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

Christine Garner
Weichert Realtors
(703) 587-4855
www.christinegarner.com
Christine@ChristineGarner.com
A look back at 2023

What a year this was!
When the much-delayed Potomac Yard Metro station opened amid fanfare in May, little did the public know what was hurting down those newly opened tracks situated above several acres of wetlands.

Less than seven months later came the staggering announcement that Ted Leonsis was moving the Washington Wizards, Washington Capitals and his Monumental Sports & Entertainment headquarters to the land most directly adjacent to the new station. The new arena and headquarters are slated to anchor a planned new Alexandria entertainment district.

Pushback to the announcement began immediately. In fact, protestors could be heard outside the tent while Gov. Glenn Youngkin and local dignitaries were celebrating the proposal with media and supporters inside.

Within a day, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which operates Metro, had an announcement of its own: That it hadn’t been consulted about the new arena and Metro isn’t capable of handling the projected crowds at a Potomac Yard arena. Those opposed to the proposal also began circulating articles purporting to prove that sports arenas are always a drag on local economies and that the proposed arena site would be subject to flooding from the Potomac River.

Next year promises to be fascinating as more details about the pros and cons of the proposed arena come to light.

In between the two Potomac Yard events came debate about, then passage of the also controversial “Zoning for Housing/Housing for All” initiative. City Council unanimously approved the initiative on November 28 after an amendment proposed by Vice Mayor Amy Jackson and seconded by Councilor John Taylor Chapman that would have separated out the elimination of single family zoning failed by a 5-2 vote, with Mayor Justin Wilson and Councilors Canek Aguirre, Sarah Bagley, Alyia Gaskills and Kirk McPike voting against the amendment.

Alexandria, like many cities around the country, also experienced a crime spike during 2023. Residents were left on edge by increased shootings, stabblings, carjackings, break-ins, flagrant armed robberies of retail stores during daylight hours and gang markings left on homes, signs and other buildings throughout the city.

The Alexandria Police Department was on the defensive after an early September attempted abduction in Old Town went unreported to the public for two weeks. It was revealed that APD had not followed up to obtain security video of the incident that a nearby business had offered the day after the incident.

APD continued to deny any lapses in its handling of the incident, though a new director of communications was brought in immediately following this incident.

The suspect was eventually apprehended and charged four weeks after the assault took place.

Significant city personnel changes are afoot in numerous other areas.

Alexandria Fire Department Chief Corey Smedley announced on November 30 that he will be resigning from his position in January, after four years at AFD’s helm. City Attorney Joanna Anderson announced in June that she will be retiring at the end of 2023. Deputy City Manager Debra Collins retired on July 1 and was replaced by Department of Transportation and Environmental Services Director Yon Lambert, who, in turn was replaced at the helm of T&ES by Adriana Castaneda.

Changes are also looming in 2024 among Alexandria’s elected officials, as Mayor Justin Wilson announced on December 1 he will not be seeking reelection next year. Within a week, both current Vice Mayor Amy Jackson and Councilor Alyia Gaskins announced their candidacies for mayor, guaranteeing that in addition to a new mayor, Alexandria will also be electing at least two new Council members next year.

Alexandria City Public Schools also underwent change in 2023 as the interim title was removed from Superintendent Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., and Minnie Howard Principal Alexander Duncan III was promoted to replace the departing Peter Balas as executive principal of Alexandria City High School.

Alexandria’s School Board also experienced turnover as Michelle Rief, Ph.D., was elected Board chair, replacing Meagan Alderton, who remained on the Board. In addition, School Board member Willie Bailey resigned in November. He will be replaced following a special election in January 2024.

ACPS continues to deal with ongoing student behavioral issues, including frequent fights and continuing student overdoses. The district received good news, however, from student performance in the state Standards of Learning tests. ACPS improved over its scores from last year in four of the five testing categories.

In other school news, Bishop Ireton High School is undergoing a $4 million renovation of its chapel in its “Honor our Faith and Build on Tradition” campaign.

It was an exciting summer in Alexandria as the Alexandria Aces, our city’s entrant in the Cal Ripken Collegiate League, reached the league championship for the third straight year under Coach Chris Berset. The Aces set a league record along the way, with an .853 regular season winning percentage. After winning the league championship last year, the Aces fell this season to nemesis Bethesda Big Train in the championship series.

The Times also reported in 2023 on world events that impacted Alexandrians. The devastating earthquake in February was explained to readers in a Times interview with a former ambassador to Turkey who lives in the city. A current Alexandria resident was one of 222 political prisoners who were released from prisons controlled by Nicaraguan ruler Daniel Ortega in February. And we interviewed four Alexandria residents following the October Hamas attack in Israel.

As we turn to 2024, it’s difficult to foresee a less tumultuous year ahead, with contentious local and national elections looming. We promise to report on all of that, but also bring you news about good and unifying people and events as well.

Next year will be a special one for our paper, as we will celebrate our 20th year of bringing you Alexandria’s local news. We express a special thank you to our loyal advertisers, without whom our free publication would not exist.

We are excited about our plans to highlight both our most loyal longtime advertisers and to look back on these last 20 years throughout 2024. Stay tuned for updates on these plans.

We at the Alexandria Times wish you a happy holiday season and a healthy New Year. See you on January 4.
Rev. George Pera dead at 93

Alexandria Living Legend and Rev. George Pera died in January at the age of 93. He was a senior pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church from 1980 to 1995 and was admired for his philanthropic nature and integrity.

Pera was a Pennsylvania native and came to Alexandria for the senior pastor role at Westminster Presbyterian Church. Pera worked as the senior pastor of the American Church in London, England, before moving to Alexandria. While he retired in 1995, he continued to pastor, even working as interim pastor at the Calvary Presbyterian Church in Alexandria.

He was involved with Senior Services of Alexandria, Elder Crafters and the Steering Committee of the Call to Community among many other local organizations. He was named Living Legend in 2009.

Birchmere owner Gary Oelze dead at 80

Gary Oelze, the owner and founder of Birchmere Music Hall, died at 80 of congestive heart failure. A Kentucky native, Oelze came to Washington, D.C. for the Air Force in the mid-1960s.

He originally managed the then-Birchmere Restaurant and introduced live music in the 1970s; his own band, The Old Five and Dimers, were among the first to play. Oelze brought in artists from all different genres: traditional country, zydeco, folk, jazz, blues and bluegrass. He booked artists such as The Seldom Scene and Alison Krauss early in their careers. During his time, Oelze also hosted Ray Charles, Johnny Cash, Emmylou Harris, Suzanne Vega, Jerry Jeff Walker and Gordon Lightfoot at the Birchmere.

“Gary had a big vision, and he achieved it,” The Kennedys’ Pete Kennedy said. “His loss leaves a void that won’t be filled in the bedrock of American roots music.”

Refugee helps fellow immigrants find work

Faheem Ahmad, an Afghan refugee raised in Pakistan, moved to Alexandria in search of a better life for himself. His parents fled Afghanistan due to civil conflicts and while living in Pakistan, they often faced discrimination. Ahmad was unable to rent apartments, find jobs and receive medical treatment due to his immigrant status in Pakistan.

Ahmad originally landed in San Francisco, California, but moved to Alexandria and started working at Ross Dress for Less by April 2022. Ahmad said fortunately for him, he is well-educated and fluent in English, which helped him land a job as an apartment complex security guard in Washington, D.C. He then became a job developer with Lutheran Social Services, a nonprofit that assists refugees in resettlement.

Ahmad now assists hundreds of immigrants – at the time, primarily Ukranians and Afghans – in finding employment and acts as a support for them.

From mentorship to friendship

Sandy Connolly and Ngoc Nguyen built an unbreakable bond at the nail salon at the Goodwin House in Alexandria. After many small talk chats at the nail booth with Nguyen, Connolly heard her nail technician was applying for United States citizenship. After joining Goodwin’s Citizenship Program, which helps Goodwin employees on their path to citizenship, Connolly asked Nguyen to be her mentor and tutor through the process.

The two spent six months studying for the citizenship test, meeting every Tuesday at 4 p.m. in preparation. Nguyen had been in the country for nearly seven years when she was eligible to apply for citizenship. She said she was nervous at first, but knew it was time. Connolly enlisted the help of a fellow resident and they assisted Nguyen in her path to citizenship. Between reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, covering the 13 colonies and taking trips to historical cities, Nguyen received a well-rounded education.

This was several years ago, and the two have remained friends since. The pair was chosen as one of four stories of impact to be honored by the Ad Council – a nonprofit that works to promote and champion social good – at its 68th annual Public Service Awards gala.

Other notable events: Tom Fulton appointed to the Alexandria Electoral Board; Mia’s Kitchen fire left none injured; city launched a BIPOC Small Business Grant Program; Celebre School opened at 2450 Mill Road; Alexandria resident and shooting suspect mistakenly released from Prince George’s County; City Council approved King Street apartment conversion.
BEYOND grateful

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Expressing our heartfelt thanks and gratitude for 20 years serving the community. Wishing you and your loved ones joy and fulfillment during this festive season.

Elizabeth Lucchesi

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The city and firefighters reach agreement

The city of Alexandria and the local firefighters’ union, Local 2141, reached an agreement to commit funding toward collective bargaining. After a months-long process with biweekly meetings and negotiations, the two parties agreed and compromised. The deal began on July 1 and runs until June 30, 2026.

The agreement provided funding for salary increases, reduced work hours, investments in safety initiatives and a benefits package. The Alexandria Fire Department will add 52 positions to reduce the amount of hours each firefighter is scheduled per week. The agreement will also allocate $2.5 million for salaries and an additional $13.9 million over the next three years.

This money will be supported by grants and the city’s general fund.

“What I found was that we always had the common goal of trying to find a great agreement that was very supportive of our fire department as well as something that from a community standpoint we could support,” City Manager Jim Parajon said.

Andre Screen Bucknell’s new starting center

Screen, a 2020 St. Stephen’s & St. Agnes alum, became Bucknell University’s starting center for the basketball program.

He came to Alexandria under former SSSAS Coach Ron Ginyard to play for the school when he was in seventh grade. At the time, he was already six feet tall – and now he towers at seven-foot-one. Screen said it was a tough transition at first from public to private school, but adjusted quickly to the homework load.

When Ginyard left before Screen’s sophomore year, Screen made further advances under new coach Mike Jones, a former professional basketball player. Jones pushed Screen to build his stamina and strength – mainly through pushups and mile time trials. Screen helped the varsity team to the Commonwealth’s divisional championship his junior year and was offered 35 college scholarships.

ACPS approves 2023-2024 budget

The Alexandria City School Board approved its combined funds budget request for the 2023-2024 school year at its Feb. 16, 2023, meeting. The budget focused on staff compensation, student learning supports and security services. It also allocated funds for the opening of Douglas MacArthur Elementary School and renovations of the North Beauregard Street building.

“When we’re working within constraints and have to balance the budget, I don’t think anyone’s going to get everything they want and we’ve got to make some tough decisions,” Board member Abdel Rahman-Elnoubi said. “But I think we did make the right decisions ... and I really appreciate everyone’s work on it.”

The School Board also received updates on screening equipment to be placed in various schools, such as Alexandria City High School at King Street and Minnie Howard and the middle schools. Some were concerned about the impact on school culture, but Board members mitigated that with these security measures being ultimately beneficial for the school.

Other notable events:

Suspect in dog poisoning attempt surrenders; Akkeim Edwards arrested in West End stabbing; man accused of killing brother pleads guilty in 2022 murder; David Jasante Cunningham convicted of aggravated murder and object sexual penetration; AlexReNew named Justin Carl new manager and CEO.

Property values increase more than 5%

The residential tax base added the most value to the property assessment base – a whopping $1.4 billion – followed by commercial taxes. One-fourth of the rise was due to new growth and constriction, while the rest was due to appreciation. Most of the growth was from multi-family residential units. Hotel values increased, but office values decreased by more than 10% due to the post-pandemic shift to remote work.

The city also reported a $321 million growth among all commercial properties, largely belonging to apartments. There were several construction projects in Alexandria, including the Venue Condominiums, Abingdon Place Condominiums, The Alexan Florence and Muse Old Town.

At the post-pandemic shift to remote work.

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2023 IN REVIEW
Thinking about making a move next year? I'm ready to help.

1732 Olde Towne Rd
$875,000

504 Cameron St
$1,485,000

6900 Fleetwood Rd #307
$1,999,000 | Represented Buyer

100-1/2 Duke St
$2,009,000

119 Wolfe St
$4,300,000 | Represented Buyer

3405 Russell Rd
$775,000

4668 36th St S #A
$525,000

509 N West St
$760,000 | Represented Buyer

2570-C S Arlington Mill Dr #3
$599,000

524 S Pitt St
$1,950,000 | Represented Buyer

1099 22nd St NW #402
$1,250,000

217 E Custis Ave
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Thanks for a great year,
Alexandria!
Gun-related homicide on East Reed Avenue

The death of Navel Chavez, 21, was ruled a gun-related homicide by the Alexandria Medical Examiner. This was in response to Chavez’s death on Feb. 17, 2023, and arrested Junior Espinal Calix, 19, and charged him with involuntary manslaughter.

In October 2023, Calix entered a guilty plea and faces 10 years in prison. Calix told investigators the pair often engaged in “play” with the gun that shot Chavez on the right side of his head. Calix said he thought he emptied the chamber and removed the magazine before showing the gun to Chavez. Police have determined this was an accidental shooting. Calix was given five years probation.

Remembering the shooting of Peter Laboy

March marked the 10th anniversary of the 2013 shooting of Alexandria Police Department motorcycle officer Peter Laboy, who was shot after responding to a call to confront a reportedly erratic taxi driver. Laboy survived the shot to the head by Woodbridge resident Kashif Bashir, the taxi driver who was stalking a woman in Old Town that morning. Laboy, after suffering the shot, was brought to MedStar Washington Hospital Center via helicopter to be treated; he was placed in a medically induced coma and was on a slow path to recovery. The bullet from the incident remains in Laboy’s head today. Bashir was found not guilty by reason of insanity for the shooting.

Vanessa Carlton plays the Birchmere

A seasoned Birchmere player, Carlton returned to tour her album, “Love Is An Art,” which was released March 27, 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Carlton revealed that instead of touring her new album during the pandemic, she was a substitute teacher at her daughter’s school. One of her most famous songs is “A Thousand Miles,” a classic hit during the 2000s. Carlton described this song as the “elephant in the room” at shows and said she cannot avoid playing it – but she loves to open her shows with it.

She spoke with the Times ahead of her performance, discussing her dual piano and cello set and her struggle with an injury that hindered her ability to play the piano. Carlton described the set as psychedelic with how she and her cellist were able to manipulate the songs to loop together.

City pulls minority business program

Following a lawsuit filed by Tridentis, which alleged the city’s new program aimed to support minority-owned businesses was unconstitutional, the city halted the program. The program would have allowed eligible businesses – with at least 51% Black, indigenous and people of color-owned ownership – to apply for grant funding from $1,000 to $7,000. Tridentis, a local engineering firm, claimed the program was “blatantly illegal” because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The city decided not to launch the program as it went under review. According to Kevin Harris, the founder of the Alexandria Minority Business Association, this lawsuit was political in nature because Tridentis did not engage in the community engagement sessions held before the launch. Tridentis said in the lawsuit this program discriminated against those who are not Black or African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Indigenous or Native American.

School Board approves weapons detectors

The Alexandria School Board voted unanimously to launch a weapons detection program in the district after surveying more than 4,000 community members. Students, staff, faculty and visitors would be screened upon entrance and was slated to be implemented at the high school and middle school levels. This initiative was in response to 15 cases involving weapons on school property between August and December 2022.

“Bottom line, this is the right thing to do and a long time coming,” Molly Kaiman, a mother of two ACHS students, said. “It is the school’s responsibility to provide kids with a safe learning space.” There was pushback in the survey to the detectors, as some said the devices would make students and visitors feel unwelcome. School Board members fought back against this notion, stating there are measures to ensure students understand the importance of these devices.
Magistrate’s lawsuit moved forward

A judge ruled on the motion to dismiss a lawsuit filed by Judicial Watch on behalf of former Alexandria magistrate, Elizabeth Fuller. Fuller was terminated by her employer, the Office of the Executive Secretary of Magistrate Services, for speaking to the Alexandria Times about a complaint that resulted in the removal of former bondsman Man Nguyen, whose gun and car were used in the 2020 murder of Alexandria resident Karla Dominguez.

This motion allowed part of the lawsuit to proceed but denied another part from continuing. Judicial Watch, a conservative activist group, filed the lawsuit against officials in the OES citing violations of Fuller’s First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. OES subsequently filed a motion to dismiss, which Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles denied and granted in part.

The court found the lawsuit sufficiently alleged a First Amendment violation to survive a motion to dismiss. The court also found OES is “entitled to qualified immunity in their personal capacities,” therefore the Fourteenth Amendment aspect of the lawsuit cannot proceed.

Expungement clinic held

Vice Mayor Amy Jackson teamed with the Commonwealth’s Attorney, the Clerk of the Circuit Court, the Alexandria Sheriff’s Department and Alexandria Bar Association to provide eligible citizens an opportunity to start removing criminal charges from records.

“Expungements exist to make sure innocent people aren’t impacted by the mere fact of having a charge on their record,” Sean Sherlock, a partner at a law firm that sponsored the event, said.

This process is lengthy and expensive, Jackson held the event to provide an easier avenue for eligible applicants. Expungement is the process where an individual arrested and charged with a crime – but was not convicted – can have records of the arrest sealed from public view. This was for charges within the city and many local organizations sponsored the event.

“Expungements exist to make sure innocent people aren’t impacted by the mere fact of having a charge on their record,” Sean Sherlock, a partner at a law firm that sponsored the event, said.

Other notable events:
Today’s Cargo celebrated 50 years; 40th Saint Patrick’s Day parade; unloaded gun seized from 14-year-old Minnie Howard student; Alexandria Fire Department Deputy Chief Brian Hricik died; 12 new Living Legends named; waterfront warehouse at 10 Duke St. planned to become a market and event space; Stomping Ground restaurant to close.

Young revelers at the St. Patrick’s Day parade.

“My gratitude to these supporters!!!!

- Agnes Artemel, former LCTA, GW & ACHS parent
- David Baker
- Naomi Brooks Parent Councilman John Taylor Chapman
- Patti Coen, former LCTA, GW, & current ACHS parent
- Carol Conjura, LCTA, GW & ACHS parent
- Jenny Considine, former LCTA, GW & ACHS parent
- Linda Couture
- Lilli DeSimone, former Maury, GW & current ACHS parent
- Mayor William D. Euille, former school board member
- Stuart Fox, CFO Route 66, Treasurer and Board Member, Visit Alexandria Waterfront and Parks
- & Rec Commissioner
- Jill Hopper, former LCTA, GW & ACHS parent
- Michael S. Ippolito
- Julie Jakopic, Immediate Past Chair, Hopkins House
- Molly Kaiman, former LCTA, GW & current ACHS parent
- Pamela and Keith Larson
- Susan Lathrop
- Mindy Lyle
- Elaine Macchio
- Nathan and Kara Macek
- Alice Manor, Honorary Mayor of Old Town
- Jody Manor, founder, Waterfront for All, co-owner, Bittersweet
- Brian McPherson, Waterfront Commissioner
- Tovah and Michael Meehan, ACHS parents
- Mary Condon Brereton
- Elizabeth Neiner, former LCTA parent
- Catherine and Robert Poulin, former LCTA parents
- Ann Southerlyn Reisig, former ACPS parent
- Danielle Romanetti, owner, fibre space
- Sue Setliff, founder, Maury schoolyard initiative, former Maury, GW & ACHS parent
- Ronna Traylor, former LCTA parent
- Amy Weist
- Devon Runyan Wells
- Patricia Zissios, Ph.D., former Principal of Lyles–Crouch (2004–2023)

In memory of Tom Devendorf and Judy Guse-Noritake

*Huge gratitude to these supporters!!!!

*as of 12/16/23

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BID considered in Old Town

For the third time in the 21st-century, a business improvement district was being considered in Old Town. After efforts failed in 2005 and 2017, efforts resumed in April 2023. Businessowners said the neighborhood would fall behind without the BID, but others were concerned about an additional bureaucracy of another board and cost. The newest proposal included solely King Street and one block of cross streets, which are also mostly commercial, and a 13- to 15-member board of business and property owners in the district, one to two city appointees, two non-voting members appointed by Visit Alexandria and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership and two resident representatives.

City Creatives share their stories

In the April 6, 2023, issue of the Times, four creatives in the city were profiled, including a vinyl records seller, an author who helped Vietnam War wives shape policy, a socially active dancer and a local actress. The twice-yearly section spotlights creative arts in Alexandria.

Alexandrian with royal ties tells story

Ethan Bond, a British-born Alexandrian, has deep ties to his home country and is an adventurer at heart. Bond was journeying to Ukraine to assist in rebuilding its military and civilian healthcare systems amidst the war with Russia that began in February 2021.

During his career, Bond has not been fearful of war zones or major political conflicts. He spent summers in the 1990s as an Army-sponsored cadet with the University of London, often traveling to Cyprus. He has also been deployed to Bosnia, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite his official retirement in 2005, Bond has spent much of his time since then in enemy combatant zones. He has settled in Alexandria with his wife Victoria and son.

City Council rescinds Taylor Run grants

City Council rescinded two grants procured for Taylor Run and Strawberry Run stream restoration projects, which totaled $3 million, following several years of significant pushback from local scientists and other residents.

The preservation of Taylor Run has been hotly contested since 2019, when activists revealed that the grant Alexandria obtained from the Commonwealth of Virginia was based on flawed methodology that overstated the level of phosphorus and other pollutants in city streambeds. A Times report also showed the city would need to cut down 269 trees, clear out natural vegetation and bring in heavy equipment to complete the restoration of Taylor Run.

After the city finally agreed to test the actual site – rather than rely on the flawed model projection – it was found that actual pollutant levels were low. City staff and local environmentalists then worked out a compromise path forward that did not include the grant.

Mayor Justin Wilson criticized the compromise action, expressing concern that taxpayers in the city would now have to finance the project.

Council clarifies health provider controls

Following the Supreme Court’s June 2022 decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, cities and states moved to enact local legislation dealing with abortion. City Council considered a zoning change with staff from the Department of Planning and Zoning to classify abortion providers as healthcare professionals. Many residents showed up to testify to City Council, both in support and opposition.

Supporters said the city can become a safe place for those seeking abortions and the opposition said abortion is not healthcare. Councilor Kirk McPike led the initiative on Council, which voted unanimously to approve the zoning change.

“Under this proposal, all healthcare providers are treated the same,” McPike said in the meeting. “And this is appropriate because abortion care is healthcare.”

Other notable events: Amazon HQ2 paused; ACPS installs speed cameras; Historic Garden Week turned 90; Potomac Yard derailment; unrelated shooting incidents cause two schools to go on lockdown; Hotel AKA Alexandria plans opening; city prepares for Potomac Yard Metro opening; Animal Welfare League of Alexandria recognized as a Certified Autism Center; Friends of the Mt. Vernon Trail won excellence award; Anna Binnewíg named as new Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic Association music director.
Flood mitigation plan shown

City Council received an updated review of the Department of Project Implementation’s flood mitigation efforts along Alexandria’s waterfront, as well as the status of efforts to rename streets bearing Confederate names, during a legislative meeting on May 23.

DPI Director Terry Suehr and Portfolio Manager Matthew Landes updated Council on the procurement process for the Waterfront Implementation Project. Suehr discussed the importance of the project and the need for transparency throughout the implementation process. He said the project is currently still in the proposal process.

Landes described how the WIP addresses the sources of flooding from an overflow in stormwater sewers due to increasingly severe rain events in the area.

“The goals of this project are to mitigate the stormwater and the most frequent tidal and riverine flooding events accordingly, but also to replace aging and failing shoreline infrastructure that is at the end of its useful life plan,” Landes said.

Improving public accessibility to the waterfront in key locations within Old Town is another major objective of the project.

Council endorses power plant redevelopment

On May 13, City Council unanimously endorsed the Coordinated Sustainability Strategy outlining the key strategies for short-and long-term energy and sustainability for the project.

According to documents outlining the redevelopment, the CSS lays out “a thoughtful set of targets to reduce the development’s impact on our planet, improve local environmental conditions and deliver healthy buildings within the Alexandria community.”

Goals for the site include the creation of a mixed-use walkable development which will include residential, retail and entertainment opportunities, to connect people to the waterfront, and to create meaningful open space with improved cyclist and pedestrian connectivity.

The redevelopment is set to happen in three different phases, with the development likely happening south to north along the site. The redevelopment is also expected to bring stormwater management and transportation improvements.

Potomac Yard Metro opens

The long-awaited ribbon cutting of the Potomac Yard-VT Metro station took place with considerable fanfare on May 19. Federal, state and local leaders gathered with nearly 600 others to celebrate the opening.

After 25 years of planning and overcoming challenges, the opening of the station is celebrated as a pivotal achievement for the city’s economic future.

“Today, we witnessed the culmination of decades of hard work,” Mayor Justin Wilson said at the event. “This station will be the legacy of every tradesperson, project manager, and the legion of residents who never gave up hope. The Potomac Yard-VT Metro Station will drive transformational economic growth in our city for generations to come.”

Potomac Yard’s proximity to Amazon’s HQ2 and the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus ensures that the station will be at the center of future growth in that part of the city.

ACHS student dies suddenly

Alexandria City High School student Yonathan Vasquez Mendez died on May 2, according to an emailed letter ACHS Principal Peter Balas sent to parents the same afternoon. Balas did not state a cause of death for Mendez.

ACPS Chief of School and Community Relations Julia Burgos responded to the Times, “Our standard protocol is that, when a student passes away, we do not share information about the cause. ACPS does not publicly share medical information about students or staff.”

Balas, in his communication to parents, paid tribute to Mendez.

“Yonatan has been part of the Alexandria City Public Schools family since he was in middle school, and his passing is a sad and tragic loss for his family, friends and our school community. He was always respectful and was well liked by his peers. On behalf of the entire Titan community, we send our thoughts and prayers to his family and loved ones,” Balas said in the communication.

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Other notable events: Alexandria Soccer Association Reds launch second season in the semi-professional National Premier Soccer League; Tom Hodges named Sportsman of the Year.
Taylor Run project approved

City Council unanimously approved a scaled-down restoration plan for Taylor Run, with an estimated cost of $2 million, during a legislative meeting on June 13.

The focus will be on repairing a sanitary sewer line that runs through the stream and surrounding wetlands, while minimizing disruption to the existing ecosystem.

The project has a multi-year, complicated and controversial history that dates back to 2019, when the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality awarded the city two grants from the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund for up to $2,255,000 for Taylor Run and $800,000 for Alexandria’s Strawberry Run, as part of efforts to clean pollutants from the Chesapeake Bay.

The initial grants were based on methodology that was later proven to be incorrect in predicting pollutant levels. When the City of Alexandria performed on-site testing, after years of prodding from local environmentalists who had conducted their own tests, they found that levels of phosphorus and other pollutants were negligible at the Alexandria streams.

Planning Commission approves GenOn site changes

The Planning Commission voted on June 6 to approve an amendment to the site plan for the former Potomac River Generating Station site. The amendment emphasized pedestrian safety. The commission also approved enhancements for Simpson Field Park and several zoning text amendments.

Among the items discussed at the meeting was the future of the GenOn site, which previously housed a coal burning power plant that was closed in 2012 after city activists called for it to be shuttered due to environmental concerns. The power plant was in the Old Town North neighborhood, bordering on the Potomac river.

Council approves summer pause to limits on Old Town events

City Council approved a waiver to the city’s 13-year-old special events policy that would allow large events of 500 or more people to be held in Old Town on consecutive weekends throughout the summer.

The prior policy dates back to January 2010 when City Council passed the Special Events Policies and Procedures, which limited events with an expected attendance of more than 500 people to no more than every other weekend throughout the year. It defined a weekend as running from 5 p.m. on a Friday through 6 p.m. on a Sunday.

Councilor John Taylor Chapman, who was the only member of the City Council to vote in opposition to the waiver, said he was concerned about the possible impact on residents of Old Town having large events in the area on consecutive weekends.

Encore staffing decision decried

Educators and parents were caught by surprise in June by a controversial decision to reallocate staff in the city’s Encore program. The restructuring announcement created a wave of support for teachers who may be forced to shuttle between several schools during the 2023-24 school year.

At a Parent Teacher Association meeting held June 5 at Naomi L. Brooks Elementary School, Alexandria City Public Schools then-Interim Superintendent Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., along with other members of the ACPS administrative staff, briefed those in attendance on the changes. They described the reasoning behind the staffing modifications, which they said were driven primarily by inconsistent enrollment numbers between different elementary schools. Administrators assured community members both in the brief and at the meeting that “assigning encore staff across schools is an efficient scheduling framework and proper use of personnel. Re-reviewing school allocations is a practice that takes place yearly and has impacted other contracted staff within ACPS over the years.”

Some teachers fear that shuffling between campuses will diminish their role in their current schools – and could compromise the quality of their instruction.

Although ACPS issued a statement regarding the rationale behind the decision, requests from the Times for enrollment data and a list of those schools lacking specific Encore programs and meeting minutes received no response.

Other notable events: Suspect in dog poisoning case sentenced; Alexandria Aces commemorate last year’s title as they launch 2023 season; Office of Historic Alexandria promotes Gadsby’s Tavern Director Liz Williams to deputy director.
Two student teams from the Alexandria City High School television and media production program won student video competitions earlier this month. A team of three students – Gryphon Magnus, Mia Mervis and Sarah McBurney – competed in the SkillsUSA media production competition in the broadcast news category. They placed first in the district and second at the state competition. Another student team, with members Leo Dienstfrey, Lashelle Sakyi and Marisa Vidal, won the StudentCam competition, run by C-SPAN and sponsored by Comcast, with their video “Modern Day Slavery” about human trafficking.

Vilma Zefran, who has been teaching the film and media production class for 23 years, said research is “not only the most important, but the most challenging skill” tested in the competitions. Zefran said, “They used many skills learned in other classes in our English and social studies programs and ... see the value in this program.”

ACHS students win C-SPAN competition

Council approves design for Duke Street in Motion

At approximately 1:30 a.m. on June 28, with many attendees still seated patiently in the chambers, Alexandria City Council, in a unanimous decision, approved a conceptual design of the Duke Street Transitway. The proposal was brought forth by the Duke Street Advisory Group.

If implemented as currently designed, the project will provide designated bus lanes and other major landscape changes along the Duke Street corridor from the former Landmark Mall site to the King Street Metro station.

In the days and hours leading up to the legislative session, an outpouring of emails flooded the inboxes of city leaders from community members pleading for their case; an overwhelming number of them showed up in person for one final chance to be heard.

The vote on the controversial project followed almost six hours of sometimes contentious discussion, as roughly 70 speakers – who were divided fairly evenly for and against the project – signed up to talk.
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Alexandria Brokerage
400 South Washington Street
Rief elected School Board chair

The Alexandria City School Board unanimously elected Michelle Rief, Ph.D., as chair at a July 20 meeting. Kelly Carmichael Booz was elected vice chair in a 5-4 vote at the meeting.

Both will serve one-year terms, which became effective immediately after the votes.

Rief succeeds Meagan Allderton, who had just been reelected as School Board chair in January. Board Member Abdel Elnouni voiced his words of support upon his nomination of Rief.

“It’s my honor to nominate Dr. Rief who is an exceptionally diligent and dedicated board member, very thoughtful and has a deep understanding of the issues,” Elnouni said.

Rief was first elected to the School Board in 2018 and was reelected in 2022. Booz previously served on the Alexandria City School Board from 2013 to 2015 and was elected most recently in 2022. She also served on the Douglas MacArthur Elementary School Advisory Committee for that school’s rebuild.

Five Guys relocates headquarters to Alexandria

“It feels like we are going home,” Five Guys’ public relations coordinator Brooke Blankenship said.

What started in 1986 by the local Murray family as a stand-alone restaurant on Columbia Pike in Arlington grew to five locations in and around Alexandria. The restaurant was franchised in 2002 and later went global. After decades of being located outside the Beltway, Five Guys saw an opportunity to move and settled on Alexandria.

The search itself was a tall order. 250 employees already worked at the then-headquarters in Lorton, Virginia, and 250 other employees worked across the country. Five Guys started to look for space before the pandemic because their lease was coming up for renewal. The doors to the new headquarters opened July 17.

Poor air quality returns to region

The poor air quality that dogged the Northeast and Midwest in early June made a return in July. The air quality problems were again caused by wildfires in Canada, with roughly 500 different blazes burning in various sections of the country. High altitude winds carried smoke from the fires to the south and east.

The worst air quality day was June 8, when the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area recorded an Air Quality Index reading of 198, while the day prior it reached 176. The bad air gradually dissipated, with the week from June 21 through 27 registering six out of seven days in the “good” category. The AQI surged again from June 28 to 30, with readings of 131, 170 and 126 respectively.

The city had to cancel events, close parks and issue air quality alerts. Professional baseball games were canceled in the District, New York and Philadelphia and residents were told to stay indoors on the worst days.

During a typical summer in the region, the air quality index rarely exceeds 50. Since June 1, there were 18 days during which the air quality index exceeded 50, another four days when it was between 100 and 150 – and three days in which it was greater than 150.

Little League all-stars shine on field

Alexandria’s Intermediate Little League All-Star baseball team rambled through a series of victories at the district and state levels before bowing out of the Virginia tournament on July 8, with a 3-2 season ending loss to Richmond in the semifinals.

It was the first state appearance for the intermediate team in four years. The Alexandria squad won the Virginia crown in 2017.

Alexandria’s team went 5-0 in the “pool” competition, which then pitted them against the second-place team, Arlington National, 4-1, in the final, and for the second time, a single run separated the two teams, but Alexandria prevailed 7-6.

After winning their state opener, the team brought hot bats into the Richmond game after out-slugging West Springfield 13-3 in the quarterfinals for their ninth straight win – six to capture the District 4 title and the first three within the state bracket.
New MacArthur Elementary School opens

On August 18, Alexandria City Public Schools celebrated the opening of the newly constructed Douglas MacArthur Elementary School. A ribbon-cutting ceremony that included ACPS and other city officials was held. The new school, built on the same site as the original 1943 building, is 154,221 square feet and has three stories, with capacity for 840 students. The design also includes turf fields and play areas.

Halal butchery receives warning from city

D.C. Poultry Market, a family-owned halal meat market on Colvin Street, was issued a warning by the Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning on August 8 after informing an inspector they had been selling more than just poultry to their customers.

Despite D.C. Poultry’s statement to Planning and Zoning that rabbits had not been on their property for several months, two videos posted to the butcher’s public Facebook page within the past week clearly show caged rabbits at the facility along with an array of poultry.

In a Facebook video dated August 4, a camera scans the room showing D.C. Poultry’s offerings and briefly shows a cage with two rabbits. Another post dated the next day of a YouTube video is an interview with a D.C. Poultry employee showing cages filled with fowl and eventually one with at least four rabbits. One rabbit curiously sticks its nose through the bars of its cage while the D.C. Poultry employee is being interviewed for the video.

Mayor Justin Wilson, who in 2019 voted to allow D.C. Poultry Market to open in Alexandria, said in an email that the business should be held to the terms of their special use permit.

Community’s help sought after gun violence spike

Alexandria experienced an alarming rise in gun violence and other violent crimes in the summer, with many felonies being committed in broad daylight. Murders, carjackings and brazen auto theft kept city residents and leaders on edge.

“Crime at this level – the amount of crimes being committed with guns. I’ve never seen it at this multitude,” Alexandria Police Chief Don Hayes said candidly in a phone interview on August 1 about the current climate in the city.

On July 24, 29-year-old father Eric Holmes, Jr. was shot and killed at approximately 11:30 a.m. at the 800 block of West Glebe Road. The incident happened at a playground in the neighborhood, and according to police, Holmes died after being transported to a hospital. It was the fifth homicide of 2023.

A video produced and posted to the city’s YouTube page following the incident includes messages from Hayes, City Manager Jim Parajon and Mayor Justin Wilson encouraging witnesses to share any information they may have about the case.

“I’ve been doing this job for a long time and we are outraged about the senseless crime that is taking place in our city,” Hayes said in his video message.

Alexandria Aces lose in championship

After an unprecedented regular season, during which the Alexandria Aces set a Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League record with an .833 winning percentage, the Aces fell to the Bethesda Big Train in the league championship series during the last week of July.

Bethesda defeated the Aces in Alexandria on July 25 by a score of 16-10, then won the next night in Bethesda, 7-3 to secure the title. Alexandria and Bethesda have traded off winning the championship the last three years, with the Aces prevailing last year and the Big Train winning in 2021.

Aces highlights during the 2023 season included a regular season record of 30-6 and a 17-game winning streak, both league records.

New ACHS principal says campus is ‘closed’

Alexander Duncan III, who became the principal of Alexandria City High School on July 1, told parents last week that ACHS’ “closed campus” policy will be enforced this year. Duncan also emphasized the need for consistent student attendance in an email and post on the school’s parent portal. Duncan’s message, which went out four days prior to the start of the 2023-2024 school year, said the closed campus policy applies to all four ACHS locations: King Street, Minnie Howard, Satellite and Chance for Change.

“As we approach the beginning of the school year, I wanted to take this opportunity to remind all of our students, families, staff and community that our high school campuses are ‘closed campuses,’” Duncan said in the email.

Duncan elaborated what a “closed campus” means in his email.

“A closed campus means that students are not allowed to leave school grounds during the school day. The expectation is that all students will arrive by the start of the school day and remain on school grounds through dismissal unless a student has specific permission, in accordance with school procedures ... for leaving at a certain time,” Duncan wrote.

The new principal emphasized there will be consequences if students leave school grounds without permission.
An Alexandria Times expose revealed many of the close to 1,000 Afghans who resettled in Alexandria following the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan in 2021 were living in rodent- and bed bug-infested apartments managed by Morgan Properties.

"On average, we were catching like eight and nine or sometimes 10 rates [per month]," according to former Willow Run resident Arafat Safi, who said the infestation in his family’s apartment was severe.

A local pastor who wished to remain anonymous, numerous church members, community-based organization NoVA RAFT and several City Council members all became involved in trying to help the refugees deal with Morgan Properties and move out of their infested apartments.

In interviews with several of the refugees, photos of children with bed bug bites all over their legs were shared with the Times, as was the story of a baby that was bit by a rat while sleeping in a crib.

"This has gone on long enough. It’s not just a cleaning one apartment issue. It’s a human rights issue. It’s a moral issue," the pastor said.

Coalition for a Livable Alexandria launched

The Coalition for a Livable Alexandria, Inc., a citizen-sponsored advocacy organization, outlined its goals and signaled an intent to be a significant voice in the city’s current housing policy debate in a Market Square news conference on August 28. Around 80 people were in attendance. The controversial initiative that CLA weighed in on is “Zoning for Housing/Housing for All.”

CLA’s flier publicizing the news conference said:

“The Coalition for a Livable Alexandria strongly believes in the need for more affordable housing in Alexandria. However, the city’s sweeping proposals would radically change Alexandria’s Zoning Code in ways that will remove existing protections and leave residents NO LEGAL SAY in development decisions.”

Roy Byrd, CLA’s chair, who has long been active in local issues through his civic association, explained the group’s rationale at the August 28 rally.

“14% of the housing stock [in Alexandria] is single family homes. We’re not Arlington and we’re not Fairfax,” Byrd said. “We have a good mix of housing, all of which could be more affordable.”

Byrd said his group’s formation is a result of not having real input into the housing debate.

“This is about being listened to, not just heard,” Byrd said.

Other notable stories:
Comcast awarded 100 laptops to Alexandria’s Summer Youth Employment Program; new school zone speed camera program goes into effect; Alexandria native Mary Calvert receives awards for her new children’s book, which aids in early language development; Olympian and Alexandria native Noah Lyles wins three races at the 2023 World Athletics Championships.

Afghan refugees live in rodent-infested apartments

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Nicaraguan prisoners rescued

A U.S. State Department official described the secret mission that rescued 222 political prisoners who had been turned out of Nicaraguan prisons by longtime ruler Daniel Ortega. At least one of the released prisoners settled in Alexandria with their family.

Delayed crime reporting draws community ire

The Alexandria Police Department faced sharp criticism for its delay in notifying the community about an attempted abduction on September 1.

According to a person who reviewed security footage of the event, an unknown assailant ambushed a woman at the intersection of S. Washington Street and Wilkes Street. The footage showed the man placed the woman in a chokehold and dragged her into an alley behind Firehook Bakery. A Good Samaritan saw the assault taking place and pulled his car over, causing the assailant to flee.

Two weeks later, with the assailant still at large, APD had not notified the public of the assault and attempted robbery and did not send an officer to review the security footage that had been offered multiple times. Only after an email exchange between a concerned resident and Mayor Justin Wilson went viral on social media did APD alert the public to the incident and send an officer to review footage.

A Freedom of Information Act request filed by the Times revealed the incident was highlighted in the APD Command Report that went to Chief Don Hayes the night of the incident. Despite evidence that APD knew an assailant had taken place from the beginning, both Hayes and APD Public Information Officer Marcel Bassett continued to deny that APD violated required procedures by not alerting the public.

The APD later arrested suspect Xavier Cooper on September 29 and charged him with “abduction with intent to defile.”

City SOL scores rise in 2022-2023

Alexandria City Public Schools’ standardized test passing rates increased overall in the 2022-2023 school year, a continuing trend from the 2021-22 school year. For the second year in a row, ACPS improved on the prior year’s Standards of Learning marks in four of five categories.

ACPS achievement still trails significantly behind the average Virginia school district in four of five categories. ACPS scores are also well below the district’s performance during the 2018-19 school year, which was the last full year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SBDC’s closure surprises city

The Alexandria Small Business Development Center, a significant support system for local business owners since its inception in 1996, abruptly shuttered its doors this summer. The Alexandria Center has officially merged with the George Mason SBDC, though many of its functions have been taken over by the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership.

Other notable stories:
Civil rights attorney Gerry Hebert dies at 74; Adriana Castaneda named new director of Department of Transportation and Environmental Services; Alexandria Tutoring Consortium to expand; Alexandria Harmonizers celebrate 75 years; Bittersweet Catering turns 40.

Gerry Hebert speaking at an event for non-profit organization ALIVE!
Council removes panhandling restrictions

Restrictions on panhandling in Alexandria were unanimously lifted October 14 during a City Council public hearing.

The vote came after a heated discussion at the October 11 City Council legislative meeting where Councilors debated a 1994 ordinance on panhandling regulations. The 1994 ordinance banned panhandling within 15 feet of ATMs and aggressive panhandling, which includes soliciting money using methods that cause fear of injury.

City Attorney Joanna Anderson said at the meeting that the panhandling code was redundant.

“The majority of the reasons why it was used ... can be enforced in different sections of the code,” Anderson said.

Leaders downplay PTO downsizing

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office is downsizing its office space in Carlyle, which has contributed to the building’s owner, LCOR, receiving a Moody’s “junk bond” rating. Alexandria business leaders and city officials nonetheless argue the move will have minimal impact on the city’s economy.

The PTO is downsizing its real estate profile due to the increase in remote work since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. A spokesperson for the federal agency, Paul Fucito, said the PTO is constantly assessing its profile and reducing its commitment whenever possible.

Other notable events:
School Board discusses restructuring; Alexandria native Leigh Orleans describes competing on Gordon Ramsay’s “Hell’s Kitchen” reality show; Process for renaming Confederate streets moves forward; Alexandria Symphony Orchestra celebrates 80 years; Don Simpson, Jr. wins Chamber of Commerce’s Business Leader of the Year award; Child injured in hit-and-run; Multiple fights break out at Alexandria City High School.

Jewish community struggles to cope with Hamas attack

Many around the world are still trying to process the gruesome videos of murders, rapes and mutilations that were released by Hamas following their surprise October 7 attack on Israel.

For Alexandria’s Jewish community – which numbers around 5,000, according to the Institute of Southern Jewish Life – these are not just events that happened to strangers in a faraway land. Rather, these are family members and friends who have been terrorized, taken hostage or killed.

To better understand how the invasion of Israel is impacting Alexandria’s Jewish community, we spoke with four Alexandria residents: a local rabbi, a resident who used to live in Israel, a resident who grew up with the mother of a young man taken hostage and a Christian, whose husband is Jewish and returned from a Holy Land pilgrimage days before the attacks.

Zoning for Housing debate intensifies

As Alexandria’s “Zoning for Housing/Housing for All” initiative approached a scheduled final vote in November, intense debates raged about the costs and benefits of the initiative. This heated discussion accelerated after drafts of revised text amendments were released in early October.

The city recommended changes to the zoning ordinance on September 5. Recommendations, published on October 6, include changes to historic development patterns, the most controversial of which is allowing multi-family units to be built where previously only single-family dwellings were allowed.

The initiative, meant to rewrite city zoning laws to allow for more units to be placed in various neighborhoods across the city, was met with resistance from residents who say the sharp increase in density will destroy Alexandria’s livability and quality of life.

Roy Byrd, chair of the Coalition for a Livable Alexandria, a grassroots organization of residents, said his group’s goal was to slow down the initiative, as he believes the city moved too fast for residents to understand the implications of the text amendments and new rules.
**NOVEMBER**

**Lawsuit settled between city, Potomac Riverkeepers**

The Potomac River is slated for a transformative cleanup after the city of Alexandria unveiled a comprehensive $11.8 million plan on November 1 to eradicate the coal tar contamination present in the River.

This initiative, which will be implemented during the next decade, stems from a settlement with the Potomac Riverkeeper Network, which took the city to federal court for being in violation of the Clean Water Act.

The settlement provides a comprehensive plan that includes upland remediation enhancements to remove the coal tar from the soil and groundwater, pipe upgrades to the storm sewer to keep coal tar contamination from migrating into the river and sediment testing to see if more remediation is needed. Also included is the Mussel Project, where the city plans to add 20,000 freshwater mussels into the river to naturally purify it.

Nancy Stoner, president of the PRKN, heralded the settlement as a historic win for the people of Alexandria.

“We commend the city for agreeing to take the necessary corrective action to halt and clean up this pollution, which has been harming the Potomac River for decades,” Stoner said.

**City’s noise ordinance scrutinized**

Alexandria’s noise ordinance has undergone many changes since its inception in the early 1960s to address the challenges of a denser and louder population. Recent studies show prolonged exposure to high noise levels can have adverse health effects, leading to issues like poor sleep, stress, high blood pressure and noise-induced hearing loss.

The city last made amendments to the ordinance in 2021, but questions remain about the effectiveness of laws on the books and the city’s enforcement of those rules. The city is likely to seek greater authority for localities to regulate leaf blowers as part of its legislative package for the 2024 Virginia General Assembly session.

**Council adopts Zoning for Housing**

City Council voted unanimously to adopt the “Zoning for Housing/Housing for All” master plan and text amendments on November 28 following a nearly four-hour discussion between Council and city staff.

Vice Mayor Amy Jackson and Councilor John Taylor Chapman attempted to defer a vote on single-family zoning to a later date. That motion failed by a 5-2 vote, with Mayor Justin Wilson and Councilors Canek Aguirre, Sarah Bagley, Alyia Gaskins and Kirk McPike voting against the deferral.

The new ordinances will allow for office-to-residential conversions, changing historic development patterns, create multi-family zones, make industrial zones more compatible with residential development, expand transit-oriented development, provide more affordable housing and increase townhouse development.

The issue has roiled Alexandria for the past year, as many questioned Council’s outreach to residents, the pace of the proposals and Council’s willingness to adapt the ordinances based on resident input. Opponents of the measure argued that the initiative will destroy Alexandria’s livability and character, nominally advance diversity, increase the cost of housing in Alexandria and act as a gift to developers at the expense of residents.

The Coalition for a Livable Alexandria, an advocacy group, formed in opposition to the initiative. The YIMBYs of NoVA, a regional group in support of development, acted as the main supporter of Zoning for Housing.

**Alexandria Democrats sweep General Assembly races**

Democrats maintained their hold on the city of Alexandria – and took full control of the state legislature – on November 7 as both chambers in the General Assembly now tout Democratic majorities.

Democratic incumbents State Senator Adam Ebbin and Delegates Alfonso Lopez, Charniele Herring and Elizabeth Bennett-Parker all won easily, with Herring and Bennett-Parker running unopposed. Although Alexandria’s district numbers and boundaries changed due to redistricting, the result was familiar.

There was a 36% voter turnout in the city, with more than 40,000 registered voters casting ballots out of the 112,080 total registered voters.

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**Other notable events:** Alexandria resident Nancy Hulkower describes participating in the show “Golden Bachelor”; the Alexandria Film Festival returned for its 17th year, with “Art Thief” winning the Best of Festival award; Willie Bailey resigns from the Alexandria School Board; Local third grader shines at Folger Theatre; Off-duty D.C. police officer arrested in city after high-speed chase; Alexandria Police Department to expand license plate reader program.

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**The Coalition for a Livable Alexandria (CLA)**

CLA is a grassroots organization of Alexandria residents focused on development and zoning issues.

CLA wants to make sure the city government:

- **Listens** to residents when making land use decisions,
- **Doesn’t** burden residents with additional costs or hardships, and
- **Preserves** the great things that we love about Alexandria.

Join our mailing list at: LivableAlexandria.org

The Coalition for a Livable Alexandria, Inc. is a non-profit, non-partisan, 501(c)(4) organization.
Controversial Old Town project advances, then pulled

A contentious project at 301 N. Fairfax St. has been working its way through the city’s redevelopment pipeline during 2023, culminating at the December 5 Planning Commission meeting when the project advanced by a narrow 4-3 vote.

The proposed redevelopment, which would replace a large office building in the heart of historic Old Town with an even larger, multi-family, four-story facility with 48 for-sale units, two of which are set aside as affordable. The proposal includes an underground parking garage with 67 spaces.

A vote by City Council was scheduled for the December 16 public hearing, but the proposal was pulled by the developer’s lawyer when it became apparent the measure lacked the votes to pass. A petition by residents triggered a requirement for a supermajority of council to advance the measure, which the measure lacked at the December 16 meeting. It is scheduled to be considered at the January 20 City Council public hearing.

Wizards, Capitals announce plans to relocate to Potomac Yard

A massive entertainment district, anchored by a new arena for the Washington Wizards and Washington Capitals, is slated for Alexandria’s Potomac Yard. The proposed complex will also include a performing arts venue and a headquarters building for Monumental Sports & Entertainment, whose CEO, Ted Leonsis, owns both the Wizards and the Capitals.

A large group of elected officials and business leaders, including Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, Alexandria Mayor Justin Wilson, Leonsis and Alexandria Economic Development Partnership President and CEO Stephanie Landrum gathered on December 13 at the Potomac Yard Metro station to announce and celebrate the planned development.

Rumors had been swirling for a couple of weeks that a major announcement was afoot, but didn’t seem concrete until December 12, when Youngkin’s office issued a press release stating “a remarkable economic development project for the Commonwealth” would be unveiled in Alexandria the next day.

Landrum spoke first at the ceremony about this “pretty incredible opportunity” and introduced Youngkin, who made the move official.

“After many years of dreaming, and many years of discussion, I am pleased to announce that right here in Alexandria’s Potomac Yard, we have a plan to unleash a brighter, more extraordinary future,” Youngkin said at the event.

In addition to a new arena for the Capitals and Wizards, Youngkin said there will be a new Monumental Sports Network media studio, a practice facility for the Wizards, a 6,000-seat performing arts venue, an expanded esports venue, new retail, restaurants, a conference center, hotels and gathering places. If approved by City Council, the project could break ground in 2025.

“This visionary sports and entertainment development district will bring together entertainment, sports and technology like nowhere in the world,” Youngkin said.

Christ Church celebrates 250 years

Alexandria’s Christ Church turned 250 this year, and the milestone was celebrated throughout 2023 with a series of special lectures and events. The church first opened its doors when George Washington was still a gentleman farmer and Virginia was a British Colony.

Famous parishioners through the years included Washington and Robert E. Lee, who grew up in Alexandria before leading the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Numerous U.S. presidents have worshipped at Christ Church, including Franklin Roosevelt, who attended on New Year’s Day in 1942 along with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.
Classifieds

LEGAL NOTICE

Notice of Willingness to Hold a Public Hearing

Find out about:
Bikeshare Replacement Station Project
VDOT Project No. 9999-100-858, UPIC 122950
Federal Project No. CMAQ-5801(592)

The City of Alexandria is planning to replace 21 Capital Bikeshare stations that are approaching the end of their useful life with new equipment. This will include new docks, platforms, and kiosks. New station equipment will be placed within the footprint of the existing stations. Additionally, new bikes will be purchased for the system.

Review the project information at alexandriava.gov/Bikesharing or at the City of Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services, 421 King St, St 235, Alexandria, VA, 22314, tel: 703.746.4025 (TTY 711).

If your concerns cannot be satisfied, the City of Alexandria is willing to hold a Public Hearing. You may request that a public hearing be held by sending a written request to Sean Martin at Sean.Martin@alexandriava.gov. Please reference “Bikeshare Replacement Station Project” in the subject heading. Alternatively, you may mail comments to Sean Martin, City of Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services, 421 King St, Suite 235, Alexandria, VA, 22314. Requests must be received prior to January 11, 2024. If upon receiving public comments it is deemed necessary to hold a public hearing, notice of date, time and place of the hearing will be posted. The City of Alexandria ensures nondiscrimination in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For information call 703.746.3140 (TTY 711).

PUBLIC NOTICE

Truist Bank, located at 233 S. Van Dorn Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22304, is in possession of assets owned by the following decedent, Willem H. Daniels, who at the time of his death was domiciled outside of Virginia. In accordance with Va. Code Ann. § 64.2-609(A), Truist Bank hereby gives public notice of its intention to deliver the decedent’s assets to the Personal Representative of decedent’s estate, Chris Horner, who has qualified as Personal Representative in accordance with the law of the decedent’s domicile. Delivery is to be made after the lapse of thirty (30) days from the completion of due publication of this notice, pursuant to the Code, once a week for four successive weeks. Inquiries, including any notice of the appointment of a personal representative for decedent in Virginia or legal notice of any lien or encumbrance upon decedent’s assets, should be directed to Truist Bank at the address above.

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During the holiday season, our thoughts turn gratefully to our communities and to our clients.

From our family to yours, we hope your holidays are filled with warmth and cheer.

McEnearney Associates
Merry & Bright
Holiday Season and a Happy New Year