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Board Matter

February 11, 2020

Mr. Chairman – Today I am pleased to bring forward a motion that addresses a set of issues that I know have been a priority of yourself personally, as well as this Board for quite some time.

My motions are designed to work within the parameters outlined in the County's Economic Success Plan, and directly address some of the most pressing concerns discussed at the most recent Economic Advisory Committee (EAC) Meeting.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the Richmond Highway Corridor is entering a tremendous period of opportunity.

From the onset of the widening of the Corridor and the adoption of the Embark plan, to the groundbreaking on both Amazon's HQ2 and Virginia Tech's innovation campus, Route One is poised to morph into an economic powerhouse that extends from the Pentagon to Fort Belvoir.

As a former economic development professional, it's clear to me that the commercial future of the Richmond Corridor is also extremely precarious. With a job base drastically leveraged into the retail and service industry sectors, the Corridor is currently on course to experience significant disruption and economic challenges given the speed at which emerging technology is drastically transforming those sectors.

However, by strategically investing in the very sectors that are disrupting our jobs base we can turn those trends in our favor, and avert the financial regression the Corridor will experience as the retail industry continues to be redefined by new technologies.

Furthermore, such an investment would create training, apprenticeship, and employment opportunities for those that live, work, and send their children to school along the Historic Richmond Highway Corridor.

Mr. Chairman, I recognize that these kinds of opportunities do not culminate out of thin air. This Board has committed a tremendous investment into the transportation infrastructure serving both Mount Vernon and Lee, and I applaud those efforts in the strongest possible terms.

Furthermore Mr. Chairman, I recognize the almost incalculable contributions that both you and Supervisor Storck have made to cultivate the Corridor's current posture. It's only through the sum of your combined efforts that I am comfortable making the motions that I will propose here today.

For reasons outside of any one person's or entity's control, and in spite of the efforts that I just mentioned, the Route One Corridor has not seen any significant new office development in a generation, and virtually zero development in the job creating sectors of the future.

Route One is in a stagnant commercial cycle, and now is the perfect moment to break that cycle.

With Amazon's and Virginia Tech's investment to our North, and the reliable stream of contractors seeking proximity to Fort Belvoir, I believe that the Mount Vernon-Lee area is the ideal ecosystem for the placement of a technology accelerator and co-working center.

Such a facility would be the perfect catalyst for bringing the initial outside investment necessary to break the cycle of stagnant commercial development, and largely undiversified employment options for those living in the Route One area.

Dissimilar to other such investments the County has previously made, such as Refraction, the project that I am proposing would be a public-private-partnership focused on the development and demonstration of emerging technology, providing both a makers space, as well as a coworking component designed to accelerate government contractors and entrepreneurs in emerging technology sectors.

As tenants' operations expand, add employees, and eventually outgrow the space, we would work with our partners at the Economic Development Authority to place them into existing or new spaces along the Corridor, or other strategic locations in Fairfax County.

Parallel to the clear economic development benefits, an equally important component is the educational and workforce development opportunities that will emerge for neighboring communities. The ability for our FCPS students, as well as graduates at various points in their post-secondary education to access apprenticeships and other training and employment opportunities would be significant.

The same is true for the underemployed residents of the Corridor who often must work multiple retail and service industry jobs simply to make ends meet.

Building on your long history of leadership on these issues Mr. Chairman, in addition to the stated priorities of the Economic Success Plan, the recommendations of the EAC, and the demonstrated need of our constituents, I make the following motions:

- 1.) That this Board direct the County Executive to assign the appropriate staff to identify county-owned sites along the Historic Richmond Highway Corridor that have excess capacity, and to work with partners such as the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation (SFDC) and the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority

(FCEDA) to identify privately-owned sites available for lease that could accommodate this project.

2.) That this Board direct the County Executive to assign the appropriate staff to identify potential operators with a proven track record of successfully establishing and operating similar facilities.

3.) That this Board request that staff present findings regarding available sites and a list of potential operators to the Economic Advisory Committee for a review of potential next steps—including an analysis of fiscal impacts, as well as the opportunities this initiative can generate.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make it clear that this approach is something that I am bringing forward only after deep consideration, and a significant amount of consultation with the various public and private sector partners that would be necessary to ensure that this effort is both appropriate and viable.

Additionally, I've spent a significant amount of time vetting and refining this proposal with relevant economic development staff within the County.

The Historic Richmond Highway Corridor is at a generational moment of opportunity. I respectfully ask for my colleagues' support for this motion to help address economic inequities in our community, and posture our jurisdiction in a way that leaves us better prepared to thrive in the economic landscapes of tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.