



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

March 23, 2021

TO: Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman and Members
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Edward H. Blum, Chairman *EHB*
Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee (ITPAC)

SUBJECT: FY 2022 ITPAC Budget Letter to the Board of Supervisors

The Covid 19 pandemic has greatly challenged the County government. The increased support for work-from-home and remote resident services has highlighted the necessity for and also strained IT provision. DIT has handled the expanded online needs of employees and citizens as well as the IT mobilization of the Health Department's vaccination program. In setting up the vital vaccination program, Health and DIT dealt with frequently changing requirements from the Federal and state governments as well as apps for scheduling and vaccine administration that proved inadequate (and have also plagued other jurisdictions).

Although the IT issues with the vaccine Phase 1B appear to have been resolved satisfactorily, ITPAC notes that the larger populations yet to be scheduled may require additional funds for further scheduling system enhancements as well as ease of use improvements, including promised multi-lingual capabilities. These, once established and maintained, should help the County respond well and quickly to future emergencies.

The County has adapted quickly to changing requirements even as Covid needs grew and circumstances and technology rapidly evolved. DIT established a framework to allow Boards, Authorities and Commissions to meet remotely. It implemented enhancement to the ability of staff to work remotely. It provided support, expertise and solutions for front-line agencies including Health. ITPAC commends the DIT team for leadership and professionalism in addressing the many technology-related challenges.

As input to the FY22 budget, ITPAC is advising on some of the County's IT plans. This assessment draws on our expertise as IT professionals as well as regular interactions with DIT senior leadership reviewing citizen services, staff facilitating, cost effective technology use, technology strategy and IT investments.

Continue to Increase Investments in IT

Strategic, effective use of IT enables and enhances substantial parts of County services. It must play a significant role in maximizing opportunities for handling current and anticipated challenges. Even with revenue uncertainties and other serious community needs, *it is important to strengthen IT investments.*

The County is wisely moving towards more agile and adaptable processes. DIT must have the financial ability to address changing requirements as County needs grow and technology and circumstances rapidly evolve. DIT must be able to pivot as needed to address new opportunities and repurpose resources. We

support DIT being a “positive disruptor” in using IT to improve residents’ services and satisfaction. Technologies delivered must achieve County goals and be sustainable. *ITPAC strongly supports fully following the County’s IT Roadmap.*

Additional recurring funds will be required to support the mobile, flexible workforce mission, especially for software licensing costs. The costs per license are increasing. The County will need additional licenses as the numbers of people with mobile capabilities and access to County systems increase. Workforce mobility and greater citizen online access are key components of the way local government is projected to operate into the future and needs to be supported in budget planning.

Key Challenges to Achieving the Mission

Being an Attractive Technology Employer: DIT is continually challenged to identify, hire and retain needed IT talent. As the metropolitan region continues to build its reputation as a hub for IT and cyber-security talent, the marketplace for that talent is growing much more competitive. Many IT professionals are lured to private sector employers with compensation and at speeds the County’s pay structure and hiring practices cannot match.

The problem is expected to worsen quickly. Currently over 20 percent of DIT staff is either in DROP or eligible to retire at any time. By the end of CY 2022, that percentage will be approximately 33 percent.

Protection of Wide-Spread County Data: Cyber threats are growing and the County’s technology footprint is expanding. Timely deployment of security protection must ensure resilient and uninterrupted operations as well as robust protected access to data. This is now a key component of the County’s overall security infrastructure.

Proliferation of data and growing value of data analytics: Data is quickly expanding for new applications, more users and services. The productive use of this data drastically increases requirements for hardware, software and experts to gather, manage, preserve and analyze data. This is critical to support service efficiency and productivity for County agencies. Satisfying demand for these new capabilities must be balanced with investments to maintain existing automation.

Agencies’ Business Process Transformations: As operating agencies seek to be more efficient through process transformation, proposed changes often have significant IT implications. To achieve effective and successful results, it is critical for DIT to be engaged early in the process working as a trusted partner. When developing cost plans, it is important to consider IT implications (both within the agency affected and in DIT) to achieve the goals and long-term sustainability.

Agility and Time Required to Execute Contracts: The County would benefit greatly from increased contracting agility and reduced time to execute IT contracts. Technology advances rapidly, but contracting rarely does. Current law and other related requirements often significantly delay needed technology investments. Slow contracting for some key systems actually prevents implementation or notably increases costs.

Legacy Application Elimination for Improved Security and Supportability: It is imperative that the County transition all legacy applications to more current defensible solutions. The out-of-date systems are difficult to maintain and integrate into County networks. Beyond that, they are targets for cyber intrusion and hard to protect. Funding must be allocated to aggressively replace these compromising millstones.

Efficiency and Effectiveness Recommendations

ITPAC supports the following for more effective and equitable use of resources.

1. Focus on projects and expenditures that increase mobility and improve the ability for a mobile, nimble workforce to conduct County business remotely while maintaining strong security.
2. Collaborate and partner with others (such as FCPS or IT companies with a significant local presence) to co-create solutions and services. Examples include predictive analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and other related “smart/connected communities” applications.
3. Seek ways to provide equitable access to computer technology, needed training and internet services across Fairfax County.
4. Expand work on enterprise-wide data governance with analytics and secure citizen portals.

Additional FY22 Recommendation Highlights

- Implement the phased funding strategy noted in the recent memo to the Board to advance the DIT Strategic Roadmap. The approach seeks to align General Fund support and charges to other agencies with ongoing costs (such as staffing, software licensing costs and security measures) while one-time funds will support projects. This is a sound plan.
- Continue the innovative multi-year, multi-budget process investment strategy for major IT projects such as the Planning Land Use System (PLUS), the Human Services Integrative Roadmap and other similar projects to achieve operational improvements while benefiting from technology innovations and providing timely funding.
- Provide additional funding as needed to obtain and maintain required licenses for software and other core systems. Costs here are increasing rapidly throughout the industry and will continue to grow in future years.

Conclusion

The County’s IT Program continues to be acknowledged as a national best practice for governance, investment and a low-risk delivery model. It has continually delivered relevant technology solutions supporting the Board’s goals and strategies for government service efficiencies. This excellence merits strong continued support.

As the County’s reliance on technology continues to increase, the County must stay abreast of the latest technologies to meet its goals and protect its operations. ITPAC appreciates the opportunity to have direct input into the County’s IT processes and will continue to support the County’s best practices for technology governance and implementation.

Cc:

Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee

Joseph Mondoro, Chief Financial Officer

Gregory Scott, Chief Technology Officer

Christina Jackson, Director, Department of Management and Budget

NOTE:

ITPAC consists of 15 citizens with technology knowledge, expertise and experience. Each BOS member appoints one ITPAC member. The others are appointed by the Fairfax County School Board, the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Civic Associations, the League of Women Voters and the Northern Virginia Technology Council. ITPAC meets regularly with DIT leadership to review and advise on plans, challenges and IT solutions and developments occurring in the Federal government as well as the private sector.