



May 4, 2018

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Identifying the Needs of Older Adults

The Board approved my request to conduct a comprehensive, community-wide survey of the needs of the older adult population in Fairfax County. This survey will be used to update the Board's 50+ Community Action Plan.

Text 911 Goes Statewide

As a result of my motion in 2011, the County's 911 center was one of the first in the region to be able to receive text messages. Thanks to some Centreville HS students, text 911 will soon be available statewide.

Other Happenings

- NVRC's Celebrate Communication 2018 at Springfield Town Center - May 5
- Community Meetings for Fairfax County's Zoning Modernization Project - May 8 & 9
- NV Rides Presents: Safe Driving as You Age - May 17
- Training: Human Trafficking Identification - May 24

Another "Unsustainable" Tax Increase

On May 1, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted 8 to 2 for a 2.25 cent increase in the tax rate on homeowners (2 cent real property and .25 cent increase in

storm water tax). Together with the rise in assessments, taxes on the average homeowner will go up over 4.5% this year and 26% over the last five years. In addition, the Board voted to increase a number of other fees and taxes including the sewer rate. It is clear that taxpayers were an afterthought and not a priority in this budget. Supervisor Cook and I voted against the tax increases and budget.

Just over a year ago our taxpayers sent a message they had been taxed enough - soundly defeating the meals tax referendum. Over the last several years, numerous opportunities to review and reduce spending have been identified - from the Lines of Business Review to firefighters bringing in six figures of overtime pay alone. Yet again described as unsustainable, this year's budget process did nothing to address the spending issues and savings opportunities identified over the past several years.

The budget mood was described as "harmonic" and reflective of the Budget Chair's desire to "fund all of the needs." This is likely because no difficult decisions were made, let alone reviewed, and almost everyone got what they wanted. From my perspective this was the most disappointing of the 10 budget processes I have been involved in because the entire burden was placed on the backs of our taxpayers. While I have supported budgets in the past, I could not begin to support this one for the following reasons:

Identified Budget Issues Not Addressed - This year the Board continued to avoid making the same tough budget decisions that our citizens have had to make when their wages are not increasing. The Budget Chair went so far as to remark about how this budget had the fewest budget adjustments of any in recent memory. Typically, we at least find some opportunities to reduce the burden on the taxpayer - this year the 'big' adjustment was an adjustment to account for an increase in state funding. Not a single meeting was scheduled to review or discuss potential reductions. Over the last three years there have been many areas for meaningful savings identified - I discuss a few of these further below.

Wages are Stagnant While the Tax Burden Goes Up 26% - While the tax bills continue to grow in Fairfax, wages have not, especially for our growing population of seniors and our dwindling population of millennials. Wages in Fairfax County have been stagnant, forcing taxpayers to make difficult decisions in order to pay for the 4.5% tax increase (26% over the last 5 years). This is especially true for our seniors who live on fixed incomes. I received more feedback than I ever have from seniors saying they are being forced out of Fairfax County by high tax rates - these are the residents that have raised their families here and have supported our economic growth. We want them and their children to stay and help grow our economy.

Surrounding Jurisdictions Reduced Their Tax Burden - Most of our surrounding jurisdictions reduced the tax burden on their average homeowners this year. Fairfax County was the exception, leaving us with the distinction of having the highest real estate tax rate in the region - not good for our homeowners or for attracting businesses.

School Resources Need to Focus on Teachers and the Classroom - The FY2019 budget includes much needed raises for our teachers; however, it also includes significant increases for administrators - including one salary band for which the starting salary increased 38%. Supervisor Foust and I questioned these increases, which were not fully explained to nor understood by the School Board, and we also asked if they could be phased in over three years like the teachers' salaries were. The School System's leadership was also unable to explain the impact of the changes over multiple years. Contrary to the remarks made by some Board of Supervisors members, I have always supported our teachers being the best compensated in the region. That said, I cannot support unexplained and therefore irresponsible increases for administrators. I talk to a lot of teachers and many have just as much, if not more, concern about their administrative burdens than they do about their salaries.

The Way Forward: Three years ago, the 6% tax increase was described as a "booster shot" explaining that it was a much-needed one time increase that was "unsustainable". This year the 4.5% increase was described as needed to "shore up the foundation" and again the increase was described as "unsustainable." Tax increases of 26% over 5 years are not only unsustainable they were also unnecessary.

If the Board had been prepared to make difficult decisions on the budget, there were options that have been repeatedly identified both in its own Lines of Business (LOBs) reviews, by budget questions, and by me and other Supervisors. Some of these are included below; it is by no means an exhaustive list.

Follow up on the Lines of Business Review - Three years ago the Board went through a long process (LOBS review) and identified areas to investigate for savings. Since that time most of the opportunities for savings identified during those reviews have not been scheduled for discussion before the Budget Committee. Examples of these opportunities include:

- The fact that many of our departments have their own Public Information Officers (PIO) in addition to the Office of Public Affairs. Currently the county has 86 PIOs with an average salary of \$140K (including benefits) for a total estimated cost of approximately \$12M. Many of these positions are filled by hard working County employees and are justified but we have not taken the time to review. There are many other areas where departments have duplicative services.
- The overlap and need to address efficiencies in the Office of Public Private Partnerships, Volunteer Fairfax and other agencies.
- The need for business metrics and benchmarking with surrounding and like-sized jurisdictions.

Address the Overtime Issues - Last year one of my budget questions resulted in identification of overtime issues that included a firefighter with a \$90K salary that was paid \$260K in one year because of overtime. There will always be overtime in public safety and other agencies but the results raise fiscal and safety questions that should be addressed. The Board approved my request for a review but after a year it has yet to be presented to the Board.

Address our Compensation and Pension Issues - Since I joined the Board in 2008, I have been advocating to address our compensation and pension issues. Far too much of our compensation dollar is going to unsustainable pensions that provide a far greater pension benefit than our surrounding jurisdictions. These pensions are paid on top of a county-paid social security benefit to retirees as early as age 55. Because these changes will only impact new employees, the savings are not immediate. In 2013 the Board did "nibble around the edges" and raised the age from 50 to 55. Three years after indicating we needed to revisit this issue, the Board has not taken additional action. It appears poised to once again "nibble around the edges" of the pension and compensation issues - further delaying the impact and in my opinion our ability to hire, reward and retain the best employees and teachers. See my newsletter on pensions [here](#).

Grow the Commercial Tax Base - I have and will continue to stress the importance of a healthy commercial tax base. It is imperative that we refrain from creating additional tax burdens on our businesses, that we eliminate the time consuming regulatory and permitting processes and expensive comprehensive plan requirements. Redoubling our efforts to attract new businesses to Fairfax County is imperative and will relieve some of the tax burden this Board has placed on its residents.

In early 2015, Fairfax County contracted with Gartner Consulting to assist in a comprehensive review of Fairfax County's land development processes with the goal of improving speed, consistency, and predictability. Since the Gartner recommendations were made, I have been persistent in the need for metrics in benchmarking our zoning and permitting processes. While we have made many improvements, we still do not have metrics or benchmarking and have a way to go on refining these processes.

Review the Many Other Areas Identified - Some of the areas that I have asked to look at over the last several years include a review of our the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP), Public/Private Partnerships, agency consolidations, competitive sourcing, a review of our proffer system, eliminating duplicative agencies, and privatizing and prioritizing the many programs we offer to our residents. These have been discussed in previous Herrity Reports and presented to the Board.

Although I was happy to see that this budget included my requests for additional resources to address our opioid public health crisis and gang issues I am disappointed that these were not funded with cost savings.

Unfortunately, I believe we will again find ourselves with the daunting task of dealing with a significant shortfall in FY20. I am hopeful that the County Executive's strategic planning process will lead to some priority setting and that these priorities will again include our taxpaying residents. I am also encouraged by the budget language that commits to beginning the long awaited LOBS part 2 process. I hope by setting priorities, the obvious and necessary spending reductions will become a reality.

Identifying the Needs of Older Adults

At our last meeting, the Board approved my request to conduct a comprehensive, community-wide survey of the needs of our older adult population in Fairfax County. As Chair of the Board's 50+ Committee I led the development of the Fairfax County's 50+ Community Action Plan. This plan includes 31 initiatives regarding housing, transportation, community engagement, services, safety and health, and long-range planning. At my direction these initiatives were to be affordable, achievable and actionable. Most required limited county resources and some will actually reduce county spending while improving service to our older adults.

After four years it is time to update and revise the 50+ Community Action Plan. In order to better support this initiative and truly understand the needs of our older adult community, a comprehensive county-wide survey would be extremely helpful. Similar to the annual Fairfax County Youth Survey, this survey would gather key data elements and solicit information on the current and future needs of older adults in our community. We are fortunate to have such robust direct input from our youth on a continuing basis, and there is a need to have similar input from our older adults as well. As with the Youth Survey, this effort will be a vital planning tool for all county agencies who serve this population and will help staff understand and prioritize the needs of all older adults in our community - not just those who currently receive services from us.

Prior to conducting the survey, staff will provide the Board the questions, methods, and costs associated with conducting the survey. The results of the survey will be reported at a future 50+ Committee meeting and used in updating the 50+ Community Action Plan.

Text 911 Goes Statewide

In 2011, following the earthquake in Mineral and Hurricane Irene shortly thereafter, the Board approved a motion I made that ultimately resulted in Fairfax County's 911 center becoming one of the first in the region and the first in the state to be able to receive text messages. During those 2011 events, residents who were unable to use their phones to make calls because all of the lines were busy were still able to let loved ones and friends know that they were okay via text messages. This is possible

because data entries will queue and be sent when capability is available while with voice, you just get unavailable circuits or busy signals.

At the time, the same could not be said for contacting our emergency services in Fairfax County, and most 911 systems in the country, who at that point only had the capability to receive phone calls in an emergency. In some situations, calling 911 is just not an option, such as during the 2011 earthquake and hurricane, and, and more tragically, during the Virginia Tech shootings where many of the kids in the classrooms were sending text messages to 911 thinking that they would get to the police. Unfortunately, those messages just went into cyberspace.

The County has had the ability to receive texts to 911 since 2015. Now, thanks to a group of Centreville High School students working with Senator George Barker, the General Assembly just passed legislation requiring all 911 systems in the state to accept texts to 911 by July 1, 2020.

Remember, it is always better to call 911 if you can, but if you can't get through or are in a situation where you cannot speak, text 911.

NVRC's Celebrate Communication 2018 at Springfield Town Center - May 5

Celebrate Communication 2018 is the area's premier information fair for anyone with an interest in or connection to hearing loss. This year between 10 am and 2 pm, they will have over 30 vendors offering information on a wide variety of resources including State and Local government programs, cutting edge technologies, audiologists, cochlear implants, ASL and Cued Speech, crafts, and social groups for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Free face painting by Dee Vinchey Entertainment from 11 am to 1 pm and photo ops during the event with NVRC's Yellow Dog all in the Springfield Town Center's Grand Court (near Starbucks). More information at nvrc.org/celebrate-communication/

Community Meetings for Fairfax County's Zoning Modernization Project - May 8 & 10

Fairfax County will hold community meetings on May 8 and 10 as part of its overall effort to modernize its zoning ordinance, called zMOD. zMOD aims to make the county's 1970s-era zoning ordinance easier to use, and the project supports the county's strategic plan to grow and diversify its economy. The meetings will provide more context to the zMOD project and will offer the community opportunities to provide feedback.

At the meetings, the county's consultant, Clarion Associates, will present its proposed restructuring of the ordinance to make it more user friendly. They also will present

national trends in zoning ordinances, focusing on how the regulations are evolving to address new land uses while still ensuring residential neighborhood compatibility.

The May 8 meeting begins at 7 p.m. in the cafeteria at George Marshall High School, 7731 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church. On May 10, the meeting starts at 7 p.m. at the South County Center, Rooms A and B, 8350 Richmond Highway, Alexandria. For more information, please [click here](#).

NV Rides Presents: Safe Driving as You Age - May 17

On Thursday, May 17 from 9:30 am to 1 pm, NV Rides will host a FREE morning of workshops offering tips and best practices to help you stay on the road safely, and for as long as possible. Workshop highlights will include steps you can take to ensure safety, using technology to find transportation, tips on keeping your body and mind healthy, how to help your non-driving neighbors, and securing safe and reliable transportation after you stop driving. This event will take place at Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 13421 Twin Lakes Drive, Clifton, VA 20124.

A light lunch will be provided. If you plan to stay for lunch, RSVP is requested by May 10 for planning purposes. RSVP to Gina Cocomello at 703-537-3070 or email ginac@nvrides.org.

Training: Human Trafficking Identification - May 24

The Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force is hosting a training on human trafficking identification in the Springfield area. The training will be held on May 24th from 10 am - 12 pm at the Greater Springfield Volunteer Fire Department (7011 Backlick Road). Speakers include Michael Lynn, Co-Chair, Outreach & Awareness, The Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force and Erin Johnson, Co-Chair, Outreach & Awareness, The Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force. Please direct questions to TaskForceSpeakersBureau@gmail.com

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