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## **Visit Alexandria's 2020 Annual Meeting Highlights Community Resilience**

*Alexandria, VA*—Visit Alexandria highlighted COVID-19 response programs and showcased the resilience of the community at its virtual 2020 Annual Meeting on Wednesday, September 23. Momentum from record-setting results during the first eight months of the fiscal year, July 2019 to February 2020, created a strong foundation for Alexandria's response to the COVID-19 crisis, which has had a disproportionate impact on the hospitality and tourism industry.

Pre-COVID, Alexandria rose to the **#3 Best Small City in the U.S. in the Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards** alongside Charleston and Santa Fe. Through February, hotel occupancy and other key performance indicators like web visits, press coverage and meetings leads were tracking ahead of the 2019 fiscal year.

In calendar year 2019, Alexandria garnered the **highest-ever economic impact from travel**. According to the Commonwealth of Virginia's just-released 2019 Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on Virginia and Localities report, spending from destination market visitors coming from more than 50 miles away was \$881 million, producing \$28.6 million in local tax revenues for Alexandria. However, these 2019 figures do not account for the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on the tourism industry. According to the Virginia Tourism Corporation, "The coronavirus pandemic put the Virginia travel and tourism industry in crisis. Tourism will be key to economic recovery as the pandemic stabilizes and leisure and business travel resumes."

In March 2020 as the COVID pandemic prompted stay-at-home orders, Visit Alexandria implemented a complete strategy shift to promote safe activities and to help locals support Alexandria's independent businesses. Just 5 days after the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, Visit Alexandria launched **[ALX at Home](#)**, featuring more than 200 ways to support local businesses with curbside and at-home friendly content. The campaign garnered 4.9 million paid marketing impressions and 117 press hits.

In May 2020, the Alexandria Health Department launched **[ALX Promise](#)** in partnership with Visit Alexandria. One of the few programs of its kind in the country, ALX Promise is more than a health and safety pledge. It includes individualized consultation with the Alexandria Health Department and staff training in addition to commitments to cleaning and sanitizing, physical distancing, face covering and more. More than 400 businesses are taking part in this voluntary program. Visit Alexandria launched additional **health and safety content** including a **[physical distancing guide](#)** with iconic Alexandria images and content to help **[promote](#)** and **[normalize](#)** mask-wearing.

In 2019, the City of Alexandria, the Office of Historic Alexandria and Visit Alexandria had a renewed commitment to racial equity. The surge in the **Black Lives Matter movement** made this mission even more urgent. Visit Alexandria consulted Alexandria Black History Museum Director Audrey Davis on quick-response strategies which tied into the newly declared state holiday [Juneteenth](#), the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the end of slavery in the U.S. Visit Alexandria also produced the blog post [24 Black-Owned Businesses in Alexandria to Support Right Now](#), which generated press coverage and received the most views the VisitALX blog has ever garnered in one day, standing as the top 2020 blog post. Visit Alexandria also secured high profile news coverage about Alexandria Black history experiences in Condé Nast Traveler, Forbes and more.

The City of Alexandria government continues to support local businesses' outdoor dining and retail with accelerated permitting for over 40 "parklets" and "streateries," providing additional outdoor dining space with physical distancing guidelines. The City turned the 100 block of King Street into a "pedestrian zone" and assisted with implementing a new pedestrian and information hub on the 1100 block of King Street as part of Visit Alexandria's annual [Alexandria Summer Sidewalk Sale](#), featuring more than 50 retailers in August. Recognizing that outdoor seating has a limited capacity even with the additional "streateries," Visit Alexandria redesigned its semi-annual [Alexandria Restaurant Week](#) with a new to "to-go" format for more than 60 restaurants. The restaurant promotion was so successful that Visit Alexandria extended it for an extra week.

Visit Alexandria's COVID-19 recovery initiatives include additional programs targeting local drive markets such as the [Great Walks program](#), marketing walkable outdoor experiences in themes like Black history, architecture and art; the [Flex Getaway Hotel Package](#), offering low rates and rooms that can be cancelled with just 24-hours' notice; [Only in ALX](#), a campaign highlighting experiences unique to the city; and a [meetings sales shift](#) to more heavily target regionally based associations, government and meeting planners. To support local business leaders, [The Leadership Collection at Alexandria's™ "Creating What's Next"](#) webinar was a new opportunity for Alexandria business leaders to collaborate with three national caliber leadership institutes during a complimentary workshop.

**Fiscal year 2021 programs** include the promotion of hybrid meetings and micro weddings and the launch of virtual site tours and virtual experiences. D.C.-regional marketing will include expanded Shop Small strategies to support independent boutiques during the holidays and the second iteration of Alexandria Restaurant Week To-Go in the late winter. A major Black history and travel initiative will increase Visit Alexandria's capacity to tell an inclusive story of the city's past and present, and includes a reimagined self-guided driving tour, major photo and video shoot and expanded PR strategies. Destination marketing will focus on a 3-hour drive radius encompassing Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware and the D.C. Metro, gradually expanding outward as health confidence improves.

Visit Alexandria closed the virtual event with a **video that highlights the resilience of the Alexandria community**, featuring the innovation and adaptations of the city's small businesses, hotels, health department and city government. In addition to the restaurant community adopting curbside service and outdoor dining expansions, a number of restaurants donated their time and resources to those in need amidst their own business hardships - [Cheesetique](#) provided 3,600 meals to hospitality workers affected by COVID-19 and [Spice Kraft Indian Bistro](#) donates meals monthly to local organizations. [Building Momentum](#) created a faster way to produce face masks and a germ-killing robot. Dozens of independent retailers like [Threadleaf](#) adjusted their service models to encourage more ways to shop and engage online. As interest in Black history accelerated, Alexandria Black History Museum Director Audrey Davis helped put Black Lives Matter in historical perspective and [Manumission Tour Company](#) relaunched tours on Juneteenth. These are just a few examples of how the Alexandria community is going above and beyond to adapt to the current climate and help restore Alexandria's tourism economy.

**View a recording of the Visit Alexandria 2020 Annual Meeting presentation [here](#) (starts at 30-minute mark).**

View the community resilience video [here](#).

Visit Alexandria was pleased to partner with Federal Conference, FirstHand Productions and The Westin Alexandria Old Town on production of this virtual event.

#### **ABOUT VISIT ALEXANDRIA AND ALEXANDRIA, VA**

Visit Alexandria is the nonprofit tourism marketing organization for Alexandria, Virginia. Named a [Top 3 Best Small City in the U.S. 2019](#) by the Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards and one of the [South's Best Cities 2020](#) by Southern Living, Alexandria hums with a cosmopolitan feel and a walkable lifestyle—a welcoming weekend escape next to our nation's capital. A nationally designated historic district founded in 1749, Old Town Alexandria is home to more than 200 independent restaurants and boutiques alongside intimate historic museums and new happenings at the waterfront. At the heart of it all is bustling King Street, a walkable mile recognized as one of the “Great Streets” of America. New restaurants tucked into 18th- and 19th-century architecture still intact from the city's days as George Washington's hometown ignite historic and off-the-beaten-path neighborhoods as the waterfront district evolves with new energy. Learn more at [VisitAlexandriaVA.com](#).

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