



**January 29, 2018**

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**Pension Reform Update**

As the next step in addressing the county's significant pension issues, the Board formed a Retirement Work Group consisting of Supervisor Gross, Supervisor Cook and approximately 10 employee unions/groups to determine the next steps for changes to the existing pension plan for new employees.

**Other Happenings**

- Paving and Restriping Community Meeting - Feb 6
- Springfield District Land Use Committee Meeting - Feb 5
- Design Public Hearing for Rolling Road Widening Project - Feb 27
- Save the Date: Springfield District Tax Relief Workshop - Mar 5
- Springfield District Budget Town Hall - Mar 22
- 2018 Shredding Event Dates - Jun 16

## Addressing the Gang Issue in Fairfax County

Fairfax County and the region currently have a significant gang issue - one the Chief of Police recently referred to as "out of control." Addressing our gang issue just became much more difficult for law enforcement with the Sheriff's decision to terminate the jails agreement with ICE. Billed as pro-immigrant, termination of the agreement is actually anti-immigrant in that it significantly hurts law enforcements' ability to rid our streets of MS-13 and other gang members. These gang members prey primarily on our legal and illegal immigrant communities and vulnerable youth in our schools. It is ironic that this announcement came on the same day as the Board approved an additional \$500K in spending to fight the gang problem and without discussion with the Board of Supervisors.

**The Gang Problem.** In the mid-2000s, Fairfax County with support from Congressman Wolf's funding of the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force (NVGTF), developed and executed a well-coordinated response to the rise in gang activity and violence during that period. These efforts were a victim of their own success as gang violence tapered off and funding for the efforts dwindled. For instance, funding for the NVGTF dropped from \$5 million to \$3 million in 2012 to around \$300K today. Funding for Identification, Prevention and Education (ICE) efforts, a critical component to dealing with gangs, saw similar reductions.

Since 2014, the County has seen a significant increase in gang activity. The activity has been significantly more brutal and violent than the past, and the offenders are much younger. Much more of the activity also takes place behind closed doors with recruitment and activities coordinated on the internet and social media. In Fairfax County alone, there have been 17 brutal gang related murders which represent 35% of the all of the County's homicides since 2014. Our police department has been doing their best and have made 64 arrests in these murders with numerous convictions.

What changed? Since 2014, the federal government has placed over 4,000 undocumented minor children in Fairfax County, and many of these "children" are in fact older than the 18 age they claim to be, and many are from MS-13 countries. Let me be very clear - all of these children are not gang members and many will not become gang members, but to conclude that this is not a large part of our gang problem is ignoring reality, as some of them actually come here as gang members. Many of these children have been placed with distant relatives that work multiple jobs, and they cannot read or write in their own language, much less English. Because of this, they have a hard time fitting in and are prime targets for gang recruitment. They also place a huge burden on our schools; Fairfax County must educate and graduate them according to federal law. While the Board approved my motion to seek federal assistance, in regards to education, there has been no funding other than local resources.

While the numbers of identified gang members vary, our police department conservatively estimates that there are over 2,000 gang members in Fairfax County - the vast majority MS-13. The number for the region is significantly higher. Estimates are also difficult to tabulate

because members make their way in and out of the county and region; they do not care or pay attention to county or state boundary lines. While we have always had, and likely will always have gangs in Fairfax, the numbers do not lie - the problem has become significant.

**My First Hand Observation.** Over the last year or so, I have met with and ridden along with the members of both Fairfax County's Gang Unit and the NVGTF. Below are details of two events from those ride alongs, as well as some of what I have learned.

In June, while on a ride along with Congresswoman Barbara Comstock and the NVGTF, they were able to take four identified gang members off our streets. Once identified as gang members based on tattoos, phone posts, and other evidence, they were placed in custody and taken to the Fairfax County jail to be held for deportation. As you will read further below, the NVGTF and our Gang unit will no longer be able to do this unless they capture the identified gang member committing a crime. Our communities are a safer place with these four gang members off our streets. That just became more difficult.

The most disturbing of the four identified was our first stop of the night. What appeared to me to be a clean cut, 17 year old young man walking on a street wearing gang colors, turned out to be a 22 year old covered in MS-13 tattoos with tear drops (murders), convicted in El Salvador for murder, deported twice from the U.S., wanted for assault in Philadelphia and he was walking the streets.

The second instance I will share demonstrates the focus of law enforcement and the NVGTF. On the same ride along as above, task force members spotted three youths drinking at a picnic table outside of an apartment complex. They approached and determined the individuals were in the country illegally but were not gang members. At that time, the ICE members of the task force stepped away and let the local police handle it. The three youths were asked to pour out their beers and go inside with a warning to behave. While law enforcement could have arrested them, they chose not to because they were not violent criminals or gang members.

I share both of these stories because they demonstrate the importance of our efforts against gangs and the restraint used by law enforcement in dealing with our immigrant population to the chagrin of many in our community on both sides - those that want everyone in the country deported and those that want no one deported. I have had many conversations with law enforcement to confirm what they are doing and what they are not doing. They are committed to removing criminals and identified gang members from our community and for better or worse - nothing more.

I have met with the pro-immigrant groups, including CASA, on several occasions and challenged them to give me the name of a single individual taken into custody by law enforcement in Fairfax County (including ICE) that was not a criminal or an identified gang member. To date they have provided no names but they, and many of our area politicians, continue to make our immigrant communities afraid of law enforcement and pushed the Sheriff to her ill-advised decision to terminate the agreement with ICE.

**The Sheriff's Decision.** In her announcement on ending the agreement, Sheriff Stacy Kincaid focused on the fact that she will still do the bare minimum to cooperate with ICE and meet federal requirements. What she did not address is the impact terminating the agreement will have on our ability to remove identified gang members and criminals from our streets. I have learned from my many discussions with law enforcement of the importance of this agreement to their ability to remove gang members from our communities.

To be fair to the Sheriff, I learned on my ride alongs that Fairfax County is the only jurisdiction in the region with such an agreement. Accordingly, the Fairfax jail was used to hold identified gang members from Loudoun, Prince William, Alexandria, and Arlington because those jurisdictions do not have their own agreements with ICE. This decision was not just a setback to fighting MS-13 in Fairfax it is a setback to the entire region. We are very proud to claim we are the safest jurisdiction of our size in the country. To maintain that standing we have to be better than the rest. I believe having this agreement in place is one of the many things that will keep us there. I have tried to reach the Sheriff to discuss the decision but have not heard back from her.

There are many definitions to the term "sanctuary city." Because the Sheriff will continue to do the immigration checks in jail and comply with federal requirements to notify ICE, I do not believe this decision makes us a "sanctuary city." What it does do is make us a less safe community as it significantly hinders our abilities to remove gang members from our communities. In particular, it is the legal and illegal immigrant communities that these gangs prey on that will be less safe.

Worse yet, the Sheriff and members of the Board are billing this move as pro-immigrant, when it is actually anti-immigrant. Gangs prey on our immigrant communities, regardless of status, and the vulnerable kids in school. Hampering law enforcement's ability to rid the county of these gang members actually hurts our immigrant communities.

I am also disappointed that the Board of Supervisors was not consulted before the decision was made even though there is no requirement to do so, as the Sheriff is independently elected. It is clear that some Board members did have advance notice, however, I did not. I have asked Chairman Bulova to have the Board briefed on the impact of the decision. I hope Sheriff Kincaid will join us for this meeting.

**Additional Fairfax County Resources to Fight Gangs.** It is ironic that hours before the Sheriff's decision was announced, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approved a strategy to spend \$500,000 in FY 2018 carryover funds to fight our gang problems. In the presentation of this plan, Fairfax County staff clearly lays out our growing problems:

- Gangs are exploiting young people who recently immigrated to the U.S. to reunite with their families, targeting them for recruitment.
- Recruitment and gang operations are evolving with advances in technology and social media.
- Reductions in federal spending for regional coordination hinder prevention and suppression efforts.

These funds will be used for additional police resources and gang prevention efforts.

**State and Federal Activity.** There has also been significant activity at the state and federal levels to address the region's gang issues. Delegate Hugo has submitted a \$1.5M budget amendment to fund the NVGTF and Congresswoman Comstock is pursuing federal funding for the task force. Our entire congressional delegation has asked the Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to provide the names of undocumented minors placed in Fairfax County to state and local authorities as required by federal law. It is my understanding this is still not occurring.

Congresswoman Comstock has been particularly active introducing legislation to address the gang problem including - the Project Safe Neighborhoods Grant Program Authorization Act to provide resources to communities to curb the rise in gang activities and Criminal Alien Gang Member Act to ensure that when ICE positively identifies a gang member they may act immediately.

**Conclusion.** Immigration is a federal issue and the federal government needs to deal with it sooner rather than later. However, local governments are left to deal with years of poor immigration policies and lack of enforcement, and the resulting impacts on our communities. While local law enforcement and the sheriff are not federal immigration officials, they have the duty to keep all of our communities safe and we have an obligation to give them the tools we can to do that. It is my hope that the Sheriff will revisit her decision and that other local jurisdictions will enter into these agreements.

I will also continue to work for additional law enforcement and ICE resources to combat our significant gang problems. Fairfax County has received a significantly greater share of the undocumented minor children than other jurisdictions in the country - we need to begin

working with ORR to slow or stop the flow, identify who they are and the impacts on our community, and pursue federal funding for the significant impact on our taxpayers.

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### **Pension Reform Update**

As the next step in [addressing the county's significant pension issues](#), the Board formed a Retirement Work Group consisting of Supervisor Gross, Supervisor Cook and approximately 10 employee unions/groups to determine the next steps for changes to the existing pension plan for new employees. While I had asked to be included in the work group, I was not invited to be a part of it. The meetings are open to the public, so either a member of my staff or I have been attending. The workgroup web and meeting schedule are [here](#).

At the last meeting I was allowed to share some comments which I have summarized below:

- The work group's mission misses the mark completely - it is focusing on changes to an outdated pension plan
- The mission should be to recommend a compensation plan that will attract, reward, and retain today's best and brightest with right balance of compensation, retirement and benefits
- Retirement benefits are only one aspect of compensation plans - salary and benefits being the other two major ones
- Shared my disappointment that they are instead nibbling around the edges of an outdated retirement plan that will continue to compete with salary increases and the quality of county services

I was also disappointed that we were not engaging independent professional advisors in the conversation - one that could look at what new employees are looking for in terms of compensation. There was at least one employee group representative that seemed to understand the importance of looking at total compensation. Our current pension plan takes up far too much of the compensation cost.

My expectations are not high for meaningful, positive recommendations. The group is made up almost entirely of long-time, employee union officials dedicated to keeping the current plan and does not have any independent experts to share today's strategies. Hopefully when the recommendations get to the Board, it will focus on the real issue - how we can recruit, reward, and retain the best employees. If not, we will once again nibble around the edges of an outdated plan that currently allows full pension retirements benefit greater than surrounding communities as early as 55 in addition to county taxpayer-paid social security benefits as early as 55. A plan whose cost keeps us from providing competitive salaries and raises and competes with the ability to provide quality county services.

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### **Paving and Restriping Community Meeting Set - Feb 6**

Comment Period Open through Feb. 23, 2018 - VDOT and FCDOT will hold a [public meeting](#) on proposed paving and restriping changes in the Springfield District on Tuesday, Feb. 6, at 7 p.m., at the West Springfield Governmental Center. Community members are invited to give feedback on general traffic safety concerns regarding roads scheduled for repaving, and the proposed striping changes either at the meeting or by [submitting comments online](#).

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### **Springfield District Land Use Committee Meeting**

The Springfield District Land Use Committee will be meeting on Monday, February 5 at 7:00 pm in the West Springfield Government Center Community Room. They will be reviewing an application from Christopher Land, LLC, who is seeking approval from the County for the construction of seven single-family dwellings at the terminus of Maritime Lane near Seabrook Lane and north of the Fairfax County Parkway. The proposal is a rezoning from the R-1 to the PDH-3 District. Planning Commissioner Murphy as well as County staff will be present to answer any questions. The application can be reviewed on the [Springfield District Land Use Committee website](#). If you have any questions about this meeting or the application, please contact Marlae Schnare at 703-451-8873.

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### **Design Public Hearing for Rolling Road Widening Project**

The Virginia Dept. of Transportation will be hosting a Design Public Hearing for the project to widen Rolling Road from two to four lanes between Viola Street and Old Keene Mill Road. The hearing will be held on Tuesday, February 27 at 6:30 p.m. at Irving Middle School (8100 Old Keene Mill Road in Springfield). The snow date is March 5.

For more information, [click here](#) to visit the project webpage.

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### **Save the Date: Springfield District Tax Relief Workshop**

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors is hosting a series of free tax relief workshops in late February and March at several locations throughout the County. The Springfield District workshop will be held at the West Springfield Government Center (6140 Rolling Road in Springfield) from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday, March 5. Real estate and vehicle tax relief is available for older adults over 65 years of age and people with disabilities who meet certain qualifications. Staff from the Fairfax County Department of Tax Administration (DTA) will be at this workshop to assist with filling out the application form, as well as answer any questions residents may have. No appointment is necessary and residents may attend the workshop

that is most convenient for them regardless of where they reside.

For the full list of workshops, visit the [Dept. of Tax Administration website](#).

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### **Springfield District Budget Town Hall**

On Thursday, March 22 at 7 pm, I will host the Springfield District Budget Town Hall at my West Springfield Office (6140 Rolling Road, Springfield, VA). I am pleased to say both the new County Executive and CFO will be in attendance. More information will be released in the next month or two.

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### **2018 Shredding Events**

The Fairfax County Dept. of Public Works has announced its annual list of dates for free shredding services. The Springfield District event is set for Saturday, June 16, there are other events nearby scheduled earlier than June. Visit the [Dept. of Public Works website](#) for the full list of dates.

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