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3-13-23
(Budget Public Hearing)

Special Hearing, City of Alexandria, March 13, 2023

Good evening. My name is Libby Bawcombe, and I am here representing the Friends of Duncan Library.

The Friends of Duncan Library is a volunteer-led non-profit group that fundraises for Duncan Library in order to help pay for books and materials for children and adults, for programs and community events, furniture, equipment, supplies, software licenses, professional development for staff, and beautification of the landscaping and grounds around Duncan branch. Overall, our goal is to augment the services and materials for Duncan branch that are not covered by the City budget.

We are actively involved in the neighboring community and have 165 members who pay dues that directly support fundraising efforts. Profits from book sales are a main source of revenue, and this is all possible through the dozens of volunteers who give countless hours to support Duncan Library.

While we appreciate that the City is funding some needs for Alexandria Library, we are concerned about some critical needs that continue to be underfunded.

Alexandria Library staff salaries have been falling behind for the past 10 years. Staff salaries today are 16-20% below what is offered in neighboring jurisdictions. This has caused a startling turnover rate, as staff leave Alexandria to take higher paying jobs in Arlington County, Fairfax County and Washington, D.C. This leaves branches short-staffed and strained, and they spend a great amount of time and effort operating a lengthy hiring process. This pulls staff away from working with patrons and providing library services.

We ask the City to commit to a concrete, actionable timeline that increases salaries of Alexandria Library staff to fair and equitable levels of compensation.

We are also worried about cuts to security guard services at Duncan Library. As public spaces, library branches are open to anyone, regardless of age. We want to ensure our branches are safe for staff and patrons, particularly children. We should not ask librarians to act as security guards. Crisis management is neither their training nor their responsibility. We need to support staff and patrons by providing a safe environment through funding security guard services.

Duncan Library is the heart of our community. It is a hub for families, students, educators, neighbors, and those in need of books, materials and technology. I am confident the same could be said for Beatley, Burke and Barrett branches.

Librarians and staff in Alexandria selflessly serve the community, so we ask the City to show its support through a concrete, actionable timeline for increasing staff compensation, and by funding security guard services to keep our libraries and community safe. Thank you.

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3-13-23
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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL ON MARCH 13, 2023, IN
SUPPORT OF THE CITY MANAGER'S PROPOSED FY 2022 BUDGET**

My name is Michael Schuster. I am the Chair of the Alexandria City Commission on Aging. I am testifying on behalf of the Commission on Aging

First, we thank the city government for its generous support of older Alexandrians over the years. In particular, we appreciate the contributions of the City Manager and the Office of Management of the Budget, in putting together this proposed budget. The director and staff of the Budget office met with our commission recently to brief us on the proposed budget. We also thank the Director of the Department of Community and Human Services for the department's proposal in this budget to increase the funding for rent relief by \$100,000. We enthusiastically support this proposal. This money will ensure there will be no waiting list for those who are struggling to pay ever increasing rent in the city. The most recent information from DCHS shows that without rent assistance, participants in the rent relief program spend 95% of their income on rent – with the rent assistance it is 70% - this is still a lot to pay for rent, but a substantial improvement. Only one medical or financial crisis could put some of them perilously close to facing eviction for non-payment of rent.

One item not in the budget is a provision for covering the gap in aging funding caused by the new intrastate funding formula for Older American Act funds. The Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (or DARS) has altered its intrastate funding formula (IFF) as it is required to do every 10 years after the decennial census. The IFF determines how DARS will allocate federal and state funding to local area agencies on aging for the next 10 years. DARS has changed the IFF by adding a new category based on the percentage of a jurisdiction's population of persons aged 60 or older. That,

and other formula changes, will cause the City of Alexandria to lose about \$19,000 in funding for the next fiscal year. Unfortunately, the Virginia Assembly failed to pass a budget amendment that would hold jurisdictions like Alexandria harmless from these cuts. Losing that amount of funding amounts to 12 fewer older adults receiving a meal – a total of 2750 meals, 591 hours of homemaker services, and a 4% reduction in personal care services. The current waiting list of 40 older adults will only grow, having a ripple effect, since many of these individuals may need government funded nursing home care. The Commission on Aging requests that the City Manager's final budget include this funding for the Division of Aging and Adult Services. If the General Assembly ultimately approves funding to cover these cuts, and big if, then that money could be used to reduce the waiting list for personal care services.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for your attention.

Concerning Elimination/Reduction of Security Guard Services at the Alexandria Library

Presentation for Budget Public Hearing, March 13, 2023

Good evening Mayor Wilson, City Council members and City Manager Parajohn.

My name is Trudi Bellardo Hahn. I am Chair of the Alexandria Library Board and I am here to speak on behalf of the Board, which includes Councilman Aguirre. The Board fully supports what I am about to say.

First, we appreciate the City Manager's support of our supplemental request of:

- Expanding the core materials collection and continuing use of an equity audit tool (\$62,000)
- Continuing the mobile hotspot and Chromebook lending programs (\$33,000)
- Implementing the Microsoft 365 migration (\$16,000)

However, Mr. Parajohn's proposal to eliminate security guard services at the Barrett and Duncan library branches and to reduce those services at the Beatley and Burke branches *contradicts* his statement made at the recent budget townhall meeting that safety is a high priority in his budget (as it should be).

Our public libraries are free and open to everyone! They should be safe places for staff to work and for the residents who use them. However, there are times where some users do not follow the Library's Behavior Guidelines and staff must call the Alexandria Police Department for assistance. You may have heard that recently, a person was stabbed and killed in a DC Public Library. What if that happened here?!

The consequences would fall on the Council and City Manager, and even worse, the many families who use our libraries would be afraid to come and attend early literacy, school readiness, summer learning, and indoor/outdoor story hours. Parents would not want their children and teens to hang out at the library out of school hours. English language learners would be fearful of attending weekly courses. The library patrons who make heavy use of free computer, Internet and wireless access, and free technology training would stay away.

Unfortunately, there has been an increase in the Special Incident Reports that are written by library staff to document negative behaviors and calls to the police. Research has also shown that there has been an increase in mental health issues from the pandemic. ***Security guards serve as an important deterrent to bad behaviors and to help diffuse potentially dangerous situations.***

Concerning Elimination/Reduction of Security Guard Services at the Alexandria Library

Presentation for Budget Public Hearing, March 13, 2023

If safety is a high priority, please do not eliminate or reduce the guard services at our public libraries.

Thank you.

Public Comments

3/13/2023

Budget Public Hearing

Good Evening Mayor, Vice Mayor, Council Members and City Manager,

My name is Ana Cifuentes and I am from Guatemala. I have been in this country since 1981 but I've been living in Chirilagua since 1995.

I live at the New Brookside Apartments and I currently pay \$1,600 for a one bedroom apartment. Currently, my job is childcare, which means my low salary does not allow me to pay the entire rent, this forces me to share my apartment with another family. And because I am a senior , it makes it difficult to find a different type of job.

How I'd like to live in an affordable apartment - in order to have my own space, buy myself a pair of shoes, a new outfit dress or even go to the river this summer. But I can't do any of that because almost everything I earn goes to my rent.

I'm here today sharing my living experience in the City of Alexandria because many people like me are in the same situation. And now that you are in the process of the budget, it is important you take into consideration this issue because it impacts many.

In this upcoming budget we would like for:

- The city to invest \$5 million dollars in order to create a voucher program for families who earn 40% of the AMI and below. We know there are revenue taxes, such as meals tax, that can be utilized to create the vouchers.

- We also know there will be a lot of development happening in Chirilagua , which is why we would like Council to invest in only projects that will be creating units at the 60% of the ami and below.

As city leaders, please make good decisions into this budget and think of the needs of the community that earn a low income. Remember that dignified housing is a basic need. Thank you.

Buenas Tardes Alcalde, Vice Alcalde, Miembros del Concejal y al Manager de la Ciudad,

Mi nombre es Ana Cifuentes y soy de Guatemala. Yo he estado en este país desde 1981, pero he vivido en Chirilagua desde 1995.

Vivo en los apartamentos New Brookside y en este momento pago \$1,600 de renta por un apartamento de una recamara. En estos momentos estoy trabajando cuidando niños lo cual mi salario es bien bajo para pagar esta cantidad de renta, esto me ha forzado a tener que compartir mi apartamento con otra familia. Se me hace difícil obtener otra clase de trabajo por ser una persona de la tercera edad.

Como quisiera tener una vivienda de bajo costo - para poder tener mi propio espacio, comprarme un par de zapatos, un vestido o hasta ir al río en el verano. Pero no puede hacer nada de eso - porque casi todo lo que gano es para la renta.

Estoy aquí compartiendo mi experiencia viviendo en la ciudad de Alexandria, porque sé que muchas personas están en la misma situación. Y hoy que están en el proceso del presupuesto, es importante que tomen este tema como prioridad ya que esto nos impacta mucho

Queremos que en este presupuesto ustedes:

- Invierten \$5 millones de dólares para crear un programa de cupones para vivienda para familias que ganan menos de 50 mil dólares al año. Sabemos que hay un impuesto de comida, así que pueden utilizarlo para crear este programa.

- También, sabemos que viene mucho desarrollo en Chirilagua por lo cual nosotros quisiéramos que el Concejal invirtiera sola en proyectos que crean unidades menos del ingreso del 60% por ciento

Por favor como ciudad, hagan buenas decisiones en este presupuesto y piensen en las necesidades de la comunidad que gana poco. Recuerden que la vivienda baja y justa es la base principal.

Muchas gracias

03/13/2023

Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Jackson, and other members of Council,

My name is Jim Durham. I live on Fort Williams Pkwy. Thanks for the opportunity to speak. I have one budget ask: please fund the remaining service increments of the FY2022 Transit Vision Plan, i.e. the Council-endorsed plan that promised all-day, 7 days a week, frequent bus service for residents in high density areas.

First – Thank you for funding the DASH Line 30 service increment in the FY2023 budget. As some of you have seen when riding the 30 bus, this line is heavily use by people from Alexandria’s diverse communities.

I offer three reasons why funding FY22 service increments is important.

Funding the FY22 plan will advance Alexandria’s Community Health Improvement Plan or CHIP. The CHIP’s Poverty focus area includes a strategy to implement the Alexandria Transit Vision plan. As you know, the CHIP is very much focused on improving health with a social and racial equity lens, and proving more useful DASH bus service in high density areas is an equity and public health initiative.

Funding the FY22 Transit plan will advance **Alexandria’s climate and environmental action plans**. These plans call for providing more transportation options as a necessary condition to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled. Providing additional all-day, 7 days a week, frequent bus service will help reduce VMT with resulting climate and environmental benefits.

Funding the FY 22 plan is an economic health initiative. The average cost of car ownership is \$10,000 per year. More useful bus service enables households to consider going car light, for example, becoming a one-car household instead of two, or perhaps going car free, More frequent all-day service, can enable people to save \$10,000 per year – with benefits similar to what you might expect from the ARISE program that directly provides low income families with \$6,000 annually.

In closing, please demonstrate your commitment to racial and social equity, to public health, to climate and environmental action plans and to helping residents in these economically challenging times. Please fund DASH service increments that will provide residents in high density areas with all-day, frequent bus service 7 days a week.

Thank you. Jim Durham

Dear City Council members,

My name is Willow De Freitas Kick. I'm 13 and have been volunteering at Duncan library since November 2022.

I grew up at Duncan, I went to storytimes and did programs with librarians who still work there today. Duncan cultivated my love for books and reading. Librarians recommended different book series to me, like The Chronicles of Narnia, or Percy Jackson. Books that I still love today. I would not be where I am right now without Duncan Library.

From volunteering at Duncan and working with kids, I have met so many amazing children and nannies. I know Leia loves mermaid books, Ana likes me to make treasure hunts. Vivienne loves it when I read stories about dogs. The nannies help me with my Spanish and form friendships with me. It's been an absolutely amazing experience to help these children's love for books grow and flourish.

When I walk into the library, I am greeted by the same librarians every single day. There's a sense of safety that comes with seeing familiar faces, asking how their day has been and getting to know them. Rania Chaya has known me since before I was born, she helped me become the person I am today. I only met Kayla Payne in November, but she has been an incredible inspiration to me. There's Yvonne Lee, our security guard who's a constant and stable presence when I enter the door. These people are the reason Duncan has such an amazing community.

But what if the librarians move to other libraries for better pay? If I walk into Duncan and the librarians I know and love aren't there, a huge piece of our community will be missing. One of the reasons we keep coming to the library is *because* of our librarians. Or what if I walk in and Yvonne isn't there? Will Kayla have to worry about security while doing storytime? What about the programs for kids? Like Spitfire, a book club for girls. Will Rory go back into her shell and stop reading? Elsa wants to volunteer and be like me, will she still want to do that if Spitfire doesn't exist anymore?

These programs, people and librarians help make the library what it is. We could lose what makes Duncan library a home and safe space for so many people. We cannot afford to have our libraries budget cut. The librarians will not be able to afford to live if you do not raise their salaries. so when you discuss the budget. the children, remember the librarians, people and programs. Because if you don't, we will.

Thank you.

Talking Points Concerning Compensation of Alexandria Library Staff

On February 28, 2023, the City Manager submitted his proposed budget to the Mayor and City Council.

The Library Board appreciates his support for the supplemental requests of:

- Expanding the core materials collection and continuing use of an equity audit tool (\$62,000)
- Continuing the mobile hotspot and Chromebook lending programs (\$33,000)
- Implementing the Microsoft 365 migration (\$16,000)

However, his decision not to include the requested funding for market-based compensation adjustments for Library staff was disappointing.

- Library employees are undercompensated with respect to their peers in the region.
- Findings from a recent market analysis conducted by the Human Resources Department indicate that the salary ranges of several position types lag behind the current market by approximately 16 – 20%.
- Funds were requested to ensure that employees are equitably compensated and to ensure that the Library can attract and retain qualified diverse individuals to provide key community services and support.
- While the Library is aware of and grateful for the general pay scale increases included in the FY23 budget, the surrounding jurisdictions made similar or greater adjustments, resulting in a continued market imbalance.
- For over six years, the Library has endeavored to identify and rectify inequities in pay between its employees and those performing similar roles in other Library systems across the region. Both formal and informal market analyses have been performed which indicate that employees at all levels of the organization are undercompensated with respect to their regional peers.

An additional City study began in June 2020 to review and address compensation levels for other Library (and City) staff serving in technology, finance, communications, human resources and administrative capacities. While the results of that study have not yet been made available to the Library, it is anticipated that significant compensation adjustments will be needed in those classifications as well as to ensure that staff is compensated equitably. In all, these studies and requested compensation adjustments impact 93% of the Library's general schedule staff and are expected to drive base salary compensation up by an average of 18%.

SINCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED LIBRARY STAFF IS A PRIORITY, PLEASE CONSIDER INCLUDING MARKET-BASED COMPENSATION ADJUSTMENTS IN THE FY 2024 BUDGET.

Talking Points Concerning Compensation of Alexandria Library Staff

Real Life Examples

1. As the library continues to lose employees to surrounding jurisdictions, we are unable to compete due to the compensation being too low. Last year, the Library hired several entry level librarians at the salary levels approved by HR. A certified librarian, master's degree, with school loans. Imagine our surprise that these individuals qualify for the City's Guaranteed Income Program, ARISE (Alexandria Recurring Income for Success and Equity).
2. The Duncan Library hired a seasoned Librarian I in February 2022. She was a good fit for the branch and we felt fortunate to have recruited her to the area. Upon moving to the DMV, she informed us that she was offered a promotional position and within 6 months, accepted a position with a neighboring library.