

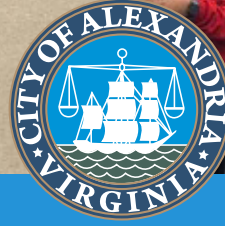
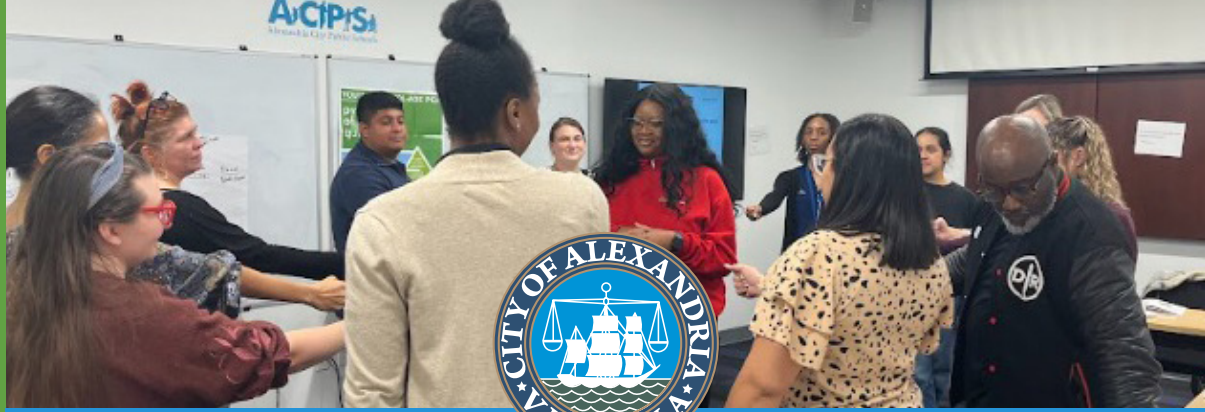
WHAT'S INSIDE:

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Using Customer Feedback to Enhance Service



CITY COUNCIL PRIORITIES

SPRING 2024 UPDATE

New Opportunities for Affordable Homeownership in Alexandria

PRIORITY: HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

In the coming years, Alexandria will have more affordable home purchasing opportunities. For over four decades, the City has helped first-time homebuyers and existing homeowners with a wide range of [programs](#). These include new purchase opportunities, rehabilitation (including energy efficiency and accessibility modifications), training, counseling, and assisting with down payments and closing costs.

The Aidan Old Town, TideLock, and 805 North Columbus St.

This summer, The Aidan Old Town, a new 94-unit condominium community, will provide seven affordable homeownership opportunities, including one accessible two-bedroom unit. These homes were made possible through the project's use of an optional increase in density permitted in exchange for affordable housing during the development process. Due to anticipated high demand, a lottery for the affordable units will be held in the spring.

Two additional market-rate projects — TideLock in Old Town North and 805

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Beyond the Classroom: The Next Steps for the Alexandria Youth Support Network

PRIORITY: ELIMINATE COMMUNITY DISPARITIES

In December 2023, the [Alexandria Youth Support Network \(YSN\)](#) released "[Increasing Opportunities for Alexandria City Youth](#)", a study about available and desired programs for the City of Alexandria's youth. The YSN aimed to inform its own development with data from the study, whose findings call for a coordinated, community-based, and youth-informed approach to expanded learning or out-of-school time (OST) programming.

The study recommends that the YSN serve as the "community hub" for Alexandria, to facilitate a robust OST ecosystem. The group can do

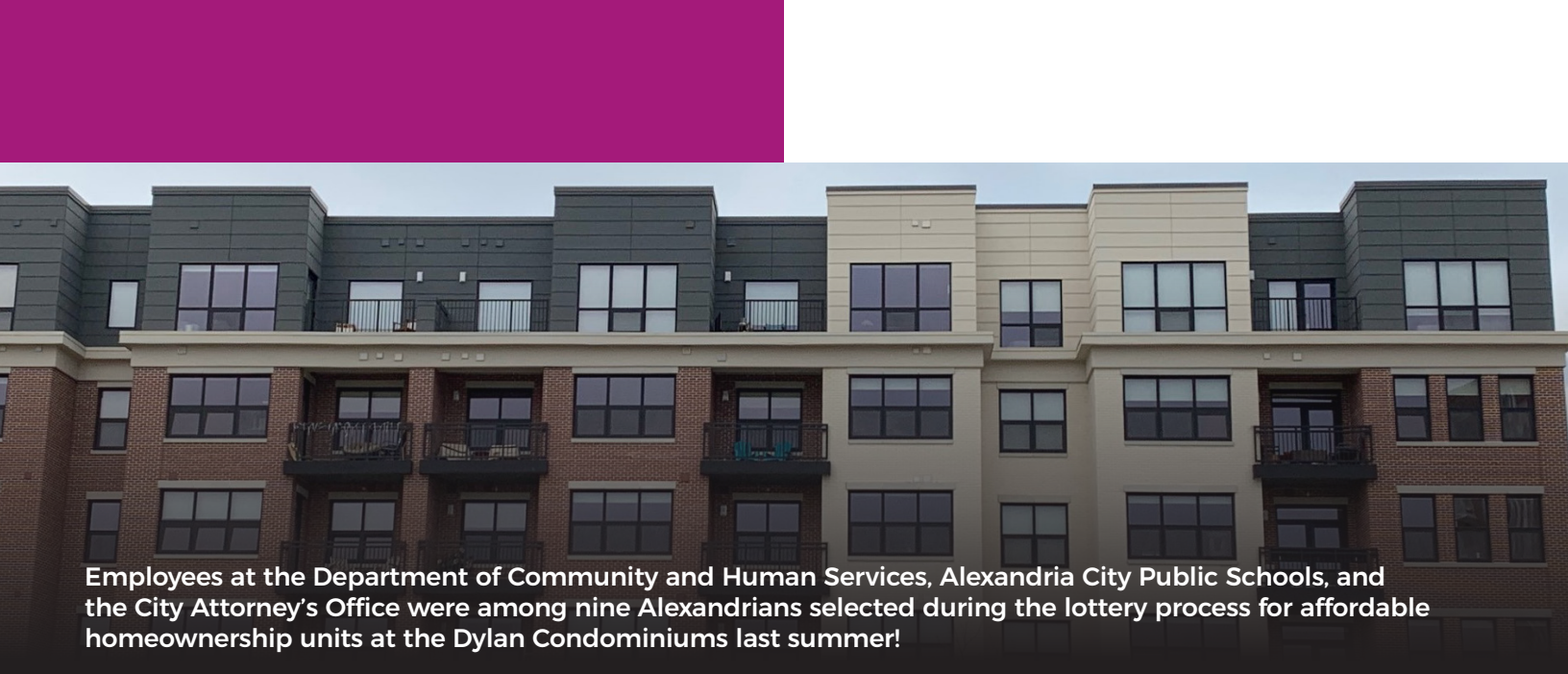
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Leveling Up Listening Skills in the City of Alexandria

Through a partnership with the Chapman Foundation for Caring Communities, City employees are able to participate in a series of trainings that build and strengthen essential communication skills.

Learn more on page 5



Employees at the Department of Community and Human Services, Alexandria City Public Schools, and the City Attorney’s Office were among nine Alexandrians selected during the lottery process for affordable homeownership units at the Dylan Condominiums last summer!

New Opportunities for Affordable Homeownership in Alexandria *(Cont.)*

North Columbus St. in the Braddock neighborhood — are anticipated to start construction this year, bringing another dozen homeownership opportunities, affordable to households with incomes up to 100% of the area median income. All of the units are subject to the City’s Shared Equity Policy and re-sale restrictions, which ensures their affordability for future buyers at similar income ranges in the long term.

2025 Outlook: Seminary Road Affordable Housing

In mid-to-late-2025, [Housing Alexandria](#) will introduce 31 townhouses and five multifamily condominiums along Seminary Road. The units will be affordable to households with incomes up to 80% of the area median income (approximately \$111,500 for a three-person household). The mixed-ability community, which is replacing an existing aging group home, will also include three 4-bedroom units for individuals with developmental disabilities. These units will be owned by Sheltered Homes of Alexandria with support from the Department of Community and Human Services. The project is made possible through

the use of City land for affordable housing and a range of funding sources, including grant funds from the City, Virginia Housing, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, and the [Housing Innovations in Energy Efficiency program](#).

Bringing Employees Closer

Financial assistance is critical to bringing homeownership within reach for many first-time homebuyers, including City employees who hope to live closer to their workplace. To help, the City created the Employee Homeownership Incentive Program (EHIP) to support income-eligible City employees purchase a home in Alexandria with up to \$15,000 in zero-interest financing. Over 140 City employees have used EHIP since 2005 as stand-alone assistance or paired with the City’s Flexible Homeownership Assistance Program and Virginia Housing’s Sponsoring Partnerships & Revitalizing Communities program which reduces the interest rate on qualifying VH mortgage loans.



“ I received guidance during the homebuying process through settlement. I am grateful I can work and live in the city I was born and raised in and can now call home for many years. ”

- City Employee



Seminary Road is the first City-sponsored new affordable homeownership construction project since the 1990s.

Beyond the Classroom (Cont.)

this by capturing data, providing professional learning, strengthening communication, growing the diversity of programs, expanding partnerships, and implementing supportive policies.

The study centered the needs and wants of youth, families, program providers, and Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) staff and garnered 5,785 inputs from these key stakeholders. With support from the City and the Frank & Betty Wright Foundation, the YSN commissioned [Weber Moore Partners](#) to conduct the study. Findings highlighted that parents/guardians and youth identified “having fun” as the top desired outcome from program participation. Inclusive, accessible, diverse, and age-appropriate programming is wanted, but many youth do not participate in programs. This indicates a need for a coordinated, community-based, and youth-informed approach to OST programming.

The study should serve as a call to action about the importance of OST programming for the City’s children and youth. With continued support from the City and the Frank & Betty Wright Foundation, the YSN has already taken strides to establish its role. The YSN is rebranding as “Alexandria Beyond the Classroom,” and a website with a Youth Program Locator will be available this summer, helping families and youth connect with programs.

The YSN has also established a new initiative – the [Weikart Center for Program Quality’s Youth Program Quality Intervention](#) – which 14 youth programs are engaged in. Based on their learning, participating providers will recommend whether this approach should serve as the citywide, overarching metric for program quality. Early feedback is positive.

“The content is not only relevant but easily applicable in our organization,” said Sara Lavan, Founder & Executive/Artistic Director of the [Local Motion Project](#). “I am eager to witness how we will leverage this for tangible, positive outcomes.”

Through collaboration with ACPS and the City, the YSN has continued its social-emotional learning initiative, which helps providers establish positive relationships with youth, centering holistic wellbeing and growth that supports the healthy management of emotions and the development of positive goals and identities. It is also exploring the possibility of serving as the backbone coordinator for middle school programming to increase student engagement in expanded learning opportunities.

Through its cross-sector approach, the YSN illustrates the commitment and collaboration of the City, ACPS, and OST providers to center our community’s young people.

“ I am eager to witness how we will leverage this for tangible, positive outcomes. ”

- Sara Lavan, Founder & Executive/
Artistic Director of the Local
Motion Project



Rubie Williams of West End's Hair Nirvana Gives Back with Style

PRIORITY: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The longtime entrepreneur shares advice on starting a business as she introduces her nonprofit dedicated to styling men and women for job interviews.

As a longtime business owner, Rubie Williams has been serving looks and the Alexandria community for over 25 years. Her entrepreneurial journey started in 2015 when she founded Hair Nirvana, a mobile hair spa that brought the conveniences of hairstyling directly to customers throughout Alexandria.

Today, Williams continues her beauty legacy as the owner of her brick-and-mortar West End salon of the same name.

"My mom said when I was a baby, I was always walking around with a comb in my hand wanting to do people's hair," Williams said.

Inspired by that life-long love of cosmetology and helping others, Williams is launching [Believe](#), a nonprofit dedicated to providing fashion and hairstyling services to those who can't afford it.

While she's an experienced entrepreneur, Williams reached out to the [Alexandria Economic Development Partnership](#), which had helped her with press coverage in the past, for help setting up this new legal entity.

"They have a lot of meetings and a lot of programs for you to get a lot more education about small businesses," Williams said. Small Business Client Services Coordinator Talia Jones "was awesome. She really, really helped guide me and calmed me down when I was going through the storm ... The whole team is great."

So far, Williams says, the new business has been approved by the IRS and is working on building its website with help from AEDP.



What advice would she offer another entrepreneur looking to start a business?

"I just feel like people just need to believe and don't give up," she said. "It's just like you're birthing a baby, but you're birthing a business. Then, once you birth that business, it's all about the steps — crawl, walk, and then it's growth."



“ It’s just like you’re birthing a baby, but you’re birthing a business. Then, once you birth that business, it’s all about the steps — crawl, walk, and then it’s growth. ”

- Rubie Williams

Leveling Up Listening Skills in the City of Alexandria

PRIORITY: EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

The City of Alexandria has been partnering with the [Chapman Foundation for Caring Communities](#) since 2019 to enhance City employee skills by offering the Our Community Listens training, a three-day learning experience designed to strengthen the way participants lead. It does so by building nonverbal, listening, and confrontation communication skills.

The Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA) initiated this partnership as an investment to attract, retain, and empower employees while making a positive impact in the lives of those they serve within their teams and the community. This year, RPCA held an Our Community Listens training in February and will hold one in June, and is planning more training this year. RPCA started offering these trainings in response to City Council's goal to promote trust-centered relationship building, equitable engagement, and meet people where they are.

"This course is a short journey that allows you to transform your communication skills, improve your relationships, and connect with others," said Sahureli Mendoza Khoury, a City employee who recently attended the Our Community Listens course.

The program has grown, with 14 participating City departments and six partner organizations leading to 150 alumni in total. A follow-up course for alumni called Our Community Serves was offered for the first time this April and focuses on building better cultures through emotional awareness, accountability, and service. Another training, Our Community Transforms, is also available to supervisory staff at RPCA. That class focuses on building a better organization through values-based leadership, psychological safety, and organizational change.

In recognition of the City's commitment to this work, Alexandria was designated as a Caring Workplace by the Chapman Foundation in 2023.

“ This course is a short journey that allows you to transform your communication skills, improve your relationships, and connect with others. ”

- Sahureli
Mendoza
Khoury





Alex311's Goldmine: Using Customer Feedback to Enhance Service

PRIORITY: COMMUNITY CONNECTION

When a customer submits a service request to Alex311, the City of Alexandria's customer service platform that connects residents to key services and information, staff members hope that it includes a valid email address.

Why is this important? Customers can access a survey included in the closure email of their request. The ten-question survey covers a range of topics, such as the level of responsiveness of City staff and the ease of submitting their request. Ratings are given on a scale of 1 to 5.

The last, open-ended question – "Please provide feedback that may help improve your future experiences" – is extremely valuable to staff.

The insights shared by customers highlight successful aspects of the process and areas for improvement. Responses to this question have commonly featured communication between staff and customers, prompting a thorough review of Alex311's notification system and an update slated for release in early May.

Alex311's staff has revamped the types of email notifications customers receive as their request progresses – open, reviewed, in progress, on hold, and closed. In the latest version, the number of notifications is the same, but they have been re-written to better describe what the status change emails mean.

This change is just the first in a series intended to show the community that Alex311 has a deep desire to excel in customer service, one gold nugget at a time.

Learn more about Alex311 at alexandriava.gov/Alex311.

