



Find me on  
Facebook 

View my profile on  
LinkedIn 

Follow me on  
twitter 

In this edition:

- **[Board Votes to Increase Tax Rate to \\$1.09 - Resulting in over a 7.25% Tax Increase on Average Homeowner](#)** -Board opts for tax rate increase over tough cost reductions and a focus on priorities. Sends the wrong message to taxpayers in the year of the \$30M bank bailout and reduced tax rates in surrounding jurisdictions.
- **[Coming Soon to Restaurant Near You - a New Meals Tax](#)**- As if a 7.25% tax increase this year was not enough, the Board is forming a committee to investigate adding a meals tax in Fairfax County to the ballot. The committee will study if, how and when to put a meals tax on the ballot.
- **[Facts of the School Budget](#)** - The \$98 million School Board request to fund our schools can be easily met without a tax rate increase and why teachers can and should get a raise.
- **[Beware of New Scam Hitting the County](#)** - Several residents have reported a hoax that has hit Northern Virginia where scammers are calling people pretending to be sheriffs. Find out the full details and tips on how to avoid being scammed below.
- **[April 24th Transportation Public Meeting](#)** - On April 24<sup>th</sup> the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) has set a public meeting to discuss potential projects and programs to be included in next update to the state's transportation Six-Year Improvement Program. Full details are below.

### **Board Votes to Increase Tax Rate to \$1.09 - Resulting in over a 7% Tax Increase on Average Homeowner**

Today, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted to increase the property tax rate to \$1.09 in addition to an increase in storm water taxes and a variety of fees. I couldn't

support increasing the rate - this budget is an over 14% tax hike for our homeowners over the last three years, 7.25% in this year alone (including the storm water tax increase) - many including those that can least afford it will see a much greater increase. I think this sends the wrong message to taxpayers in the year of the \$30M bank bailout and reduced tax rates in surrounding jurisdictions. I was joined in opposing the budget by Supervisors Smyth and Cook.

This bucks the trend of surrounding jurisdictions that have been reducing their tax rate to offset increased assessments. Prince William County - \$.023 reduction (advertised rate); Loudoun - \$.05 reduction and even Arlington is reducing their rate by \$.01. Our taxpayers are having to make difficult choices - cutting spending to meet increased costs in the face of steady or shrinking incomes - our government should be doing the same.

I put forth an alternative budget at our Board Budget Committee meeting on Friday that cut spending and the tax rate. While many of the spending reductions that I proposed during the budget process and on Friday were included in the Chairman's budget, I think we should have and could have done better for our taxpayers. Almost every proposed reduction on my list of proposed reductions was a good program and does some good for our community but we cannot be all things to all people. For instance our consumer affairs department is a great department and they do great things but we are the ONLY jurisdiction in the state with a consumer affairs department; it is not an expense our taxpayers can afford when their taxes have increased 14% over the last three years and their salaries have not gone up.

One of our priorities that I was happy to see addressed in the budget (and that was included in my alternative budget proposal) was taking care of our county employees and the promises we made to them - last year's budget language promise was broken and we needed to address compensation in this budget and in the long term - especially for our police, fire and general county employees. I am happy to see that started in this budget.

I also differed with the Board majority on school spending. The School Board passed a budget that requested an additional \$97M that included increases in teacher compensation. I believe the schools can get to the \$97M with the additional \$34M from us, the roughly \$30M from the state and \$30M by changing the budget assumption that has resulted in \$50 plus million salary budget surpluses in each of the last five years. **I explain this further in the article below.**

While my alternative budget was not passed I was happy to see some of the \$34M in reductions I proposed during the process included in the approved budget or the tax rate increase may have been higher. I recommended budget language on increasing the time spent by the Board on budget during the year. We claim it is the "most important thing we do every year" - yet we only had two budget committee meetings over the last 12 months - we need to work on it more during the year. My motion to add this to budget guidance failed 5 to 5 but the Chairman and the Board majority agreed to schedule the additional budget meetings.

I have supported budgets in the past but I will not be able to support this one - we could have and should have done better for our taxpayers. More so than in any period since I have been on the Board, the last three years seem to be the years of misplaced spending priorities. Some notable examples of these misplaced priorities that I opposed include:

- Approval of a \$30 million stormwater bond over county staff's objections after we told the School Board we could not afford an increase in school renovation and construction bonding authority.
- Approval of a \$30 million bank bailout to pay off an unsecured loan belonging to the Lorton Arts Foundation instead of working a long term solution and monetizing the surrounding land. There will be another \$3 to \$5 million in capital required to complete the Events Center, so this issue is far from over.
- Plans to spend an additional \$12 million on an adaptive reuse project in Lorton. According to the response from my budget question this is an expense that will be addressed during carryover with expected budget surplus.
- We continue to pour money and developer contributions into rent control housing (\$500 million projected for Tysons alone) rather than our priorities of schools, transportation, parks and libraries.
- We continue to pursue transportation projects like the Columbia Pike Trolley that do not provide cost effective transportation congestion relief.

Between 2000 and 2007 taxes doubled, and unfortunately now, in a time where Fairfax County citizens and businesses are having to tighten their belts, their government refuse to do the same. Over my last six years on the Board of Supervisors I have called for tax relief for our residents, it is past time to focus on our priorities not bank bailouts and rent control housing.

### **Coming Soon to Restaurant Near You - a New Meals Tax**

As if a 7.25% tax increase this year was not enough, the Board is establishing a committee to investigate adding a meals tax in Fairfax County to the ballot. The committee will study if, how and when to put a meals tax on the ballot.

I have opposed the meals tax as a single industry tax, especially in light of the recent increase in the sales tax. While some of the tax will be paid by guests and visitors the bulk will be just another tax on our residents. Currently Fairfax City, Arlington and Alexandria have a meals tax and Prince William and Loudoun do not.

Before it would become effective the Board would have to vote to send it to referendum for voters to decide.

### **Facts of the School Budget**

There have been a lot of accusations leveled at the Board of Supervisors over the alleged "failure" to make schools a priority. The simple fact is that FCPS always has been, and always will be, our #1 priority. It accounts for over 53% of our budget. Schools are the top reason that businesses and people relocate to Fairfax County and I am committed to keeping them strong. The schools \$98M requests includes an increase for teachers and it should - they have been slipping in comparison to neighboring jurisdictions and the best teachers are one of the key ingredients to a great school system.

**The Simple Math on FCPS' \$98 Million Request:** The School Board claims to need another \$98 million to keep our schools strong. The simple truth is that they already have it.

- **\$34 Million**-current funding increase planned from the Board of Supervisors.
- **\$30 Million**-additional revenue from the state that was not included in the current approved FCPS budget.
- **\$25 Million**-a 1.25% increase in the lapse rate. The lapse rate, sometimes called the attrition rate, is the assumed savings from employee turnover. Fairfax County uses a lapse rate of 8.8 while FCPS uses 2.1. For the last five years, FCPS has consistently over budgeted their salary costs by over \$30 million per year due to an overly generous lapse rate assumption. Increasing the lapse rate assumption to 3.35, still significantly lower than the County's, would produce a savings of \$25 million without a single impact to class sizes, and would still maintain a cushion of \$10 to \$25 million in over-budgeted salaries (see the detailed history at bottom of email).
- **\$13 Million**-eliminate the proposed pay raises for administrators who all received a pay raise last year. Teachers will still get a pay raise. I concur with Superintendent Garza that in order to have the best school system in the region we must keep our teachers the highest paid in the region. As I did last year I am committed to raises for our teachers.
- **\$3.8 Million**- eliminate the eCart program - increases testing and workload on our teachers.
- **\$.850 Million**- eliminate 2 of the 8 cluster superintendents and the administrative burden on our schools.

**The items above represent a total of \$106.7 million in funds available for FCPS - in excess of their \$98M request.**

Perhaps the biggest area where we can improve our schools both fiscally and functionally is to reduce the administrative and non-school based positions that have resulted in new additional "programs" and administrative programs for teachers. Now we have a large number of teachers doing nothing but administration. If you take the total number of students in the school system and divide it by the number of full time equivalent teachers you should get average class size. If you do the calculation for our schools, you get a class size of 12. This is less than half of our average class size. What are all these teachers doing? Administration. We need to let them teach.

The new superintendent started the budget process on the right foot; meeting with Supervisors and explaining why it is a very difficult budget, and some of the difficult

cuts she made. Our schools have great challenges ahead, not the least of which is a County-wide kindergarten class where 37% of the students are receiving free and reduced meals and a very high English-as-a-second-language population. I still have high hopes that the Board's relationship with the new superintendent will improve as she grows into the role.

### **Proposed Reductions**

As Herrity Report readers know I have been proposing some simple reductions for the last several years:

- **Privatization:** There are many areas of the County that could be privatized which would result in significant cost savings. Some examples include trash collection and disposal, and the solid waste center operations.
- **Streamlining Agencies: There are agencies in the county that could cut down on duplicative work with other county agencies or the state. For instance,** each County department has a position in charge of public relations, but we also have a central Office of Public Affairs; and we also have a Consumer Affairs department, which is a function of the state.
- **Reducing Excessive County Publications:** Each year we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on printing and mailing publications through the County. A few, targeted reductions in these could generate significant savings. Several times per year, ACE catalogs and ParkTakes magazines are mailed to every County resident and cost nearly \$1 million. Registration for these courses has largely shifted to online platforms and continuing to print and mail catalogs to those who have not requested one is a waste.
- **Focusing Developer Contributions on our Priorities:** We need focus the contributions we receive from our developers on our priorities instead of everything from bird friendly glass on buildings to even more rent control housing. We can't do everything for everyone - we must focus on priorities.
- **Excess Rents should go to Debt Reduction:** Rather than pay off our debts from county owned rent control housing, \$4M is being leveraged to incur more obligations. These funds should be used to reduce our housing subsidies.

### **Growing our Commercial Tax Base (not the tax rate)**

This year, more than any of the past budget years the importance of a broad and diverse commercial tax base was painfully evident. For every \$1 paid by a commercial entity, only \$0.60 in services are used by that entity. This means that residential taxes are being subsidized by commercial entities; allowing residential taxes to remain low. Decades ago, the Board of Supervisors set a goal to have commercial taxes comprise 25% of total real estate taxes collected. While we have reached that goal in the past, in the current budget it dropped to 19%.

While spending in the County Executive's proposed budget increases spending by 3%, the burden on our homeowners jumped over 7% largely due to weaknesses in our commercial tax base. I have been preaching the importance of a healthy commercial tax base since I got on the Board. It was a lesson I learned young as I watched a successful

Fairfax grow great services while the tax burden stayed low. While some of the current decline in the commercial tax base is due to economic conditions beyond our control, we also have not helped it with additional taxes on businesses, a time consuming regulatory process, expensive comprehensive plan requirements.

If we are to begin to grow the commercial tax base we must:

- Redouble our efforts to attract new businesses to the County.
- Keep our schools the best in the nation to attract businesses.
- Eliminate the barriers to commercial development that increase the time to process applications.
- Focus developer contributions on priorities like schools and transportation, not rent controlled housing and bird friendly glass.
- Keep the burden of overlay tax districts off our commercial and residential districts.
- Eliminate narrow unnecessary development conditions that are passed on to businesses and residents.

### **Beware of a New Scam Hitting the County**

I want to make you aware that some Fairfax County residents are starting to report a hoax that has been reported in several localities in the area (<http://www.arlnow.com/2014/02/25/police-warn-of-jury-duty-phone-scam/>). You may have already seen reports of this scam in surrounding areas, but, if not, a scammer, or scammers, fraudulently claiming to be deputy sheriffs or often a lieutenant with a local Sheriff's Office, including now ours, are calling residents of Fairfax County and surrounding jurisdictions claiming that the resident failed to appear for jury duty and must pay a court fee and/or fine to avoid arrest.

Scammers, identifying themselves as deputy sheriffs, are calling residents of Fairfax County and surrounding jurisdictions, claiming that the resident failed to appear for jury duty and must pay a court fee to avoid arrest. The Fairfax County Sheriff's Office is in no way associated with this scam. Sheriff's deputies will NOT call you asking for money nor threatening you with arrest.

If you receive a threatening phone call related to jury duty, please hang up immediately. Do NOT give out personal information such as your Social Security number, bank account or credit card numbers, passwords or any other identifying information. Regularly monitor all of your monetary accounts and always use strong passwords.

### **April 24 Transportation Public Hearing**

I want to alert you to an upcoming public meeting to be held on April 24th by the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to discuss potential projects and programs to be included in next update to the state's transportation Six-Year Improvement Program (FY2015-2020). The meeting will provide citizens the opportunity to review and provide comments on transportation initiatives in Northern Virginia.

**CTB Public Forum on Six-Year Improvement Program**

**April 24, 2014**

**6:00 p.m.**

**VDOT Northern Virginia District Office, Potomac Conference Center  
4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030**

More information may be found at: <http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/syp-default.asp>

Written comments may be submitted during the hearing, mailed, or emailed afterwards. Comments related to the project can be e-mailed to: [Six-YearProgram@vdot.virginia.gov](mailto:Six-YearProgram@vdot.virginia.gov). You may also mail comments to Programming Director, Virginia Department of Transportation, 1405 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA, 23219.