



Why I Couldn't Vote for this Budget

Board votes 9 to 1 to increase taxes 4.5% on County residents, \$216 increase to average homeowner

Yesterday, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted to increase the property tax rate by one cent to \$1.085. With the increase in assessments that translates to a 4.5 % or \$216 increase in taxes on the average homeowner. This increase is on top of a 1.9% increase last fiscal year (FY2013) and another 4.5% increase in next year's tax bill (FY2015) if cuts are not made for a total of 11% over three years. I voted against this budget. Here is why.

For the first time in recent memory, our citizens are seeing significant tax increases at all three levels of government. We can and should have done better. Our furloughed residents do not have the option of raising revenues - they must make difficult cuts in their family's budgets and that is what we should be doing.

This one cent increase to the tax rate is not one penny, it is a 4.5% increase and will mean an extra \$216 out of the pocket of the average homeowner. Worse yet those who least can afford it will see their bills go up by a whopping \$700 due to the assessments on some condominiums and town houses that went up by 20%. That increase can be the difference between choosing Fairfax to live in, staying out of foreclosure, or in the ability of new families or the elderly being able to afford to support themselves here. We as a Board spend a lot of time talking about helping people in need, I can only say that when it came time to tax them, they were sadly forgotten.

Between 2000 and 2007 taxes doubled, and unfortunately now, in a time where Fairfax County citizens are having to tighten their belts, their governments refuse to do the same. Over my last five years on the Board of Supervisors, I have called for tax relief for our residents, but it seems

the Board does not have the courage to make the tough decisions to lower the tax burden on our homeowners. We are now on track to increase homeowner taxes a whopping 11% by next year.

Many Fairfax County residents see an uncertain future: furloughs, no pay increases, lay-offs, and a rising cost of living. Many have seen their pay stay the same but their expenses go up, and their take home pay go down. This is not the time to increase the tax burden on our already struggling homeowners. I am disappointed in the Board's decision yesterday and their unwillingness to even consider some very simple changes that I have advocated for since I took office that could save the county and our citizens millions of dollars. What makes this worse is there were common sense options - some of these are detailed below:

Privatization

Since I first took office I argued that the county could lower costs by privatizing services that we provide. The county has several of these areas that I believe could be better served by the private sector. As an example, we could easily save \$1M by privatizing agency trash routes. Instead of having the county send trash trucks to dozens of our facilities, we could allow the private sector to collect our garbage on their existing routes.

Efficiencies and Common Sense Reductions

There are numerous areas where we can continue to make common sense reductions and improve efficiencies. Here are just a few examples:

- School Age Child Care (SACC) teachers are being converted to non-merit positions over a course of time, currently there are 85 SACC teachers left who have not yet been converted. Converting the remaining 85 in this budget year would save \$0.8M.
- We have at least one communications person in each county agency, plus an Office of Public Affairs comparable in size to a mid-sized public relations agency. We are also one of the only jurisdictions in Virginia to have a Consumer Affairs department. In Virginia consumer affairs is handled at the State level. We don't need this duplicity. Reducing our non-public safety communications and our Consumer Affairs departments by 25% would save \$1M.
- Certain county publications are costing us hundreds of thousands of dollars and are wasteful in the age of online information. You may have seen some of these in your mail boxes, at government centers, libraries, or rec centers. Examples include ACE and ParkTakes magazines. Many of these publications could be posted online, reducing the copies printed, or only mailed to those that request it. This change would save us up to \$1M.

- Fairfax County contributes 70% of total funding received by the Community Services Board (CSB), more than any other jurisdiction in Virginia and 180% more than the state-wide average. As a part of FY2012 carryover, CSB received \$10M in emergency funding because of mismanagement of their budget which resulted in a deficit. After promising to find savings and make cuts, the CSB has returned to the Board with little real savings or efficiencies. The CSB has numerous departments that provide duplicative services and there are no less than two departments which are established solely to help our citizens navigate the myriad of services. For FY2015, the County Executive needs to bring to the Board options to improve the efficiency and operations of the CSB with the goal of reducing duplicative services, improving access and reducing the cost of service.

Pensions

By far pensions are the fastest growing part of the budget. The private sector and many governments have realized that these are unsustainable and not designed for today's more mobile workforce. Since 2001, the cost of pensions and benefits have ballooned 54% beyond inflation and population growth despite the decrease in the size of the County workforce. While pension adjustments for new employees would not provide much immediate savings it would provide long term sustainability. The longer we wait to make the change for new County employees the more expensive it will be.

Smarter Schools

Our schools are the best in the country and a leading reason why both businesses and families locate in Fairfax County, but that doesn't mean their spending should not be subject to the same transparency and scrutiny that the County's General Fund is subject to. Despite the Board of Supervisors repeated requests, schools continue to refuse to establish an independent auditor. This request was repeated in this year's budget language passed by the Board of Supervisors.

Money for schools should be going into the classroom and to teachers, not into administration and administrative burdens on our teachers. Some examples of where schools can find reductions in administrative costs and in many cases also relive the administrative burden on teachers, include:

- Eliminating eCART, an electronic testing system that most teachers hate. Over the last 3 years eCART was largely responsible for increasing the number of tests by 600% from 500,000 to 3,000,000. Teachers are required to coordinate the testing and assessments meaning less time teaching. The program and tests are not mandated and as of yet have

not been directly tied to improving student achievement. In addition to saving \$4.5M this would allow us to reduce the administrative burden on our teachers.

- When FCPS estimates what its salary costs are going to be for the year they use an attrition rate to calculate how much funding they would need. However, based on historical experience the attrition rate they use is way too low (2.1%), resulting in over \$30M of unspent reserves in the salary pool in every year of the last 4 years. By comparison the County was within \$3m of its salary estimate last year using an 8.2% attrition rate, and \$5M the year before that. The schools should be held to a similar standard. Changing the attrition rate to a more reasonable 3.2% would be more than generous and would save a minimum of \$20M.
- A simple 25% reduction in non-school based strategic communications, media relations, and multimedia services would result in \$1.3M in savings and not impact the classroom. FCPS has a mid-sized public relations firm sized public affairs shop of 24 people.

The School Board has just hired a new Superintendent and a new COO. I am encouraged by the reaction to the new hires and that the combination will result in a more efficient school system where our resources are focused on the teachers and the classroom.

I am truly disappointed in yet another budget that increases the tax burden on our homeowners. And I am disappointed that yet again the Board of Supervisors lacks the appetite to implement some simple changes that I have consistently called for, that would save us millions of dollars and provide real relief for our homeowners.