

***FY 2013 Budget Feedback: Online Comments
November 2011 - January 2012***

| Number | Comments By Topic Area |
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| | County Budget - General |
| 1 | In the spirit of "the glass is not merely half empty, but is half full," has some consideration been given to asking managers for budgets that would reflect a 1%, 3% and 5% increases... for programs and services that might be beneficially impacted via additional revenues? At the very least, this might be [somewhat longer-term] instructional for the incoming County Executive. "Doing more with slightly more." (This would be in addition to any general County-wide surpluses, such as for salaries, if proposed by the County Executive and/or the Board.) |
| 2 | The defense budget is about to take a 6% hit. Discretionary civilian programs will be reduced by an equal or greater amount over the next few years. Fairfax is totally dependent on fed spending. Around the country counties are cutting pensions and programs. What are you doing? We still have bicycle czars, environmental coordinators, and "cluster principals." Your response is to hand out raises. |
| 3 | I have never responded because I'm old enough to know it is a waste of time. Enough said. Do what you want to do - you always do. One fact is ALWAYS true in Fairfax County - tax hikes. There will be nothing different next year. |
| | Public Libraries |
| 4 | Can the library hours be uniform! It is really frustrating to go to a branch and find that it doesn't open until 1 PM or closed at 6 PM that day. If the hours were the same for all the branches it would be much better and easier to remember when open/close. |
| 5 | The Library has already suffered the greatest portion of the previous budget cuts. The Library cannot function efficiently with less staff even under the 1% reduction plan, which suggests not filling vacant positions. Some community branches only have a handful of staff to cover all hours they are open and serving the public - including weekdays, weekends, and evenings. Losing even one staff member and not being able to replace him/her would put a huge burden on the remaining staff and drastically impact public service. Library staff provide direct public service to the citizens of Fairfax County. Further cuts will directly impact the everyday life of library users who rely on staff help when using the library for literacy development, educational needs, job searching and other important aspects of life. It's time to leave the Library off the chopping block and seek cuts that will have less impact on the quality of life in Fairfax County. |
| 6 | Please make the library hours consistent! The various hours for the different branches is frustrating!! |
| | Taxes and Fees |
| 7 | Increase hotel occupancy taxes. It would seem, that most of the people spending money at local hotels are not from the county. I'm sure the hotel owners would balk at such an idea. However, to garner their support allow them to benefit also. Let them keep 50% of the additional tax revenue to offset property taxes. The county can utilize the other 50% to fill the shortfall or to boost EDA and/or the convention bureau budgets. |
| 8 | Does the residential garbage collection pay for itself through fees to customers or is the burden shared to some degree by all tax payers in the county? |

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| | County - Compensation |
| 9 | I think restoring the step increases would greatly help all County employees out. This is a very hard time for people and any little would help. Thank you for the great work the County does. |
| 10 | Please move employees to Defined Contribution Retirement Plans! |
| 11 | The county currently has 7 different pay plans C, E, F, L, O, P and S. In an effort to help save money for the county. Why doesn't the county go to one pay system like pay for performance? Then people would be rewarded for good performance and not just a cost of living and step increase for just getting by with little to no performance. By doing that it would help save the county money in the long run. I am not saying to down grade any persons pay. Keep the current pay scales the way they are. Just move them all to one pay system. Then everyone would see the cost of living adjustment on the starting and max out pay scale. But their pay will only change by their performance rating. Just like the current S scale system uses. Another option the county could go to is the US pay plans the school board uses and just use one pay scale county wide. With the county going to a focus system. It would make better sense to go to one system like the US pay scale so we all are on one system. |
| 12 | Slide 6 of the joint presentation to the board and school board is incorrect. It shows the years in which all or a portion of employee compensation increases were eliminated. In FY 2004, PFP was changed and whatever any employee earned that year was cut by 25%. This should have been included. Your chart makes it appear that we had 15 years of uninterrupted raises. In addition, it would be nice if citizens knew we had a pay reduction during the peak years of this housing boom. |
| 13 | While employees are appreciative of the 2% raise, the focus should definitely be on reinstating the pay scales, even if that means cuts to the overall budget(s). Costs of everything else have risen, and in many cases, people are taking home less now than they were 3 - 5 years ago, or they are sacrificing important healthcare and/or other benefits to try and keep their take home pay "level." Employees have been hanging in there, but if this continues, turnover will increase. |
| 14 | After three fiscal years of frozen pay scales, the County's number one priority must be to restore the employee pay scale to normal functioning (merit increments, longevity steps, and pay for performance). When I say number one priority, I mean cut positions and programs if needed to get this done FIRST. When I accepted a job with Fairfax County, I was provided a pay scale and an explanation of raises I would receive through good performance combined with longevity. I saw this as a contract. The County has broken that contract in my mind and the pay system needs to be restored. You can forego any other MRA's - just restore the pay scales before doing ANYTHING else. Period. |
| 15 | We need a decent raise! We have been so very patient but, this has gone on way too long. Very proud to have a job but, it's hard to get by without two jobs. |

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| | Local Cash Match for Transportation Enhancement Programs |
| 16 | Fairfax County should budget funds for the 20% local matching contribution required for Transportation Enhancement Program projects. The Transportation Enhancement Program is a reimbursement program administered by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). The program provides reimbursement up to a maximum 80% with federal STP funds of the eligible project costs and requires a minimum 20% local match. The Board of Supervisors hold public hearings, endorse the project applications, pass resolutions supporting the projects, but the county does not provide the required 20% local match. A number of current Transportation Enhancement Projects are in progress but lack sufficient funds and cannot be completed. The Mason Neck Trail project (15 years in process) is one example. A contribution of \$100,000 in FY-2013 for the Mason Neck Trail project could be matched by a federal funds allocation of \$400,000 for a total of \$500,000 allowing Fairfax County to complete this trail. |
| | Environmental |
| 17 | Solar energy paneling should face in southerly direction on all county schools and buildings: I believe that all county buildings including schools, shelters, prisons, etc. should have solar paneling facing in the southerly direction to absorb the highest intensity of the sun's rays year round. It has been scientifically proven that positioning all solar panels on a roof in the southerly direction has the highest accumulation of solar energy and power and proves to be a tremendous economical move by any jurisdiction. I suggested this to the Obama White House for all federal buildings and this budget proposal is now under consideration. Why can't the County do the same to save money and be a leader in "Going Green the right way." |

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| | Schools |
| 18 | Cut back on FCPS central office administrative positions. Allow only one Assistant Principal per building. Eliminate PLS positions. |
| 19 | Please do an evaluation of the effectiveness of the SROs in our schools. A survey to kids would let us know if the SROs are, in fact, building relationships with our students. |
| 20 | Fairfax County Public Schools should allow all employees with 25 years of service to retire with a medical "stipend." This would allow higher earning employees (under the ERFC legacy plan) to leave even if they have not yet reached the magic age of 55 years old. By freeing up workers who are simply waiting for the age requirement (because they need the stipend), the school system could save a lot of money. They have the option of hiring younger workers who need to be employed but may not have the years of experience that would qualify them for higher level salaries. This could potentially result in a savings of \$30,000-\$40,000 per person (the difference between new retirees and new hires), which would allow the school system to pay the medical stipends with ease. |
| 21 | Keep this as a guide for the upcoming defense and discretionary budget cuts. Over the last 10 years Fairfax County has received more defense dollars than the entire state of Maryland. That's about to end. Ways to cut the school budget: Convert all county employees to defined contribution plans like we, the donors use. Eliminate teacher "working days" They don't teach so they're essentially not working. Eliminate the premium pay for a master's degree. Can you remember if any teacher you had possessed an advanced degree? Put the school department under the control of the BOS. IT, maintenance, HR and other departments can be reduced. Limit ESOL to one year. Asians and Eastern Europeans seem to thrive and Spanish translates to English with ease. |

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| | County and Schools |
| 22 | <p>I would support a real estate tax or a gasoline tax increase. But first make every effort to make our buildings more energy efficient. Money spent on building energy consumption improvements will provide benefits for the long term. Control lighting of corridors, decorative lighting and other rooms with motion sensors would reduce both daytime and after hours costs. The list of lighting improvement options is huge. Do not allow cleaning staff to use lighting as the way to track the cleaning of rooms. Update custodial contracts to say that all cleaning staff must turn off lights if they are not actively cleaning a space. Cleaning staff often leave on lights for inspection of a space by their supervisor hours later in schools and offices. Look into other options. Make all our data centers more efficient both with upgraded servers and more efficient cooling designs. For the general county budget, consider treating general county employees' compensation at the same level as school and safety employees. Consistency is better for staff than why each is treated differently. Reduce the EDA budget. Eliminate overseas offices. Use video conferencing. Our great schools also attract businesses as does our lower overall tax rate without the efforts of the EDA. Make entering drop an option only on the approval of the branch or department head. Entering DROP should not be automatic. Let the choice of keeping a staff member be the option of a supervisor and the needs of the line of business. Staff can choose to not retire as the other option but drop has a higher cost to the county. Do not take on the roads from the state unless there is an identified funding method. Schools: Get rid of poor performing principals that have a high turnover of staff. Poor principals can make good teachers leave the profession in addition to leaving the school. Get rid of teacher coaches and use some of that money to pay good teachers to mentor new teachers. There is already a teacher mentoring program. The coaches are not monitored for effectiveness based on the cost and are not staff that directly support students. Do not increase class size to balance the budget. Add edible landscaping to our schools for the benefit of students.</p> |
| 23 | <p>Topic: Expenditures – Paying our real estate taxes prompted contemplation of what we are getting for them. Unfortunately, the cost-benefit ratio is quite inadequate whether the analysis is general or specific. Beginning the analysis led to the just published FY2013 Budget Inputs by the County Executive (CE) and School Superintendent (SS). Thank you for posting those. Let us first make a few comments on the Budget Inputs. First, the "2% market rate adjustment" in the CE presentation is an insult to taxpayer intelligence. It is a raise with accompanying health and pension liabilities. Second, county actions to address the \$114.4M shortfall do not, but should, include: reducing salaries to private sector equivalent levels; increasing employee contributions to pension and health benefit programs; implementing teacher performance programs and firing those who do not meet standards. Not only would measures such as these reduce the 36% increase in 2012-13 "compensation," they would contribute to more affordable and sustainable out-year expenditures. Related to this, a recent local paper article indicated that the FCPS Supervisor is paid more than the Governor of Virginia. If accurate, this is ludicrous and rectifying it is one small way of addressing the 36%</p> |

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| | <p>increase in "compensation". Suggest that rectifying it might also result in obtaining a Supervisor who is committed to educating, rather than indoctrinating, students.</p> <p>My first comment on the SS presentation is that the 2013 budget has no mention of teacher performance evaluation - why not? Jettisoning ineffective teachers is one of many ways to improve our schools while reducing costs. The brief also contains an implicit assumption that more money and smaller class size result in improved student performance. Comparisons on expenditures/student with either Washington DC or globally where the US is in the top 5 on \$/student expenditures but ranked 30-50 among countries, depending on subject, demonstrates this assumption is not valid. A comparison of FCPS with Catholic schools on class size and student performance will show that the correlation between class size and performance can be negative. FCPS is to be congratulated on .8% "efficiency." However, given jurisdictions to which it is relative, it needs to be much lower. Why are priorities C & K duplicated? With very different "reasonable interpretations" of performance? Who assessed the "reasonable interpretations?" Why is there not an explicit priority for quality teaching? Why are there not explicit criteria for student performance? Why is there so little focus on core academics and so much on irrelevant and expensive fluff? Why does the list of 2013 challenges not include measuring teacher performance? Why does it include "living wage" and "teacher work load"? Let us return to the inadequate cost-benefit ratio for real estate taxes - whether the analysis is general or specific.</p> <p>In general, for example, the Board recently granted 2% pay increases (and thus health and retirement benefits) to County employees, most of whom would make less in functionally equivalent private sector jobs. The surplus used to fund these increases came from taxpayers who were not consulted on priorities for using the funds. Had they been, they might have preferred several alternatives, e.g., return it to those who provided it; construct sidewalks where they don't exist in 50 year old neighborhoods; develop a plan to educate rather than indoctrinate Fairfax County school students; and/or fund independent studies to evaluate ways to reduce Fairfax County government and school costs while increasing performance and efficiency. This last possible alternative leads to a request - please send me the methodology and schedule for calculating and executing increases for Fairfax County government and school employee salaries and health and retirement benefits. The pay scales on the web site are useful but insufficient. A specific example of the inadequate cost/benefit ratio is the .0010 tax for "infestation prevention". The performance metric for the "Disease Carrying Insects" component of this is at best self-serving for the relevant department/employees and, at worst, specious. A much more cost-effective "surveillance" program than the one taxpayers currently fund would involve county-wide citizen volunteers who report via a web site how many times they are bitten by mosquitoes or gnats in X-minute long time blocks throughout the day in the summer months. There would likely be many more volunteers than needed. The resultant data base would be more statistically significant and much less expensive than the current method. In addition, the pest reduction "outreach and education" program taxpayers are</p> |

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| | <p>funding can be found for free on the internet in less than 1 minute by an average 8 year old and translated with free online translation software by an average 10 year old. Please provide the per capita cost of translating your materials for and distributing to the readers of Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese in Fairfax. Finally, personnel ("authorized positions") on this program increased by 40% in 2011. I assume their salaries, health and retirement benefits account for much of the 2011 expenditure increase. May I suggest that a better use of taxpayer funds would be to reestablish the excellent and efficient spraying program that Fairfax used to have. That program made it possible to be outdoors for more than a minute in the summer without being harassed by gnats and mosquitoes.</p> <p>Finally, request that Fairfax managers aim to improve the quality of life of all taxpayers rather than just those who belong to unions.</p> |