

BRADDOCK DISTRICT CITIZENS BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Comment Appendix
January 20, 2010

The 2010 adopted tax rate should reflect decreases in appraised property values if the process is to retain any integrity (that is, the dollar amount of tax paid during 2010 should be less than paid for 2008/2009).

Lots of good information on budget matters available on County web site.

Reductions should impact all County functions, including schools and public safety.

County and FCPS employee benefit costs need to be controlled and reduced.

County remiss in not providing citizen budget meeting comments in detail as they have for previous years.

County government needs a meaningful program audit capability (like the Montgomery County, MD, Inspector General Office).

County discretionary functions need better identification...parks are not the only area of non-mandatory resource expenditures.

The Board of Supervisors should institutionalize citizen review of the budget as they have for other advisory boards and committees.

Larry Juul

“The best defense against usurpatory government is an assertive citizenry.”

[William F. Buckley, Jr. quote](#)

Thank you Chris, for your hard work in getting this organized. I wasn't able to participate due to other obligations, however I am impressed with the overall assessment and recommendations. I may not agree with all of the specifics, but I wholeheartedly support this entire package and if there is anything I can do to get our BOS to adopt these measures, let me know. Great JOB!!!

Frederick C. Cassiday, SMSgt. (ret.)
United States Air Force Reserve

Craig,

Thanks for the information and status. Your outline for the final report looks great. Thanks also for giving us the opportunity to review the subcommittee reports and provide our comments.

The Acquisitions Subcommittee report contains excellent recommendations, well-written and clearly stating guidelines for implementation. It's good to hear that the County's acquisition system and personnel has many strengths.

I strongly support the following recommendations:

Issue 2 Short-term - Implement Executive Program Reviews

Issue 3 Short-term - Leverage Competition for Better Performance and Lower Costs

Issue 4 Extended-term - Eliminate Fragmentation of the County's Acquisition System

Issue 5 Extended-term - Improve Contract Administration

Issue 7 Extended-term - Document Office Practices and Expand Acquisition Policy

The recommendation to Dramatically Increase Acquisition Transparency would provide additional accountability, but at a cost of increased bureaucratic procedures and increased IT costs to collect, manage, and provide access to the data. The discussion does not provide convincing evidence that this recommendation would produce budget savings.

The report's statement that " Limited review of potential acquisitions indicates County offices have not adjusted to the fact the County faces a deficit." is believable and unfortunate. However, establishing a committee to review ALL acquisitions would disrupt and delay on-going work, require county personnel resources to implement, and not likely lead to significant savings. The subcommittee's near-term recommendations to implement executive program reviews of major acquisitions and to tighten purchase card controls would be more effective near-term budget control mechanisms.

Craig, any of the above comments can be included in the Appendix and attributed to me. I would urge you to use editorial judgement and not include my comments if they are substantially repetitive of comments submitted by someone else. The Appendix could indicate that a number of committee members agree with the comment.

Regards, Marilyn

The LOB Subcommittee's final report is an exceptionally well-done assessment. The report shows in-depth research and insightful recommendations. I fully support the Suggested FY 2011 Budget Decision Guidelines and Summary of Recommendations. Most of the specific recommendations I fully support or at least agree with in principle. Following are some areas where my opinion differs from the LOB Subcommittee Committee's report.

1. School buses: Do not eliminate school buses. But FCPS should make the routes more efficient. Out-of-county students attending Fairfax County Public Schools should provide their

own transportation.

2. School nurses: Keep school nurses and clinic room aides. Reduce their numbers to those needed to provide for emergency first aid and to give students their required medication. Note that students are not permitted to have required medications (e.g., insulin, asthma inhalers) in their possession at school.

3. Adult & Community Education: Do not eliminate this program. First, determine how many county residents these programs serve. Second, increase fees to cover the cost of the programs. Like parks and libraries, these are programs that serve many residents and make Fairfax County a better place to live.

4. ESOL: In-school ESOL resources are essential because non-English-speaking students are mainstreamed into the classrooms. Providing ESOL support at school is a very cost-effective way to help our immigrant populations speak English. Typically, a school student will be fully proficient in English within a year. The student usually provides translation services for non-English-speaking family members, as well as helping them to learn English.

5. ESOL for adults: Fairfax County needs a program to provide English language instruction for our large immigrant population. It is essential that we as a community can communicate with each other in English. This is especially important if the County does not plan to provide interpretation for residents interacting with County government and services. The ability to speak English will reduce unemployment and under-employment.

This program should be a cost-effective combination of Fairfax County sponsored instruction, as well as resources to connect non-English speakers with other sources of instruction, such as church-based and other volunteer programs, online training (often free), NOVA, GMU & other college programs, and English conversation groups in libraries.

The Fairfax County web site demographic data (2008) says that 34.9% of persons age 5 and older do not speak English in the home. That implies that there is a large segment of the population who does not speak English or speaks it poorly. The number of non-English-speakers has been growing. Surely, this is a large enough served-population to warrant keeping this service. (In the interest of full disclosure, I will add that I am a volunteer ESOL teacher and I feel passionately about this issue.)

6. FASTRAN: The County should investigate alternatives that might be less costly. For example, subsidizing seniors' cab rides, as long as the ride is within the county, rather than providing a bus or other county-operated transportation.

7. Employee Compensation: Do not freeze employee compensation through 2012. That would be four years of no compensation increases! Outstanding county employees would be highly motivated to look for other jobs. Marginal employees would probably stay. We would pay a price, both in terms of poorer service and poorer decision-making.

8. Fire: Why propose eliminating funding for volunteer fire stations' utility bills? We are already getting the services of the volunteer fire-fighters for free. Who would pay the cost of those utility bills? What if no one did?

9. Interpreters in General District Court: Is it feasible to eliminate these interpreters? What would be the impact? Is it reasonable to rely on volunteers? Do we have data on this?

10. School crossing guards: Keep. On busy roads, adult guards are needed for students' safety. Another important factor is that walking students need to be protected from people who would harm them. Having an adult along the route gives a measure of protection, especially since many homes are empty with all adult residents having gone to work.

Regards, Marilyn

Chris: . . .

THINK the following REVENUE option for consideration should appear in the final report:
"Petition the General Assembly to broaden the 400 year old property tax as the main source of local government funding
by authorizing local government bodies two additional alternatives for spreading revenue sources:

- (1) piggy back local income tax on state income tax (zero collection cost);
- (2) piggy back local sales tax on state sales tax (zero collection cost; 12% bonus on pass-through traffic)."

THINK the following possible EXPENDITURE saving option should be included
"instruct the County Executive to approach present multiple employee benefit carriers to determine if consolidating
to a single carrier and providing a much larger employee group base would enable lower premiums."

Bill

Comments of Charles W. Dane to attach to the LOB Subcommittee Report

First, let me endorse the comments provided by Marilyn Schroeder, especially her concern about recommendations to eliminate foreign language services and training. While I understand that the specific recommendations in the LOB Sub-committee report are included based sometimes only upon one individual's input, the language support programs recommended for elimination or reduction are not only necessary for fairness, but to provide a better workforce for businesses in Fairfax County.

Secondly, because we had such strong but divergent views as to whether busing of school children is required by State law in order to be able to require attendance at school, that if non-

busing of students is to be considered, I believe that the County should appoint an independent, legislation knowledgeable lawyer to review State code.

Thirdly, let me note that it is unfortunate that the salary and benefits subcommittee was not able to complete their task as this area as salaries and benefits increased significantly for both the County and FCPS. Furthermore, our subcommittee could have recommended reducing the pension packages for newly hired FCPS staff.

Now, instead of dealing with the other individual recommendations in the LOB report, some of which I agree with and some of which I think lack a full understanding of the effect of the recommendations, rather let me try to address the broad recommendation to reduce the County's transfer to the FCPS by 3%. I cannot support this 3% reduction because I understand the severe impact on FCPS programs that would occur even with the present transfer amount. There are just too many uncontrollable increases, especially in State and local retirement accounts, that are dictating the FCPS budget. However, I do not know that impact of the possible reductions in the County budget because the County finance office has not been willing to share uncontrollable costs associated with increased human service needs for families and individuals in this recessionary period, although I note the unemployment rate may be dropping in the County, and may be less by FY 2011.

However, I do know that (1) the County did not provide comparable information in their approved budget, i.e., the FCPS included the stimulus monies received in their approved annual budget, whereas the County did not include the stimulus money so the impact reflected in the County approved budget was less severe than originally depicted, (2) the uncontrollable increases are higher for FCPS so any proportionate distribution of funds from any tax rate or fee increases against each agency shortfall should favor FCPS, (3) the County had about \$90M in carryover funds from FY09 and committed most of these monies to the rainy day fund and several budget items further lessening the impact on the FY 10 budget, but reducing the amount that could be carried over into FY11, and (4) police and fire personnel received significant salary increases prior to FY10.

Now, a look at the FCPS proposed budget document shows that the non-school management and leadership team members make up less than 1 percent of the total authorized positions, and there are an additional 81 such positions proposed for reduction in the Superintendent's budget.

Inasmuch as the proposed budget was just released, I will not go into specifics at this time, however, there are a couple of items identified as needing additional transfer funds that in my opinion could be reduced, but the elimination of all day kindergarten for those schools with high percentages of disadvantaged students would have a major long term impact, and some of the fee increases appear excessive. To offset these items, I believe that there are other items in the budget that could be reduced further.

Below are my comments on the Sub-Committee Reports, as well as, the Fairfax County Internal Audit Office Reports:

General Accountability Sub-Committee Report:

Section 3(a) – Although an on-line voting process could be beneficial, recognize that the County also needs to take into account any increased costs associated with vote integrity and avoiding electronic attacks, which can be a very costly investment.

Section 3(b) – Recommend that Fairfax County conduct an immediate audit of all persons living in subsidized housing and that Fairfax County cease and desist any subsidies to those no longer qualified.

Section 3(d) – Please do not report on the dead tree “issue,” as it appears trivial and petty in this report, unless the Committee proved an ongoing or continuing practice of a disregard for safety concerning dead trees. One dead tree does not equate a “lax management.”

Acquisition Sub-Committee Report:

Issue 1 Recommendation – Recommend that the County Executive and School Board immediately establish a Committee to review and eliminate low priority acquisitions. Also recommend that they provide a delegation of authority letter to the Committee for access to all acquisition information. Further, recommend that they conduct an audit of all purchase cards to determine an adherence to policy and the appropriateness for each card.

Line of Business Sub-Committee Report:

Although there may be an initial savings associated with eliminating certain programs, such as training, crossing guards, lights in parking lots, translators, etc., recognize that one or more of these programs may be regulated and eliminating certain programs may, in the long run, be more costly. For example, one or more lawsuits as a result of an improperly trained employee, a student being struck by a car, an assault in an unlit parking lot, or a failure to provide assistance to a legal immigrant, may possibly be more costly, financially and through public relations, than any projected savings.

Combining the Fairfax County Police Department with the Sheriff’s Office, in theory, seems reasonable; however, their missions are separate and distinct, with the Police Chief being an appointee and the Sheriff independently elected. The only part of these two entities that could reasonably be consolidated, if they have not already, is their communications centers.

The best cost savings can be found in the Sub-Committee’s recommendations to reduce overtime, civilianizing animal control positions, and eliminating take-home vehicles. Except for emergency personnel, most overtime is the result of poor time management during normal duty hours, and is used more often to supplement income rather than through necessity. Although the County can probably justify keeping some animal control officials in sworn positions, they can more than likely reduce that number and supplement with a civilian workforce. In addition, the County can probably justify some take-home vehicles; however, the Committee should recommend that those vehicles have GPS installed on them. (New York Times reported that Islip, NY – a population 1/3rd the size of Fairfax – installed GSP on their Government-issued vehicles, and in the first quarter, they saved nearly 14,000 gallons of gasoline over the previous

year, and noticed an increase in productivity.) I have seen, on many occasions, employees driving County-owned vehicles on circuitous routes, transporting family and friends, and parked for hours under a shade tree in a public park while the employee slept.

Fairfax County Internal Audit Office Online Reports:

In a cursory review of the Fairfax County Internal Audit Office (IAO) online reports, they appear to only be a brief abstract of each audit, failing to post the entire report for review. Although the AIO makes recommendations, the reports do not reflect who is held responsible for compliance. I also found it curious as to why they found no waste, fraud, or abuse of procurement cards in the past 3 years. It is a statistical improbability that they did not find one or more improper uses, or they conducted their audit wearing blinders.

My Thoughts:

I continually came back to one question when reading the Sub-committee reports and reviewing Fairfax County online reports – Why doesn't the County have an Office of Inspector General (OIG) like Montgomery County, MD, or Washington, DC, or many of the other public venues that have them as “watchdogs” to prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse? From my experience, most savings are found when you eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse and hold managers and senior officials accountable for their own and their employees' misconduct. A lack of oversight and accountability seems to be a common theme in the reports provided by these Committees, and an OIG typically recoups more than twice their annual operating costs in waste, fraud, and abuse recoveries.

Fairfax County employees have the opportunity to abscond laptops and cell phones; improperly use copy machines, facsimile machines, postage meters; spend the day surfing the internet; use the workday to run a personal business; or use a County-issued purchase card to buy tires for their personal car or school supplies for their child, is overwhelming. Furthermore, some managers and senior officials establish a culture that promotes and encourages such misconduct, and with no oversight and accountability, the behavior only perpetuates.

I hope that my feedback has been constructive, and I again apologize for not being more actively involved with the Committee. If you have any questions or need clarification on any of my comments, please don't hesitate to contact me.