

Response to Questions on the FY 2006 Advertised Budget Plan

Request By: Chairman Connolly

Question: Why do County sidewalk projects cost more than others to complete?

Response: Several factors can make sidewalk construction in the County costly. For example, given that the majority of the County's sidewalk projects are in existing, well-established neighborhoods, land rights to construct and maintain the sidewalk are required in nearly every case. Often permanent sidewalk easements and temporary grading and construction easements (which require property owners to be compensated from project funds) are also necessary. The County makes every effort to coordinate with citizens, avoid condemnation, and minimize impact to the existing communities, all of which add to project costs. Typically, County staff meet with impacted citizens several times during design, land acquisition, and construction. Often times the County makes concessions to the citizens (additional plantings, alignment adjustments, etc.) which add to overall project costs. In some cases, it becomes obvious why a sidewalk was not originally installed in a particular area due to difficult terrain (steep slopes, poor soils) and/or significant property impacts (fence relocations, loss of trees, adjustments to driveway slopes). To the extent practicable, sidewalk projects are designed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Often this is difficult in established neighborhoods when filling in missing segments of sidewalk, therefore additional project costs may result in order to comply with ADA requirements.

As Fairfax County becomes more urbanized and densely developed, additional project costs are encountered for land rights, and expensive utility relocations. Costs for construction labor and materials (concrete, asphalt, stone, etc.) are established through an open bid process and reflect local construction market conditions. Also, in accordance with the Board of Supervisors' emphasis on pedestrian safety, sidewalk project scopes may now include features that may not have been considered in the past. These additional items may include signalized pedestrian crossing controls, crosswalks, and additional signage. All of these items add to the overall project cost.