



# City of Alexandria, VA

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City Hall, 301 King St. Room 3500, Alexandria, VA 22314

## **State of the City Address Mayor William D. Euille February 21, 2009**

Good morning, and welcome to members of the City Council, residents, honored guests, friends and those who are watching on the City Web site at home. Thank you for joining me here at the rebuilt Charles Houston Recreation Center and allowing me the great privilege of reporting to you on the state of our City. I want to thank the Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities for hosting the annual State of the City Address in this amazing facility.

Now, I would like to ask my colleagues on the City Council to stand and be recognized for all of their outstanding work this year: Vice Mayor Del Pepper, Council members Ludwig Gaines, Rob Krupicka, Tim Lovain, Paul Smedberg, Justin Wilson, and City Manager James Hartmann. Thank you for your commitment to Alexandria. We are a great team.

It is obvious that I did not get the e-mail about dressing casual today for the Center's grand opening—after all, it is a recreation center. But I felt it would be proper to be in my Sunday best in order to deliver my message—so, you just sit back, relax, and enjoy the moment—and let me do the sweating. Your opportunity will come when I ask you to join me in the slam-dunk contest after the ribbon cutting ceremony!

Without a doubt, I am excited to report to you about where we are as a City, and about our challenges and accomplishments, from this new building that we will dedicate this morning. Our recreation center, located in this beautiful, historic neighborhood, is a 35,000 square foot, state-of-the-art community facility that will be enjoyed by everyone. This building uses advanced green technology and is a shining example of how together we must continue to build the foundation for a

successful future. When I delivered last year's address, I was excited about our City, because by working together, we had started laying the foundation for Alexandria's success.

That is my vision for Alexandria as we look ahead. Together, we can build the foundation for a successful future. There are challenges to overcome, but difficult times often provide great opportunity. Now is our time—everyone's time—to act together. We will build a prosperous livable city where every resident is welcomed and has a real opportunity to succeed.

One month ago yesterday, our new President was sworn into office. Not only did President Obama capture the nation's desire for change, but he also captured something else: the idea that everyone can make a difference. The late Charles Houston, for whom this recreation center is named, is one of those people who made a real difference in people's lives.

A nationally respected attorney and a critical figure in the civil rights movement, Charles Houston used his expertise and influence to bring educational opportunity to Alexandria's African American community. By working to establish the Parker- Gray High School, the first high school for African Americans in Alexandria, Houston made the dream of higher education, and a better life, possible for black Alexandrians. Charles Houston (who later served as the Dean of Howard University's Law School) also authored a legal brief used by Thurgood Marshall to win *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*, the case that helped end racial segregation in American schools. In many ways, the Parker-Gray High School was a symbol of Charles Houston's future vision. Today, this recreation center is a symbolic cornerstone laid for our City's future, for the entire neighboring community and city to use and to enjoy.

I'd like to ask the members of the Parker-Gray Alumni Association, who attended the high school and the original Parker-Gray School, the "Bull Dogs," that stood on this very site, to stand and be recognized. Thank you for helping us to make history today.

I am sure there isn't anyone in this room who doesn't know about the economic challenges we face today. Alexandria is not insulated, and faces its most serious fiscal crisis in more than 30 years. The current economic decline has affected everyone, including me. We share each other's pain. Many home values have declined or stagnated; credit markets are frozen; food banks have run nearly

empty; we have more homeless children in our schools than ever before; and many people are concerned about their once stable jobs. Despite all of this, let's change "despair" into "hope" and "challenges" into "opportunities." Let's lift each other to succeed by caring and sharing. This is what families are supposed to do.

Due to the economic downturn, the City had to make \$10 million in reductions during Fiscal Year 2009 to balance the budget. Next fiscal year, things are even tougher. Since last fall, Council and the City Manager have been working to close a \$44 million budget gap. Declining residential real estate assessments and falling tax revenues, which are the main source of funds for the City's budget, primarily caused these shortfalls.

On February 10, City Manager James Hartmann submitted his proposed Fiscal Year 2010 budget to the City Council. To achieve the \$44 million in reductions necessary to balance the budget, some of the services that Alexandrians are accustomed to may be reduced. The proposed budget includes a decrease of \$18 million from this year's budget and a \$44 million decrease from what it would cost to maintain current City services. The proposed budget also calls for a City employee pay freeze, the first in nearly two decades, and elimination of 121 funded positions, which is unprecedented in modern Alexandria history. Most of these positions are currently vacant; but unfortunately, some employees may lose their jobs.

City Council is evaluating the City Manager's budget proposal and it is considering raising the real estate tax 4.2 cents. However, in keeping with City Council's budget guidelines, this proposed rate increase recognizes the estimated 4.7% decline in the average assessed home value. As a result, the average homeowner would pay about the same amount in 2009 as in 2008. The good news is our home and business tax rate would remain among the lowest in the region. The average real estate tax bill for homes has declined 7.5% in real terms since 2006, when home values were higher.

I understand that this situation is difficult, but I strongly believe that by working together we can deal with the unprecedented challenges ahead.

Call me crazy, but I am an optimist: in my short lifetime, we have experienced three prior recessions and we have recovered each and every time. This is by far the worse and the longest. This too, shall pass.

Excellent City services are one of the things that make living in Alexandria great. Let me assure you that we will make every effort to maintain our exceptional quality of life. City Council, the City Manager and I are committed to maintaining public safety; protecting the health and welfare of our most vulnerable residents; and preserving the City's AAA bond ratings in order to secure funding for our capital projects.

Together, we pledge to improve our efficiency and effectiveness, and the City Council looks forward to your input at our three public hearings on the proposed budget.

As we make changes, our City employees have been asked to work harder and smarter. In many cases, City employee workloads will increase as we implement cost efficiencies. Employees and residents will be better served as we install new information systems, as well as continue to expand online government services. I feel it is extremely important that our residents know that we on City Council admire the hard work and dedication of our City employees and teachers. I know you do, too: from picking up trash to planning neighborhoods, from assisting residents in need to providing recreation activities and educating and mentoring our children, City employees deliver an unparalleled level of service. How do I know this? Because you tell me so with your e-mails, phone calls, and yes, even at the gym, grocery store, and at the parades. We applaud their exceptional work and commitment.

While we face many challenges, there are also new opportunities. Our economic foundation remains strong. Alexandria is in a unique place at an unprecedented time.

We are an entrepreneurial City. Approximately 69% of businesses in Alexandria have fewer than 10 employees; 82% have less than 20 employees; and just 7% have 50 or more employees. The City's commitment to small businesses is evidenced by:

- Activities of City-supported agencies such as the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, and partnerships with the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, the

Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, and the Small Business Development Center, all of which create jobs and add to our tax base;

- Sponsorship of unique programs like the Alexandria Marketing Fund. Councilman Paul Smedberg represents the City in overseeing this effort, which provides funding for nurturing public/private partnerships between small business and other organizations as a means to promote Alexandria as a destination for tourism, shopping, dining, and doing business; and
- Assisting small business by making changes in the zoning ordinances to streamline the building permitting process, and enactment of a temporary portable sign program to assist businesses located on streets adjacent to main retail streets, like King Street.

Over the last year, we took a number of steps, and supported other efforts, to ensure that the City's economic growth and viability continues throughout the 21st century and beyond.

- A City site was selected in a regional competition to become the future home of many key Department of Defense agencies in what, for all intents and purposes, will serve as an extension of the Pentagon. This move will bring 6,400 new jobs to the Duke Realty site at Mark Center in 2011. We are working with West End residents and representatives of the Department of the Army to address transportation, traffic, and other neighborhood issues.
- The City and our economic partners have implemented, and continue to implement, many of the more than 100 strategies for economic growth recommended by the Mayor's Economic Sustainability Work Group. One project implemented was the promotion of the King Street Corridor and the Potomac River Waterfront, which received national attention. The National Harbor Collaborative, a group of residents, businesses, and City staff, with full support of the City Council, planned and implemented interim improvements to the marina area and the launching of the free King Street Trolley, which has carried more than a half-million people between the Waterfront and the King Street Metro station since April 2008. The new water taxi, which carried more than 100,000 passengers in its first nine months of operation, may be expanded in the years ahead.
- In December, at the encouragement of your Mayor and in collaboration with the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, we invited the community to participate in *Buy Alexandria, Our Dollars Count*, an educational

marketing campaign encouraging Alexandrians to buy in Alexandria to support our local businesses.

Participating in *Buy Alexandria, Our Dollars Count* is easy: simply shop, dine, and buy essentials in Alexandria. Purchases, from big-ticket items to everyday necessities, will have direct benefits to the City tax base. Buying in Alexandria and spending our dollars here will strengthen our economy, bolster our businesses, and help sustain the excellent services Alexandrians are accustomed to receiving. When you spend here, everyone benefits.

Part of the City's efforts to sustain economic growth and development is to ensure that its resident workforce has access to resources for obtaining employment. *Joblink*, the City's one-stop career center, works to prepare jobseekers through education, training, and counseling, and refers qualified candidates to prospective employers. More than 1,000 businesses have hired *JobLink* customers. *JobLink* provides:

- A resource center for self directed job searches and job search assistance services;
- Employment training for dislocated workers, recipients of public assistance, people with disabilities, and other special populations; and
- TeensWork! The Alexandria Youth Employment Program, which provides job readiness training, and summer and year-round jobs for young people ages 14 to 21.

Please utilize their services as you seek employment opportunities.

Infrastructure—roads, bridges, sewers and other such projects—are things we often take for granted. However, development and maintenance of these projects are part of what makes our city great. In Alexandria, we believe that investing in the our public works projects, large and small, supports the City's development and growth, protects the safety of our residents, and improves the quality of life. Some examples of the City's infrastructure projects include:

- Completion of the Monroe Avenue Bridge project through a partnership with Pulte/Centex that evolved from community meetings held over the past decade. The \$50 million project, funded entirely by Pulte/Centex, increases safety for motorists and pedestrians, and encourages biking and walking on its trails.

- Installation of decorative and functional vegetative filter boxes on residential streets to treat and clean roadway runoff; and
- Construction of state-of-the-art artificial turf sports fields that not only provide a better, safer surface for athletics, but also can be used more frequently than a grass field.
- Establishment of a Transportation Commission, and adoption of a Transportation Master Plan that outlined a transportation system encouraging use of alternative modes of transportation and promoting a balance between travel efficiency and quality of life.

Another reason the City is a great place to live is the vitality of its diverse neighborhoods and public spaces. The City is also involved in regional planning efforts and Councilman Ludwig Gaines represents the City on the Metropolitan Council of Governments' Metropolitan Development Committee.

The City, in concert with community residents and professional organizations, is developing plans to revitalize older neighborhoods, develop new communities, and improve public amenities. Some examples are:

- The continuing progress of the Potomac Yard development and the construction of the Station at Potomac Yard, the first newly constructed fire station in the nation to combine a fire station, affordable housing, and retail in a single, mixed-use building. Development of the Potomac Yard community includes implementation of a transit-oriented plan focusing on growth around the fire station and a possible new Metrorail station, which is now under study.
- The Landmark/Van Dorn Plan, a planning effort that engages community members and Landmark Mall's core owners, General Growth Properties, who are proponents of its revitalization through a major reconstruction project. Over time, the mall could potentially be the center of more than five million square feet of new development, including a regional retail center built in a pattern of urban blocks along with new office, residential, and hotel uses.
- The Braddock Small Area Plan, the culmination of a comprehensive community planning process that brought City staff and community residents together to work toward building a shared vision. That vision includes development that preserves the community's history and diversity; provides pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods with parks and open spaces; and provides housing opportunities for hundreds of low-income

residents through development of mixed-income housing. The Plan, now in its implementation phase, will improve the quality of life in the community. As a result, we all benefit.

Like many municipalities, Alexandria will be obtaining funding from the federal economic stimulus package. Since December, Councilman Tim Lovain and I have served on a Council Subcommittee on Federal Stimulus Package Funding identify key City needs that might be addressed when funding became available. As your Mayor, I wrote to Governor Tim Kaine to outline potential projects that the City has identified for possible federal economic stimulus funding. Our needs list, which totals \$585 million in projects, includes:

- \$40 million for Alexandria City Public Schools, to replace HVAC, plumbing and fire alarm systems at three schools;
- \$60 million for incorporating energy and environmental efficiencies in City buildings and green retrofitting projects;
- \$100 million for transportation needs, including trails, transit, and roads;
- \$90 million for infrastructure improvements to the City's sewage treatment plant, channel and sewershed maintenance, and flood mitigation measures along Cameron Run;
- \$19 million for rehabilitation of affordable housing and public housing units; and
- \$40 million for repairs at the City's waterfront and at Windmill Hill Park.

Ten days ago, I, along with 29 other Mayors, paid a visit to the White House and Congress to lobby for the stimulus bill. And just yesterday, I was among 85 Mayors from across the nation invited by the White House to meet with both President Obama and Vice President Biden to discuss our economic challenges and commitment to working together.

We are a caring community, and the City government works hard to ensure the health and well-being of our residents who are in need.

We have always been proud of the services we provide to our community, but we aim to be even better. Many of our childcare centers participated in Governor Kaine's Pre-K Pilot and Quality Rating Improvement System demonstration project, strengthening an important level of child development. Jointly with Arlington County, we created an Alexandria/Arlington School Readiness

Council to ensure that all families with young children have the resources they need to achieve success in school. And Alexandria's Council of Human Services Organizations was created to improve the delivery of human services to the Alexandria community.

Our top priority is providing safety net services for our most needy and vulnerable residents: low-income families, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly. Last year, the City's Department of Human Services served 15,746 people. Also in 2008, our Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse and the Alexandria Community Services Board (which celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary next month) helped 4,342 Alexandrians in need of their services.

To ensure that such services continue to be available, agencies that serve these special populations need your help. The City has many volunteer opportunities, including:

- Mentoring programs such as the Alexandria Mentoring Partnership, A Space of Her Own, and iMovie Mentors—for people who wish to help a young person learn and grow;
- Volunteer opportunities through the Office on Women and the Community Services Board to serve women, children and families who are striving to rise above poverty, domestic violence or homelessness, to lead a new life.
- Opportunities for youth, like the City's Youth Council, and programs offered through the Office on Youth Services and the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy;
- *Give Alexandria*, a new initiative that teams up Alexandria's nonprofits, volunteer organizations, faith community and the City to help those in need. *Give Alexandria* will be a place to offer your financial donations, goods, and time, as well as a place for people to obtain assistance. Go to [alexandriava.gov](http://alexandriava.gov) to learn more about *Give Alexandria*.

And on May 1, the City, in cooperation with Volunteer Alexandria and other organizations, will present the second annual "Spring for Alexandria Community Service Day," a volunteer opportunity for City residents and employees. There are many ways to get involved, and I hope that you consider joining us. Volunteer Alexandria has a table in the lobby today. Stop by and sign up for this wonderful opportunity.

We strive to be a healthy City. Part of keeping that commitment is ensuring that all people in our community are healthy. The Alexandria Health Department, a state agency that is a close City

partner, provides medical services for the medically underserved; develops and implements plans for health emergencies; and protects our health and safety in the workplace, in restaurants, and in hotels. The Health Department also works to improve access to care for our City's most vulnerable populations. The Alexandria Health Department served 16,552 residents in 2008, with 40,875 visits at all three health centers. Led by new Health Director, Dr. Lisa Kaplowitz, the Health Department has

- Consolidated and relocated the Pediatric Clinic from the Casey Clinic to the Health Department at 4480 King Street, to serve more children and families more efficiently;
- Implemented the Smoke-Free Alexandria program, with 75% of the City's restaurants now smoke free;
- Held a cross-jurisdictional emergency drill with Arlington County to test its ability to quickly deliver medication to all our residents during a public health emergency;
- Recruited and managed the Medical Reserve Corps and the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, which provides opportunities for residents to become involved in the health of their communities.
- In a few weeks, I will be announcing the Mayor's Healthier Alexandria Initiative. This is part of the 50 Million Pound national weight loss campaign in collaboration with nationally recognized Doctor Ian Smith and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. More details are to follow.

But the Health Department cannot do it all. Keeping our communities healthy also requires personal commitment to be fit and healthy. In 2007, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that in Virginia nearly 37% of adults were overweight and 25% considered obese, conditions that are risk factors for cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases. I can say this from personal experience—60 pounds and 11 inches later, I've been leading by example. It is a battle to stay in shape, one that we must all fight, not only for our own health, but also for the health of our children.

The City has the resources to help you win. In addition to recreation centers and programs, residents can utilize the City's community pathways, trails and parks, all pedestrian- and bike-friendly options that encourage healthy activity. With all of these resources available, including private facilities, there is no excuse not to get up, get out, get moving, and get fit. I hope to see many of you in the weight room and on the cardio equipment later this morning to challenge me.

And there's another way to help: The Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria is leading Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships, a community-wide effort to identify, analyze and prioritize health needs in Alexandria. The Partnership is collecting surveys from as many community members as possible to find out what the community's vision of a healthy Alexandria is, and to develop ways to make that vision a reality. If you have not participated in the survey, there's still time: the deadline for surveys is next Wednesday, February 25.

With respect to the past, and an eye toward the future, the City works hard to preserve its natural, artistic, and historic treasures. From Old Town to Fort Ward to Ben Brenman Park; from Del Ray to Jones Point Park, we are a City filled with historical districts, open spaces and parkland spanning our history from prehistoric times to the present. These treasures beautify our surroundings, enrich our lives, contribute to our economy, nurture our residents and welcome our visitors. Through the years, the City has won awards for its open spaces, scenic trails and roadways. The City has made an investment in, and commitment to the arts. In the last year, the City has

- Established an Office on the Arts
- Began two public arts projects: The Charles Houston Memorial Public Art Project, and the Freedmen's Cemetery Public Art Project;
- Held the Second Annual Alexandria Film Festival;
- Hosted the Sixth Annual Festival of the Arts;
- Was named as one of the nation's 25 top arts destinations;
- Purchased land, designed and planned for two new pocket parks at 48 South Early Street and at 1&7 East Del Ray Avenue;
- Designed and installed the City's newest play grounds at Goat Hill and Hunter Miller Parks;
- Initiated the design and engineering process for the Witter properties project, which uses land acquired as a result of the mitigation impact from the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. The Witter project, now in the design and engineering phase, will include three playing fields, restrooms, and a pavilion.
- Gained state approval of the Uptown/Parker-Gray Historic District for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register; and
- Established and implemented expanded historical and living history programs and activities.

By the way, this year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Alexandria Commission for the Arts. I encourage you all to celebrate the integral role that the arts have played in the life of our City by investing in the arts with your time, talent and financial support.

At City Council's request, the Department of Planning and Zoning is conducting a study of industrial uses to identify alternatives for such sites in the City. The Council is seeking to eliminate the Norfolk Southern Transloading Facility and to continue to control pollutants and noise from the Virginia Paving Company, both located in the West End.

Alexandria's Eco-City Initiative affirms the City's reputation as one of the region's "greenest" municipalities. Vice Mayor Del Pepper and Councilman Rob Krupicka have served as the Council representatives in our Eco-City effort, with the assistance of the Alexandria Environmental Policy Committee and Virginia Tech. One of the City's most significant Eco-City accomplishments occurred last month, when City Council adopted one of the first Environmental Charters in the region. The Charter, developed with significant community involvement, will guide the City in its efforts to become environmentally sustainable for decades.

Other Eco-City Alexandria actions include:

- Reaching a settlement and agreement with Mirant Potomac that resulted in Mirant funding \$34 million toward environmental improvements at its Potomac River Generating Station.
- Receiving recognition by the Virginia Municipal League as one of the top three "greenest" local Virginia governments with a population greater than 90,000;
- Designing and constructing new public buildings to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System Silver certification or better, when possible;
- Developing a draft green building policy for development projects for Planning Commission and City Council consideration this spring;
- Enhancing our recycling program, and expanding days and hours of operation for the City's Household Hazardous Waste drop-off center;
- Designating \$1.5 million over five years for energy conservation projects in public

buildings, with a goal to reduce consumption by 3% per year; and

- Forging a partnership between the City's Office of Environmental Quality and the Alexandria Public Schools to obtain a \$70,000 state grant to retrofit approximately 40 school buses with clean air technology.

I encourage you to join us in preserving Alexandria's environmental resources. Whether it is volunteering to help with a stream clean up, composting food and plant material scraps, or buying compact fluorescent light bulbs, our collective actions will help to keep our City green, and create job opportunities.

I want to acknowledge those that keep us safe: our police officers, firefighters, and deputy sheriffs. One of the elements that makes Alexandria such an attractive place to live is its safety. That reputation is a result of the skill, knowledge, and dedication our public safety officers put into their everyday work. They are among the best, professional, and caring in the nation.

In addition to protecting us, our public safety officers are active participants in our community. They do this through community policing, promoting safety awareness, beautifying our neighborhoods, improving customer service delivery, assisting communities during local weather emergencies, and active and visible participation in community festivals and safety events.

Their hard work and commitment shows. For example, our Sheriff's Office:

- Won the prestigious "Triple Crown" Award from the National Sheriff's Association for achieving accreditation from three national agencies;
- Increased savings to the City through renegotiation of the federal prisoner contract payments, while maintaining focus on operational efficiency and facility safety; and
- Helped to keep the City free of litter and debris by assigning two work crews to pick up trash and assist City departments and the Alexandria Public Schools with other maintenance work. In 2008, the crews worked a total of 9,860 hours, saving the City more than \$197,000 in costs.

Our Police Department

- Has achieved record lows in the overall crime rate over the past 10 years, including a continued reduction in violent crime.
- Launched new resources for residents on the City's Web site: APD's Most Wanted, APD Cold Case, and a new searchable online crime database through crimereports.com; and
- Continued its use of its successful Strategic Response System to analyze crime trends, series, and patterns in real time to rapidly deploy police resources where they are most needed in the community.

Our Fire and EMS Department has

- Reorganized and renamed the former Code Enforcement Bureau the Office of Building and Fire Code Administration, implementing customer service- oriented strategies to manage citywide code compliance of Virginia's Uniform Statewide Building and Fire Codes;
- Implemented community emergency preparedness education, firefighter training, and acquired specialized firefighting equipment training in response to the establishment of the Norfolk Southern ethanol transloading facility in the West End; and
- Added three shift safety officers to address safety at fire scenes and throughout the Department.

In addition to their local duties, our Police, Fire, and Sheriff's Office personnel have also been part of the national stage, providing protection to Pope Benedict XVI (Sixteenth) during his visit to the United States, and assisting with the Presidential Inauguration, providing services for events in Washington, D.C., and in Alexandria.

The City has been active in regional planning on public safety and homeland security issues. Councilman Justin Wilson represents the City on the Council of Governments Public Safety Committee.

For me, one of the highlights of the Inaugural Parade was the sight of the T.C. Williams High School Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps Drill Team and Color Guard as they marched past the Presidential reviewing stand. Before a national and international audience, not only did the

mighty Titans represent their hometown and their school, they represented a thriving school system that provides award-winning teachers, top-rated performing arts programs, state athletic champions and a nationally recognized high school. Most recently, the Schools have initiated “Turn the Page,” a community reading event co-sponsored by the Alexandria PTA Council, to bring all Alexandria residents together to read books related to the future of education and engage in conversation about this important topic.

The City places a high value on education. The community’s dedication to these young people is reflected in the more than 150 business and community partners, and programs such as the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria, the Alexandria Mentoring Partnership, and Project Discovery that support and encourage the City’s young people. At the helm of the Alexandria City Public Schools is our new superintendent, Dr. Morton Sherman, a dynamic leader and nationally recognized educator with more than 25 years experience in raising academic standards, closing achievement gaps, and uniting stakeholders. His passionate advocacy and fervent commitment to our children will lead them and our schools into the future. He is the right leader for our Schools, particularly at this time.

The Schools FY 2010 budget totals \$197 million, a decrease of more than \$2 million over the current year. The requested City appropriation is \$166 million, a 1.5 percent decrease. This is occurring as our Schools are facing increased enrollment, the highest percentage increase in the State. Many of these new students and their families are struggling to cope with the economic situation, and they need extra help and support.

Despite this funding decrease, the Schools are committed to making the sacrifices necessary to continue providing quality education to our children. Like the City, the sacrifices will be difficult, and will affect Schools employees, too.

But even with this challenge, there are opportunities. Part of Dr. Sherman’s initiatives for improving education in the City is a reorganization that aligns administration with current needs and with the Schools’ forthcoming strategic plan, creating a more effective structure to do the work needed to ensure success for each child. In addition, the Schools’ has merged its program for grades 9-12, making Minnie Howard 9th Grade Center an official campus of T. C. Williams High School. The

merger will provide a strengthened and unified secondary program that enhances teaching and learning for all students. Best of all, these reorganization activities require no additional funding.

In building a foundation for a successful future, what we must do reminds me of a West African symbol called *sankofa*. The symbol—a bird looking backward, while moving forward—represents the concept of taking from the past what is good and bringing it into the present to make positive progress, just as this new building symbolizes today.

That is our charge today. Take lessons from the achievements of our forebears and work together in the present to keep this City great. Like the leaders who shaped our past, we must invest our time, treasure and talent in preserving and protecting our City, which has blessed us with its prosperity, history, and beauty.

As we prepare to dedicate this magnificent new facility, it is critical to remember this community center was built for the residents of Alexandria, and it is the residents who we strive to serve. However, it takes vision, teamwork and a partnership between the community and the City to succeed. Together, and with bold leadership, we will do great things.

We are One Alexandria. Let us work together to lift our community from its current economic challenges, resulting in many opportunities. I have hope that we can move forward toward our future together with commitment and inspiration.

Won't you join me in this endeavor? Thank you.