



Dulles Direct Newsletter

December 2012

Welcome to the December edition of the Dulles Direct Newsletter. I hope you are enjoying the holiday season and that everyone had a Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah. As I prepare to enter into my second year as your Supervisor, I thought it would be helpful to provide updates on some of the things that I'm asked most frequently about, especially road projects, so you'll find that below.

On a personal note, I'm pleased to share that in May, Margaret and I will welcome our fourth child. I am blessed to have a wonderful and supportive family—without them, it would not be possible to serve on the Board of Supervisors.

When I began my term in January, I was appointed to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Board of Directors. COG is a regional nonprofit organization whose membership consists of elected officials from 22 DC area jurisdictions. Earlier this month, at the COG Annual Meeting presided over by DC Mayor Vincent Grey, the current president, I was elected a corporate Vice President for 2013. I look forward to taking on more leadership responsibilities at COG in order to strengthen Loudoun's representation in regional debates over transportation and planning.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Resolution to Accelerate HS-6 Construction Approved

At our December 5 meeting, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved my Board Member Initiative cosponsored by Supervisors Williams and Clarke directing county staff to accelerate all applications involving the construction of HS-6, a new high school in the Loudoun Valley Estates community.

HS-6 will help relieve severe overcrowding at Briar Woods High School. The school was originally planned to be open in 2015, but the latest LCPS projections showed that even with 10 trailers in place, Briar Woods would be overenrolled by 566 students in 2014. Accelerating the school was endorsed by the School Board earlier this month, and could potentially save money due to reduced construction costs.

The Board of Supervisors previously approved the Special Exception to build HS-6 in 2006, so that major hurdle is already complete. The next major step is for LCPS to file a site plan with the County, which will be reviewed by staff. From a legislative standpoint, no further Board of Supervisors action is required. I will be continuing to monitor progress on the approval process and will provide updates. The attendance boundaries for HS-6 will be entirely determined by the School Board, and they will set the schedule for that discussion at a later date.

Assessor's Office Change

Earlier this month, the Board approved an ordinance that will move the responsibility for assessing residential and commercial property from a county department headed by an employee of the Board of Supervisors to the Commissioner of the Revenue. The change was made following a recommendation of the Government Reform Commission. In most counties, the Commissioner of the Revenue already performs this function, but a change was made in Loudoun many years ago that no longer made much sense. Moving this function will more clearly separate the assessment function from setting tax rates, and it will also make us eligible for more state funding through the Commissioner of the Revenue office.

FY12 Fund Balance

In a time of great financial uncertainty, I'm pleased to report that Loudoun County finished FY2012 with a \$47.5 million fund balance. The Board of Supervisors chose to reserve \$15.6 million for potential tax rate reductions, and left the remaining \$31.9 million available to pay down debt or be used during the FY14 budget process. Given the impact that the fiscal cliff and sequestration could have on our local economy, I favor being as conservative as possible with these funds.

FY14 Budget

School Budget

Work is well underway on the FY2014 budget. The County Administrator has been given fiscal guidance to prepare a budget that has an equal tax rate for County functions, and a reduction of 3 cents for LCPS. As I've previously noted, I did not support this fiscal guidance because I think the school parameters are unrealistic. LCPS will be absorbing 2500 net new students next year and opening two new schools. LCPS Superintendent Dr. Hatrick has presented his proposed school budget of \$876.4 million, an increase of \$53.3 million (roughly 6.5%) from last year. The School Board will perform their review and send a revised budget to the Board of Supervisors by the end of January.

While I did not agree with the Board's fiscal guidance, I do believe significant budgetary reforms are needed on the schools side. When I evaluate the School Board's budget request this year, I will be looking for significant progress in the areas of retirement and benefits. The Board of Supervisors made a difficult, but fiscally responsible decision to reform our post-employment benefits system for County (but not LCPS) employees. I believe these reforms warrant serious consideration by the School Board. Our reforms brought Loudoun's system closer to market and will ensure a healthy self funded system for the future, while realizing about \$4 million annually in cost savings for taxpayers.

I also believe that the School board should take a hard look at health care benefits. County employees saw a less than 1% increase in health care costs. However, given rising costs nationwide and the impact of the Affordable Care Act, we increased the employer contribution for county employees by nearly 9 percent for 2013. On the schools side, health care costs rose 16 percent last year. I think some adjustments by the School Board will be needed to bring down these costs and incentivize employees into less expensive plans. Finally, LCPS policy provides full health care coverage for all employees who work over 17.5 hours a week. I asked County staff to evaluate this policy compared to surrounding jurisdictions, and we found that our policy was much more generous than every other jurisdiction. Most counties have a tiered system, in which costs go down for employees that work more hours. LCPS employees pay significantly less for health insurance than those in Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria and Prince William counties.

Transportation

It is blatantly obvious to me that more money must be invested in our road infrastructure. It is also obvious that Loudoun County isn't going to get it from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Therefore, I will be supporting a proposal in the FY14 budget to dedicate two cents of our tax rate for road construction in Loudoun. This line item would generate between \$13-\$17 million per year, and could be used to obtain funding authority for over \$100 million. While I have a strong desire to hold the line on taxes, I also believe that our residents would be willing to pay a small amount in their tax rate if they knew it would be used for road construction specifically in Loudoun. This budget line item could be the key to funding needed projects like the Route 606 widening. Stay tuned over the coming few months for more about this proposal.

Rail Service Districts Approved

As part of the Board's decision to opt in to the Dulles Rail Corridor Project, Loudoun was tasked with funding 4.8% of the cost, which is estimated to be around \$270 million. This month, the Board formally approved service tax districts in areas around stations to help cover expenses. The tax districts will assess an additional 20 cents per \$100 assessed value to pay for all costs. As I've noted before, no existing residential communities in the Dulles district are included in tax district.

DULLES DISTRICT UPDATES

Transportation Update

Here are updates on some of the most frequently mentioned transportation projects in or near the Dulles District:

Rt. 606 Widening—The preliminary engineering for widening Rt. 606 to 4 lanes is nearing completion. I held a meeting last month with the Loudoun Valley Estates III community to share VDOT's plans, and I am working with the County's Office of Transportation Services and VDOT to address some of the concerns that were raised by residents. It is estimated that this project will cost over \$120 million. Currently, there is no construction funding identified. However, we are working with the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to work out an agreement to fund this project. I will once again note that the Board of Supervisors voted it the most important transportation project in the entire county.

Loudoun County Parkway—The \$33 million portion of Loudoun County Parkway that is not completed is tied to proffers with Brambleton. Brambleton is in the process of submitting a multi-phase rezoning request which would allow them to build an additional 800 residential units, in exchange for completion of the road, several school sites and park improvements. This package will go through a substantial review by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. At this point, Brambleton is working with the county and VDOT on the design for three custom built bridges that will be needed in the new section.

Braddock Road and Pleasant Valley—On November 20, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors endorsed our application for state matching funds to improve this intersection. So far, \$1 million has been allocated by the Board of Supervisors and \$600,000 by the state. VDOT is finishing a study of the intersection to determine what will be needed to make the improvement. Turn lanes and a signal are far less expensive than a roundabout.

Poland Road and Edgewater St.—At this point, a VDOT study of the intersection did not meet warrant (or the VDOT standard) for a traffic light. VDOT is currently considering a pilot program for a "mini" round about, using off the shelf materials. We will be engaging the neighboring HOAs to share more details and gather feedback.

Greenstone/Mineral Springs 4-way stop—I am currently working on a possible solution with VDOT to keep the stop sign located near Mercer Middle School. This will involve action by the Stone Ridge HOA and the Board of Supervisors. An item is being prepared in consultation with VDOT for a future Board meeting. I will keep you updated.

Route 50—Construction continues on the widening project. They have accelerated the expansion on the Pleasant Valley intersection in Loudoun to accommodate straight and right turn traffic separately. Construction has begun on a third east bound lane from Stone Ridge to Loudoun County Parkway. This work is being done by Van Metre on a proffer tied to the Stone Ridge community. I know how frustrating the construction is but the good news is the project is still on time and on budget.

Tall Cedars Parkway—Work is underway on the design of Tall Cedars from Gum Spring Road to Pinebrook Road. I have been working with County and VDOT staff on a route that has the least impact to landowners. Funds have been identified from developer proffers for this stretch of road, which means it will move forward once we've worked on the path. However, there are so far no funds for the last piece from Pinebrook Road to Riding Center Boulevard. I have had preliminary discussions with some developers about potential rezoning applications that could result in getting the road completed. It will likely require approval of some new residential units in exchange for constructing the last segment of the road.

Tall Cedars Parkway at Poland Road—A traffic light has been approved for this intersection. The warrant study is done and came back positive for the signal. The signal will be paid for by developer proffers. It will likely take about another 12 months for the signal to actually be installed by VDOT. (The process is slow...)

Turn Lanes on Tall Cedars Parkway—I'm frequently asked about the two left turn lanes from Tall Cedars to Route 50. I know it doesn't make much sense. They are there because there was not enough room to have two lanes making a right turn. However, as part of the Route 50 project, they will be "turned around" and there will be two right turn lanes. Delegate Ramadan and I have tried to have this particular construction piece accelerated but we've been told it isn't possible for engineering reasons.

Braddock and Gum Spring Road—The timing at this light has been adjusted after residents expressed concern about the timing for traffic on Braddock Road trying to cross Gum Spring. I requested a review by VDOT and they found that there was an issue and made adjustments allowing more time for traffic to cross.

Providence Ridge Stop Sign—The developer of this community sought to have roads placed into the VDOT system. As part of the acceptance process, a stop sign at the intersection of White Sands and Paradise Place was removed prematurely by VDOT. Delegate Ramadan was able to get the stop sign replaced quickly. VDOT is now working with us on keeping it there—it will likely require the signatures of residents who live on the cul de sac nearest the intersection.

This is not meant to be an all-inclusive list of all the road issues I've been asked about, or all the ones I'm working on. There are dozens of others that we've been involved in in one way or other over the past year. However, these are the ones that come up most frequently and have seen the most activity.

Economic Development

As chairman of the Board's Economic Development Committee, my job has been to conduct oversight and help direct the Loudoun's economic development strategy. Since I've spent so much time on this over the past year, I wanted to share a brief update on the progress we're making. My primary goal is to increase our commercial tax base, which has a multiple benefits. It will create jobs here in Loudoun, meaning that our residents have more work options closer to home. That will improve quality of life and help ease traffic congestion. It will also lessen the burden on residential taxes and allow us to lower our tax rate and invest in

infrastructure and other needs. There is one statistic that stands out: for every dollar we collect in residential taxes we spend \$1.62 in services. For every dollar we collect from commercial taxes, we spend just \$0.38 in services.

To help kick start our efforts, over the past year I have worked to reorganize the Department of Economic Development and increased the number of staff members focused on “selling” Loudoun as an ideal business location.

Even though most of the changes didn’t take effect until July, we’re starting to see some results. The commercial office vacancy rate in Loudoun is now 12.3%, which is down from 13.1% in January 2012. So far this year, the county has processed real estate permits for 960,058 square feet of commercial and industrial development, compared to 772,025 square feet in 2011. In addition, there have been over 4,300 new jobs added in Loudoun this year, including 46 companies that have expanded or moved to Loudoun. I really believe that we are now moving in the right direction, and I look forward to working hard over the next year to support our team so that we can see even greater success.

Athletic Field Utilization Initiative

As an update to the item I offered earlier this fall on athletic field utilization, the Parks Recreation and Open Space Board is continuing work on the field inventory and gathering data from the sports leagues. Staff is working on plans to upgrade select fields with irrigation and turf fields. Since many of these fields are school fields, they are also working with LCPS on exploring options for consolidating maintenance and partnerships for more substantial improvements. I expect a final report back to the Board of Supervisors in January.

Lighting at Byrne’s Ridge Park and Brambleton District Park

Public information sessions were held earlier this month regarding lighting the athletic fields at both Byrne’s Ridge and Brambleton District Parks. The Planning Commission approved both permits at its December 19 public hearing. I expect the Board of Supervisors to hold our public hearing on these applications on January 9, with action likely to be taken at the first meeting in February. You may sign up to speak at the Public Hearing by calling 703-777-0200 before 12:00 noon the day of the meeting or by signing up in person at the meeting. I know there are some concerns from residents who live in the vicinity of Byrne’s Ridge Park. I’m sensitive to those. However, the Dulles District currently has no lit fields and Byrnes Ridge is a good candidate. Not all of the fields will be lit, which should mitigate the impact, and the technology used by the County now has a very limited footprint. If the Board approves the permits, once the lights are operational we will monitor them closely for issues.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Board Meeting Schedule

The Board of Supervisors meetings will be shifting to Wednesday evenings in 2013. We will now be meeting the first and third Wednesday of the month at 4pm. Public comment will still be available during those meetings. The Board's monthly Public Hearing will also be shifting to the second Wednesday at 6pm. All meetings are broadcast on TV and webcast online at www.loudoun.gov. The change was made for several reasons, namely, to better accommodate Supervisors schedules, and so that we would be making most of our significant decisions during the evening hours, when the public is more likely to be able to watch or attend.

Christmas Tree Removal

After enjoying your Christmas tree, be sure to have it disposed of properly. In South Riding, AAA Trash will remove and recycle Christmas trees on SRP's regular yard debris days which are the first two Mondays in January. Please ensure your tree is placed curbside with all the trimmings removed. Trees in excess of 8 feet in length need to be cut in half in order to be removed by the AAA crews. After Friday, January 11th, trees will be removed with the regular trash.

For your added convenience, dumpsters for tree collection and recycling through Loudoun County, will be located at the Town Hall parking lot from through January 24th. Please follow the guidelines below for tree removal.

- Remove all decorations from trees
- Remove tinsel, fake snow, angel hair
- Remove all lighting
- Remove all twine, metal or plastic ties and string
- Place tree at curb the night before recycling day
- Do not place in plastic bags or "Christmas Tree Disposal Bags"
- Remove stands and bases from trees

For a list of Loudoun County Christmas Tree disposal sites click [here](#).

Gum Spring Library Grand Opening

The Gum Spring Library grand opening is scheduled for Saturday, February 23rd at 10:00am. I'm very much looking forward to this ceremony and I encourage all members of the community to mark your calendars!

To unsubscribe click [here](#).