alexandria over 22 years of living in the city, but the longtime resident originally hails from a small town in upstate New York.

**“These policies aren’t divisive or partisan; they’re consistent with the long-term tradition of Alexandria, our community. They’re just common sense and after all, potholes are not red or blue – they just need to be filled.”**

– Darryl Nirenberg,  
Republican City Council candidate

When he was 14, Nirenberg's father sat him down and said that due to financial issues Nirenberg would have to figure out a way to pay for college himself if that was an avenue he wished to pursue.

"So, I got to work. I started a paper route, mowed lawns, delivered groceries for a convenience store, worked at a grocery store, was a painter and bussed tables," Nirenberg said.

Through these gigs, Nirenberg paid his way through college and eventually graduated from Colgate University. He then secured a job as a U.S. Senate staffer on Capitol Hill and waited tables at the Marriott to save for law school. Nirenberg graduated from George Washington University Law School and later entered private practice. He has worked with D.C.-based international firms for the past 25 years.

By day, Nirenberg is a partner at Steptoe & Johnson focusing primarily on tax policy, financial services, government affairs and public policy.

These experiences have equipped Nirenberg with vital tools he said he would carry to the dais, if given the opportunity.

"From the first day I started on the hill until my last day, I always focused on the same thing, which was: How do you reach an agreement to solve problems?" Nirenberg said. "My role was figuring out how to pull the levers to come to solutions which meant working across the aisle, figuring out what peoples' concerns were and then finding a path to create agreements. To this day, it's the same thing: figuring out what peoples' positions are, hearing what they have to say and trying to find the path for compromise."

When it comes to applying these tools to city governance, Nirenberg emphasized his preference for a ward-based election system, noting that similar systems already exist on both a federal level and within many cities of Alexandria's size. Although Alexandria has districts for School Board elections, the city has elected the entirety of City Council at-large since 1950.

"I think that is something that has been missing from our city: the idea that neighborhoods have someone on the council who is elected by them and accountable to them directly," Nirenberg said. "Representa-

tion is the absolute core of our democracy, especially when it comes to city impact, which is having a daily impact on the daily lives of residents."

Another one of Nirenberg's top priorities on council would be fixing the city's storm drains, which Nirenberg asserted have grown into a colossal problem area in the city today because of three contributing factors: aging infrastructure, overdevelopment and climate change.

Nirenberg argued the city has not made flood mitigation enough of a priority, and that its years of deferring maintenance is now having adverse effects on residents.

"Ask residents whose basements flood time and again with no end in sight whether they believe the city has done its job here," Nirenberg said. "There is no excuse in a city our size and with the wealth in the city for raw sewage to be flowing into resident zones year after year."

According to Nirenberg, the issue requires a very specific plan of attack. For Nirenberg that means a three-pronged approach that involves appointing a "stormwater czar" who is directly accountable to the mayor, City Council and residents, creating a detailed plan with deliverables, timelines, priorities and projected costs and developing a strategy for obtaining federal funding.

Nirenberg pointed to the \$550 billion infrastructure bill that Congress is currently discussing, expressing hope that the bill will include funding for water-related infrastructure.

"We need a strategy to go to our representatives in



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## CANDIDATE PROFILE

### NIRENBERG

FROM | 6

Congress and government agencies to get funding out of that program to help us

pay for the repairs that are needed,” Nirenberg said.

Nirenberg also said one of his goals is pausing density – a long-time controversial

topic for Alexandria, which, at 159,428 residents over 9,466 square miles, is currently the densest city in Virginia.

Instead of throwing more

tax dollars toward promoting density, Nirenberg argued the city should place a higher priority on “catching up” schools and infrastructure to meet the needs of current residents.

“[The city is] promoting density in the midst of a pandemic without a plan as to how our schools, infrastructure and public safety will handle the growth,” Nirenberg said. “We need to manage our growth because we need to plan for our future, not muddle into it.”

Above all else, though, Nirenberg stressed that his goal is to simultaneously enhance and preserve the city that he, his wife and two children have called home for so long.

“Having spent 22 years here, I realize how fortunate we are to have what we have here, that the idea of distinct and diverse neighborhoods that operate in a cohesive, caring, diverse community next to one of the most exciting cities in the world is really unique,” Nirenberg said. “I’ve learned what a great city this is and what a special and unique place it is, and I’m running to keep it that way.”

—oanderson@alextimes.com

“[The city is] promoting density in the midst of a pandemic without a plan as to how our schools, infrastructure and public safety will handle the growth...We need to manage our growth because we need to plan for our future, not muddle into it.”

– Darryl Nirenberg,  
Republican City  
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## MANDATE

FROM | 1

According to Alexandria City Public Schools staff, 2,225 ACPS employees are fully vaccinated. In a decrease from the 422 found in initial surveys, 362 staff members receive required

weekly COVID-19 testing. Of that number, 15 are administrators, 138 are licensed staff and 209 are support staff, making up 14% of the total employee population, according to ACPS.

Staff predicted that possible impacts of the newly ap-

proved mandate could include a decrease in administrators, licensed staff and support staff. This, in turn, could lead to an increase in class sizes, as well as bus delivery, pickup and meal service preparation delays, and potential reduction of cleaning efforts.

Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt, executive director of Human Resources for ACPS, said this prediction comes from the fact that a number of these staff members are student-facing.

"It's really hard to determine because you've indicated there may be a staff member who sits behind a counter, but that staff member is in the building and while there may not be that direct contact one-on-one sitting in a classroom, there may be times where they have to interface with other staff members who are going into classrooms," Kay-Wyatt said.

Board member Margaret Lorber asked how many staffers are not vaccinated for religious or medical reasons, calling the potential loss of personnel "kind of scary."

"That assumes people are going to decide, 'Well, no, I don't want to be even though I don't have a religious reason or a health reason,'" Lorber said. "So, it would be helpful to know what percentage of that group actually have either a health reason or religious reason so we know how many people we're talking about."

Kay-Wyatt did not disclose a specific number to protect the privacy of certain staffers, but said it is "very small." She also said the number of staffers who remain unvaccinated without a valid medical or religious basis is "pretty high," but pointed out that many of them do not regularly interact with students.

Superintendent Dr. Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D. noted that this amount might decrease, since the initial vaccination status surveys offered an option to not disclose medical or religious rationale for abstaining. Now, because that option is no longer available, he predicted that more staff will come forward with valid conditions.

"That's a new thing.... [Religion and medical conditions] are things you're not supposed

**“That’s a new thing. ... [Religion and medical conditions] are things you’re not supposed to discuss in school, and now we’re saying that’s something they need to share with us to be exempt.”**

– Dr. Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., ACPS superintendent

to discuss in school, and now we're saying that's something they need to share with us to be exempt," Hutchings said. "... I think that data will be a lot more telling than the current data we have because right now we're basing it off of what-ifs and we don't really have specifics."

Regardless, there will likely still be staff members who do not qualify for either exemption yet refuse to get vaccinated. The board addressed this possible outcome, noting that it is important to start preparing in advance for the loss of personnel. Board member Christopher Suarez highlighted that while these employees may have decided to forego receiving a vaccination due to understandable reasons like societal historical inequity, the fact that many will still be interacting with stu-

SEE MANDATE

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MANDATE FROM | 10

dents on some level must take precedence.

“There are many, many reasons people might not get vaccinated and that’s why it’s so hard to have this conversation, but with that being said, it is a public health issue and so we need to balance all these things,” Suarez said. “It creates some difficult conversations.”

Board member Ramee Gentry made a motion to approve the staff recommendation, with Suarez seconding. The resolution was passed unanimously, 8-0. Board member Cindy Anderson was not present at the meeting.

The board also unanimously passed a resolution requiring proof of vaccination for students participating in all Virginia High School League sports, with Gentry making

the motion and Lorber seconding.

Beginning Nov. 8, all ACPS students participating in winter and spring sports will have to require proof of a COVID-19 vaccination for winter and spring sports, from conditioning to competing.

The resolution follows a COVID-19 outbreak among sports teams in the spring that interrupted certain seasons with quarantine and cancellations.

ACPS joins Fairfax and Arlington counties in requiring vaccination of student athletes. Fairfax County approved a mandate on Aug. 30 and Arlington County on Sept. 10.

Board members agreed on the necessity of such a resolution and debated how much further it should be taken.

Suarez asked about the rationale behind proposing a

“It creates some difficult conversations.”

– Christopher Suarez, board member

vaccination mandate for student athletes but not for the general student population.

More than 70% of students ages 12 to 15 are fully vaccinated, and approximately 78% of students ages 16 to 17 are fully vaccinated, according to staff.

“I do think we need to have the conversation about all students,” Suarez said, expressing concern for young children who remain unvaccinated. “I want to make sure we get out in front of that and just think about what our lon-



CHRISTOPHER SUAREZ

ger-term vision is in terms of vaccination.”

Hutchings said one of the major reasons for requiring athletes to be vaccinated is because winter sports take place indoors.

“Athletes are not wearing masks; they are contact sports, meaning that you don’t have all the other health and safety mitigations we do on a typical school day,” Hutchings said. “A lot of the teams for particular sports are not able to wear masks at


particular times during their practice or actual games, so we wanted to ensure that we’re providing the safest environment possible.”

Alexandria Health Department Director Dr. Anne Gaddy added that sports teams across the region and country tend to be a source of COVID-19 outbreaks. According to Gaddy, this may be due to the amount of close contact involved in the nature of certain sports or the socialization that goes along with athletic teams.

“It’s something that’s been observed last year and even over the summer as people were starting to get vaccinated, we were still seeing that as one of the major contributors to outbreaks so that’s part of the reason that population of students is particularly focused on,” Gaddy said.

-oanderson@alextimes.com

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## RIVER FARM

FROM | 1

Despite the board's vote, AHS released a statement following the decision that it "overwhelmingly welcomes the opportunity to continue dialogue with NOVA Parks concerning River Farm."

"The negotiations with NOVA Parks have been a positive experience. The AHS board has not been able to reach an agreement on selling River Farm to NOVA Parks, so we must decline the current offer," said Board Chair Terry Hayes.

According to Paul Gilbert, executive director of NOVA Parks, the board's vote is not an end to the park authority's offer, but rather the next step in a public negotiation process, one that has been disrupted by the bitter division over the sale that has existed within AHS leadership for the duration of 2021.

"Having a board that is as split and as split for as long

**“Having a board that is as split and as split for as long as they have been makes it very difficult to come up with that solution that you can get a majority of board members around.”**

– Paul Gilbert, executive director of NOVA Parks

as they have been makes it very difficult to come up with that solution that you can get a majority of board members around," Gilbert said.

NOVA Parks' offer, a revision of an offer that AHS initially declined in March without making a counter offer, involves purchasing the property at "fair market value" with payments made over the course of several years

with interest. NOVA Parks' offer also included the potential for AHS to remain on site at River Farm.

During negotiations over the past few months, the offer was revised further and involved a joint ownership of the property with AHS, with NOVA Parks obtaining a majority 51% ownership. In July, NOVA Parks also pledged \$800,000 that would

go toward maintenance and improvement of River Farm should AHS approve the sale.

The root of the conflict between those on either side of the board goes back to the 1970s, when philanthropist Enid Haupt donated \$1 million to AHS with the purpose of purchasing the historic property and keeping it open to the public. Since then, River Farm has served as the organization's headquarters.

After the AHS board voted to put the property up for sale last September, citing the financial strain of maintaining the 27-acre property, five board members came out and questioned the circumstances of listing the property for sale. Several board members told the Alexandria Times that they were misled by board leadership, including Hayes, about the need for the sale and what was, at the time, a potential merger with the American Public Gardens

Association.

The five board members who don't want to sell River Farm on the open market argue that Haupt's initial gift came with the "intent that River Farm should be owned and operated by AHS as its national headquarters while making the property available for the public to enjoy," according to a statement released on Sept. 13.

The other five, who voted against both offers by NOVA Parks, have remained largely silent throughout the process.

In advance of the vote on Sunday, the five board members opposed to the current NOVA Parks offer sent a statement to Mount Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck, NOVA Parks Board Chair Cate Wyatt and Gilbert expressing support for any solution that "guarantees both the long-term success

SEE RIVER FARM

| 16



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## RIVER FARM

FROM | 15

and preservation of AHS ... as much as it does the protection and stewardship of iconic River Farm.” They also stated that the negotiations with NOVA Parks “were developed early on in meetings with the pro-sale side of our equally divided Board. Unfortunately, the current offers are not in the best interest of AHS.”

Although the five board members voted against the current offer, they still supported partnering with NOVA Parks on the future of the property.

“Towards that end, while our contingent of five Board members cannot support an affirmative vote on the current NOVA Parks proposals on the table this evening, we are absolutely in favor of continuing discussions with

NOVA Parks – and potentially additional partners – who support our common goals of preservation, stewardship and public access to River Farm,” the board members said in the statement.

Gilbert, a self-described optimist, admitted that the process has been challenging but said both sides of the board are still entertaining NOVA Parks’ role in the future of River Farm.

“Board members on both sides of the divide would like to see River Farm protected, would like to see River Farm open to the public, and they just differ in how they would like to see that happen,” Gilbert said. “Both sides view some kind of a partnership with NOVA Parks in a favorable way.”

For NOVA Parks and those involved in the Save River Farm campaign, the board’s apparent willingness to continue working with NOVA Parks is welcome news. However, for Alan Rowsome, executive director of the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, the vote on Sunday is troubling.

NVCT is a nonprofit that works with NOVA Parks to raise public funds that have gone toward the offer on River Farm. According to Row-



PHOTO/CODY MELLO-KLEIN

A private developer submitted a letter of intent, which the American Horticultural Society board declined, to purchase River Farm and its two adjoining properties.

some, the decision paralysis gripping the board has meant little to no progress on negotiations since May. Instead of negotiating with one entity, NOVA Parks is now negotiating with two sets of board members in an attempt to find a solution.

“I don’t think we can stop trying to get there, and we won’t, but somehow, some way AHS has to figure out how to solve its internal battle,” Rowsome said.

“Those that are hurt by this right now are the public, who are locked out of the property, and the property itself, which is just adding more backlog maintenance as it’s not cared for as much as it should be during this now year-long saga,” Rowsome added.

While NOVA Parks’ offer on the property has been in limbo over the past three to four months, another offer materialized. The offer, which came from private developer A. Wayne Johnson, proposed not only purchasing River Farm but also the two properties on either side of it with the intent of building a \$300 million private resort, according to Gilbert. When the Times asked for comment at the time, AHS did not confirm the offer from the developer.

“The only offer the AHS board is currently entertaining is an offer from NOVA Parks, and we are pleased

with the ongoing positive spirit of these negotiations,” AHS said in a statement on Sept. 9. “From the beginning, our board has committed not to sell River Farm to a developer for subdivision.”

According to the statement released ahead of the vote on Sunday, the five board members opposed to the NOVA Parks sale also voted against an exclusive letter of intent to sell River Farm to Johnson. For NOVA Parks, community members and the coalition of politicians throughout the region who have expressed support for preserving River Farm, a private sale such as this would represent the worst-case scenario.

But Gilbert remained adamant that the chances of a private developer taking over River Farm are slim.

“If the AHS board has not been able to agree to sell River Farm as a public park, it really will not be able to sell it as a private development,” Gilbert said.

The development potential of the site would pose a challenge for many commercial developers, and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors has taken further steps to restrict how the site can be used.

On April 13, the Board of Supervisors voted 9-0 with one abstention to create a historic overlay district on

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**RIVER FARM** FROM | 16

the property, which created a set of specialized restrictions for what changes could be made to the property. Then, after two delays, the Board of Supervisors voted on Sept. 15 to adopt additional provisions for historic overlay district zoning that were proposed by state Sen. Scott Surovell (D) in the Virginia legislature.

"The historic zoning overlay basically says the [Architectural Review Board] can require, as part of a historic zoning district, that the property owner require access to the public and can restrict subdivision," Surovell said.

Adding to the restrictions around the River Farm property are two conservation easements. One is located at the front of the property, adjacent to East Boulevard Drive, and is set by the National Park Service; the other is located at the back of the property, along the

Potomac River, and is set by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. On top of that, East Boulevard Drive, the road that leads to the front of the property, is owned by the National Park Service, according to Surovell.

"Any kind of road access would require National Park Service blessing, and, of course, they look at things in terms of its impact on the park, which is a very different standard than [the Virginia Department of Transportation] has," Surovell said. "... So, the only thing that could be developed is the stuff in the middle, which, because you could never get a proper street through, it's not really capable of redevelopment," Surovell said.

As negotiations continue between NOVA Parks and AHS, Rowsome expressed interest in a partnership with AHS, one that may not even involve a sale.



PHOTO/CODY MELLO-KLEIN

Since going up for sale, River Farm has been closed to the public, although it is now open for set appointments.

"I would say that we now have to work equally as hard for the possibility that AHS stays and a partnership can be forged that gives them a sustainable path toward staying that's financially viable and has the property managed for public benefit," Rowsome said.

"That possibility now has to be weighed equally with an offer to just straight buy the property."

Meanwhile, Gilbert said the board's internal strife does not mean there is no way forward for NOVA Parks, AHS and River Farm.

"NOVA Parks is not stuck on one way of doing things. We're very open to figuring out what mechanism will help achieve the goal that the community wants to see, which is preservation, public access and a good operation," Gilbert said.  
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# Times Living

## “Dear Evan Hansen” should have stayed on the stage

BY RICHARD ROEPER

The problem with “Dear Evan Hansen” the movie is “Dear Evan Hansen” the Broadway musical. A commercial hit that somehow won six Tony awards, the original show remains a problematic, manipulative, cynical and creepy story that asks us to empathize with an admittedly troubled teenager who tells an unspeakably cruel lie and proceeds to double down on that falsehood again and again, even as he realizes he’s causing lasting emotional damage to a grieving family.

Dear Evan Hansen: You’re the worst.

The adaptation is a curiously strange effort, as director Stephen Chbosky (author of “The Perks of Being a Wallflower”) films the story like an indie drama, with straightforward, realistic, dialogue-driven scenes that are then interrupted every 10 minutes or so by a character breaking into song. As a result, it seems much more contrived and jolting than something like “La La Land.” It doesn’t help that Ben Platt (reprising his Tony Award-winning role as the title character) is still playing the part as if he’s on stage and aiming for the rafters, while the supporting ensemble, including Julianne Moore, Kaitlyn Dever, Amy Adams and Amandla Stenberg, is performing in more subtle, film-friendly notes.



PHOTO/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Ben Platt as Evan Hansen in “Dear Evan Hansen.”

Platt’s Evan Hansen is a shy and depressed kid whose therapist has given him the assignment of writing encouraging letters to himself. The printout of one such letter falls into the hands of the volatile bully and loner Connor Murphy (Colton Ryan). When Connor commits suicide and the note is found in his pocket, Connor’s family mistakenly believes Connor wrote the letter, that Evan must have been Connor’s only friend, and they turn to Evan for comfort.

After a teen suicide is

used as a plot contrivance, Evan decides that rather than coming clean to Connor’s mother, Cynthia (Adams), stepfather, Larry (Danny Pino), and little sister, Zoe (Dever), he’ll concoct an elaborate, ongoing lie about his nonexistent friendship with Connor, manufacturing a series of emails they shared and telling ridiculous stories about their adventures together. We understand Evan has been in emotional pain for a long time and is in need of help. But he still allows a well-meaning classmate (an

excellent Stenberg) to spearhead an online fundraiser in Connor’s memory, he sings the show’s signature anthem, “You Will Be Found,” at a service for Connor and he enters into a romance with Zoe – all under false pretenses. The tonal disconnect between this darker-than-dark material and the ultimately upbeat nature of the story as it’s presented simply cannot be reconciled.

There’s been a lot of chatter about how the 27-year-old Platt looks far too mature to be playing the title character

– though there’s no denying the power of his voice as he belts out one standard-issue Broadway tune after another. And in truth, virtually everyone playing high school students in this adaptation, from 24-year-old Kaitlin Dever to 26-year-old Colton Ryan to 27-year-old Nik Dodani (as a family friend of Evan’s), looks as if they should be playing young teachers instead of students. But even with more age-appropriate casting, it’s difficult to imagine a version of “Dear Evan Hansen” that wouldn’t make me cringe.

# Turn your deck into a modern farmhouse retreat

## Create an outdoor oasis with the right deck material

BY BRANDPOINT

When DIY maven Allison

Aars purchased a ramshackle Texas farmhouse on a leap of faith, she knew her work was cut out for her. Determined to reveal the full potential of her historic farmhouse, Aars

spent several years transforming her family’s home and bringing it to its current designation, The Festive Farmhouse. When her home improve-

ment efforts shifted to the barren pasture behind her family’s home, Aars knew she wanted to create a modern farmhouse-inspired outdoor retreat for her family to enjoy. Characterized by its neutral color scheme and natural materials and textures, the modern farmhouse style combines the clean lines of contemporary design with the cozy farmhouse aesthetic to evoke feelings of warmth and comfort. Given the emphasis on achieving a modern farmhouse aesthetic, it was hard for Aars to ignore the appeal of a wood deck. But there was one problem. While wood deck boards are sought-after for their warmth and charm, like all wood products, they

tend to deteriorate in outdoor applications. In fact, Aars’ very first farmhouse purchase was a pair of darling wood Adirondack chairs. Much to her disbelief, the chairs disintegrated after just a few months of sitting in the pasture behind the farmhouse. Having personally experienced the effects of Texas’ severe wind, rain and sun on wood products, Aars turned to composite decking to bring performance and lasting style to her “festive” outdoor retreat. Here are three pieces of deck building advice that Aars picked up along the way.

SEE **DECK**

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Make sure to choose a deck material that will weather the elements.

## DECK

FROM | 20

## Choose an enduring decking material that captures the warmth and charm of the modern farmhouse look.

Aars knew she wanted composite decking for her backyard renovation, as the engineered product is designed to sidestep issues associated with moisture absorption, one of the most common reasons wood products will deteriorate. Composite deck boards are also available with a protective cap, which means they provide increased resistance to fading, staining and scratching. But not just any composite decking material will do. It also needs to emulate the character and richness of a natural wood grain, qualities that Aars said she admired and associated with the modern farmhouse style.

To bring her modern farmhouse inspired vision to life, Aars selected Infinity I-Series capped bamboo-plastic composite decking from Fortress Building Products. The outdoor building products manufacturer employs a dual embossing technique on its composite offerings to reveal realistic grain patterns and textures. To visually distinguish the deck boards against the white of her home's exterior, Aars opted for a luxurious russet-almond color. The vibrant hue also provides distinction against the surrounding Texas dirt and pea gravel. With its unyielding qualities, enhanced wood grain textures and rich, earth-tone color palette, this kind of modern farmhouse-inspired deck will provide timeless style for years to come.

## Protect little feet and provide peace of mind underfoot.

Beautiful and strong, Aars' bamboo-based com-

posite deck is engineered to defend against water infiltration while also offering slip resistance and first-rate protection against heat.

Bamboo-based composites release heat faster than wood-based composites, making the deck boards feel much cooler underfoot. Such performance capabilities provide Aars with peace of mind knowing her two young boys can safely step into and out of the hot tub without slipping and falling. Similarly, the boys can comfortably play on the deck in bare feet under the sizzling sun without hurting their toes.

## Shape a dreamy modern farmhouse retreat with distinctive "zones."

Beyond selecting an engineered decking material that fits her family's lifestyle, Aars knew landing on the right deck configuration was key to creating a dreamy modern farmhouse retreat that was both livable and luxurious. To bring function and visual appeal to the pasture, Aars designed the deck in an "L" shape to frame the space and provide a natural pathway from the two French doors at the back of the house to the charming white shed that serves as Aars' workshop.

With a framework in place, Aars created small, functional zones to accommodate her family's active lifestyle. From dining al fresco at the rustic farmhouse dining table, to splashing in the hot tub and planting fall squash in her garden planters, Aars used her deck's layout and contemporary outdoor furniture to create well-defined spaces for the family to enjoy together year-round.

With a leap of faith and some sweat equity, Aars transformed a forgotten farmhouse pasture into a functional and beautiful outdoor living space. By selecting wood-alternative decking

to frame the space, it is possible to marry the in-demand modern farmhouse look with the resiliency of composite to create an outdoor retreat that will last for years to come.

“The vibrant hue also provides distinction against the surrounding Texas dirt...”



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CALENDAR

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**THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA SCREENING** Come enjoy a silent film screening of Universal Picture's creature feature "The Phantom of the Opera" starring Lon Chaney. The screening, which will run weekly through Oct. 22, includes a live organ soundtrack of the original music. **Time:** 7 to 9 p.m. **Location:** 323 S. Fairfax St. **Information:** <https://www.visitalexandriava.com/event/the-phantom-of-the-opera-screening/18303/>

**DOGTOWER FEST IN OLD TOWN NORTH** From Oct. 1. through Oct. 31, Old Town North is going to the dogs with events sure to please four-legged friends and their two-legged companions. From Paw and Palm reading at the Thursday Farmers Market, puppy pub crawls and trick-or-treating at the Thursday market, there is much spooky fun to be had. **Time:** Varies **Location:** Old Town North

**Information:** <https://oldtownnorth.org/>

OCTOBER 2

**26TH ANNUAL ART ON THE AVENUE** Art on the Avenue is a multicultural festival held the first Saturday in October, rain or shine. Stroll down Del Ray's Mount Vernon Avenue between Belle-fonte and Hume Avenues and discover more than 300 artists, from jewelers to glass makers to painters, while enjoying a variety of musicians and food vendors. **Time:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. **Location:** Mount Vernon Avenue **Information:** <https://www.artontheavenue.org/>

**TEDXORONOCOBAYPARK** The second annual TEDxOronocoBayPark event will highlight local and national voices under the theme of Ripples, which is an illustration of the compounding effects of actions in our ever-changing world. Independently organized and licensed

by TED, the event will include several speakers and a meet-and-greet reception with both the speakers and larger TEDxOronocoBayPark network. Heavy hors d'oeuvres and open bar are included with admission to the talks. **Time:** 1 to 5 p.m. **Location:** 5380 Eisenhower Ave. **Information:** <https://www.tedxoronocobaypark.com/event-faqs>

**ASO PRESENTS: BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH AND RHAPSODY** The ASO's 2021-2022 season launches with two giants from the symphonic repertoire: Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" and Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." Described as a "compelling, sparkling virtuoso," Michelle Cann will grace the ASO stage with Gershwin's "Rhapsody." The concert also features Copland's inspired "Fanfare for the Common Man" and "Umoja" by Valerie Coleman, recently commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra. The concert will be presented with no intermission. Masks are required, and all attendees must be vaccinated. Performances will

occur on Oct. 2 and 3. **Time:** Saturday from 7:30 to 9:30; Sunday from 3 to 5 p.m. **Location:** Northern Virginia Community College, 4915 E. Campus Drive **Information:** <https://alexsym.org/performance/beethoveninthe/>

OCTOBER 8

**FALL WINE FESTIVAL AND SUNSET TOUR** Celebrate the kickoff to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association's most popular event of the year. This three-day event features unlimited samples from Virginia's finest wineries, fruit and cheese boxes and views overlooking the Potomac River from the East Lawn. Tickets start at \$43 for members and \$53 for non-members. **Time:** 6 to 9 p.m. **Location:** 3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Highway **Information:** <https://www.visitalexandriava.com/event/fall-wine-festival-%26-sunset-tour/9764/>

HOME OF THE WEEK

Custom classic Colonial



**Left:** This Cape Cod style home sits on a more than 20,000 square foot lot. **Middle:** The master bathroom features a luxurious bath and shower as well as a double sink vanity. **Right:** The kitchen includes custom cabinetry, quartz countertops and a spacious island.



COURTESY PHOTOS

AT A GLANCE

**Address:** 2025 Scroggins Road, Alexandria, 22302  
**Neighborhood:** Northridge/Braddock Heights  
**Price:** \$2,695,000  
**Square feet:** 6,090 finished  
**Bedrooms:** 5  
**Bathrooms:** 5.5  
**Year built:** 2021  
**Contact:** Cindy Byrnes Golubin 202-437-3861 and Courtney Golubin 703-989-1873 KWMETRO [Cindy@thegolubingroup.com](mailto:Cindy@thegolubingroup.com), [Courtney@thegolubingroup.com](mailto:Courtney@thegolubingroup.com)

This newly built Cape Cod style home is situated on a more than 20,000-square foot lot and boasts more than 6,000 square feet of space. The statement front porch leads into the formal living room with a gas fireplace. The formal dining room

features an adjoining wet bar with a wine refrigerator. The gourmet kitchen includes custom cabinetry, quartz countertops, a spacious island and a 48' Monogram stainless steel range and built-in refrigerator. The family room adjoins the kitchen with a gas fireplace. The main level

also features an office with built-ins and a mud room. Upstairs is the primary suite with custom built dual walk-in closets and a luxurious bath with a double sink vanity, large soaking tub and separate shower. There are three additional bedrooms with en suite bathrooms.

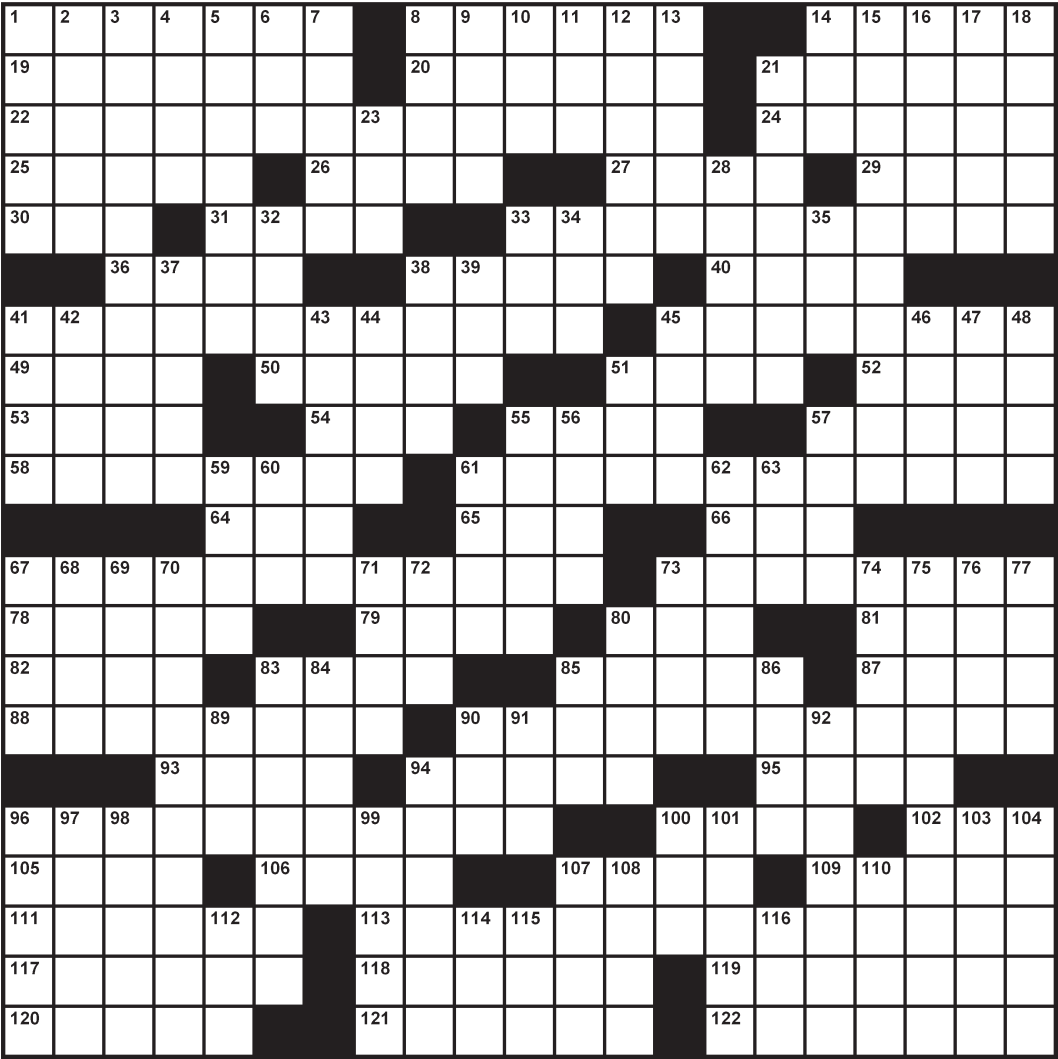
There is also a bedroom level laundry room. The lower level features a rec room with a wood-burning fireplace, a separate game room or home gym and a fifth bedroom with full bath. The home also features an oversized two-car garage.

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Weekly Words



SPLIT DECISION by Zhouqin Burnikel, edited by David Steinberg

- ACROSS
- 1 Applies eyeliner and lipstick, say

8 In the center of

14 Ardent supporters, in slang

19 What the first caller may be held on

20 Kind of oil for sauteing

21 Egg holder

22 ABCDEFGJKLMNOQRТУ-VWXYZ

24 Morphine, e.g.

25 Titular video game princess

26 Bucks go after them

27 Obtain through merit

29 Operatic solo

30 Tarzan portrayer Ron

31 "Do not \_\_\_ Go, do not collect \$200"

33 ABCDEFGHJMOPQRSTU-VWXYZ

36 Stole

38 Put into law

40 Santana's "Oye \_\_\_ Va"

41 ABCDFGHIJLKNQSTU-VWXYZ

45 Experience tire trouble

49 Warsaw \_\_\_ (Cold War treaty)

50 Approaches

51 Glutton's want

52 Bean type in certain falafel

53 Part of QED

54 Some detectives, briefly

55 Rapper's smoothness

57 Tractor-trailers

58 New England house style

61 BCDFGHIJLMNOPQUVWXYZ

64 Lang. with hand-formed letters

65 Period of history

66 Small battery size

67 BDEFGHIJLKNOPQRSU-VWXYZ

73 One traveling the bases?

78 Place for rockers ... and many folding seats

79 Brunch spot

80 Run smoothly

81 Brick that hurts to step on

82 Unkind

83 Small mistake

85 Fireside Chats' medium

87 Pundit's piece in the paper

88 Caps on leg joints

90 CEFGHIJLKNPQSTUVWXYZ

93 A slowpoke brings it up

94 They have their kinks

95 "Bohemian Rhapsody" actor

96 ABCDFGIJLKNPQRSTUVWXYZ

100 Carded

102 Engine speed stat.

105 Jafar's sidekick in "Aladdin"

106 One may make mascara run

107 Reasonable

109 Whole-grain cereal brand

111 Intense conflict

113 BDEFGIJKLMPQSTUVWXYZ

117 Assembled, with "together"

118 Negotiator's refusal

119 Sea \_\_\_ (flowerlike creature)

120 Knight mare, maybe?

121 Pays for the meal

122 Soaked, like a tea bag

- DOWN
- 1 Potter's coat

2 Written defamation

3 Based on reasoning

4 Fix, as fences

5 Drink whose name consists of two synonyms

6 Colorful card game

7 Awaits judgment

8 Teenage skin affliction

9 Some short reads?

10 Stand-\_\_\_ (substitutes)

11 "How did I miss that?!!"

12 Most cunning

13 Spanish cuisine at some bars

14 Maple syrup source

15 One lets you sample a product

16 "Breakout" company

17 Away from the office

18 Move stealthily

21 Suggest

23 Apple platform since '07

DEATH NOTICES

- KATHLEEN CRIPE (87), formerly of Alexandria, Sept. 21, 2021

STEPHEN GEORGE DAKES (89), formerly of Alexandria, Sept. 13, 2021

ANTHONY DELCOCO (87), of Alexandria, Sept. 21, 2021

MIDLRED GALLAHAN (76), of Alexandria, Sept. 26, 2021

EDWARD HEIDEN (82), formerly of Alexandria, Sept. 23, 2021

LLOYD LANGHORNE CRAIGHILL (93), formerly of Alexandria, Sept. 14, 2021

Solutions from last week



- 28 Potato gizmo

32 Comparable

33 Cartographer's creation

34 Bartender's rocks

35 "Today" rival, briefly

37 Decide one will

38 Displays humanity, in a way

39 Negative votes

41 Guideline, informally

42 Corn syrup brand

43 Like the Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, by birth

44 "Top Chef" judge Simmons

45 Graduate's attire

46 Fabric that may be gold

47 Sneaker maker

48 Assignment

51 "Who, me?"

55 Mass times acceleration

56 Aspiring D.A.'s exam

57 Command that tests a dog's patience

59 Org. that launched Curiosity

60 Kinda sorta

61 Table extender

62 GPS company

63 Patriotic Uncle

67 Repeated musical passage

68 Realm

69 "Cool!"

70 It really speaks to you

71 Show with a Hawaii spinoff

72 Generational divide

73 BMW rival

74 Flower

75 Many-car garage?

76 New \_\_\_ (person who may use crystals)

77 Mary \_\_\_ Lincoln

80 Many have brims

83 Like writing in italics

84 Size above medium

85 GPS suggestion

86 Mythical monster

89 Luau garland

90 End of Google's URL

91 Employ

92 Result of a torn ACL, perhaps

94 King's genre

96 Speech therapists' targets

97 Wipe out like a surfer

98 Go along

99 "In case you \_\_\_ noticed ..."

100 Quaint lodging

101 Impressionist Edgar

103 Give a ring

104 Stuck in the mud

107 Couple's quarrel

108 Feels sick

110 Pinnacle

112 Gave, as lines

114 Keats' "\_\_\_ to a Nightingale"

115 Fried rice morsel

116 Industrious colony member

# Council approves eviction prevention resources

**Increased staffing and legal services go toward keeping residents housed**

BY CODY MELLO-KLEIN

City Council approved additional resources, including increased staffing and legal services, for Alexandria's ongoing eviction prevention efforts during Tuesday night's legislative meeting.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as residents felt the financial strains of the lockdown, the city increased its eviction prevention efforts. In 2020, the city established its eviction prevention task force consisting of various city departments and community partners, which worked to provide legal advice and rental assistance to residents facing eviction.

During the meeting on Tuesday, Lisa Gilbert, Department of Community and Human Services economic support director, proposed

that City Council provide additional resources for the city's efforts. After the end of Virginia's eviction moratorium in August, Gov. Ralph Northam (D) signed a budget bill that extended eviction protection until June 30, 2022. The new bill requires that landlords issue to tenants a 14-day pay or quit notice, which states the landlord's demand for the tenant to vacate the premises within a given time period. Landlords must also apply for rental assistance within 14 days after serving the notice before they evict a tenant for unpaid rent. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also extended protections for tenants until Oct. 3, 2021 after its moratorium ended on July 31.

Since June 2020, 2,135 unlawful detainer summons have been filed, according to Gilbert. Of those cases, 1,307, or 61%, were dismissed or non-suited and 599, or 28%, were ruled in favor of the



JUSTIN WILSON

landlord. Additionally, 283 writs of eviction have been issued in that time. Gilbert said that 134 households in the city are still at risk of being evicted at the end of the moratorium.

According to Gilbert, the city has already given legal advice to more than 1,000 residents through its outreach at the courthouse. The city has also provided rental assistance to more than 3,700 households.

In the last two weeks, there have been 120 eviction hearings, a slight decrease from the beginning of September, of which about 22

“One of the nice things about the moment we are in right now is that there is an enormous amount of resources that aren't normally available.”

– Justin Wilson, mayor

were dismissed and six ruled in favor of the landlord, according to Gilbert. Thirteen unlawful detainers summons were filed in the past two weeks, with a monthly total of 37, a 90% decrease from August.

Despite an extension on state level protections for tenants, since the eviction moratorium ended, Gilbert said DCHS staff have seen an increase in the number of filings being submitted by landlords. In order to protect tenants, the city proposed allocating \$457,000 to increase staffing for specific positions: two service navigators and two housing locators.

According to Gilbert, the navigators go out into the community, work with households to complete rental assistance applications and provide information about available resources. Housing locators, of which there are currently none in the city aside from those in shelters, assist those facing eviction with finding new housing.

“We want to be able to have this resource available in the community for those in the community who are in the eviction process,” Gilbert said. “If they have no choice but to move, we want to help them get quickly housed in a place that meets their needs.”

City staff also proposed additional resources be added to DCHS' eviction storage efforts in order to help find

and secure temporary storage for tenants' belongings as they go through the eviction process.

“We know that typically when someone is evicted and they don't have storage and a place to move to, they can lose their belongings discarded on the street,” Gilbert said. “We want to help minimize the trauma and the loss that comes with eviction by providing this service.”

DCHS' final request was for resources to provide legal support for undocumented residents. According to Gilbert, staff is engaging in preliminary discussions with the Legal Aid Justice Center to provide this service.

Mayor Justin Wilson applauded staff's efforts and said that although the pandemic has been tough on many residents, it has also opened up new doors to fund programs like DCHS' eviction prevention efforts.

“One of the nice things about the moment we are in right now is that there is an enormous amount of resources that aren't normally available,” Wilson said. “We just need to make sure people take advantage of them.”

Councilor Del Pepper made a motion, which Councilor John Chapman seconded, to approve the additional resources for DCHS. Council approved the motion unanimously, 9-0.

–cmelloklein@alextimes.com

**Give it a Shot!**

**Protect Yourself & Your Community.**

The Alexandria Times encourages all residents to get the COVID-19 vaccine when available.

 **#VaxALX**



## Our View — Embattled police

There are zero dollars allocated to police body cameras in Alexandria's 2021-30 Capital Improvement Program budget. There were zero dollars allocated to police body cameras from Alexandria's windfall of \$29.7 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding – in fact body cameras for police weren't anywhere on the wish list of proposals.

It's also well documented that the starting pay for Alexandria police lags well behind that of other jurisdictions in this region. According to IUPA Local 5, a police union in Alexandria, APD's starting salary is \$50,839.88, while in Fairfax City it's almost 20% more, at \$60,210. Apparently, even the Northern Virginia Community College's Police Department is paid 10% more than Alexandria's officers.

These funding facts bring two old adages to mind. The first is, "you get what you pay for." The second is, "budgeting is philosophy."

In Alexandria, we have a police department that is stretched to the breaking point with not enough officers to do all the tasks expected of them. It's no coincidence that violent crime is on the rise in this city – and is seemingly getting worse by the week. While residents used to be concerned about things like auto theft or vehicle break-ins, we now have armed car-jackings and murders along with seemingly weekly shots fired incidents.

City Council's spending decisions reveal that they do not sufficiently value our city's police department. Instead of budgeting pay that's competitive with our neighboring jurisdictions, our local government parrots the platitude that our police pay is "competitive." Except it's not.

Additionally, Alexandria's City Council in 2021 alone voted to eliminate the school resource officer program in city schools and to create a police review board.

So, our City Council is so concerned about police misbehavior that it has created a review board, which lacks any voting positions for people with actual law enforcement experience, in the name of police accountability and oversight. But it won't allocate any money, not even a token amount, toward purchasing body cameras that would actually document police behavior and provide tangible evidence if misbehavior occurs.

Alexandria's Congressman, Don Beyer, (D-8) along with D.C. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton just this week sent a letter to President Joe Biden requesting body cameras for federal officers. Beyer and Norton wrote: "While some federal law enforcement agencies have begun to adopt camera programs, we strongly believe that every federal law enforcement agency should be required to do so. We believe this is a simple but necessary step to protect officers and the public."

According to Brad Greenwood, an associate professor at George Mason University's School of Business, there have been three significant benefits to body cameras being worn by New York City police officers: more legitimate stops are being made by police; there are fewer complaints alleging officers' abuse of authority; and there are fewer arrests being made.

City Council's vote to remove SROs from Alexandria schools was done over the very loud protests of several School Board members. That 4-3 vote overruled Alexandria's elected School Board, which had carefully considered this issue over many months with input from teachers, students and parents.

These are unwise decisions being made by City Council regarding police pay, oversight and utilization.

There's a direct line between how our police officers are treated and how safe we are. Residents might want to remember that as they watch what's happening with crime in Alexandria – and as they ponder who to support in the upcoming City Council election.

# Opinion

"Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe."

- Thomas Jefferson

## Photo of the Week



PHOTO/DENISE DUNBAR

Three Alexandria residents rally on Tuesday in support of returning school resource officers to Alexandria City Public Schools.

## School Board protects Hutchings instead of our children

*To the editor:*

There have been many complaints about what the board of Alexandria City Public Schools and Superintendent Dr. Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D. did not do last summer to prepare for in-person learning amid a COVID-19 surge.

I write to shed light on an action the board did take: The June 17 unanimous vote to issue Hutchings a replacement contract was stunning.

It was calculated. It was unnecessary. It may even be incongruous with Virginia law. But it was obviously done to solidify Hutchings' position ahead of the November election, during which the thorny issues of ACPS' COVID-19 mitigation, academic underperformance and school violence are on the ballot.

Hutchings' first contract, dated Dec. 14, 2017, called only for the board to "communicate ... its intent with respect to renewal or extension ... by December 31, 2021." With his first term ending June 30, 2022, renegotiation wasn't needed.

Virginia law stipulates that "at the expiration of the initial term, the division superintendent shall be eligible to hold office for the term specified by the employing school board," which in the case of Hutchings' contract, would be elected by Alexandrians in November and take office in January.

Virginia law also ensures that no School Board shall renegotiate a superintendent's contract during a so-called lame duck period, that time after which a new board is elected but has yet to assume office. Plainly put, Virginia law dictates that superintendent contracts expire June 30 and empowers the board sitting when a superintendent's contract expires to negotiate terms for additional service.

What happened June 17 was a shrewd end run. That evening, agenda item 15 on the board's consent calendar, "Superintendent Contract Replacement," was

HILLIS

FROM | 25

buried amid routine committee appointments, regulatory policy reviews and athletic hall of fame recommendations.

It was anything but routine.

The board issued Hutchings a free pass beyond the three-year reach of the board we will elect in weeks. His new contract, negotiated a year early, ends June 30, 2025, six months after the term for the board we are about to select.

This vote came nine days after six of nine board members chose not to run for office again – but they had no qualms with imposing their will on Alexandrians far beyond when their work ends in January.

There was a word missing from the transcript of that June 17 meeting: “Delta.” Members did not ask Hutchings to think ahead about how this new variant in the news might influence learning here. Deliberations on staff and student COVID-19 vaccinations wouldn’t happen for weeks until the board finally scrambled just before school began.

It is important to understand the context of the June 17 meeting. A proclamation read at the beginning says that due to the state of emergency, the School Board meeting was held electronically pursuant to Virginia code “for the purpose of providing for the continuity of operations.”

Was it appropriate during that meeting for the board to approve a new superintendent contract that should be the purview of its successor board a full year later? Was it right to place this item on the consent calendar? Immediate action was not needed to continue ACPS operations.

This board isn’t inept. It wanted to plan for the future – just not the future, and crisis with Delta, that we were fac-

ing. Though COVID-19 cases temporarily waned last spring, we were on the cusp of another front in the COVID war, another existential threat to in-person learning from this virus.

Delta was sweeping through Southern states and became predominant nationally by late June. It was becoming obvious that sending kids back to school would be much trickier than hoped, even if the variant was later to arrive in our city than others.

But instead of concentrating on how to teach students in this complex environment, this board was preoccupied with job security for our superintendent, whom board members described as a “visionary” that would “transform” ACPS once the COVID-19 crisis passes. It was unfair to hang COVID-19 performance around his neck, they told me. Hutchings simply told me via email that the timing of the new contract “is typical and fully in compliance with legal requirements.”

Regardless of whether one supports him, his leadership, COVID-19 strategy or strategic plan, I argue this board’s calculated effort to protect Hutchings from the next board, and its constituents, was undemocratic.

Guaranteeing a safe, productive handoff from one elected body to another was at the time one of the more radical ideas codified in the U.S. Constitution. That we take this for granted in modern life is a testament to its effectiveness. Virginia law on elected boards shifting oversight of a superintendent is clear; our board just got creative.

I am disheartened that members took extraordinary measures this summer to protect the superintendent instead of our kids.

-Amy Hillis,  
Alexandria



## Poor Robert's Ruminations

with Rob Whittle

# Travels through the Big 10

BY ROB WHITTLE

A few years ago, I had the idea of designing a fan avatar for the Washington Capitals. My company developed an online way to superimpose a fan’s face onto an image of a Caps player, customizing it with choices of scars, facial hair, mullet/no mullet and, finally, a mouth that would move with the spoken word.

The idea was to use the avatar on social media. So, a fan could choose his or her favorite player’s jersey – or sweater, as I learned to call it – record a message and post it to Facebook. I named it Slapstick.

The Caps loved it and began promoting it to their fans. Ever the entrepreneur, I thought that Slapstick could scale up to virtually any sport, including college football where opportunities would abound. This led to my excellent road trip to the Big 10.

I called my acquaintance from Tennessee, Larry, who is basically an insurance salesman with many connections in the football world. Larry is a rotund, merry dreamer with an outrageous southern drawl and a million corny jokes and adages, most of which involve football or “foot-bawl.”

Keeping in mind that Facebook and all social media was still a relatively new phenomenon, and that Larry had probably never heard of it, let alone understood its power, I nevertheless knew that he was the perfect sales guy for Slapstick, precisely because he was an uber entrepreneur and a dreamer. I also knew that he was close with Gary Moeller.

The important thing about Gary was that he’d been head coach of the University of Michigan football team for five years. Never mind that he’d resigned under murky circumstances involving alcohol. All he would say on the subject was that “it was a bad night.” He, like any winning coach in the Big 10, was a god. In other words, the perfect “door buster.”

The three of us converged on Ann Arbor and proceeded to the Michigan football facility, which is about the size of Rhode Island. There, Gary, Larry and I were feted. Everyone knew “Coach” and bowed and scraped; even the current

players knew of him, though he hadn’t coached there in more than a decade.

It was then on to Ohio State where Gary had captained a national championship team under legendary former Buckeyes coach Woody Hayes. More bowing and scraping and touring of their uber-impressive facility, led by the athletic director himself.

Various showcases featured multiple Heisman trophies along with a huge digital clock that counted down the days, hours, minutes and seconds until the next Michigan game. Seems that’s a pretty strong rivalry.

The most fun part of the trip was the time on the road. I was situated in the back seat like the kid with the parents up front. Larry got Coach to loosen up and tell some war stories.

Coach talked about Woody Hayes – not his coaching or his strategies, but rather his recruiting style. Woody would sit down in a recruit’s home and barely acknowledge the recruit himself. He would address the mom, and only the mom, promising her that her boy would be in good hands and would call home every Sunday. He rarely left without a commitment. And, you can be sure, the boy did call home every Sunday.

Coach looked like a kid on Christmas morning when he told the story of calling a pass play on fourth down to Heisman Trophy winner Desmond Howard against Ohio State. The play was successful and Coach beamed as though it had happened that morning.

On the road to our final stop, Indiana University, we pulled into a diner for lunch. Larry polished off his meatloaf and mashed potatoes with a helping of cherry pie. When the server delivered the check, Larry drawled with a twinkle in his eye that he’d like his money back because he didn’t like the meal. I was as embarrassed as any teenager would be over a parent’s bad joke.

Oh, and Slapstick? I remember nothing about the meetings except that nobody wrote a check. It was all about the road trip.

*The writer is CEO of Williams Whittle Advertising and the author of two historical novels, “Pointer’s War” and “Pointer and the Russian.”*

The opinions expressed in letters and columns are those of the writers only and do not reflect the views, nor receive the endorsement, of the Alexandria Times.

## Remembering the Senators' last game

To the editor:

Who would ever have thought the nation's capital would endure 33 years without Major League Baseball?

I certainly didn't as I drove with a high school buddy to RFK Stadium on the night of Sept. 30, 1971. My beloved Senators were about to play their final game in Washington, D.C. before departing for Texas to become the Rangers. American League owners had voted 10-2 to allow owner Bob Short to move his team to what he thought would be greener pastures down south.

I could sense despair in the voice of Ron Menchine, the Senators' radio play-by-play broadcaster. But on this night, there was a sense of excitement as a larger crowd than usual showed up to witness history. In the center field upper deck, fans unfurled two large sheets with a simple message: "Short stinks."

Another huge sign, unfurled later in the game, was far more vulgar, and the crowd loved it. We had hoped the Senators, who had struggled all season and decades for that matter, would finally give their fans something to cheer about.

The New York Yankees jumped to an early 5-0 lead. But several innings later, slugger Frank Howard electrified the crowd by hitting a line drive home run that barely cleared the left field fence. It sent the crowd into a frenzy for several minutes as "Hondo" rounded the bases and waved to the fans. The blast inspired his teammates, who rallied to take the lead.

The Senators were within one out of closing their 71-year history on a high note. Then, a young man sprinted onto the field, grabbed second base and ran off. That prompted hundreds of others to storm the field searching for souvenirs. Some ripped out huge numbers from the scoreboard, ripped up chunks of sod and anything else within reach. One man with shoulder length hair shimmied up a flagpole and tried to steal the American flag.

RFK's legendary P.A. announcer Charlie Brotman implored rowdy fans to clear the field or the game would be forfeited. Sadly, the crowd did not comply.

The small number of uniformed police officers at RFK were vastly

outnumbered, helpless to stop the melee. Twenty minutes went by before a large contingent of Metropolitan Police tactical officers in riot gear suddenly emerged from the Yankees' dugout. They formed a line and then charged through the infield. The sight of helmeted officers sent the mob scrambling back toward the stands.

But by then, it was too late. With the once pristine field literally torn to shreds, the umpires had no choice but to declare a forfeit. The Senators were ahead, but the Yankees were declared the winner. Menchine described the fans' behavior as "despicable."

My friend and I never considered running onto the field to join the rambunctious crowd. After all, I always viewed a major league baseball field as sacred ground. It later dawned on me the raucous crowd had prevented other fans from bidding their team a proper farewell.

No one hit more home runs in the final seven seasons than Frank Howard. Dick Bosman, who started the final game, was the Senators' best pitcher in recent years. It was also Hall of Famer Ted Williams' last game as manager. Two years earlier, he led the team to its first winning season in more than a quarter century.

After the '71 season, some die-hard fans were still convinced D.C. would receive yet another team. After all, when the old Senators moved from Washington to Minnesota after the 1960 season, the city was awarded an expansion franchise for the '61 season. Call me an optimist, but I always thought baseball would return to D.C., even though it took more than three decades. I guess Major League Baseball could no longer discount the huge D.C. media market and affluent fan base.

So now, a new generation of fans has been spoiled by a spectacular ballpark in a burgeoning part of town and the great success of the Nationals, who surprised virtually everyone by capturing the 2019 World Series. And while a promising 2021 season suddenly crumbled with injuries and wholesale trades of marquee players, Major League Baseball in Washington is here to stay. Hopefully, Nats' fans won't take that for granted.

-John Rydell,  
Baltimore

My View | Heather Peeler

## Working together for a vibrant Alexandria

BY HEATHER PEELER

To say that the past year has been unpredictable is an understatement. At the onset, few could have predicted that this fall we would still be figuring out how to navigate COVID-19 and its impacts on Alexandria.

Some aspects of normalcy have returned for some of us, but many Alexandrians continue to be challenged by unemployment, housing instability and food insecurity. Access to affordable childcare is an urgent need. And personal health and safety remain a concern.

Amid this uncertainty, we have turned to one another. ACT was founded on the idea that when people come together, they can achieve big things. The Sept. 11 tragedy was catalytic and sparked philanthropic generosity as well as ACT's founding. That event changed our lives in ways we could not predict; also ushered in unprec-



HEATHER  
PEELER

ed uncertainty. Over the years, the giving back have remained the foundation for what I call Team Alexandria. Team Alexandria – community members, businesses, nonprofit organizations – worked together to address human needs of our neighborhood from every neighborhood and more.

Team Alexandria continues to organize, respond and assist our community. Back-to-school drives, assistance for refugees and aid for those navigating natural disasters are recent efforts led by community members. The Alexandria Resilience Fund and Sleeves Up ALX, a partnership between ACT and the Alexandria Health Department, are supporting vaccine outreach efforts led by community organizations that have trusted relationships with residents.

As we look to the future, we are focused on ensuring a just recovery to the pandemic. We are working with partners to make investments in solutions that address the underlying issues of inequity that were exacerbated by the pandemic. Income inequality, economic mobility, housing affordability and educational opportunity are top priorities. For example, the City of Alexandria's Guaranteed Income Pilot is an exciting opportunity to think differently about how we help all Alexandrians thrive.

Finally, we are also thinking differently about who is at the table and how we can be more inclusive in our work. That is why ACT is forming a Youth Advisory Council to ensure that young people are at the forefront of philanthropy and community solutions in Alexandria. Designed by youth for youth, the advisory council will provide workshops, training, mentorship and resume-boosting skills to youth who want to make a difference. Visit [www.actforalexandria.org](http://www.actforalexandria.org) to learn more.

ACT's founders could not have predicted the needs of our community today and how ACT as an institution would respond. They had faith that Alexandrians would deploy their generosity and creativity in big and small ways to make a difference.

Thank you, Team Alexandria! We celebrate you and all you do to make Alexandria a vibrant place for all.

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constant. They are  
my colleagues and  
Over the past year,  
prised of hundreds of  
the faith community,  
and city govern-  
to address the basic  
bors. Alexandrians  
supported each oth-

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# The power of neighboring in Chirilagua

BY ADRIANA GÓMEZ SCHELLHAAS  
AND JUAN MARTÍNEZ OVALLE

Casa Chirilagua is a faith-based non-profit which serves alongside the Central American immigrant community of Chirilagua located in Arlandria. For almost 15 years, we have been developing relationships with families to see the Chirilagua neighborhood transformed by Christ. We do this through the various programs that begin with our leadership pipeline, which includes family support, as well as adult education, community collaboration and engagement.

Our story as an organization begins with our founders, three young women, who moved into the heart of Chirilagua in 2007. They moved in with no goal of starting a nonprofit but rather with the intention of listening to and learning from the stories and wisdom of their Latino neighbors. This posture of listening and learning from our neighbors is one we use to this day. After two years of neighboring, our founders reflected on and responded to neighbors' concerns about their children's academic progress. They opened a tutoring space in their own apartment for a small group of elementary students. This grass roots after-school enrichment program became what is now known as Kids Club, which serves 40 students between first to fifth grade.

Kids Club is the beginning of what we call our Leadership Pipeline, where a student and their family begin with Kids Club, transition to Teens Club while in middle school, then to Casa to College while in high school and finally to a paid, part-time internship known as our Local Leaders program. Students in our Leadership Pipeline are matched one-on-one with a committed mentor and provided with spiritual support through our middle and high school Bible study groups. Our Leadership Pipeline provides a safe environment of belonging



PHOTO/CASA CHIRILAGUA

A volunteer sorts food in the Casa Chirilagua food pantry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

where children receive social, emotional and academic support all while fine-tuning their leadership skills.

Today, Casa Chirilagua is a community of parent committee officers, staff members, board members, church partners, community partners, children and their families and hundreds of volunteers. At Casa Chirilagua, we work to honor the voices, stories, experiences and wisdom of our neighbors. At the core of Casa Chirilagua's history and philosophy is the importance of intentionally learning from and listening to the community.

Anyone who considers the heritage of our Central American neighbors will find not only unique stories of professional achievements, but of the strength and resilience that shape the day-to-day experiences of immigrant families living in Chirilagua. We celebrate our neighbors' wisdom by highlighting the gifts they bring to the city and the broader society.

It's a blessing when people outside our

neighborhood know the challenges families face in Chirilagua and decide to help. It is an even more significant blessing when people recognize the spiritual, cultural and economic contributions of our neighbors who make up the heart of Chirilagua's legacy and decide to join us in developing relationships with families to see our neighborhood transformed. We have found that our neighborhood-centered approach that celebrates the heritage of Chirilagua is not only an effective means for community development, but a joyful journey of relationship as well. We invite you to join us in this transformative work. Visit [www.casa-chirilagua.org](http://www.casa-chirilagua.org) to learn more.

*Historic Alexandria is excited to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month this year from Sept. 15-Oct. 15. We invite you to our virtual lecture by Dr. Enrique Pumar on Domingo Sarmiento's visit to Washington in 1847 on Oct. 13. You can register at [Alexandriava.gov/shop](http://Alexandriava.gov/shop). Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*

## Weekly Poll

### Last Week

Do you plan on voting in the Nov. 2 general election?

89% Yes, I have registered to vote and plan on voting for both state and local offices.  
6% Yes, I have registered to vote and plan on voting for only state offices.  
5% Yes, I have registered to vote and plan on voting for only local offices.  
0% No, I do not plan on voting this year.  
0% I have not registered to vote.

### This Week

Take the poll at [alextimes.com](http://alextimes.com)

What is the best path for the future of River Farm?

A) The American Horticultural Society should sell River Farm to NOVA Parks.  
B) AHS should stay on as owner of River Farm.  
C) NOVA Parks and AHS should become joint owners.  
D) AHS should own the property, while NOVA Parks partners with AHS to oversee and maintain the property.  
E) AHS should sell River Farm to a private developer.

# City updates council on stormwater work

## Larger projects to start construction in 2024

BY CODY MELLO-KLEIN

During Tuesday night's City Council legislative meeting, staff from the city's Department of Transportation and Environmental Services presented a timeline for the city's large scale stormwater projects that involves construction starting in 2024.

For residents who experienced the impacts of several intense summer rainstorms, from widespread flooding to sewage backup, the news may prove frustrating, especially after another series of intense summer storms.

The two most significant storms that occurred over the last couple of months swept through Alexandria on Aug. 15 and Sept. 16. The storm on Aug. 15 was the most intense of the two, dropping three to six inches of rain in about 30 minutes in some areas of the city, according to Yon Lambert, director of T&ES. The storm caused flooding, power outages, sanitary backups and road closures and resulted in a total of 5.5 inches of rain falling over the course of six hours. The city received 155 service requests related to the storm's impact through the 311 service.

The Sept. 16 storm lasted less time but brought down about two inches of rain in 30 minutes in Rosemont and about 2.6 inches total.

Lambert characterized the Sept. 16 storm as a 10-year storm, meaning the kind of storm that would typically have a 10% chance of occurring annually, while he said a storm with the intensity of what occurred on Aug. 15 would typically have less than a 0.5% chance of happening annually.



PHOTO/ALEX SNYDER

At its most intense, the storm on Aug. 15 dumped 4.11 inches of rain on the city in 40 minutes.

"Obviously, given what's happening with climate change, we are all experienced with seeing these storms more frequently now," Lambert said.

According to Terry Suehr, director of project implementation in T&ES, the city is making progress on the first three larger stormwater capacity projects that the city has invested in. Council's approved 10-year capital improvement program budget includes \$267 million for stormwater projects, with \$27.5 million set aside for projects in FY2022.

The first two projects – one at Glebe Road and Commonwealth Avenue and the other at Ashby Street and Glebe Road – are entering the design phase, while a third project at the Hoofs Run culvert bypass is "right behind that," according to Suehr.

"We anticipate design award to be this coming spring. [The] design pro-

cess typically goes about 18 months, and then we go straight into construction after that," Suehr said. "So, we're looking at construction award around the spring of 2024 and then proceeding with construction on those three projects that we have going."

Shovels will not enter dirt on the city's larger flood mitigation efforts for a few years, but the city is implementing a series of smaller spot improvement projects and maintenance efforts in the meantime, according to Lambert. There are currently three spot improvement projects being designed and five projects in the preliminary design phase.

"Obviously, with the new funding, we're able to do now more projects annually than we were able to do previously," Lambert said. "... Two of those are on Mount Vernon Avenue ... and both involve replacing of inlets, extending some storm sew-

ers and adding new inlets."

T&ES staff have also cleaned out about 5,000 linear feet of storm pipes over the summer, repaired 14 stormwater structures, completed cleaning on the lower portion of the Hooffs Run culvert and inspected 15 miles of sanitary sewer pipes, according to Lambert.

Although residents continue have continued to feel the impacts of these storms and the resulting flooding, Lambert said the city has been better able to analyze the rainfall from these storms using new rain gauges. The hope is that the data provided during storms like this will help staff target specific areas of the city for upcoming projects in its new Flood Action Alexandria program.

"I would say that with the addition of the city's rain gauges ... that has provided us with additional data to be able to monitor and



YON LAMBERT

understand what's happening with these storms and how localized some of these events really have been," Lambert said.

The program launches this week and with it will come a new public data portal where residents can view the data collected by the city's expanded network of rain gauges.

As part of the program, the city announced on Tuesday that it had hired Daniel Medina as Alexandria's first Flood Action Alexandria program manager. The new position will involve work across city departments in order to successfully implement the city's flood mitigation program and manage the city's growing list of stormwater capital projects. Medina will also serve as a liaison to the Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group.

Medina was virtually present at the meeting on Tuesday and said he was glad to hear council asking about flooding in other parts of the meeting on Tuesday. Medina stressed how vital it is to assess flood mitigation in every part of city policy.

"It's going to continue raining. It's going to rain more, so we all need an approach that starts with the ground up and constitutes a holistic solution to the problem," Medina said.

-cmelloklein@alextimes.com



## Classifieds

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## Obituary

### Deborah Byrnes File

Deborah Byrnes File died peacefully at Goodwin House in Alexandria on Sept. 17, 2021 surrounded by members of her family. Debbie was the daughter of E. Daly Byrnes and Dorothy Kemp Byrnes of the Roland Park neighborhood of Baltimore where her large family included the first Irish Catholic governor of Maryland, Herbert R. O'Connor. She was a 1958 graduate of Mt. Saint Agnes High School and earned a nursing degree from Church Home and Hospital, now part of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

After working as a registered nurse for two years, she married Lt. Gerald B. File, USMC in 1965. During Jerry's 1967 tour in Vietnam, she gave birth to their daughter Jocelyn in Alexandria. She worked part-time as a registered nurse at Washington Hospital Center, Alexandria Hospital and Alexandria City Public Schools.

As a community supporter she volunteered at Beverly Hills Preschool, St. Mary's Elementary, St. Mary's Academy; the office of State Sen. Bob Calhoun, and she represented her friend, the late Sarah Brady, in testimony before a Virginia legislative committee on handgun safety. She also headed a Christmas fundraising gala at Gonzaga College High School and was a founding sponsor at the Washington Jesuit Academy. The National Gallery of Art benefited and commended her for 10 years of service as a docent.

Debbie was a long-time member of Alexandria's the Twig and Junior Friends of The Campagna Center, which supported the Alexandria Hospital, YWCA and children at risk.

While raising two children of her own, she mentored four boys who lost their mothers at very young ages and also has sponsored a student at the Washington Jesuit Academy every year since its founding in 2002.



She was preceded in death by her parents, her sister Margaret Byrnes and her infant daughter Laura. She is survived by her husband of 56 years Gerald of Alexandria; daughter Jocelyn Adamoli, husband Joseph and grandchild Charlie of Arlington; son Jay, wife Nikki and grandchildren Brendan, Bridget, and Bryce of Atlanta; and grandchild Brianna File Johnston, husband Eric and great-granddaughter Charlotte Marie of Dallas; brother Kemp Byrnes (Fritzi) of Baltimore and sister Cindy Byrnes-Golubin (Greg), children Garrett, Courtney of Alexandria; and sister-in-law Mary Ellen File, children Nancye Vermillion, Bill Butcher, and Katie Sargeant.

A memorial mass will be held on Oct. 9 at 10 am at St. Aloysius Church on North Capitol Street at Gonzaga College High School. Burial will be later at Arlington National Cemetery.

Because of her many years as a volunteer school nurse, the family will have the student clinic at Bishop Ireton High School in Alexandria named in her honor.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Campagna Center, 428 S. Washington St., Alexandria, Va. 22314 or the Washington Jesuit Academy, 900 Varnum St. NE, Washington, D.C. 20017.

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