

Bulova Byline

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On Monday and Tuesday of this week our Board engaged in a two day **Strategic Planning Retreat**. The retreat, held at the [Lorton Arts Workhouse Center](#), was an opportunity for board members to engage in some informal, in-depth discussion of our respective district issues, as well as countywide opportunities and challenges. Our location, the site of the former Lorton Prison, served as an impressive example of revitalization and historic re-use in the South County area of Fairfax County. The old prison buildings, built at the beginning of the 20th century, are now home to artists' studios and performance arenas. If you haven't visited, I hope you will do so. During a tour of the studios at lunch time, I chatted with several of the artists and vowed to return to purchase some original artwork!

I am happy to introduce this special edition of the Byline to share with you some of the highlights from our retreat discussion. It is interesting to see how well these themes align with the [Board Priorities](#) that were adopted by the Board following our last retreat in 2009.

The importance of **Community Engagement** was woven throughout all topics during our two days. The board recognized that we make the best decisions when we have the community at the table with us. Some examples of especially successful community engagement have been our Community Dialogues on the Budget, Neighborhood College sessions, the Parks Listening Tours, and our use of new social media using online chats and surveys. Engaging our growing minority and immigrant community, as well as our younger generations, was identified as a challenge and will be the subject for future Board discussion.

- Day One of our Retreat included a presentation by Fairfax County's Financial Advisor, Public Financial Management, (PFM Group) on **how the Rating Agencies view us**. We were described as having "Gilt Edged" ratings, which we're very proud of and which saves us millions of dollars when we sell bonds to pay for County and School facilities. Board members were complimented on our disciplined fiscal stewardship and adherence to the 10 Principals of Financial Management that guide budget decisions. The presentation sparked discussion about how large or small the county's liquid reserves need to be. Rating agencies would like them to be larger. Budget watchdogs question whether we have too much "cushion" that should instead be used to reduce the tax rate, or fund more services. More discussion of adequate vs. inadequate reserves will be subject to future discussion.

- **Transportation** played a major role on our agenda during both days. Each Board member spoke to the need to identify creative, multimodal solutions to traffic congestion within their districts and throughout Fairfax County. With less and less funding coming from the federal government and the state, local governments are pressured to assume more responsibility for transportation - for capital, operation and maintenance. A great deal of discussion took place both days about a new Board of Supervisors Four-Year Transportation Plan that will be developed during upcoming Board Transportation Committee meetings, as well as potential sources of new revenue to support it.

Our Board continues to be concerned about plans at the state level to “devolve” the maintenance of neighborhood and secondary streets to the localities. Without sufficient state investment, our streets have deteriorated to an alarming degree. Assuming this responsibility without sufficient funding will result in a significant cost to local taxpayers.

- The topic of Transportation was coupled with a presentation on our **Financial Outlook** as we undergo a sluggish recovery from the Great Recession and as we face additional **major Capital and Operational Challenges** to support our growing and changing community. Bottom line, we have more needs than anticipated revenue. Both opportunity and challenges will result from future economic development and from the redevelopment of older parts of Fairfax County. The presentation was extremely valuable in setting the stage for this Board’s challenges as we begin this four year term.
- The second day of our retreat ended with a discussion of planning and development – **The Next Planning Horizon**. When Fairfax County experienced its earlier periods of growth we were a community of farms and villages. The early planning process involved Annual Plan Reviews, later changed to Area Plan Reviews. Early planning called for everything (residential, retail, commercial) to be separated from each other. The pattern requires us to get into our car in order to get almost anywhere. Newer development strategies call for more mixed use, “walkable” communities and more connections of pedestrian, bike and transit modes of transportation.
- As Fairfax County matures, our growth and development will involve more **Redevelopment and Revitalization of our older commercial and industrial area**. Retreat discussion on this topic dealt with how we can adopt better tools for this pattern of development, and how best we can engage our community in the process. The development of a Next Planning Horizon process will take place during the next months at the Board’s Revitalization Committee.

- Other common themes included:
 - The importance of supporting our non-profit partners with capacity-building training and coaching.
 - Making sure we have the best compensation and benefits needed to attract and retain our Fairfax County workforce.
 - Ensuring that our aging population can continue to live comfortably in their community.

- **Education continues to be our number one priority.** Throughout the retreat Board members expressed that they are looking forward to meeting with members of the School Board at a full day retreat on Saturday, February 25th. A number of areas for collaboration (human services, transportation, sharing capital facilities) were suggested for discussion at that venue. As we continue to struggle with fiscal challenges and changes, it is critical that we forge an effective working relationship with our partners on the School side of the aisle.

Fairfax County is an exceptional place to live, work, play and grow older comfortably. It's not that way by accident. We are blessed with a committed Board, an engaged community and a dedicated workforce. I look forward to working with you during these next years as we seize opportunities and address our challenges. Thank you so much for your continued interest in Fairfax County and for staying informed through this Byline.

Sincerely,



Sharon Bulova – Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors



Presentation from County staff on future planning horizons

“There’s nothing you could do better in fiscal management in Fairfax County” - JoAnne Carter, Financial Adviser from Public Financial Management



Gerry Hyland puts the finishing touches on his famous Brunswick Stew, to which I added some homemade bread. It was delicious!



Discussing common themes with the Board of Supervisors



Susan Datta, Fairfax County CFO, gives her presentation on the County’s fiscal outlook