



## January 2010 “A Month in Review”

**Editor’s Note: Due to the reports of an impending major snowstorm, the Town Hall on Short and Long Term Solutions to I-66 Congestion scheduled for Saturday (2/6/2010) at Chantilly HS has been POSTPONED. I will be in touch soon with a new date and time.**

- **New Affordable Housing Plan Is Not Affordable** – The Board formally endorsed a new affordable housing policy that is focused primarily on rental subsidies. This is a really bad time to be creating an unsustainable new housing program.
- **Reaction to Changing the Equation** – The response to my article on the school budget has been extremely positive. We can keep the programs that make our schools great without increasing class size or taxes. I encourage you to contact your school board member.
- **VDOT’s Response to the December 19, 2009 Record Snowfall** – VDOT did a reasonable job responding to the major snow storm in December but there is much room for improvement. I have called for a ‘lessons learned’ session so that we all can be better prepared to handle significant snowfalls in the future. We may need many of those lessons tomorrow.
- **Utilizing the Public-Private Transportation Act (PPTA) in Fairfax County** – I supported Supervisor John Cook’s proposal that would have allowed Fairfax County to better utilize the PPTA that unfortunately failed to pass. Like me, Supervisor Cook believes that the business community can help the county come up with new ideas and creative funding sources for transportation solutions.
- **Evaluating Alternatives for Appropriating School Funds** – My request to look at an alternative way to appropriate money to the school system failed by a vote of 7-3. My idea could have given the Board of Supervisors the ability to focus our school dollars on our classrooms, students and teachers.

- **Fairfax County's Virginia Task Force 1 Returns from Haiti** - Virginia Task Force 1 (VATF-1), Fairfax County's Urban Search and Rescue Team, returned last week from Haiti after heroically saving the lives of 16 people that were trapped in rubble and wreckage.
- **Upcoming Events**
  - **Budget Town Halls with School Board Member Liz Bradsher**
    - Wednesday March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 7:00 PM at Willow Springs ES (5400 Willow Springs School Road, Fairfax, VA 22030-6323)
    - Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 7:00 PM at West Springfield High School (6100 Rolling Road Springfield, VA 22152-1599)
  - **Springfield District Tax Relief Workshop**
    - Thursday, March 18<sup>th</sup> 2010 from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM  
West Springfield Government Center

### **New Affordable Housing Plan Is Not Affordable**

On January 26, 2010, the Board of Supervisors formally endorsed a comprehensive "Housing Blueprint", a sweeping new affordable housing policy developed by the county, housing advocates, and non-profit organizations. I did not endorse this program and here's why.

Last year, due to a severe budget deficit, the Board cut the "Penny for Affordable Housing Fund" program which devoted one cent of the county's real-estate tax rate to preserve low-rent housing. As *Herrity Report* readers know, I have been a constant critic of this program. I have consistently fought to limit the scope of this program and the yearly \$20 million bankroll associated with the purchase of real estate making Fairfax County one of the largest landlords in the region.

At the Board's retreat last year, Board members acknowledged the need for affordable housing, especially for those families earning \$31,000 or less and for those with special needs. I do applaud the new housing plan's shift in emphasis from preservation and purchasing real estate to focusing housing resources on those with the greatest need and also more partnering with the non-profit community to provide creative affordable solutions. The blueprint, however, came with a price tag of up to \$10.1 million in additional county funding for FY 2011. And the price will only increase after this year. The new plan also creates a permanent welfare class with recurring rental subsidies. The program goes well beyond helping people get back on their feet and people that cannot help themselves.

The new plan is simply unaffordable. Later this month the county executive will present his proposed budget and we will be discussing in detail how to close next year's \$315 million shortfall. **This is exactly the wrong time to create an unsustainable new program that will only exacerbate our budget crisis.** Far too often this Board forgets that the tax burden in Fairfax County is already too much for many of our citizens to bear. I constantly hear from seniors or from residents who have lost their incomes and

they tell me they are on the verge of being taxed out of the county. I will not support a program that is sure to increase this burden.

### **Reaction to Changing the Equation**

On January 28th, I sent out a special edition of the *Herrity Report*, The School Budget- Changing the Equation. I am pleased to say that the response was overwhelming and unanimous in support of having the school system keep their budget reductions focused on administration. We can keep the programs that make our schools great without increasing the tax burden or class size.

I have included a link below for anyone who has not had a chance to read the article. For those of you who did read it and responded, I appreciate you taking the time to let me know how you feel. I hope that you will also email your school board member and tell them to focus our education resources on our classrooms, students, and teachers. In the end, the school board members will be making the final decision on how the money is spent.

Changing the Equation:

[http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield/pdf\\_files/herrity\\_report/january\\_2010.pdf](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield/pdf_files/herrity_report/january_2010.pdf)

### **VDOT's Response to the December 19, 2009 Record Snowfall**

In the days following the record snowfall our area experienced December 19<sup>th</sup>, my office received hundreds of calls and emails regarding the lack of treatment neighborhood streets received during and after the storm. VDOT stated in its news releases that its priorities lie with the main, more heavily traveled roadways, and that residential streets would receive treatment in the form of a one-lane path in and out; though the latter was not widely known to residents. What was especially frustrating was the inconsistency of treatment between neighborhoods with no apparent reason behind it. A good example of this occurred in two communities in the Springfield District. One received several passes with a plow while a community comparable in size approximately five miles away, received no plowing.

In addition there were numerous incidences of lanes dropping which created extremely dangerous situations once traffic returned to speed. Many turn lanes were left unplowed and there were still mountains of snow blocking right of ways in some areas weeks after the storm.

It is not often we receive 20 plus inches of snow (although at press time it appears another major storm is imminent) and to maintain the staff and equipment to quickly address such a rare snowfall would be fiscally imprudent. In general I think VDOT did a reasonable job addressing the record snows, however, as with all things in life there is room for improvement and we should not let the lessons of this record snow go to waste.

At the January 12 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board approved my motion directing the Fairfax County DOT to communicate with VDOT areas where its response was effective as well as where improvement can be made during future snow events, including how it can better distribute information on the status of the roads and its progress clearing them. The Fairfax DOT will communicate the problems discussed above as well as those identified by other Supervisors and staff. My motion also encouraged VDOT to hold a 'lessons learned' session so that we all can be better prepared to handle significant snowfalls in the future.

Although plowing is a state responsibility, if you have any concerns regarding a specific roadway, please let my office know via e-mail at [Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov) and we will communicate those concerns directly with them. You can also communicate your concerns directly to VDOT at 703-383-8368 or [novainfo@VDOT.Virginia.gov](mailto:novainfo@VDOT.Virginia.gov).

It is important to note that VDOT crews first clear interstates, primary roads and routes that connect localities, fire stations, employment hubs, military posts, schools, hospitals and other important public facilities. They will then treat secondary roads and subdivision streets, but crews will focus efforts on roads carrying the most traffic. For residential streets, it is not VDOT's practice to plow curb-to-curb, nor to bare pavement. For updates on road conditions, as well as real-time weather conditions, traffic incidents and traffic camera video, you can visit [www.511Virginia.org](http://www.511Virginia.org).

### **Evaluating Alternatives for Appropriating School Funds**

It is well known that while the Board of Supervisors (BOS) funds the school system, it ultimately has no control over how the school system spends their money. What is not well known is that instead of transferring one lump sum over to the school system, the BOS has the ability to fund the school system using nine different line items that have been established by the State Board of Education. The line items are: (i) instruction, (ii) administration, attendance, and health, (iii) pupil transportation, (iv) operation and maintenance, (v) school food services and other non instructional operations, (vi) facilities, (vii) debt and fund transfers, (viii) technology, and (ix) contingency reserves.

Last year at my request, the Board included in our FY 2011 budget guidance language requesting that we study the benefits and disadvantages of funding the school system by line item rather than one lump sum. I inserted this language into the budget guidance because I believe that funding the school system by line item would potentially give the Board the ability to make sure that our school dollars are focused on the classrooms, students and teachers, and not on administration.

I made a motion at our January 26<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting requesting that the school system submit their FY 2011 proposed budget using the nine line items for school funding as permitted by the State Board of Education. By doing this, we give ourselves the option to use this method in case further discussion leads the Board to the conclusion that using this method is an appropriate action to take. Unfortunately my motion failed 7-3. While I am disappointed in the outcome of this proposal, I assure you that I will continue to do all

that I can ensure that our education dollars are focused on our classrooms, teachers and students, and not on administration.

### **Utilizing the Public-Private Transportation Act (PPTA) in Fairfax County**

At the December 7 Board of Supervisors meeting, Braddock District Supervisor John Cook discussed the need for the county to explore new and innovative approaches to transportation. Like me, Supervisor Cook believes that the business community can help the county come up with these new ideas for transportation solutions. The passage of the Virginia PPTA in 1995 allowed localities throughout the Commonwealth the opportunity to engage with private entities on a variety of transportation projects. To utilize this opportunity, Virginia law requires that these jurisdictions first adopt a set of guidelines that would among other things, dictate how solicited and unsolicited public-private proposals would be accepted.

To bring Fairfax County in line with other local jurisdictions utilizing the PPTA approach, including Prince William, Loudoun, Stafford, and Spotsylvania Counties, Supervisor Cook asked the Board to direct staff to develop guidelines for accepting proposals and have these proposed guidelines submitted to the Board's Transportation Committee for review and discussion. When it was put to a vote, the Board voted 7-3 against this initiative. Instead of directing staff to come up with guidelines, the Board decided to send it to the Transportation Committee for further debate. I supported Supervisor Cook's motion.

Acknowledging that this is not a cure-all to our county's transportation crisis, I still believe that this is a worthy proposal and I applaud Supervisor Cook for bringing it forward. The business community can bring fresh ideas and funding options to the table and often bring projects to reality much faster than the traditional, often bureaucratic government process.

### **Fairfax County's Virginia Task Force 1 Returns from Haiti**

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and congratulations on a job well done to Virginia Task Force 1 (VATF-1), Fairfax County's Urban Search and Rescue Team, who just last week returned from Haiti. This elite task force is made up of specially trained career and volunteer fire and rescue personnel, with expertise in rescuing victims from collapsed structures, following a natural or man-made catastrophic event.

VATF-1 was dispatched to Haiti in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, and in fact they were some of the first American boots on the ground. During their 15 day mission in Haiti they were able to save the lives of 16 people that were trapped in rubble and wreckage.

I am incredibly proud of these brave men, women, and rescue dogs that heroically volunteer to put themselves in harms way in order to save the lives of others. The work they did in Haiti is an inspiration to us all.

For a good story on VATF-1 please see this article from the Washington Post:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/28/AR2010012803978.html?sid=ST2010012803665>

### **Upcoming Events**

- **Budget Town Hall Meetings with School Board Member Liz Bradsher**

This year I will be co-hosting two budget town hall meetings with Springfield District School Board Member Liz Bradsher. The meetings will be held on:

**Wednesday March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 7:00 PM at Willow Springs ES (5400 Willow Springs School Road, Fairfax, VA 22030-6323)**

**Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 7:00 PM at West Springfield High School (6100 Rolling Road Springfield, VA 22152-1599)**

- **Tax Relief Workshop for Senior Citizens and People with Disabilities**

On **Thursday, March 18<sup>th</sup> 2010 from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM** I will be hosting a Tax Relief Workshop for senior citizens and people with disabilities at the West Springfield Government Center (6140 Rolling Rd, Springfield, VA 22152). Staff members from the Office of Tax Relief will be on hand to meet with constituents on a one on one basis and to assist them in filling out the necessary forms.

Fairfax County provides real estate tax relief and car tax relief to citizens who are either 65 or older, or permanently and totally disabled, and meet the income and asset eligibility requirements. For eligibility requirements please contact the Tax Relief Office at 703-222-8234 or [taxrelief@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:taxrelief@fairfaxcounty.gov) or click on the following link [http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/DTA/taxrelief\\_faq.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/DTA/taxrelief_faq.htm).