



# County of Fairfax, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

December 8, 2023

**TO:** Bryan Hill  
County Executive

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

**SUBJECT:** FY 2025 ITPAC Interim Budget Letter to the County Executive

ITPAC is a Fairfax County Advisory Committee comprised of citizens with significant government and IT industry expertise. In regular interactions with the County's Department of Information Technology (DIT) senior leadership, the members of ITPAC recommend options for addressing Fairfax IT challenges and opportunities with current technology and methods.

Fairfax County is perennially recognized as a high-achieving county with first-class IT management. Thus, expectations are elevated for DIT to deliver quality IT-based citizen services and staff support using innovative technology solutions with cost-effective IT investments. DIT employs agile development methods using a flexible technology infrastructure and strategies aligned with County objectives.

It is a major challenge to meet expectations during fiscal stress such as now. All county agencies have been asked to submit a reduction plan of 7% for the FY 2025 budget process. Although these reductions may not become part of the FY 2025 budget, it is critical that IT be spared as much as possible with reductions only a last resort. In fact, ITPAC understands it is important to expand and strengthen IT investments during these periods. Technology Investments are critical to achieving savings in other areas of the county budget and they will produce additional IT savings over time. Also, serious new community needs exist with expanding technology-related requirements.

**County Successes:** ITPAC recognizes IT operation and leadership are County strengths.

**DIT Earns National IT Best Practice Award:** The County's IT Program continues to be acknowledged as a national best practice. It is praised for its governance, investment, and low-risk delivery model producing cost-effective technology solutions supporting the Board's goals. For 2023, Fairfax County received first place in the Center for Digital Government's Digital Counties Survey for jurisdictions with populations greater than 1 million. The survey honors the innovative use of emerging technologies, enhanced cybersecurity, and strengthened digital equity initiatives. This is not a finish line crossed, but a success marker reflective of a citizen and business community that has high expectations of the County's commitment to effective technology. Maintaining this success will require ongoing and consistent investments in technology.

**Tax System Upgrades and Planning Land Use System (PLUS) Improved Service:** Recent technology upgrades to tax systems have greatly benefited County taxpayers by reducing personal property tax transaction times and decreasing the need for in-person payments. Also, significant increases in permit volume with reduced processing times have emerged with the updated Planning and Land Use System, the County's platform for online permit applications.

ARPA Funds Used to Support Security Infrastructure and Replacement of Network Switches: DIT used Federal ARPA funds to enhance its security infrastructure. It expanded and strengthened the County’s “Defense in Depth” approach with improvements in the detection and remediation of vulnerabilities. It allowed cloud integration and further capability enhancement. ARPA funds are also supporting the second phase of the county’s network infrastructure upgrade, replacing network switches that are at or beyond end-of-life.

**Effectiveness and Efficiency Investment Recommendations:** ITPAC supports the following investments, crucial to guaranteeing the dependability, expandability, and effectiveness of County IT.

Cyber Security: Investment in cyber security technologies and expertise is paramount. Having current security systems reduces the risk of disruptions to County operations and services.

Steps to Bring IT to Its Optimal State: As the Chief Technology Officer noted in correspondence with the County Executive, despite the budget situation, County IT must be brought to an optimal state. Specifically, IT-related needs in these five key areas must be addressed.

- Infrastructure Requirements:  
With the County’s critical data-driven initiatives, storage use and computing are expanding rapidly necessitating substantial investment. Included are the establishment of data lakes and a focus on data curation and cleanliness. Upgrading hardware is imperative for throughput processing.
- Cloud Expansion:  
DIT will need to extend the use of cloud services to offload workloads encompassing Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and Intrusion Detection and Prevention (IDP).
- Applications Modernization:  
DIT’s extensive application portfolio which does not always leverage current technology must be updated. Some parts rely on an outdated Framework with end-of-life in 2026. Addressing this may mean staff augmentation and/or implementation of best practices such as containerization, DevOps and RPA (Robotic Process Automation).
- Phone System Replacement:  
DIT is looking to address deficiencies in the phone system whose architecture cannot accommodate all the requirements of the County’s current mobile workforce.
- New Technology and Training:  
To keep pace with evolving technology and expand needed capabilities, it is imperative to allocate funds for acquiring new technology when needed and providing ongoing staff training to support it.

**Other areas requiring investment include:**

Hybrid Operation: The Remote Access Project and other options are needed to improve the workforce’s ability to function both remotely and on premises securely.

Enterprise Data Analytics: Work on enterprise-wide data governance with analytics and citizen portals must be expanded to leverage the enormous value of County data for making more effective decisions.

*Equitable Technology Access:* DIT should seek ways to incorporate equitable access to technology across the County.

*Collaboration with Partners for Growth:* With others in the area (such as FCPS or IT companies with a large local presence), co-create services such as predictive analytics and “smart/connected communities.”

**Challenges to Achieving the Mission:** ITPAC recommends acting to address these longstanding items.

*Hiring Impediments with IT Staff Approaching Retirement:* DIT struggles to hire and retain the high-level talent required to compete in the DMV marketplace. Issues include non-competitive compensation, hiring responsiveness, limitation on home location and telework restrictions. The business impact of this situation will be felt soon as nearly 25% of DIT staff are in DROP or eligible to retire shortly.

*Protection of County Data:* Cyber threats continue to grow and become more sophisticated. Timely deployment of security protection across the entire County network is necessary to ensure resilient and uninterrupted operations, while protecting access to a wide variety of data. This must continue to be a budget priority.

*Growing Value of Data Analytics with Data Proliferating:* Data expansion and increased use drastically escalates the need for technology to gather, manage, preserve and analyze data.

*Agencies' Business Process Transformations:* As agencies seek more efficiency through process transformation, proposals often have significant IT implications. To achieve effective results, DIT must be engaged early as a partner for the program to be cost-effective and have long-term sustainability.

*Agility and Time Required to Execute Contracts:* The County would greatly benefit from increased contracting agility and faster contract awarding. Current processes often extend the time required to implement technology. This can increase implementation cost and even prevent implementation entirely.

**Additional FY25 Recommendation Highlights:** ITPAC also supports the following initiatives.

- Use any remaining Federal funds and other revenue sources to make more IT investments. This includes any funding designated for broadband coverage equity and other areas in DIT's purview.
- Continue the innovative multi-budget process investment strategy for major IT projects, allowing timely funding for multi-year projects such as the recently implemented PLUS system, the Human Services Integrative Roadmap and similar major projects.
- Provide additional funds needed to obtain and maintain required licenses for software and other core systems. Costs are increasing rapidly and will continue to grow in future years.

**Conclusion:** As with other large high performing organizations, the County's reliance on technology continues to increase. With the need to protect against constantly evolving cyber threats and the rapid advance in the use of information and technology to deliver services, the County must stay abreast of the latest technologies and applications to meet its goals. ITPAC appreciates the opportunity to assist the County to achieve best practices in technology governance and implementation strategies.

Cc:  
Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee  
Gregory Scott, Chief Technology Officer  
Christina Jackson, Chief Financial Officer  
Ellicia Seard-McCormick, Deputy County Executive