The Braddock District Citizens Budget Advisory Committee
January, 2010
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the newest member of the Fairfax Board of Supervisors, Supervisor John Cook recognized that one of the most important issues facing the Board was Fairfax's looming budget deficit. In searching for solutions, he was also confronted with an apparent lack of visibility into the County budget and budget process. With that, Supervisor Cook challenged the Braddock community to form a citizen's budget advisory committee that could, possibly, provide a fresh, objective and insightful review of Fairfax County government, its budget and budget process.

The Braddock District Citizens Budget Advisory Committee (the Committee) was created in May, 2009. The Committee, which includes approximately 30 Braddock residents who volunteered their time and talents in response to Supervisor Cook's challenge, is a cross-section of Braddock District. Each brings his or her own set of interests, but the Committee as a whole is not a "Special Interest" – but rather a reflection of Braddock District. The mission:

> To fairly, objectively and independently consider Fairfax County's current and projected budget shortfall, and to issue recommendations to reduce or eliminated program spending and to recommend appropriate taxation levels based on findings of fact and evidence which will align Fairfax County's resources with its acknowledged priorities of public safety and safe neighborhoods, adequate services and support for the poor and lower income elderly, and quality education.

The Committee's goal: create an effective deliverable (e.g., a report or recommendations) which Supervisor Cook could use during the 2011 budget cycle, and beyond. To tackle this project, the Committee convened three subcommittees[1]:

- **Budget Process, Lines of Business & Programs, and Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Subcommittee** to analyze the County's lines of business and study the County budget system from a traditional standpoint, analyzing specific programs and services;

- **Acquisitions Subcommittee** to evaluate the County's acquisitions and acquisition processes**;** and

- **General Accountability Subcommittee** to consider the concept of an independent County office task with initiating cross-directional program analysis to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the County government.

The Committee gathered information from several resources, including County hard copy and on-line publications, prior citizen advisory committee reports, meetings with County personnel and presentations by County and Fairfax County Public Schools officials, leaders of outside interest groups, and former Congressman and Fairfax County Chairman Tom

[1] The Committee also created a Revenue sub-Committee and a Personnel Sub-Committee, but due to time and volunteer constraints these Sub-Committees were continued for future consideration.

Davis. Relying on these sources and sub-committee talents, the Committee learned to appreciate Fairfax County's personnel and managerial expertise and the complexities and challenges of local government management. The Committee learned that County expenditures greatly increased from 2002 when revenues were abundant, with further increases over several years. Now that the reverse is true, and the Committee has asked the question: can the County continue to provide the same level of services to a citizenry that prefers such high quality services in a down economy and uncertain future, and if so, how?

The Sub-Committees met and developed the attached Reports, advancing a (non-exhaustive) array of suggestions, comments and critiques. It is important to note, though, that the Reports were not voted upon, and do not (necessarily) represent a 'majority' opinion. It was determined that striving for unanimity or consensus would defeat the purpose of the Committee's Mission. Instead the Reports provide varied suggestions for consideration by the Board of Supervisors and others. In the absence of a majority opinion report, the Committee includes a verbatim Comments Appendix with attribution where the commentator has authorized.

The Committee recognizes that in some cases, there may be legal or other reasons why certain suggestions cannot be adopted, and in other cases, a suggestion may be based on incomplete information. Why? For a variety of reasons, the Committee did not enjoy unfettered access to information. This apparent lack of information transparency is reflected in prior citizen advisory reports and in comments by Supervisor Cook and others who have actively sought information. In addition, the Committee learned that certain realities are apparent. Specifically, that a citizen advisory committee is, by its nature, constrained in what it can accomplish – even if it had unfettered access to information – as it is working on a voluntary, time-available basis.

For these reasons (among others), the Committee has concluded in its GAO Sub-Committee Report that a professional, empowered investigatory agency should be deployed to study County processes, functions and organizations; and then present recommendations, based upon information that the Committee could not obtain, regarding matters that were nonetheless identified, and any other future assigned matters. At the very least, the role and effectiveness of the *Fairfax County Office of Financial and Program Audits* (OFPA), which currently provides analysis services to the Board of Supervisors, should be reviewed in light of this Committee's experiences, Supervisor Cook's concern about visibility into the budget process/resource shortfalls and the dramatic spending increases since 2004. OFPA's integration into and support for Board of Supervisors activities is clearly a matter which goes to the core of governance itself, especially in light of the its seemingly inadequate staffing level which has stood for many years.

Finally, while there are many interest groups in Fairfax County advocating for one program or the other, 'community-at-large' advocacy is limited; and as such, this Report is presented on behalf of the community. Highlights of the Sub-Committee reports are:

Acquisitions Subcommittee:

Reduce County General Fund expenditures $88,000,000.00 by:

- Reducing low priority acquisitions

- Implementing Executive Program Reviews
- Leveraging Competition for Better Performance and Lower Costs
- Eliminating Fragmentation of the County's Acquisition System
- Improving Contract Administration
- Dramatically Increasing Acquisition Transparency
- Documenting Office Practices and Expanding Acquisition Policy

General Accountability Subcommittee:

The General Accountability Sub-Committee believes that an independent consultant or outside agency is best suited to conduct a review of Fairfax County government, budget and spending. Doing so would project a fresh, objective and insightful benefit to the County. Such an agency would (among other possible tasks):

- Evaluate cross-departmental programs, policies and planning impacts;
- Establish controls that trigger action;
- Study whether commercial product/service acquisition is understood;
- Review Fairfax County expenditure management of Metro-wide agreements;
- Study the possibility of collecting existing use taxes due on Internet purchases.

Line of Business Sub-Committee

- Reduce Fairfax County Public Schools Transfer by 3%;
- Identify each position as mandatory or discretionary; eliminate all discretionary increases implemented since 2002;
- Reduce contribution to County employee health insurance premiums from 75% to 70% at a minimum; examine reduction in salary and benefit expenses to reflect an appropriate competitive level for similarly situated employees;
- Increase Fairfax Connector base fare (and consider other user fee increases).