February 22, 2022

Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Fairfax

Chairman and Board Members:

Today we introduce recommendations for the County’s FY 2023 budget as we appear to be turning a corner in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, although – as we have learned over the past two years – there may still be some surprising turns ahead. In the last few months, we have seen our COVID-19 cases spike as a result of the Omicron variant, despite our high vaccination rates, but we now fortunately find ourselves with declining cases. However, our community transmission rates remain elevated. Although we are weary from the impact that this pandemic has had on all aspects of our lives, it is imperative that we remain steadfast in our approach until our numbers improve even further. The pandemic has certainly taken us on a roller coaster ride, but, throughout, it has provided an opportunity for us to witness the resiliency of our residents and our employees. I am cautiously optimistic that we have started down a new road towards economic recovery with a return to a somewhat normal way of life.

The County’s cautious yet creative approaches have served us well since the pandemic first hit. I know that the past two budget years have been leaner than we would have otherwise preferred, with limited resources available for investments in so many of our County priorities. I am hopeful that – like with the pandemic – we are also turning a corner in terms of our ability to continue to invest in our community and the programs that best serve our residents. I believe this budget demonstrates our appreciation of our County employees and exhibits our commitment to our partners with Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), while also focusing on strategic and necessary investments in public safety, affordable housing, public health, and transportation. Therefore, I am pleased to present the FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan for your consideration.

For the past two years, the County has struggled with uncertain revenue streams as the pandemic’s waviering trajectory influenced travel, dining, and spending plans. However, as I noted in my budget message last year, we have fared better than many other jurisdictions across the country. We are currently projecting that FY 2023 General Fund revenues will increase 6.83 percent over FY 2022 levels, driven primarily by strong real estate and personal property values. As part of the FY 2023 fiscal forecast presented to the Board in November, we shared that our total real estate base was estimated to increase by just under seven percent, with significant increases in residential equalization and slight declines on the non-residential side. Based on the Department of Tax Administration’s final analysis, both residential and non-residential categories came in stronger – with residential equalization at 9.57 percent and non-residential now positive at 2.27 percent. Although this is good news for the strength of the County’s real estate market, these increases will result in significant impacts to our residents. With no change in the current Real Estate Tax rate of $1.14 per $100 of assessed value, the average tax bill will increase by over $666. Anticipating that the Board will wish to alleviate the impact to our taxpayers, we have left a balance of almost $80 million in this proposal for the Board’s consideration.
I will note that, historically, we have seen the largest residential equalization increases in categories which include more affordable homes, such as condominiums and townhomes. However, this year, as many of our residents look for more square footage to accommodate long-term teleworking arrangements, single-family homes are seeing the largest surges in values. Overall, single-family home assessments have increased almost 11 percent, while townhomes have grown just under 9 percent and condominiums slightly under 4 percent.

It is also important to note the action that the Board has already taken to expand the County’s tax relief program for the elderly and disabled. With the ordinance passed on December 7, 2021, it is estimated that more than 2,000 additional residents will qualify for tax relief as a result of increased income and net worth limits, as well as the exclusion from the net worth calculation of up to five acres of land that cannot be subdivided. In 2023, the program will be expanded even further, with the addition of a 75 percent tax relief bracket and the introduction of a tax deferral program. These adjustments mark the first updates to the program since FY 2006. The projected revenue reduction associated with this program change as well as baseline funding to support the additional positions approved by the Board at the FY 2022 Mid-Year Review to implement the expanded program are included in this proposal.

Based on the impact that the pandemic has had worldwide on supply chains and the manufacturing of technological components, we are also seeing tremendous impacts on vehicle values and Personal Property Tax projections. As new cars are in limited supply and used cars appreciate in value, our projections as we were building this budget proposal indicated increases in the average vehicle levy of approximately 15.5 percent, based on November 2021 values. However, updated vehicle values from JD Power as of January 2022 now indicate an increase of over 33 percent in the average vehicle levy in the County. This increase – combined with the declining impact of state Personal Property Tax Relief Act (PPTRA) funds (which have been frozen at $211 million since FY 2007) – will have a significant impact on Personal Property Tax bills. With no changes to the Personal Property Tax rate or the methodology utilized to value vehicles for purposes of assessing the tax, the average tax bill will increase by $181 and additional revenues of $83 million beyond what is included in this proposal could be realized.

Based on the unprecedented nature of these increases, staff recommends discussing options with the Board at an upcoming Budget Committee meeting. It is important to note that as supply chains rebound, it is likely that the upward pressure on vehicle values will begin to soften. Therefore, a portion of these increased revenues should be considered short-term in nature, and spending these funds on recurring expenses is strongly discouraged.

Administering the County’s tax programs in a just manner is of paramount importance to building trust with the community. During the first year of the pandemic, the Board took action to extend deadlines for Real Estate and Personal Property tax payments and temporarily adjusted late payment penalties for taxpayers experiencing financial hardships. During these difficult times for many of our residents, staff has continued to look at policies to determine if there are changes that can be made to assist taxpayers. As part of this proposal, we are recommending eliminating the 10 percent penalty for late filing of vehicle registrations, which is assessed if a resident fails to register a vehicle with the County within 60 days of purchase or move-in. Instead, the County will automatically register vehicles using data from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles. In order to implement this change, staff will bring the necessary ordinance changes before the Board.

To the extent possible, we have tried to limit tax and fee increases as part of this budget proposal, although some increases are required based on the specific circumstances of the programs they
support. The collection rate for residents within the County’s approved sanitary districts is proposed to increase by $75 to $475 per home in FY 2023. In FY 2021, as a response to the pandemic, the proposed collection rate increase from $385 to $400 was deferred and the rate was instead reduced to $370 to provide a credit for reduced service levels due to COVID-19. In FY 2022, the annual collection rate was increased to $400 per home. The delay in increasing the rate – and the one-year reduction – has impacted the fund’s financial position, resulting in reduced fund balances and requiring the deferral of needed capital investments. The increase in FY 2023 is necessary to cover increasing costs related to salaries and capital equipment. Similarly, we are recommending that sewer charges be increased by 5.95 percent in FY 2023. The five-year sewer rate plan approved by the Board as part of the FY 2022 Adopted Budget Plan had proposed to increase sewer charges by 7.4 percent in FY 2023, but the recommended rates have been reduced after careful review. With the 5.95 percent increase, impacting both the Sewer Service Charge and the Base Charge, the average annual customer bill will increase by $38.08. Additional revenues will be used for capital investment and to address costs required to meet more stringent nitrogen discharge limitations.

Some residents may wonder why we need to rely upon increased County revenues to fund our priorities this year, since we have been fortunate to receive significant stimulus dollars over the past two years. While it is true that Fairfax County and FCPS have jointly received over $1 billion in direct federal stimulus or pass-through funds from the state, it is important to note that those funds are one-time in nature, with a majority of the funds accompanied by restrictive spending parameters and arduous reporting requirements. The Board’s focus in utilizing these funds has been to implement public health programs to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic and to assist residents and small businesses that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. With the final tranche of American Rescue Plan Act funds expected in the spring, and no significant additional stimulus anticipated after receipt of those funds, it is imperative that we continue to utilize our funds judiciously.

Although most of the funds have been used for direct community assistance, we have been able to take advantage of stimulus dollars to provide initial funding for a number of initiatives which were driven by the pandemic, mandated by the state, or aligned with longstanding County priorities. This includes strengthening our public health preparedness and coordinated services planning staff, adding school health nurse positions to address a new state-mandated staffing ratio, and implementing a co-responder model to respond more appropriately to behavioral health crisis calls. When utilizing one-time stimulus funds for recurring adjustments, we have relied upon the same practice that we have always used when funding recurring items as part of a quarterly review – we include the necessary funding in the following year’s baseline budget. As a result, you will see a number of adjustments included in this proposal that have been initially funded with stimulus funds or were previously approved as part of the FY 2021 Carryover Review or FY 2022 Mid-Year Review.

Also released today is the FY 2023-FY 2027 Advertised Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The County’s capital program has received renewed interest following the work of the Joint County/Schools CIP Committee, and the proposed plan today incorporates many of the recommendations that came out of that work. As part of the adoption of the FY 2023 budget, staff recommends that the Board formally update the County’s Ten Principles of Sound Financial Management to reflect an increased annual bond sale limit of $400 million, up from the current limit of $300 million. With this change, we will gradually increase our annual sales for both County and Schools over the coming years, beginning with the January 2023 sale. The increase will ultimately allow us to expand the capability of our...
In the short-term, it will alleviate some of the pressures that have been building from project delays – in part attributable to COVID-19 – and the impact that a growing Metro need has had on the rest of the County bond program.

The Committee recommended setting aside the equivalent of one penny on the Real Estate Tax rate to be used for required debt service payments resulting from the increased sales and for capital paydown – or pay-as-you-go – expenses. Based on other spending requirements, particularly those related to compensation, this budget does not include the allocation of a full penny. However, we have included a $5 million investment – split evenly between County and Schools – which can be used for capital paydown in FY 2023, as debt service requirements will not increase until next year. Our hope is that we can continue to build this investment to the full penny over time.

As part of our overall review of our bond and capital program, we examined our upcoming planned bond referendum to ensure that we are timing our questions to the voters appropriately. We have determined that a slowdown in the bond program is necessary in order to address a backlog of outstanding bonds. This backlog has gradually increased based on project delays only exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic, higher Metro contribution requirements, and changes in project scopes. As the Board may recall, we have recently requested Board approval twice to extend our timeframe for selling bonds by two years, extending the normal eight-year limit to ten years. And based on projections, it is anticipated that additional extensions will be required in the coming years.

As a result, we are recommending that the County place no referenda on the ballot in November 2022. The previously planned referendum for 2022 was relatively small and included public safety and early childhood facilities. As there are still many outstanding projects from the 2015 and 2018 Public Safety bond referenda, being able to progress on new projects would be difficult. And we have had great success in identifying funds for early childhood facilities outside of the bond program, such as the almost $10 million identified as part of the FY 2021 Carryover Review for the Kingstowne Complex Childcare Center. Additionally, most referenda are proposed to be delayed by two years, with six years between referenda (instead of four years). Planned School and Metro referenda remain unchanged. We do not anticipate that this will impact project timelines or have other negative impacts on our program. These adjustments should help with the backlog of bonds that need to be sold and position the County to better take advantage of the increased sales limits in the future.

The Joint County/Schools CIP Committee was successful in part due to the focus for County and Schools elected leaders and staff to understand the challenges that each entity was experiencing and develop recommendations that would be beneficial to both. As we have experienced over the past years – and certainly during the course of the pandemic – the County and Schools are both better positioned for success when we work collaboratively towards our shared focus of Lifelong Education and Learning. I have enjoyed a close working relationship with Superintendent Brabrand since I arrived in Fairfax County several years ago, and I hope to build a similar relationship with his successor following his retirement later this year.

In his Proposed Budget, the Superintendent included funding for a number of priorities, including a strong compensation program for Schools employees. As we discussed as part of the November fiscal forecast discussion, recruitment and retention issues have been challenges for both the County and Schools, and a majority of the funding requested in the Superintendent’s budget is included to address this significant area of concern. Despite projected increases in sales tax and state aid, the Superintendent’s General Fund transfer request was an increase of $112.65 million – or 5.18 percent. Recognizing the importance of focusing on employee compensation, this proposed budget fully funds the Superintendent’s transfer request. Including required adjustments for
School Debt Service and $2.5 million in additional capital funding as I discussed earlier, the total increase for Schools as part of the FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan is $117.90 million.

On the County side, disbursements are recommended to increase by $127.84 million, with a majority of those funds going towards employee compensation. As directed by the Board of Supervisors in the approved FY 2023 Budget Guidance and in recognition of the serious recruitment and retention issues that many County agencies are facing, I have prioritized compensation for County employees in this budget. I am recommending full funding of the calculated 4.01 percent Market Rate Adjustment (MRA) as well as performance, merit, and longevity increases. If approved, this will mark the first time since FY 2019 that the County’s full compensation program has been funded.

In addition, funding has been included to adjust job classes that have fallen behind relative to the market – job classes that include those which have been the most impacted by the pandemic and are experiencing the most severe recruitment and retention challenges, such as behavioral health specialists, public health nurses, and public safety communicators. As discussed at the February 1, 2022 Personnel Committee meeting, we are increasing the pay adjustments associated with benchmark regrades, moving to a standard five percent adjustment per grade. Additionally, instead of implementing these adjustments in July, these pay increases will go into next month’s paychecks, providing a needed boost to recruitment and retention efforts.

Although these benchmark changes will benefit many of our employees, there is no impact to our uniformed Fire and Rescue, Sheriff, or Police employees, as these job classes were found to be within our market comparison parameters. However, we recognize that public safety agencies are also struggling to reduce vacancies and are losing uniformed employees to retirement as employees who joined the County during hiring surges in the 2000s reach retirement age. Therefore, I am recommending a new 25-year longevity step for all of our uniformed pay plans. This should incentivize employees to further their careers with the County and hopefully help curb the tide of rising retirements.

In total, proposed pay increases included in this budget average 6.16 percent for non-uniformed merit employees and 7.86 percent for uniformed merit employees. These averages do not include increases associated with benchmark regrades, so employees in job classes that are out of market will see additional adjustments.

Outside of compensation, proposed adjustments included in the FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan are included to meet a variety of needs, including the scheduled opening of new facilities and parks; continued investments in affordable housing, Diversion First, and the Opioid Task Force; required funding for Metro and Connector; and baseline adjustments resulting from prior Board actions. A detailed list of all adjustments included in this proposal, organized by the ten priority areas as included in the recently adopted Countywide Strategic Plan, follows this letter. Additionally, brief descriptions of all General Fund adjustments are included in the Advertised Budget Summary. I highlight some of the more significant County adjustments below.

As we have done over the past two years, we are continuing to make investments in our Health priority area. Increased funds included in the FY 2023 proposal support the County’s Diversion First and Opioid Task Force initiatives. We have also included significant baseline funds for positions added as part of the FY 2021 Carryover Review and initially funded with federal stimulus dollars,
including School Health Nurse positions to meet the new state mandated staffing ratios and positions to aid in the County’s public health preparedness.

An important component of the Housing and Neighborhood Livability area is the need to have quality, affordable housing available to County residents. Included in the Board’s FY 2023 Budget Guidance was the directive to include the equivalent of one half-penny on the Real Estate tax rate as additional funding on top of the existing half-penny in both FY 2022 and FY 2023 for the County’s affordable housing program, either using County dollars or federal stimulus dollars. Based on total allocations of $30 million from the County’s ARPA Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, a total of $10 million allocated as part of the FY 2021 Carryover Review and FY 2022 Mid-Year Review, and $5 million in baseline funds included in my FY 2023 proposal, we have already surpassed this goal. In total, including County and federal funds allocated for the current fiscal year and projected for FY 2023, we are committing over $73 million to this important initiative.

Just as we are investing in housing opportunities for our residents, so too are we investing resources to assist our vulnerable residents beyond their housing needs. In the area of Empowerment and Support for Residents Facing Vulnerability, we have included funds to boost our Consolidated Community Funding Pool, provide for new positions to meet increased demand for domestic and sexual violence services, and support the County’s Children’s Advocacy Center. Additionally, this proposal includes baseline funds for initiatives previously approved by the Board, including the new Co-Responder Model, augmented behavioral health services, and staffing to support the Emergency Rental Assistance program – all initially supported through stimulus funds. Other baseline adjustments, including increased staffing in Child Protective Services and additional public assistance eligibility workers, were previously approved as part of quarterly reviews with County funds.

Another area where we have been successful in utilizing federal stimulus funds is in Mobility and Transportation. With federal funds available to WMATA as well as funds directed to the County’s Connector system, we have been able to avoid significant funding increases in these areas over the past two years. WMATA stimulus funds have been used to offset the County’s required subsidy to Metro, while Connector funds have been used to offset revenue losses. However, these one-time funds are not sufficient in FY 2023 to fully cover cost increases. With gas tax revenue recovering, but not back to pre-pandemic levels, and state aid balances that have largely been spent down, additional General Fund resources are required and have been included in the FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan.

Many of the adjustments related to Safety and Security in the FY 2023 proposal relate to new facilities that have recently opened or are anticipated to open in FY 2023. In last year’s budget, we recommended phasing in staffing for the new Scotts Run Fire Station based on resource constraints, including positions only to staff a Medic Unit. As part of this budget, the remaining positions required are included, including positions to staff a Fire Engine and support positions. Additionally, positions to begin staffing the new South County Animal Shelter are included. Based on the timing of the opening of the facility – currently projected for late FY 2023 – additional positions will be considered in future budget processes as the timing of the facility opening becomes clearer. We have also included funding to support the Office of the Commonwealth’s Attorney, in line with a multi-year strategy to increase resources, as well as funding to provide electronic control weapons so that all uniformed officers in enforcement units have these devices when on patrol.

The Ten Priority Areas included in the Countywide Strategic plan include:

- Cultural and Recreational Opportunities
- Economic Opportunity
- Effective and Efficient Government
- Empowerment and Support for Residents Facing Vulnerability
- Health
- Environment
- Housing and Neighborhood Livability
- Lifelong Education and Learning
- Mobility and Transportation
- Safety and Security
Similar to Safety and Security, much of the new investment in the area of **Cultural and Recreational Opportunities** is related to the opening of new facilities, although we have also included funding specifically to address equitable access to Parks services. This Social Equity pilot program would support the development of a strategy to significantly expand the Park Authority’s existing scholarship program and approach to serving residents living in disadvantaged areas of the County. Working with staff from the One Fairfax office and human services partners, income and eligibility definitions will be developed to offer fee reductions based on demonstrated financial need. Staffing and funding is also included to support the new Patriot Park North Complex – scheduled to be completed this December – which was a priority of the Sports Tourism Task Force. We have also included adjustments for the new Sully Community Center and Community Center in the Lee District, as well as expanded programming associated with the South County Teen and Senior Centers that have relocated to the Original Mount Vernon High School facility. Lastly, in accordance with the Board’s Budget Guidance, baseline funding is also included for Celebrate Fairfax (CFI) as part of the multi-year approach to Recover, Rebuild, and Relaunch from the disruption caused by the pandemic. This funding will allow CFI to staff the new PARC (People, Arts, Recreation, and Community) site full-time and expand the number of events held in the community.

As I noted last year, the area of **Economic Opportunity** was one where we have been incredibly successful in utilizing stimulus funds in order to help our residents and small businesses rebound from the impacts of the pandemic. With the successful implementation of the RISE and PIVOT grant programs, followed by the recent discussions with the Board regarding the new THRIVE program, the County has taken significant steps to target our available funds to assist in the economic recovery of the County. Our FY 2023 proposal includes baseline funding for positions previously approved to support unemployed and underemployed workers negatively impacted by the pandemic, as well as funding to support seven new School-Age Child Care classrooms. Safe and affordable childcare is an essential element for residents to be able to fully participate in the workforce and increase their financial self-sufficiency.

Many of the investments that have been recently made in the area of the **Environment** have been approved as part of quarterly reviews, including almost $19 million approved as part of the FY 2021 Carryover Review. Those funds have been programmed for projects to reduce carbon emissions and begin to implement the County’s Zero Waste plan, continue to convert streetlights to LEDs, and support electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. Baseline funding to support new positions added at Carryover to support these initiatives has been included in the FY 2023 proposal. In addition, funding has been included to support the Sustainable Procurement Program, which considers supply chain emissions, prioritizes low- or no-carbon solutions, and works to achieve zero waste when selecting vendors and making procurement decisions, in accordance with the County’s Energy Strategy.

Our final priority area is **Effective and Efficient Government**, which covers a broad range of investments. These include additional resources for the Office of Elections to expand early voting and support no-excuse absentee voting, as well as for elections software and equipment; additional support for the Board of Supervisors offices, including $100,000 for each Supervisor’s office and $200,000 for the Chairman’s office; and additional positions to support workload requirements in Capital Facilities and at the County’s expanded warehouse space. Funding and positions are also included for the County’s Language Access program, which will provide guidance, training, and resources to expand translation services and ensure that language is not a barrier to accessing County information, in line with the County’s One Fairfax policy. Also included in this category are Information Technology investments. Included in this proposal is funding for technology infrastructure needs, particularly to boost the financial position of our PC Replacement program.
Hardware and licensing costs have increased, especially as the County’s technology has been expected to support a more mobile workforce. For the past two years, we have used CARES Coronavirus Relief Funds to offset some expenses, such as new laptop purchases and expanded licensing costs for teleworking software. However, it is important that baseline funding be added to ensure that appropriate resources are in place to meet replacement needs. Staff is also in the process of revising our methodology for determining chargebacks to agencies to ensure that charges are right-sized based on the specific hardware and software requirements of individual agencies.

I am also recommending several organizational changes as part of this proposed budget which have no net financial impact. The first is the creation of the new Fund 40200, Land Development Services (LDS), which moves all activities in the current agency in the General Fund to its own Special Revenue Fund. The new fund will be fully supported by the fees charged by LDS, with reserves held to sustain operations through periods of economic uncertainty, and will allow for greater transparency and clarity regarding the use of those fees. Any excess revenues at year-end will stay in the fund and may be used for future investment or to help finance operating activities when fee revenues do not fully support expenses. The self-sustaining nature of the fund also will allow for more flexibility in responding to market demands to increase staff and resources, as land development fees will cover land development activities.

Additionally, several organizational changes are included to more appropriately align programs and services within the health and human services system. This includes the transfer of Adult Day Health Care and Long-term Care Services from the Health Department to the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) and the Department of Family Services (DFS); the transfer of Community Action (including the Community Services Block Grant revenue which is allocated through the Consolidated Community Funding Pool process) from DFS to NCS; and shifting the billing administration of the Medical Care for Children Partnership (MCCP) from DFS to the MCCP Foundation, which is funded out of the County’s Contributory Fund.

The FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan also includes over $4 million in identified savings. This includes a $2.5 million reduction in the County’s required contribution for Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEBs). As part of the latest valuation, the County reached full funding of its OPEB liability – a remarkable achievement that very few jurisdictions have accomplished. As a result, the required contribution to the OPEB Trust Fund can be reduced by $2.5 million. We also examined and increased indirect costs charged to agencies outside the General Fund for central support services provided by agencies including Human Resources, Purchasing, Budget and Finance. These costs had not been adjusted in several years, recognizing that some other funds were experiencing fiscal constraints, but small increases are proposed as part of this plan.

This budget proposal includes a net increase of 109 positions, with these positions spread across each of the ten Strategic Plan priority areas. Many of the new positions are associated with new facilities such as the Scotts Run Fire Station, South County Animal Shelter, Sully Community Center, and Patriot Park North. Others are included to support long-standing priority initiatives such as the Diversion First program, Opioid Task Force, and affordable housing. Others are associated with workload requirements, including those in the Office of the Commonwealth’s Attorney and Office of Capital Facilities. It should also be noted that the total position increase includes positions in other funds – such as the McLean Community Center and the County’s Stormwater and Wastewater funds – which have no General Fund impact. Some may question adding positions during a time when we are experiencing significant recruitment and retention challenges. However, my hope is that with a robust compensation program in FY 2023, combined with declining COVID-19 cases, we will start to see falling vacancy rates. As our agencies are faced with service demands from our residents and
with the need to ensure that our facilities are staffed appropriately, I want them to have the flexibility they need to hire employees as necessary.

I am incredibly proud of the work that we have been able to accomplish together over the past two years as we have endured during these unprecedented times. My hope is that FY 2023 will find us turning a final corner on the pandemic, although certainly we will not leave behind the lessons that we have learned throughout. With regard to this proposal, I am especially thankful for the exceptional County staff who contributed to the development of the FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan. And I am thankful for my continued positive relationships which each of you as we work towards adoption of the FY 2023 budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Bryan J. Hill
County Executive