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4-22-17

Statement by Richard J. Jones, 2455 N. Stevens Street, Alexandria VA 22311

I live in a townhouse in the West End.

I would qualify by age, but I do not qualify by income, for the tax relief this Council generously offers senior citizens.

I am happy to pay my full real property tax because I happily receive excellent city services -- schools for my four grandchildren, swimming pools both indoor and outdoor for myself.

But I would like even more services from my city -- more and better swimming pools, classes of smaller size for my grandchildren, and affordable housing for neighbors less fortunate than myself.

As an Alexandrian by choice, I want to pay now for necessary infrastructure improvements rather than burden my children with future debt service. I want to pay now for the improved services that will keep life good in this city.

So I urge the hardworking members of this Council to think big. I urge you to raise the tax rate by the maximum permitted of 5 and 7/10ths cents.

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Madam Mayor and Members of City Council:

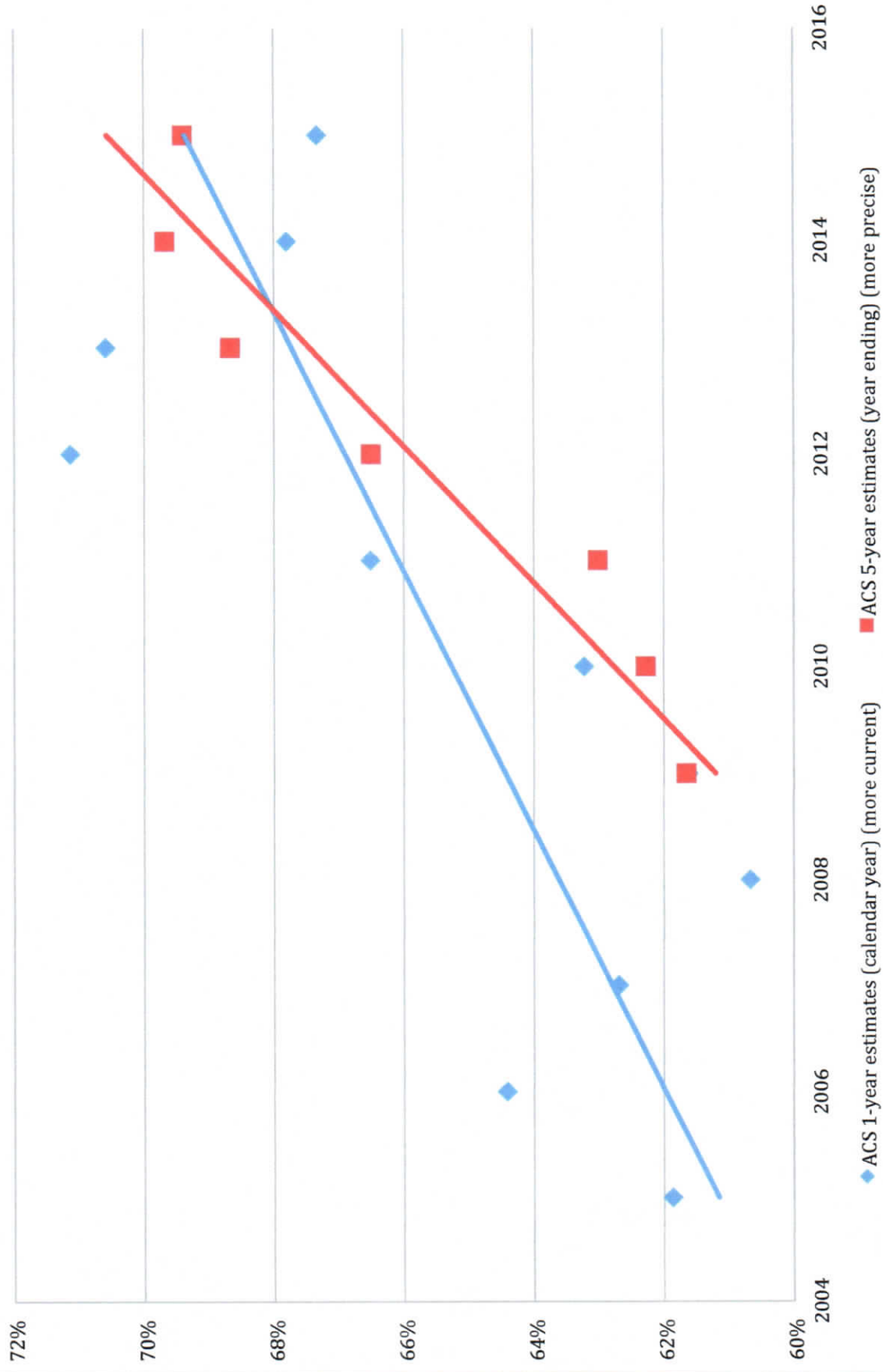
My name is Dan Brendel. I am a parishioner of St. Joseph Catholic Church and a member of VOICE. In order to fund the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection's affordable housing project, we ask that you allocate a fraction of any tax rate increase, in some combination with bonds and the add/delete. Even with the maximum rate of \$1.13, Alexandria would still have the second lowest residential and commercial taxes in Northern Virginia.

The family "is the basic cell of society and a subject of rights and duties before the State or any other community," including "the right to housing suitable for living family life in a proper way," said John Paul II. But, he noted, "the delays and slowness with which [society] acts" can hinder these rights.

The Housing Master Plan says explicitly that the private market will not solve the housing crisis, and that "'housing for all' will not occur without government intervention." The city has taken certain positive steps. But the simple fact remains that we have not acted decisively to arrest a worsening situation for thousands of our families and other residents. Several churches, including St. Joseph, wrote to you describing a growing strain on their assistance ministries due to housing-related needs. And certain data from the Census Bureau indicate that the proportion of low- to middle-income households that are housing cost burdened has been rising on average—from 62 percent in the period 2005-2009 to 69 percent in the period 2011-2015. I would note that many teachers fall in this category, such that our request complements rather than conflicts with the schools' request.

We have little hope of transforming this reality without funding projects like Resurrection, which seems like low-hanging fruit. It is hard to imagine a much more golden opportunity than a church voluntarily repurposing its land, at significant cost to itself, for an all-affordable project. Conversely, funding Resurrection would be beneficial in two ways. First, you would help address an immediate need in the Beauregard. Second, more generally, you would incorporate affordable housing into this budget and tax rate's overarching narrative of critical infrastructure investment and capital planning stabilization. While housing should be treated as critical infrastructure, currently it is funded in a mostly ad hoc manner—in this case left to the eleventh hour—and excluded from the CIP. By explicitly including Resurrection in *this* tax increase, you could have the distinction of leading the city in assuming a more effective, forward-leaning posture toward housing-as-infrastructure.

## Households Earning < \$75,000/year Spending ≥ 30% of Household Income on Monthly Housing Costs





## TESTIMONY ON TAX CEILING

Mayor Silberberg, Members of Council

I am here today to urge you to approve the 2.7 cent per hundred increase in the real estate tax that is proposed by the City Manager and to reject the higher tax ceiling proposed by Vice Mayor Wilson. Just two points:

First, in actuality, the tax increase in the Manager's budget already is 4.4 cents. That includes the 1.7 cents now set aside for storm water remediation. The need for that levy will be obviated by the storm water fee and — at least to my mind — under normal circumstances should be eliminated.

Under the Manager's budget, however, it will remain and the funds directed to the general account. I support the proposed new storm water fee and can understand that these are not normal times in city finances. At the same time, that amount should be included in any calculation of tax increases.

Vice Mayor Wilson has proposed another 3 cents be added for a total of 5.7 cents. Even at 2.7 cents under the Manager's budget, given the totality of taxes and fees, the levy on the average homeowner will be \$370 more in 2018 than this year. For many people like me, retired and on a fixed income, that is a substantial tax additional burden.

You may have noted the news story this week that a national organization ranks Alexandria as only the 34th most desirable place to live in Northern Virginia, behind, for example, Arlington, which is ranked first, and even, Centerville,

ranked 32nd. The primary reason for the low ranking is the high cost of living here — something we all know. The Wilson proposal likely would result in \$165 more to our tax bills for 2018 and, for my money, can be considered “piling on.”

Moreover, the Council by agreeing to a “blue ribbon” task force effectively has eliminated any rationale for such an increase. As I understand Mr. Wilson’s intentions, most of the funds to be raised by the 3 cents would go to help meet the School Board’s request for a 125% increase in its capital spending.

One of the stated purposes given for the “blue ribbon” group, however, is to re-examine in depth all proposed capital spending, and develop a longterm joint municipal facilities CIP that prioritizes school and city needs based on identifiable funding.

*then agreement in implementation follow  
time.*

Until that group has studied the issues, issued its report, and the report has been adopted by Council, what assurance would you have that funds raised by Mr. Wilson’s additional 3 cents on the property tax — and ceded to the schools will be used in accord with those priorities? You would have none.

Thus fiscal prudence and responsibility suggests that you not pre-empt “blue ribbon” findings and stay within the Manager’s already generous allocation to the schools.

Thank you for your time and attention.