

MEETING MINUTES

HEALTH AND SAFETY COORDINATING COMMITTEE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2025

ITEM #1: MAY MEETING FOLLOW-UP

Domestic Violence Response:

- Director Garvey reported ongoing collaboration with the Alexandria Police Department (APD) to quickly share information and identify concentrations of domestic violence calls.
- The team is strengthening communication with property managers in affected areas, while balancing confidentiality and safety concerns.

Truancy and Youth Coordination

- APD maintains three commanders and two officers assigned to school partnerships, working closely with ACPS to identify and support truant students.
- A Best Practices Group meets regularly at the Juvenile and Domestic Relations (JDR) Court, involving police, schools, court staff, and city attorneys to coordinate responses for youth involved in truancy, delinquency, foster care, or CPS cases.
- Council members expressed interest in connecting these efforts to ensure coordination across initiatives.

Access to Justice Initiatives (JDR Court)

- The JDR Court is launching a new pro bono legal initiative to provide representation for petitioners in civil protective order cases, most of whom are women, often immigrants, and non-English speakers.
- The Court is also working with IT on major technology upgrades to improve access to justice: installing microphones and video screens for better evidence presentation, enabling virtual interpreter access for limited English proficiency and hearing-impaired participants, improving digital evidence sharing to enhance safety and efficiency.
- These efforts aim to reduce barriers for survivors seeking protection without triggering criminal proceedings, which may deter immigrant residents from seeking help.

Mental Health and Jail Coordination

- Sheriff Casey reported continued collaboration with PLPHS and the City's mental health team to address staffing challenges and integrate services within the jail. The new Jail Management System (JMS) is expected to improve data sharing between mental health providers and correctional staff. Focus remains on ensuring appropriate triage and timely access to mental health care for inmates.

ITEM #2 STATE OF HEALTH UPDATE (AHD)

Natalie Talis provided an update on Alexandria's ongoing Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) process. Following the release of the comprehensive assessment in July, the City is now moving into the action phase, launching community-driven

coalitions to address identified health concerns.

Coalition Development:

- Citywide Mental Wellness Coalition
- Landmark–Van Dorn Neighborhood Coalition
- Arlandria Neighborhood Coalition

These coalitions will bring together residents, businesses, nonprofits, faith organizations, PTAs, and civic associations to shape shared strategies and solutions. Recruitment efforts are intensive and grassroots-focused, including door-to-door outreach and attendance at community meetings.

Current Participation as of September 25:

- 165 people have expressed interest in the mental wellness coalition.
- 111 for Landmark–Van Dorn.
- 62 for Arlandria, where outreach is intentionally slower and more community-sensitive due to local conditions; engagement will focus on small “living room chats” rather than large public meetings.

Next Steps:

- **Fall 2025:** Initial coalition meetings (late October–early November) will focus on vision-setting and building operational structures for sustained monthly participation.
- **Early 2026:** Coalitions will begin defining priorities, strategies, and root causes of key health issues. The goal is long-term, community-led collaboration, not short-term consultation.

ITEM #3: Safe Housing Team Update
Led by Virginia Patton, Office of Housing

The topic focused on improving coordination and proactive city responses to ongoing health, safety, and quality-of-life issues at several apartment complexes, particularly Mason at Van Dorn and Brent Place, on Alexandria’s West End. The conversation emphasized accountability, data-driven intervention, and better communication with residents and property managers.

Background:

Both properties, built in the 1970s, have long-standing issues with maintenance, safety, and management. The City formed a Housing Safety Task Force in early 2025 (including Code, Health, Police, Housing, DCHS, Parks, and Emergency Communications) to coordinate actions.

Recent Actions:

- Monthly meetings between city staff and property management to address issues.
- A resident meeting in August 2025 gathered input on pest control, security, trash, and communication problems.
- Trash pickup was increased to six days per week, dumpsters replaced and relocated.
- The Office of Housing conducted 180 rental inspections and held a “Know Your Rights” seminar in September 2025.

Positive Trends:

- Police calls for service and serious crimes have decreased significantly from 2024 to 2025 at both properties.
- Participants agreed the City must move from a reactive to a proactive model for identifying and addressing property issues. Ideas included:
 - Setting criteria or triggers (e.g., volume of service calls) that automatically activate interagency responses.
 - Using data integration tools or dashboards to track trends and mobilize resources earlier.

Accountability & Enforcement:

- Concern that many issues stem from poor property ownership and management, not just on-site staff.
- Suggestion to develop a “landlord scorecard” or public transparency tool to highlight responsible and irresponsible property owners.
- Need to explore legal authority and potential policy tools to hold landlords accountable.

Resident Engagement & 311 Use:

- Few residents are using 311 to report problems (only 10 complaints recorded from 2020–2025).
- Barriers may include language, technology access, and trust.

Recommendations:

- Create a culturally competent outreach campaign to promote 311.
- Ensure residents use both 311 and property portals to document complaints for accountability.
- Improve coordination between 311 and task force efforts so data reaches the right departments automatically.
- City field staff (fire, police, parks, etc.) often see quality-of-life issues but may not know how to report them.
- Need for a clear, simple system or training so staff can quickly flag issues while doing their regular duties.
- Discussion over whether to use 311 or an internal reporting mechanism for such observations.

Tenant Protections:

- Residents fear retaliation for reporting problems.
- Current law prohibits retaliation during a lease but allows non-renewal afterward, limiting protections.
- City continues to use outreach, mediation, and legal partnerships to discourage retaliatory practices.

ITEM #4: REDUCTION IN HARM OF EVICTION PROCESS

Led by Mary Horner, Office of Housing & Ali Coleman, DCHS

The discussion revisited the City’s eviction trends, building on a prior session that examined the human side of eviction. This meeting focused on data insights, trends, and next steps for citywide intervention, prevention, and policy coordination.

Key Findings from Eviction Data

- **Return to Pre-Pandemic Levels:** Eviction filings in Alexandria have returned to pre-pandemic levels, with a 21% increase in filings year-over-year.
- **Judgments Stable Despite More Filings:** Filings are increasing, but actual evictions are not rising at the same rate, suggesting many tenants resolve payment issues before court.
- **Automation & Debt Collection:** Faster digital and automated processes by landlords and attorneys are leading to quicker filings—sometimes within days of a missed payment.
- **Dismissals & Non-Suits:** Roughly 60% of cases where tenants do not appear in court end in dismissal or non-suit, likely because tenants pay off rent owed before their hearing.

Patterns and Concentrations

- **Repeat Landlords and Serial Filers:** A small group, eight to nine landlords or three to four corporate entities, are responsible for most filings and repeated filings against the same tenants. Example: ARHA properties recorded 490 serial filings within a single year.
- **Resident-Level Data:** From 2017 to present, about 8,500 individual tenants have had at least two eviction filings; roughly 10% have had more than five filings, with a smaller subset facing 15–20 filings over time. Staff are exploring how to identify and connect these households with targeted supports through DCHS and other city partners.

Discussion

- **Persistent Housing Instability:** Many repeat filers remain trapped in a cycle of temporary relief and recurring debt, highlighting gaps in financial stability and long-term support.
- **Potential Interventions:**
 - Financial literacy and budgeting support could help residents avoid repeated filings.
 - Early outreach and coordination with DCHS and property managers may prevent crises before court filings occur.
 - Legislative changes (e.g., extending the 5-day pay-or-quit period to 14 days) could reduce unnecessary filings.
- **Legal Disparities:**
 - Over 90% of landlords appear in court with attorneys, compared to less than 1% of tenants.
 - Typical attorney's fees now range from \$350–\$700 per case, with some reaching \$3,100, adding significant debt for tenants.
 - Late fees of ~\$200/month further compound financial strain, often pushing tenants deeper into instability.
- **Serial Evictions & Policy Implications:** Repeated filings against the same residents indicate systemic barriers, limited income growth, lack of safety nets, and high court costs, that keep families in chronic risk of eviction.

NEXT STEPS FOR FOLLOW UP AT NOVEMBER MEETING:

State of Health Update (Alexandria Health Department)

- Launch the first coalition meetings (late Oct–early Nov).
- AHD to send formal invitations and meeting logistics to all interested participants.

Safe Housing Team Update

- Develop a data dashboard integrating APD, Code, Housing, and 311 data (lead: OPA/IT, support: Housing) that establishes “early warning” criteria (e.g., frequency of calls, inspection scores).
- Continue monthly meetings with management at Mason at Van Dorn and Brent Place; document progress trends.
- Explore mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability among property owners.
- Improve resident use of 311 and streamline staff reporting mechanisms, including a culturally competent campaign to promote 311 (languages, visuals, trusted messengers).
- Determine whether city field staff should use 311 or a dedicated internal form for housing-related observations.

Eviction Prevention and Harm Reduction

- Use eviction data to identify repeat filer landlords and at-risk tenants for targeted outreach.
- Office of Housing and DCHS to match eviction data with client service data to identify overlapping households.
- Develop quarterly dashboard of eviction trends and serial filings (lead: Housing, support: OPA).
- Explore local and state policy changes to reduce serial eviction practices and financial burdens.