2022 YEAR IN REVIEW
Wishing you Peace and Joy this holiday season and in the New Year! Thank you for the love, support and referrals over the years. I am truly grateful.

- Christine

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A look back on 2022

For the third straight year, the COVID-19 pandemic had an outsized impact on Alexandria.

By the start of 2022, a sizable majority of residents had been vaccinated against the virus, and a smaller majority had also received at least one booster shot. Yet the transition from the Delta variant to the newer, more easily transmittable Omicron variant led to an extreme surge in cases in January 2022.

The good news is that this surge subsided, by mid-February, as quickly as it had flared. Of course, that was not the only case spike of the year, as another surge began alongside a cold spell a week before Thanksgiving that sent temperatures plunging and people indoors. The virus subsequently spread quickly to people who gathered for Thanksgiving. While it’s anecdotal, we have heard in recent weeks of many people contracting COVID-19 for the first time. These are the people whose mask-wearing and diligence had enabled them to escape contagion for more than two years. Thankfully, this cohort is the one most likely to be fully vaccinated and boosted, which usually results in milder cases.

It’s going to become increasingly difficult to get accurate case counts for COVID-19 moving forward in Alexandria. This is partially because people are increasingly testing at home and not seeking medical care or reporting their illness to their doctor or the health department. Others aren’t bothering to test at all, instead assuming the mindset that they will recover at home whether they have COVID-19 or something else.

Alexandria has been blessed by having multiple, efficient Curative testing kiosks in the city, but these will be shutting down next week as the company closes their testing sites in this region. This time last year, block-long lines formed outside of the kiosks, as people tried to get tested, but usage has dwindled in 2022.

Curative has been an important player in the fight against COVID-19 in this city, and we owe them our gratitude. As more time passes since the start of the pandemic, studies of various facets will occur and results that are both unexpected and interesting will emerge. This summer we ran an article showing that Latinos have much better outcomes per case of COVID-19 than either whites or Blacks, and that this was true for every age group. Our article showed a strong correlation between vaccination rates and outcomes, though it’s possible there are other factors at play.

We ran another article in December that touched on COVID-19 demographics. It showed that whites accounted for an astronomical 86% of COVID-19 deaths statewide in Virginia this fall, based on data on the Virginia Department of Health website. Again, this is likely related to vaccination status, as well as age, as whites are the least-vaccinated of the three largest ethnic groups in Virginia and most of the deaths were of people aged 80 and older.

Inflation is another issue that impacted all Alexandrians in 2022. It became much more expensive to shop at the grocery store, dine out or fill up our vehicles with gas. Interest rates were hiked to try and tame inflation, which cooled the wonderful real estate market of the past few years. Borrowing money became more expensive for everyone, not just prospective home-buyers.

Alexandria’s public schools, particularly at the high school level, continued to be in a state of turmoil in 2022, despite the often-heroic work done by teachers day-in and day-out to try and educate our students.

Violence continues to be the most significant problem; it’s the element that impacts everything else. In early 2022, news broke that an alleged sexual assault had taken place at the Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School in October 2021 – and that parents had not been informed of the alleged assault, for which one student was charged with three felonies in January 2022.

Most tragically, ACHS senior Luis Mejia Hernandez died from a stab wound when a melee erupted in the McDonalds parking lot at Bradlee Shopping center. The fight happened during school hours just a week before Mejia Hernandez was due to graduate from ACHS. Another large fight erupted on Dec. 5 in the cafeteria of the Minnie Howard campus of ACHS. Student videos of the fight show an administrator being knocked to the ground as he attempted to quell the fighting. Additionally, an apparent student called 911 and told the dispatcher “There’s a big-ass fight here.”

In June, Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., announced his resignation after four years at the helm of ACPS, ending a controversial tenure during which Alexandria’s public schools were shut down from COVID-19 longer than our regional counterparts, Alexandria lagged behind the rest of Virginia in Standards of Learning test scores and ongoing violence led one former contract employee to describe the Minnie Howard campus of ACPS as something “out of Lord of the Flies.”

Interim Superintendent Melanie Kay-Wyatt assumed the helm of ACPS on Sept. 1. She and whoever succeeds her as permanent superintendent will have their hands full, as progress on creating a learning environment in which all students succeed will depend on quieting the ongoing disorder and violence.

Three local sports triumphs stood out in 2022: The Alexandria Aces won their first championship in the Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League, the Bishop Ireton cheerleading team won a national championship and the ACHS women’s volleyball team won the Virginia state championship. Congratulations to all!

We would like to thank our many wonderful advertisers in 2022 for your ongoing patronage in choosing the Alexandria Times to market your businesses and services. We are grateful for our partnership with you.

Alexandria lost a number of giants in our community in 2022, most notably former Mayor Kerry Donley and former city elections registrar Anna Leider. Both died far too young – Donley was 66 and Leider 62 – and both are greatly missed. Other notable residents who passed in 2022 included business owners Rob Kaufman and Charlie Euripides, long-time Boys and Girls Club employee Ron Rust and community activists Townsend Van Fleet, Lee Fifer and Chet Avery. RIP.
**Bill Reagan retires from SBDC**

Bill Reagan retired on Jan. 31 after 25 years as executive director of the Alexandria Small Business Development Center. Reagan founded the SBDC in 1996, and since then the center has worked to strengthen independent businesses in the city through free counseling and educational opportunities for both new and seasoned entrepreneurs.

Twenty-five years and more than 90,000 consulting hours later, Reagan said he is ready to step aside and explore new ventures in life.

“I’m looking at the opportunities in my life to do new things, and I feel that it’s a good juncture coming out of the pandemic where there’s kind of a reset for almost everyone for the Small Business Development Center to have new leadership and take new approaches …,” Reagan said.

**Big snow for the New Year**

Alexandria ushered in the New Year with an intense snowstorm, as some areas of the city were hit with up to 10 inches of snow on Jan. 3, the day after the local temperature reached 65 degrees.

The storm, which dropped 7 to 10 inches of snow before subsiding at about 2 p.m., shuttered city facilities, suspended services and closed roads as city workers attempted to keep up with an unexpectedly severe winter storm. Although Metro continued to operate, the city’s DASH bus network suspended service on Jan. 3 before resuming service the next day.

**COVID-19 spikes**

Cases of COVID-19 and resulting hospitalizations surged in Alexandria following the holidays. Confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 jumped by more than 50% in the first week of January 2022 compared to the last week of 2021. In addition, the city’s PCR test positivity rate almost doubled in the first week of the New Year, up to an average of almost three new hospitalizations per day.

**Raft of crimes, arrests**

Several arrests were made in the first week of January 2022 for crimes committed in late 2021, while a man assaulted multiple people with a hammer in Alexandria’s West End.

On Jan. 3, a man entered the CVS in The Shops at Mark Center and attacked two people with a hammer, causing serious but non-life-threatening injuries, according to police and media reports. The suspect fled, but was found by police at a nearby apartment complex with serious, self-inflicted wounds to his head. The suspect was taken to the hospital for treatment and a mental health evaluation.

Meanwhile, David Cunningham of Alexandria was arrested and charged with second degree murder for the Dec. 7 murder of Melia Jones, also an Alexandria resident. Additionally, a Falls Church resident was arrested for a Christmas Eve hit-and-run against Alexandria firefighters. Three people were arrested after hitting a bystander while firing into a nearby car on Jan. 2 outside a 7-Eleven on S. Reynolds Street.

Additionally, a potential firebombing occurred on Jan. 3 at a 7-Eleven on S. Jordan Street. Police were searching for several male suspects who were suspected of tossing Molotov cocktails into the convenience store.

**Other notable events:**

Alexandria’s mayor, City Council and School Board sworn into office following the November 2021 general election; DASH announces service reduction because of staffing shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; Wesley Housing, a nonprofit affordable housing developer, acquires Parc Square Apartments in Chirilagua to preserve affordable housing in the neighborhood.
ParcView II project approved

City Council unanimously approved a large-scale affordable housing project in the Holmes Run neighborhood known as ParcView II, despite concerns among some residents regarding parking and density.

The current ParcView Apartments site at 5380 Holmes Run Parkway includes a 14-story affordable housing complex. With council’s approval, Wesley Housing, the owner of the property complex, will build two new nine-story buildings.

During the meeting, residents showed up to both support and criticize the project. Those supporting ParcView II cited the increase in affordable housing units it would provide for Alexandria. Other residents expressed concerns for potential issues surrounding safety, parking and density that may arise from the project.

Other notable events:

Boys and Girls club legend Ron Rust dies at 75; Alexandria City High School junior DeShawn Francis, 16, killed after 19 rounds were fired at or near a parked car in which he was sitting; Pizza Hut employee stabbed in the parking lot at 1049 W. Glebe Road

Former registrar Anna Leider dies at 62

Anna Leider, the former voter registrar who managed 41 city elections, lost her battle with an aggressive form of brain cancer known as glioblastoma on Feb. 12. She was 62.

Appointed by the Alexandria Electoral Board, Leider oversaw local voter registration services, maintained voter registration records, certified candidates for local office and administered state and national elections for six years. As general registrar and deputy of elections, Leider oversaw four presidential elections and three state or regional election recounts.

She also served as a member of the Alexandria Electoral Board.

Thanks Alexandria for a terrific ‘22! Here’s to a fabulous ‘23!

The Shannon Group has a combined 44 years of Alexandria real estate experience, a sweeping local knowledge and a dogged determination to achieve success. They are ready and willing to help you find the perfect home or to list your treasured house.

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Sold | $3,600,000

19 Pioneer Mill Way
Sold | $2,900,000

17 Pioneer Mill Way
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117 Prince Street
Sold | $2,350,000

10 Bakers Walk #401
Sold | $2,000,000

601 N Fairfax Street #511
Sold | $1,795,000

6211 Randall Court
Sold | $1,150,000

321 S Saint Asaph Street
Sold | $1,195,000
Thank you to my Alexandria clients for their continued support in 2022. My heartfelt wishes for a happy, healthy, and rewarding 2023!

With over 40 years of experience and over 4,000 real estate transactions, Heather Corey is a seasoned professional who maintains an enthusiastic passion for her calling. When working with Heather, you receive expertise that reaches down the block and around the world.

- #1 Individual Agent in Virginia (2022 REAL Trends & The Thousand Rankings by WSJ)
- #1 Individual Agent for TTR Sotheby’s International Realty’s Alexandria Office for the past six years
- Named in the Top 100 out of 24,478 Sotheby’s International Realty Agents worldwide
- Only D.C. area agent with the coveted Sotheby’s International Realty China Global Advisor designation
Parents were not notified of an alleged multi-assailant sexual assault in October 2021 at the Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School. After the incident came to light in mid-March 2022 via the online arm of National Review, ACPS parents have criticized the district for handling the situation in a manner that left them in the dark.

One student was charged with aggravated sexual battery, rape and forcible sodomy, all of which are felonies under Virginia code. The city released a statement on March 18, in response to swelling public interest in the case, saying that the city “is aware of the incident, that it was adjudicated in Court, and that the defendant was acquitted.”

Many parents and community members contend that the city could have — and should have — informed the community immediately that an incident was more broadly, being investigated, without sharing specific details or names.

Duke Street crash raises racing concerns

A car crash in the 3200 block of Duke Street left one person dead and two others badly injured in late February. The incident, which involved five separate vehicles, has since led some community members to speculate that it might have been related to street racing, which they say has been occurring in the area for some time.

According to the Alexandria Police Department, officers responded to reports of a car crash around 11:50 p.m. on Feb. 22 and arrived to find five vehicles in the roadway that sustained damage. The crash resulted in the death of a D.C. resident, one critical injury, one serious injury and two minor injuries.

“Initial investigation suggests that speed may have been a contributing factor to this crash …,” APD Public Information Officer Marcel Bassett said. Duke Street was closed for more than eight hours.

Ukrainian Alexandrians react to war

Several Ukrainian immigrants living in Alexandria expressed sadness at the Russian invasion of their country, and pride in Ukraine’s resilient defense in the early days of the war. Despite Russia’s claims that its troops targeted only military locations, Human Rights Watch documented a cluster bomb attack just outside a hospital in Eastern Ukraine.

Alexandria resident Viktor Stafiychuk said he was able to move his parents, both of whom have visas, to the U.S. two months prior to the invasion, as the situation started to escalate on Ukraine’s eastern border. Ukrainian-born Alexandria resident Svitlana Yarynova said she was proud of how her country has united not only to help its people but how they have been defiant in the face of Russia’s latest armed attack on Ukraine.

Torpedo factory artist Tatjana Schremko said that during a visit back to Ukraine in 2019 there was a lingering sentiment among Ukrainians that their freedom could disappear at any moment, a fear that was borne out with the Russian invasion.

Other notable events:

The Alexandria Soccer Association turns 50; Alexandria City Public Schools seeks funding for school resource officers through June 2023; ACPS makes masking optional; The city’s first homicide occurs in Alexandria’s West End, due to upper body trauma; Parklets, outdoor seating areas in front of restaurants created during the COVID-19 pandemic, are made permanent but City Council approves fee requirement; Bishop Ireton cheerleaders win national championship; Community Lodgings to redevelop Elbert Avenue Apartments

Planning begins on civil rights pilgrimage

City of Alexandria officials began planning a trip for October 2022 to Montgomery, Ala., to honor two victims who were lynched in Old Town. The trip is in tandem with the Equal Justice Initiative, which opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in April 2018 to remember the legacy of enslaved Black people and their descendants.

The trip follows City Council’s decision in 2019 to approve the erection of two monuments in the city honoring Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas, two Black Alexandria teenagers who were lynched in the late 1890s.

Bondsman convicted, awaits sentencing

Man Nguyen, the bail bondsman involved in the Karla Dominguez murder case, was convicted for contempt of court on Jan. 26 in Alexandria Circuit Court. The court found that Nguyen violated the recognizance he signed mandating that Ibrahim Bouaichi stay at his parents’ home in Greenbelt, Maryland while awaiting trial for allegedly raping Dominguez.

Nguyen, a then-surety bondsman with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services who posted the $25,000 to release Bouaichi, subsequently employed Bouaichi at his kiosk in the Arundel Mills Mall, spent time with Bouaichi at a local park and asked him to watch his dogs while away for the weekend. While Bouaichi was out on bond, Nguyen gave Bouaichi the keys to his vehicle and home, inside of which was a bag of unlocked handguns. Bouaichi later drove Nguyen’s vehicle to Dominguez’ apartment and allegedly fatally shot her.

Alexandria Magistrate Elizabeth Fuller, whose office issues arrest warrants and holds bail hearings, told the Times in an October 2021 interview that Nguyen came to work after Dominguez’ murder boasting about the fact that Bouaichi had used his gun and vehicle. Fuller subsequently filed a complaint with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, even though she said her supervisor advised her not to.

DCJS opened an investigation and held an Informal Fact Finding Conference which resulted in the revocation of Nguyen’s bail bondsman license in September 2020. Fuller was later fired for speaking with the Times about her decision to file the complaint.

Because Nguyen was convicted of indirect contempt of court, meaning he violated orders outside the courtroom, he faces a misdemeanor offense. According to the Commonwealth’s Attorney’s motion, Nguyen’s actions “constituted the knowing and willful violation of several of the provisions contained in the court order and recognizance.”

Alleged sexual assault comes to light

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Judicial Watch announced on March 1 that it had filed a lawsuit on behalf of former Alexandria magistrate Elizabeth Fuller against officials in the Office of the Executive Secretary of Magistrate Services in violation of her First and Fourteenth Amendment rights.

Fuller was terminated from her job after speaking to the Alexandria Times about her 2020 complaint that led to the revocation of former bondsman Man Nguyen's license for his role in the murder of Karla Dominguez.

The lawsuit reads, in part: “Plaintiff enjoys the right to freedom of speech, as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. This includes the right to comment to the Alexandria Times on Plaintiff’s public complaint filed in her personal capacity about the misconduct of a bondsman and its outcome, and the system’s failure to protect a rape victim. Plaintiff also enjoys the right to due process, as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.”

Options for blood donations shrink

Despite the importance of donated blood, and a recent crisis during which the Red Cross pleaded for more donors, there is currently no fixed location in Alexandria where residents can donate blood. The Red Cross previously operated an office at 123 N. Alfred St., but shut down the site last year.

Residents expressed concern about the lack of a fixed location, which they claimed was important for residents to plan ahead and donate blood on a regular basis. Resident Rod Kukro said, “… The universe of people who [donate blood] is pretty small, and now a lot of those people may fall off the radar…”

Bondsman in murder case sentenced, released

Man Nguyen, the bail bondsman whose gun and car were used by the killer in the Karla Dominguez murder case, was sentenced to one year in jail for contempt of court with all but 30 days suspended for good behavior. Judge Charles Sharp said during trial that Nguyen was being tried for “serious malfeasance … almost on a daily basis.”

However Nguyen was released from jail after serving less than a week after an appeal by his attorney following the sentencing hearing on March 31. Nguyen was convicted on Jan. 26 in Alexandria Circuit Court for contempt of court for his actions after posting bond for Ibrahim Bouai-chi, an acquaintance who had been charged with assaulting and raping Dominguez in 2019. On July 29, 2020, Bouai-chi used Nguyen’s gun and car to allegedly kill Dominguez – and then himself – while out on bond.

Nguyen claimed he was unaware of the terms of Bouai-chi’s bond – which involved Bouai-chi remaining at his parents’ home in Greenbelt, Maryland – despite having signed the bond release. Nguyen was later found to have helped Bouai-chi violate bondsman and its outcome, and the system’s failure to protect a rape victim. Plaintiff also enjoys the right to due process, as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.”
Minnie Howard assault statement criticized

Parents and community members raised questions in the weeks following the release of a city-issued statement regarding the city’s handling of an alleged sexual assault at a local high school.

An article critical of the city’s handling of the alleged sexual assault broke on NationalReview.com the morning of March 18, and the city statement was released a few hours later. The alleged assault took place at the Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School in October 2021, and there had been no notification to parents during the five months between the incident and the appearance of the story by National Review.

The statement released on March 18 reads, “The City of Alexandria is aware of the incident, that it was adjudicated in Court, and that the defendant was acquitted. Pursuant to Virginia State Law Section 16.1 - 301, details regarding incidents involving juveniles must remain confidential and cannot be shared.”

But according to Virginia State Code, the word “acquitted” does not exist in juvenile court, nor does a conviction, as it does in adult court. If a juvenile is found guilty, the legal term is “being adjudicated delinquent of a criminal act.” The chosen language in the city’s statement has led some to question how it was written and whose hands it passed through before going to the public.

In a tweet at 7:14 p.m. on March 18, Alexandria Mayor Justin Wilson said, “The statement was issued by the Police Department in consultation with the Commonwealth’s Attorney who prosecuted the case.” However, Alexandria Commonwealth’s Attorney Bryan Porter denied that his office wrote or approved the city’s release. Alexandria Police Department Public Information Officer Marcel Bassett declined to confirm whether or not APD helped craft the statement, but he did say that APD was “made aware” of the statement before its release. “[APD cannot] confirm what role if any [we] played in the creation of the statement,” Bassett said.

BONDSMAN FROM 9

his bond, hiring Bouaichi to work at his Arundel Mills Mall kiosk and giving him the keys to his car and house, in which were two handguns, while away on vacation.

Alexandria Magistrate Elizabeth Fuller then reported Nguyen to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services for violating his oath as a bondsman. DCJS investigated Nguyen and eventually revoked his bondsman’s license. Fuller spoke to the Times about reporting Nguyen and was later fired for speaking to the paper.

Nguyen served five days in jail before his attorney filed an appeal, an option given to any defendant in a criminal case. According to Commonwealth’s Attorney Bryan Porter, after the sentencing hearing, Judge Charles Sharp ordered that if Nguyen and his attorney noted an appeal of the conviction, Nguyen would be released on bail pending the resolution of the appeal.

Other notable events:

Businessman and entrepreneur Rob Kaufman dies on April 8 at age 71; Longtime Royal Restaurant owner Charlie Euripides dies on April 14 at age 89; Afghan refugees face job struggles after relocating to Northern Virginia following the U.S. pullout of troops from Afghanistan in August 2021; Alexandria Times launches new City Creatives arts section, featuring stories on The Bacon Brothers, The Alexandria Harmonizers, dancer Carleigh Jones and actor Janice Rivera; Don Hayes appointed police chief for speaking to the paper.

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ACPS teen killed in Bradlee melee

A teenager from Alexandria City High School died from a stabbing wound suffered during a fight on May 24 outside the McDonalds at the Bradlee Shopping Center.

Alexandria police received a call for service at approximately 12:26 p.m. for a large group fight at 3536 King St., in which one male was critically injured and taken to the hospital where he later died. The student killed was later identified as Luis Mejia Hernandez. The King Street and Minnie Howard campuses were placed on “secure building” status until 3:15 p.m. on the 24th, meaning that the school day continued on a regular schedule, but no one was allowed to enter or leave the building for a period of time. Students were eventually dismissed in small, staggered groups and all after-school activities were canceled.

“This decision is being made out of an abundance of caution for the safety and security of our students and staff,” an ACPS email read.

A video of the incident was widely circulated on social media. It depicts a large crowd of students fighting, chaos in the parking lot of Bradlee shopping center and a student on the ground suffering from a stab wound to his leg who stands up before collapsing back to the ground.

Youth opioid overdoses spike

City officials took steps to respond to a spike in opioid overdoses, particularly among youth, in Alexandria.

According to a city news release, 12 opioid overdoses were reported in the city in April and May, six of which occurred in people under age 17. None of these overdoses were fatal and first responders administered Narcan, an opioid reversal medication, to many of the victims.

Between the beginning of 2022 and May 12, 30 opioid overdoses had been reported in Alexandria and two people died of confirmed fentanyl overdoses.

Monica Lisle, commander of Alexandria Police Department’s criminal investigations division, said that many of the school-aged youth experiencing fentanyl-related overdoses reported using a “little blue pill” they thought was Percocet, a prescription medicine used to treat pain.

According to Lisle, illicit drugs are often laced with fentanyl, which is an inexpensive substitute that is approximately 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more powerful than morphine as a painkiller. It is more potent than any other opioid or synthetic opioid antigen and can be deadly.

The Old Presbyterian Meeting House celebrated 250 years in 2022. This shows the OPMH in the late 1920s, after the Meeting House restoration of 1925-28.

Two Artists Sold in Old Town Alexandria in Mid-to-Late 20th Century

The Potomack Company auction house is seeking George Nakashima furniture bought from Full Circle Gallery and Hilda Shapiro Thorpe art, Washington Color School, sold in her Old Town gallery.

If you own any of these works, please contact Kira Greene at 703.684.4550.

Hilda Shapiro Thorpe
(American, 1919-2000)
Washington Color School
Oil on canvas: 68 x 49 in.
Sold: $26,000

George Nakashima
Fine Burl Oak Coffee Table, 1968
Sold: $125,000

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Historic ship re-sunk at Ben Brenman Pond

On May 2, Alexandria started the process of re-sinking three historic ship hulls at Ben Brenman Park Pond that were recovered along the city’s waterfront in the past seven years. Following several years of study, the approximately $400,000 submersion project began in order to preserve the hulls.

“These were truly significant and very large findings that tell us a lot about Alexandria’s history when it was a thriving port,” City Archaeologist Eleanor Breen said. “These ships really built Alexandria because they weren’t shipwrecks in the traditional sense, but instead reused derelict hulls that became landfill as land was being built out in the deeper channels of the Potomac River.”

Archaeologists working for developers along the waterfront discovered the first of the hulls in 2015, near the current Hotel Indigo site. That ship is currently undergoing restorative treatment at Texas A&M University.

Then, three years later, three additional hull remnants were discovered at the Robinson Landing site. Those have been kept in storage at a city warehouse in tanks of water to prevent wood from decaying and will be relocated to the man-made pond in Ben Brenman Park.

City FY2023 includes 9% spending spike

City Council unanimously adopted the FY2023 operating budget on May 4, keeping the real estate tax rate steady, though rising assessments pushed the average tax bill up by $445, or 6.5%. The budget provides car tax relief to residents, increases compensation for city employees and fully funds Alexandria City Public Schools’ requested budget.

The $839.2 million operating budget is an 8.9% increase over the $770.7 million FY2022 budget and higher than City Manager Jim Perajon’s originally proposed budget, which came in at $829.9 million, a 7.7% increase over last year. The budget increase is about on par with the national inflation rate of 8.5% for the 12 months ending March 31, 2022, according to USinflationcalculator.com.

Other notable events:

Alexandria Times wins nine Virginia Press Association awards, including five first place finishes, one second and three third place awards; The Old Presbyterian Meeting House celebrates 250 years of ministering to Alexandrians; Goodwin House Inc., a senior living nonprofit, acquires Hermitage Northern Virginia; Longtime Carpenter’s Shelter supporter Lee Fifer dies on April 21 at age 79.
Other notable events:

Planning Commission defers action on controversial zoning amendment that would have allowed developers to apply for up to 25-feet of bonus height; City Council approves parking changes designed to free on-street spaces for residents; First class of 809 students from newly renamed Alexandria City High School graduates; Alexandria Health Department and other providers begin offering COVID-19 vaccinations to children under five years of age; 18-mile Mount Vernon Trail, which runs along the Potomac River, turns 50.

‘Werewolf’ killer released from mental hospital

The man who brutally stabbed an Old Town store manager to death was released from the mental health facility at which he had been held for the past three years. Pankaj Bhasin attacked Brad Jackson, 65, inside Window Universe on King Street in July 2018.

Bhasin’s defense attorneys said he drove from his home in New Jersey to Virginia in a psychotic state and killed Jackson because he thought he was a werewolf. Prosecutors agreed to find Bhasin not guilty by reason of insanity in July 2019 and since then he had been held at the Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute.

After three years, Bhasin’s doctors declared him fit to leave the facility – under strict conditions. At the prosecutor’s objection, an Alexandria judge signed a conditional release. The terms of Bhasin’s release include regular alcohol and drug testing, GPS monitoring and Community and Services Board home visits. Bhasin will also be required to live with his parents.

Community reacts to murder of student at Bradlee

Parents, leaders and community members scrambled to figure out how to best promote student safety following the fatal stabbing of Alexandria City High School senior Luis Mejia Hernandez, who was 18, on May 24 at Bradlee Shopping Center. In pursuit of this goal and an ongoing investigation, Alexandria City Public Schools implemented a modified return to school schedule. ACHS executive principal Peter Balas sent an email to families detailing the modifications.

Parent Marcus Lindsey called for stricter citywide policy changes, claiming that the culture of discipline is too relaxed.

“The big piece for me is, ‘Who is responsible for this?’ There is a child that’s dead, and it was during school hours,” Lindsey said. “… Our system has led from behind on a lot of things, but nobody was held to account and responsible for this. Now we’ve got murder.”

The Alexandria Police Department announced on June 1 that they arrested a juvenile suspect, a 16-year-old male, and charged him with murdering Mejia Hernandez.
ACPS superintendent resigns

Alexandria City Public Schools Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D. announced his resignation from the district on June 10, sparking a community debate about the circumstances surrounding his announcement. Hutchings announced that he would work through Aug. 31. The resignation announcement produced mixed responses, with School Board members generally praising his tenure, while some parents and other community members were critical of Hutchings' tenure at the helm, the manner of his departure and the payout he received upon leaving.

School Board Chair Megan Alderton praised Hutchings’ “... vision, integrity, and passion” and said that as a board, members were “… sad to see him go.” Hutchings, who assumed the superintendent's role in July 2018, has received heat over numerous issues during his four years as superintendent. Despite his oft-repeated goal of “Equity for All,” the achievement gap between Black and Hispanic students and their white and Asian counterparts grew when learning shifted to virtual-only during COVID-19.

Hutchings was criticized by many parents for not taking the initiative to resume in-person instruction sooner, and for working on his book in the summer of 2021 instead of leading the preparation to resume in-person classes last fall.

Most recently, Hutchings admonished the School Board, which oversees his position, to refrain from speaking with media following an alleged sexual assault at Minnie Howard in October 2021 and a deadly stabbing of an ACPS student during the school day at Bradlee Shopping Center.

Potomac Riverkeepers propose settlement

The Potomac Riverkeepers Network, an environmental nonprofit organization that aims to protect the Potomac River, sent the City of Alexandria a settlement proposal in mid June after filing a lawsuit in May, PRKN member Dean Naujoks said.

According to PRKN, the settlement proposal is the most recent chapter in a continued effort to reach an agreement with the city despite years of conflict over pollution flowing from Alexandria into the Potomac River.

The proposal comes after PRKN filed a lawsuit in federal court against the city for allegedly allowing toxic coal tar and creosote wastes to contaminate the Potomac River since at least 1975.

According to the lawsuit, the river waste comes from a stormwater outfall subject to a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Permit that bans non-stormwater discharges from the storm sewer system. The group claims that through these discharges the city is actively violating the permit, the Clean Water Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.
COVID-19 data trends surprise

The Times examined mortality trends of ethnic groups from COVID-19, and the results were surprising.

Latinos in Alexandria and statewide have by far the lowest death rate per COVID-19 cases of the three main ethnic groups of whites, Latinos and Blacks, while Blacks have the worst outcome per case in Alexandria. Perhaps the most shocking data point is that whites have the worst outcome per COVID-19 case statewide of Virginia’s three major ethnic groups.

In Alexandria, Blacks have a death rate of .82% per case of COVID-19, with 61 total deaths out of 7,427 cumulative cases of COVID-19 through July 18, 2022, according to the Virginia Department of Health website. The Black death rate per COVID-19 case is more than double that of Latinos in Alexandria, as Latinos have a death rate of .39% per case of COVID-19, with 30 deaths out of 7,712 cumulative cases.

The white death rate per case of COVID-19 in Alexandria is between that of Blacks and Latinos, at .66%, with 85 deaths out of 12,873 cumulative cases, according to data found on the Virginia Department of Health website. The white death rate per case of COVID-19 in Alexandria is 69% higher than that of Latinos, while the Black death rate per case is 110% higher than the Latino death rate.

Next steps for Taylor Run

After the controversial proposed Natural Channel Design stream restoration project at Taylor Run was paused by City Council in April 2021, because local scientists and environmentalists discovered negligible amounts of phosphorus at the site, the fate of this forested wetlands remains uncertain.

Environmentalists, major city players and residents mostly agree that something needs to be done to address spots of erosion and exposed sewer pipes along the stream at Taylor Run along the walking path in Chinquapin Park. But how this can be achieved has been the root of debate for quite some time.

There has been no final decision yet to move forward with any type of stream restoration project. This includes the controversial 1,900 linear foot NCD stream restoration project that the city had previously approved before the pause.

Controversy behind Alexandria’s project stems from a Stormwater Local Assistance Fund grant that was awarded to the city by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. The basis of testing for this grant was recently updated, and the premise upon which Alexandria received its grant – presumed high levels of phosphorus at the site – has been discredited, both as a model and at Taylor Run itself.

Alexandria Hospital celebrates 150 years

This year marks Inova Alexandria Hospital’s 150th anniversary, which the City of Alexandria is celebrating in many ways, such as with an exhibit in partnership with the Alexandria History Museum at the Lyceum called “Alexandria Hospital: Women Mobilize the Community.” The exhibit will examine the prominent role women played in founding the hospital and include rare artifacts, photos and oral history interviews with doctors, nurses and volunteers involved with the hospital.

Throughout the years, the hospital has accumulated a hefty list of firsts, including the title of the first 24/7 emergency department in the country. It’s also the first hospital in Northern Virginia to have a moveable X-ray table, lung chamber and provide a full-body CAT scan unit.

Last year, Inova Alexandria performed 7,991 total surgeries and 3,113 deliveries, accepted 12,790 inpatient admissions and amassed 80,967 ER visits. Over the course of its century-plus-spanning history, Alexandria Hospital evolved from a group of women establishing a small infirmary to a full-fledged hospital. In the next few years, Inova Alexandria will move to the old Landmark Mall site to accommodate its growing demand.

The road hasn’t always been simple; from rocky early beginnings to some turmoil surrounding its upcoming move, the hospital has dealt with numerous obstacles. Yet throughout all the changes, the mission has remained the same: to serve the community and provide quality healthcare.

Former Mayor Kerry Donley dies at 66

Kerry Donley, former Alexandria mayor and Living Legend, died on the evening of July 13 from an apparent heart attack. He was 66.

A longtime resident of the city, Donley was known for being an ardent and devoted community leader – he served multiple terms as Alexandria’s mayor and vice mayor – as well as a banker and a family man.

In the preceding hours before his death, Donley had been delivering Meals on Wheels to needy residents, and in the days and weeks prior to that he had gone on multiple long-distance bike rides. His sudden death came as a shock to many community members, who immediately began sharing memorials, condolences and love for Donley.

Born Feb. 1, 1956, in Sioux City, Iowa, Donley spent his early childhood years in South Dakota before moving to Alexandria with his family when he was 7 years old. Aside from attending college at Marquette University, where he earned a political science major and English minor, Donley called Alexandria home for more than 50 years.

Other notable events:

New Alexandria Police Department Chief Don Hayes shares law enforcement philosophy; Metro plans for six-week shutdown; Alexandria Aces secure spot in league playoffs; Historic marker placed at George Washington High School; Park and Recreation Commission endorses proposal to install athletic field lights.
School Board appoints interim superintendent

The Alexandria School Board appointed Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ph.D. as the interim superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools.

Previously, Kay-Wyatt was the ACPS chief of human resources and joined the district in July 2021. During her year in Alexandria, she served as both the ACPS executive director and acting chief of human resources, until she was promoted to chief on July 1. She is the second Black female interim superintendent at ACPS. Kay-Wyatt replaced former Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., who announced his resignation on June 10 amid mounting concerns about violence in ACPS, complaints from many parents about transparency and misgivings around his approach to COVID-19 safety.

Hutchings and School Board members praised the work Kay-Wyatt has done during her time at ACPS, though several parents in a local school-oriented Facebook group expressed concerns about aspects of her past performance.

Aces win first Cal Ripken League championship

The Alexandria Aces won the Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League title for the first time in the team’s 14-year history.

The Aces, a summer wood-bat baseball team for college players, defeated Bethesda Big Train 5-3 on July 30 at Shirley Povich Field in Bethesda to claim the championship. The game itself was something of a ping pong match, as the Aces took a 1-0 lead, then Bethesda scored twice to go ahead 2-1. By the top of the ninth inning, the teams were tied 3-3.

The Aces manufactured the winning run in the ninth inning. Dylan Koontz, a rising sophomore from Camp Hill University, scored after Sullivan, from Western Michigan University, hit a home run left field, allowing Koontz to steal. The throw sailed into left field, allowing Koontz to race home to give the Aces a 4-3 lead. Moments later, Cade race home to give the Aces a 5-3 lead. By the top of the ninth inning, the Aces manufactured the winning run in the ninth inning. Dylan Koontz, a rising sophomore from Camp Hill University, scored after Sullivan, from Western Michigan University, hit a home run left field, allowing Koontz to steal. The throw sailed into left field, allowing Koontz to race home to give the Aces a 4-3 lead. Moments later, Cade

Future of Cameron Run Park discussed

The Northern Virginia Regional Parks Authority released its 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, which included plans to determine Cameron Run Regional Park’s future. How to optimize the use of Cameron Run Regional Park is an issue that has bedeviled Alexandria residents, city staff and elected leaders for years.

City Council considered wrestling control of the 26-acre tract of open space away from NVRPA back in 2017, but instead opted to renew the city’s pact with the regional entity for another decade. Though improvements have been made in recent years and use of the facility has expanded to winter as well as summer, opinion is still divided on where long-term control of the park should reside.

Alexandria city staff are preparing to engage with residents to receive input on long-term plans for the park, while NVRPA’s upcoming Strategic Plan also includes a stated goal of engaging the “public in visioning the future of Cameron Run in coordination with the City by 2025.”

According to NOVA Parks Executive Director Paul Gilbert, over the past year NOVA Parks has invested $398,219 in structural improvements toward the wave pool and nearly $98,816 to Ice and Lights. After subtracting the total park capital expenses, totaling $497,035, from the net operating income, totaling $168,653, Cameron Run incurred a net loss of approximately $328,382 in the past year.

Other notable events:

Camp counselor arrested for sexual assault; New race and identity program launches for city parents; City expands Del Ray Avenue inlets to prevent water buildup; City votes to implement automated cameras in school zones; Community meeting discusses Duke Street traffic mitigation; Former Virginia deputy attorney general files lawsuit
‘Werewolf killer’ ordered to stay off social media

A man who killed a stranger in Old Town several years ago while having a psychotic episode – during which he thought the stranger was a werewolf – has been ordered to stay off of social media. Following a conditional release from a mental health facility in the summer, his online dating profile sparked concerns.

On July 13, 2018, Pan-kaj Bhasin, 34, stabbed Bradford Jackson, 65, more than 50 times in Window Universe on King Street, breaking his neck in the process. Bhasin, who was from New Jersey, was discovered naked in a car nearby and arrested for the slaying.

A year later, Bhasin was found not guilty by reason of insanity. He spent the past three years in the Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute and was released earlier this year. Upon release, Bhasin created a Facebook page and dating profile where he claimed to have just returned from traveling.

In response, Commonwealth’s attorney Bryan Porter filed a motion earlier this month requesting that the judge amend Bhasin’s terms of release. The judge agreed with prosecutors, ordering Bhasin to take down his social media accounts while on conditional release.

ACPS installs new security measures

Amid pressure from concerned parents, Alexandria City Public Schools officials increased security at school campuses by adding new measures to prevent a repeat of violence from the 2021-2022 school year.

Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., whose last day with the district was Aug. 31, announced that ACPS will now require students and staff to have an identification card present at all times. Additional school security officers are also in place to keep students from leaving campus without permission.

These new measures for the 2022-2023 academic year apply to ACPS middle and high schools, and Alexandria City High School will implement a new staggered dismissal process to prevent students from congregating outside of the school. Hutchings also said ACPS officials will continue to make sure every school is a “closed campus,” meaning that students are not allowed to come and go without permission, including during lunch time.

Alexandria SOL pass rates lag

Alexandria City Public Schools’ 2021-2022 Standards of Learning scores improved from last year in three of four categories, though state officials said the reading improvement was primarily due to lowered benchmarks. Even with the lowered standards, the city’s marks were lower than those prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The performance of ACPS also lagged behind that of Virginia as a whole in every category by at least 11 percentage points, with Alexandria students achieving a lower than 50% proficiency in both math and science. The SOL scores were released by the Virginia Department of Education in August.

For the 2021-2022 school year, ACPS had a pass rate of 60.94% in reading; 62.39% pass rate in writing; 53.90% pass rate in history and social science; 48.64% pass rate in mathematics; and 48.68% pass rate in science. Comparatively, the 2021-2022 VDOE statewide results revealed a pass rate of 73.12% in reading; 64.74% pass rate in writing; 65.75% pass rate in history and social science; 66.37% pass rate in mathematics; and 65.01% pass rate in science.

Chet Avery dies at 85

Chester “Chet” Pike Avery Jr., a Living Legend of Alexandria and an advocate for people with disabilities, died on Sept. 8. He was 85. For more than 50 years, the longtime resident worked to make Alexandria a more accessible and inclusive place for everyone.

Avery was born in Sanford, Maine, on Aug. 1, 1937, to Chester, Sr. and Gladys Avery. At age 16, he began to lose vision in his left eye, and a year later at 17, he became fully blind. He graduated from Harvard University in 1960 with his B.A. in history, and remained at Harvard to complete his M.A. in counseling and education.

He served on more than 25 boards and commissions, including the Special Education Advisory Committee for the Alexandria Public Schools, the Alexandria Human Rights Commission, the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, the Virginia Assistive Technology System Advisory Council and the Virginia Human Rights Commission.

Other notable events:

Teen killed in scooter incident; Alexandria shelter helps rescue pups from abusive breeding facility; School Board debates grading policy changes; Construction worker dies in industrial incident; City honors centenarians at second annual event; Soil Collection Ceremony honors lynching victims; Agenda Alexandria hosts safety panel; City holds first community meeting on future of Taylor and Strawberry Run

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Governor’s transgender policy criticized

Gov. Glenn Youngkin’s (R-VA) recent announcement of updated model policies for transgender students elicited a response from Alexandria residents. Known by the Virginia Department of Education as the Privacy, Dignity and Respect policies, the proposal has sparked debate in Alexandria City Public Schools and in other Virginia districts regarding the protection of transgender students in a classroom environment.

The policies indicate that transgender students will have to use the bathrooms based on their assigned sex at birth, use athletic facilities based on their assigned sex at birth and join athletic teams based on their assigned sex at birth, rather than the gender with which they identify.

Supporters of the new policies argue it would grant parents the right to have control over their children’s education and classroom experiences. Opponents to the newly proposed policies argue that politics should not be forced upon children in educational settings like schools.

In response to the model policies that were released on Sept. 17, School Board chair Meagan Alderton and Interim Superintendent Melanie Kay-Wyatt issued a statement to the community. The letter detailed ACPS’ commitment to ensuring that the district is working to protect its transgender students.

Kay-Wyatt settles into new role

Melanie Kay-Wyatt began her new position as interim superintendent at Alexandria City Public Schools, which she’s been preparing for since the School Board appointed her in July.

Since joining ACPS last summer as executive director of human resources, she has been promoted to acting chief and then chief of human resources. Previously, she worked as principal and assistant principal at Fredericksburg City Public Schools, as a special education teacher at FCPS and Culpeper County Schools and in human resources at Spotsylvania Public Schools.

Kay-Wyatt, who replaces former Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., sat down with The Times to discuss what she hopes to bring to her new position, some of the issues facing ACPS and her ideas for the 2022-2023 school year. Several of her goals include working toward school safety, pandemic recovery, open communication and student growth.

Community leader Townsend Van Fleet dies

Townsend Van Fleet, a retired U.S. Army colonel and outspoken city advocate, died at his Alexandria home in his sleep on Oct. 16. He was 87.

Van Fleet was known in Alexandria for his strong and vocal opinions, many of which he expressed in the Alexandria Times’ letters to the editor section. He ran unsuccessfully for Mayor in 2003 and City Council in 2006 and 2015. Van Fleet also served on the board of the Federation of Civic Associations for 15 years, Alexandria Waterfront Commission for eight years and the Old Town Civic Association for three years.

Van Fleet was born on Jan. 12, 1955. He graduated from West Point in 1958 with a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering, and from the Army War College in Carlisle in 1976. He also earned a master’s of science degree in public administration from Shippensburg State College.

Residents adjust to fixed parklets

In early October, the City of Alexandria made permanent the parklet system that was installed during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to keep businesses afloat when people could not dine inside restaurants. Now that the system is here for good, those restaurants are adjusting to the changes.

Established in 2020, the temporary policy allowed some eateries to create outdoor dining for the first time, while others expanded their current capacity. After shifting to a permanent model, the city began charging fees for these parklets – which are defined as an extension of a sidewalk into a city parking lane to be used for a business’ extra space, such as outdoor dining.

According to Max Devilliers, an urban planner with Transportation and Environmental Services, the city’s rules indicate that if a parklet extends beyond the frontage of the business’ property, that business must obtain permission from the property on which it encroaches. Fontaine Caffe & Creperie, for example, is located at 117 S. Royal St. Its parklets extended past that, facing north – near the Alexandrian Hotel’s property.

If one business wants to operate a parklet in front of another’s business, the city requires a letter of support from the business it would be affecting. Yet Wharam argued that the parklet was not in front of the Alexandrian but to the side, facing a brick wall, and would not affect the hotel.

Other notable events:

Potomac Yard Metro delayed until 2023; Longtime car dealership receives permits to stay in business; Pedestrian injured in Landmark car crash; Handover Pizza opens in Old Town; Alexandria Times launches second City Creatives section, featuring the Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic, Virginia Theological Seminary, artist Jacelyn Orellana and Baffin Records.
Council approves athletic field lights

During its public hearing on Nov. 12, City Council approved the installation of lights on several athletic fields: Francis C. Hammond Middle School, Patrick Henry K-8 School and Recreation Center, Jefferson Houston K-8 School, George Washington Middle School and Eugene Simpson Stadium Park.

The decision follows ongoing debates about whether the lights are necessary that go back several years. Most recently, on Nov. 1, the Planning Commission voted unanimously, 6-0, to recommend approval of the new plan. According to the city’s website, the approval will “provide additional capacity to accommodate current and increasing scholastic and community program needs within the city’s fixed field resources.”

It also intends to support City Council’s priority on expanding youth programs and providing equitable access to facilities and services for all ages, Abigail Harwell, an urban planner with the Department of Planning and Zoning, said. Evening use, Harwell added, will allow up to 1,000 additional hours each year and add to the city’s recreational options, which are presently limited to 20 fields.

The fields at Francis Hammond, George Washington and Jefferson Houston could have lights next year, while Patrick Henry and Eugene Simpson will undergo construction in 2024 and 2025.

New art for Waterfront Park

The city announced in November that come March 2023, Alexandria’s Waterfront Park will trade its elegant cursive letters that spell out “I Love You” for something more archaeologically driven: a steel structure representing a ship’s hull.

The piece, called “Two Boxes of Oranges and Admionia Jackson,” is in commemoration of four 18th century ships, whose remains were found over the past few years at Robinson Terminal South and Hotel Indigo.

As the fifth installation in the city’s Site See: New Views in Old Town annual public art series, the structure will abstract the hull of a ship with steel verticals rising from the ground and bending the same way a hull’s frame does. There will also be shadows of the spines on the ground beneath the piece, with painted text and information about the ships’ cargo embedded within them. The “Two Boxes of Oranges and Admionia Jackson” title refers to examples of the types of cargo the ships brought in.

Ghost scooter placed in honor of victim

A painted white scooter was placed near North Beauregard Street and Sanger Avenue to memorialize a crash victim who died in August and to honor the World Day of Remembrance for Traffic Crash Victims.

Attendees listened to local officials and representatives from Alexandria’s chapter of Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets discuss the ghost scooter and how to bolster Alexandria’s street safety efforts. Speakers included Mayor Justin Wilson, Interim Alexandria City Public Schools Superintendent Melanie Kay-Wyatt and Lt. Gregory Simon of the Alexandria Police Department.

The event, held in front of William Ramsay Elementary School, follows an incident in late August in which a 16-year-old student at Wakefield High School in Arlington County, Miguel Ángel Rivera, was hit while riding an electric scooter home one evening. Rivera was riding south along North Beauregard Street and trying to turn left on Sanger Avenue when he was struck by a Toyota RAV-4 headed northbound. Rivera was transported to the hospital around 10:20 p.m. and died a few days later.

The painted white scooter, or “ghost bike,” was inspired by a known tradition in the bicycle community where if a fellow cyclist is killed on a road, a “ghost bike” is placed nearby.

Other notable events:

Street Lights Billiards Academy, host to worldwide professionals, announces expansion; Lyceum exhibit highlighting Inova Hospital women founders opens; Alexandria holds Plaid Friday; ACPS officials discuss school safety in public forum

AEDP awards grants

The Alexandria Economic Development Partnership and the City of Alexandria will give out $535,000 in grants to eight different business associations in the city through a grant program.

The ALX B2B Business Association Grant Program will “fund existing or emerging business associations to support organizational capacity building, long-term sustainability and improved programming that promotes economic prosperity,” according to the AEDP website. “The grant aims to accelerate economic growth within business districts and among the small business community by creating robust and sustainable business associations.”

The money for the grant program comes from the American Rescue Plan Act. The $535,000 in grant money was given to the AEDP by the city. The AEDP then distributes money to the associations once the grantees are chosen. Applications for the grant opened this summer and were awarded several months later.

Eight business associations applied and every applicant received a grant: Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, Alexandria Minority Business Association, Inc., Del Ray Business Association, Eisenhower Avenue Public-Private Partnership, Old Town Business Association, Old Town North Alliance, Social Responsibility Group and West End Business Association all received funding through the program.

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Minnie Howard brawl raises security concerns

A fight at the Minnie Howard campus of Alexandria City High School on Dec. 5 resulted in three students being arrested for obstruction of justice. Videos of the melee, along with publicly available police, EMT and school audio communications reveal a dangerous situation in which one school administrator was knocked to the ground trying to restore order while others frantically and exasperately tried to gain control of the situation.

Two parents and a former contract employee who worked at Minnie Howard last year raised numerous concerns in interviews with the Times. In the interviews, one parent claimed that newly implemented security measures aren’t being followed, while another said there’s a perception that ACPS no longer expels students who are chronically violent. The contract employee described the Minnie Howard campus as a scene out of “Lord of the Flies.”

Police bargaining agreement approved

City Council voted unanimously to approve funding in the upcoming fiscal year budget for a collective bargaining agreement between the city and the Alexandria chapter of the Southern States Police Benevolent Association.

Since Virginia’s bargaining provision went into effect last year, this is the first in the state to have been implemented. Collective bargaining allows the city’s public sector employees to negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions with their employers.

If the good faith commitment is ultimately approved, the agreement will include pay increases for officers, sergeants and lieutenants, with officers’ starting pay increasing 11%, from $54,698 to $61,503, starting July 1, 2023. Police sergeants’ starting salary will be $69,497 and police lieutenants’ salary will be $86,288. Salaries would continue to increase annually through June 30, 2026.

The agreement includes specialty pay for positions that require training or experience, creation of a labor-management partnership for training access and the formation of a union committee. Police officers in other localities will be able to transfer to the Alexandria Police Department, with their experience compensated at market rate, and there will be a clear promotional process for those interested in advancing in the APD ranks.

Alexandria readies for 2023 General Assembly

City Council discussed on Dec. 13 its proposed legislative package in advance of the 2023 General Assembly Session.

Each session, the city works with state lawmakers to create the necessary legal framework, funding and authority in order to advocate for Alexandria’s budget and policy goals. The draft legislative package is the culmination of many proposals from City Council, staff, boards, commissions and members of the community.

This year, the final draft was crafted around the six key priorities City Council adopted in March, intended to create a cohesive framework for policy decisions in the upcoming fiscal year. These include providing diverse housing opportunities, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting youth and families, fostering economic development, developing a compensation philosophy and defining the city’s community engagement approach.

ACHS volleyball players reflect on 32-2 season

The Alexandria City High School girls’ varsity volleyball team’s Virginia secured a state championship win on Nov. 19. The Times spoke with several players about their 32-2 season – from how they prepared to how they’ve grown to what they’ve taken away.

On Dec. 9, the Virginia All-State teams were announced. Rex was named Virginia Player of the Year, Wilmot was named to the All-State First Team and Thorne was named Coach of the Year. Rex, the Occoquan Region Player of the Year and MaxPreps Virginia Player of the Year, and Wilmot, First Team All-Occoquan Region, were the only returning starters on an inexperienced squad that returned only four players from last year’s team.

“I think it [the season] was a huge accomplishment just because a lot of us did not expect it to happen,” Rex said. “We just kind of played carefree and ... built up that mental toughness during the season which showed when we matured emotionally, as players, off the court more than we did on the court.”

Other notable events:

School Board talks new FACE program; Several COVID-19 testing sites close; Carpenter’s Shelter awarded $2.5 million; COVID-19 surge part of triple virus threat; AWLA seeks home for senior dog pair

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