



Dulles Direct Newsletter

June 2013

Welcome to the June Dulles Direct Newsletter. I hope that everyone's summer is off to a great start. In addition to this email, in the coming days you should be receiving by mail my FY2013 Annual Report. This four page report highlights some of the most important things I've been working on during the past year and will get you up to date quickly on the biggest projects and issues in the Dulles South area.

In this newsletter, I've included more information about the recent news alerts I sent out regarding the Braddock/Pleasant Valley and Edgewater/Poland intersections, as well as many updates on other issues I haven't yet addressed with you. As always, if you have questions or comments, let me know at matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov.

DULLES DISTRICT UPDATES

Braddock-Pleasant Valley Intersection Receives State Matching Funds for Roundabout

As I mentioned in a recent news alert, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) has designated \$1 million for design work at the Braddock/Pleasant Valley intersection. The CTB funds come as a result of a matching fund application from Loudoun County. The Board of Supervisors previously authorized \$1.2 million from the County, bringing the total available for the project to \$2.8 million (including \$600,000 last year from the CTB for design). While we are still \$200,000 short, this additional funding is enough for VDOT to proceed with the design and engineering process for the intersection.

Since my announcement earlier this week, I've received some questions about why a roundabout was chosen instead of turn lanes and a traffic signal—which is what I was originally pursuing. I'd like to share with you a little bit more about this decision.

First, I made the assumption that turn lane/traffic signal option would be cheaper and quicker. That option was studied extensively by VDOT. Ultimately, my assumption turned out to likely not be accurate. The big obstacle to the turn lane/signal option is the amount of room needed for the turn lane in order for it to be effective. Given the space constraints, VDOT does not believe it can build a turn lane that's actually long enough to handle the volume of traffic that is taking a left turn onto Pleasant Valley. The turn lane would need to be short, and cars taking a left would back up onto the through lane—leaving us right back to where we are today. The way around that is to acquire a large amount of additional right of way, which is costly and takes time.

Additionally, VDOT believes that the roundabout will have better long term capacity to handle traffic, and will be safer. VDOT is gaining confidence with roundabouts and finding that they are good solutions in some locations.

There are still challenges with this project. The entire intersection will need to be shifted slightly to the north, and this is located in an environmentally sensitive area. For that reason, the timetables for completion may shift from the current estimate, which is completion some time in 2015. However, VDOT will now be embarking on more detailed engineering, and from that we'll have a firm timetable. You can view the VDOT project page and see the proposed design [here](#).

Improvements Coming to Edgewater and Poland Intersection

Earlier this week I also sent out an email alert about the Edgewater and Poland intersection. I wanted to take the opportunity to give you a little more detail about what will be happening there, and why the decision to install a roundabout was made.

First, to recap, I have been trying for well over a year to bring some improvements to this intersection, but VDOT would not allow a traffic signal or a four-way stop. Several serious accidents have occurred there this year, and eventually VDOT agreed to come up with a different solution to make the intersection safer. To do so, they had to think outside the box a little bit, and they presented me with plans to install rubberized pylons at the intersection of Poland Road and Edgewater Drive to create a roundabout. This mini-roundabout installation is temporary (it will be reevaluated when Route 50 construction is complete.) The work will be paid for by VDOT and should be completed by the end of the summer.

The most common question I have been asked is: why a roundabout instead of a four-way stop? Here's the answer:

- 1) The original traffic analysis done by VDOT at my request found that the intersection did not meet their minimum criteria for either a signal or a four-way stop based on traffic volume. While there are significant delays on Edgewater in the morning, VDOT needs to see a greater incidence of delay through the day.

2) VDOT does not allow three lanes to enter a stop-signed intersection. There are three lanes on Poland at the Edgewater intersection--a right turn lane, left turn lane and a through lane. VDOT would have to remove the right turn lanes in both directions on Poland. This would have created a significant PM delay for traffic on Poland heading to Edgewater--every car would have had to wait its turn at the intersection. Also, it would have taken some time to pave over and re-stripe.

3) VDOT has safety concerns about a four-way stop. Traffic travels fast on Poland and cars would not be used to having a stop sign there. As a result, they would have wanted to add rumble strips and other materials to cause disruption to drivers. The rumble strips are noisy and would have created a disturbance for the homes at the edge of Edgewater and some of the homes in Ridings at Blue Springs that back to Poland. Also, VDOT finds that four way stops don't generally decrease accidents all that much, especially compared to roundabouts. Some drivers still don't stop at stop signs and sometimes there is confusion about who should go when.

Based on these factors, I agreed with the roundabout approach. As part of my decision making process, I met with citizens from the Ridings at Blue Springs community and the South Riding Proprietary Board of Directors. The plan was well received by citizens in RBS, and I received a letter of support for it from South Riding.

As we get closer to installation, I will do what I can to provide drivers with more information about what to expect.

Emergency Staffing Approved for Arcola-Pleasant Valley Volunteer Fire Department

When you see a fire engine responding to a call, you might think that it is being staffed by paid employees. They might be, but they also might be volunteers. Loudoun County has a unique combination system of volunteer and career firefighters who respond to calls for service. Our stations are staffed with different configurations of a certain number of career (county-paid) firefighters and volunteers to make sure we can cover each station 24/7. In recent years, we have noticed that some volunteer fire companies are having more difficulty covering their shifts due to lower recruitment. In these cases, the volunteer companies will request the County to pick up their coverage with career positions during those shifts.

Such is the case with the Arcola-Pleasant Valley Volunteer Fire Department (APVFD), which provides "first due" engine coverage for Stone Ridge, Kirkpatrick Farms, and Brambleton. In June, the Board received a request from the APVFD for 8.96 FTEs for emergency fire staffing of the Arcola station for the overnight hours, 6PM to 6AM. Currently, career staff covers the 6AM to 6PM shift. APVFD has advised that they are still able to provide EMS service during the overnight shifts.

In order to avoid dangerous coverage lapses, the Board approved a request from Fire-Rescue to fund the career positions at the cost of \$1,037,540 for FY14 on an 8-1 vote. I supported the motion. The cost to continue funding these positions in FY15 is approximately \$648,250, with

the discrepancy from year to year due to the need for immediate overtime for proper coverage while career recruits attend the fire school.

APVFD is not alone in its difficulties to find volunteer recruits. The Board has received other career staffing requests from Lucketts, Round Hill, Philomont and Middleburg Volunteer Fire companies. These issues led the Board of Supervisors to instruct the County Administrator to put together a Fire-Rescue task force to make recommendations as to the future of the combined career/volunteer system. In addition, the Board tasked the Government Reform Commission to do the same.

Both recommendations will be coming to the Finance and Government Operations Committee in July. I look forward to hearing them.

Stone Ridge East Rezoning Clears the Way for Tall Cedars Construction

I have often spoken and written about the catch-22 in residential rezonings—higher density requested by developers can bring needed infrastructure, but the additional houses create a bigger impact. I've said from the beginning that I would evaluate each developer request on a case by case basis, with strong consideration given to the overall good of the community.

In light of those criteria, at our June 19 meeting I supported a request from Van Metre homes to build a new section of Stone Ridge on the east side of Gum Spring Road. That request was approved unanimously by the Board, and also had the support of the Stone Ridge HOA representing the current residents of Stone Ridge. Van Metre will be building 160 single family homes on 47 acres.

There was one overriding factor that led me to support this application: Tall Cedars Parkway. I have been working to get Tall Cedars built between Stone Ridge and South Riding since the beginning of my term. The last major impediment was acquiring the needed right of way to build the road across the parcel that Van Metre acquired for this rezoning. The County had made attempts over the years to acquire access but was unable. As part of this rezoning, Van Metre will now control the right of way, and as a condition of approval, will be donating it to Loudoun County so that we can build Tall Cedars. This section of Tall Cedars has already been funded by the Board using other developer proffers, so this truly was the last step needed. Construction should begin in 2014 and be completed in 2015.

In addition to donating the right of way for Tall Cedars Parkway, we negotiated a total contribution of \$6.7 million in capital contributions from Van Metre in exchange for permission to build the homes. These funds will help to offset the costs associated with the residents that will live there.

At the end of the day, my judgment is that the greater good of the community is well served by getting Tall Cedars built as a reliever to Route 50. I will continue to carefully evaluate each developer request and hold developers to a high standard on rezonings.

Traffic Signal Study for Belmont Ridge Road and Croson Lane Intersection

This month, I joined Broad Run District Supervisor Shawn Williams to address the intersection of Belmont Ridge Road and Croson Lane, which touches both of our districts. As those of you in this area know, lengthy backups are common at this intersection as drivers from Croson try to access Belmont Ridge Road, which can get very busy. After a serious accident in 2012, Supervisor Williams and I asked VDOT to examine the intersection. Although they counted three accidents in the previous year, they did not find sufficient evidence to warrant a traffic signal based on crash data alone. However, a full warrant study was not done, because VDOT does not control Croson Lane. Currently, Croson Lane is still controlled by the developer and will not be turned over to VDOT until it is expanded to four lanes. The four lane expansion will only be triggered by development in the southeast quadrant of the intersection, which is on an undetermined timeline set by the developer. Meanwhile, traffic continues to increase at this intersection and something needs to be done.

To get a complete analysis done, Supervisor Williams and I brought forward an item asking the Board to allocate \$13,000 in local gasoline tax funding to conduct a traffic signal warrant study at this intersection. The Board approved this allocation and staff will move forward with the warrant analysis, which will take several months. Pending the outcome, we would then take a look at ways to fund a signal, should it be warranted. I'll keep you updated.

Bull Run Post Office Road Paving Clears First Hurdle

Once I learned that the new transportation package passed by the General Assembly included funding for unpaved roads, I began pushing VDOT to assign funding to pave Bull Run Post Office Road. I'm pleased to report that the County and VDOT are proposing BRPO paving as a priority project for the use of secondary road funds in the latest 6 year plan, which is the first step toward funding. The overall project cost is estimated at \$8.6 million and is not actually fully funded in the plan until FY2018. However, enough funds are included in FY14 to begin design work and get a better cost estimate. I will continue to discuss the options regarding BRPO—which could also include a tar and chip solution—with VDOT and the impacted residents. In the meantime, I would encourage residents who want to see BRPO improved to participate in the public hearing the Board is having on secondary road projects on July 10. See information below under announcements.

Gum Spring Library Wins Design Award

Gum Spring Library has only been open for a few months, but it is already winning awards. The library won a "Signatures of Loudoun Design Excellence Award" from the Loudoun County Design Cabinet for the interior design of the library. The award program recognizes exceptional buildings, interiors and landscape design throughout Loudoun. Design Cabinet members include professional architects, planners, engineers, and students who volunteer their expertise to

recognize the best in Loudoun. I would also like to thank the two Freedom High School students who served on the cabinet: Katelyn Smith and Pallu Karmacharya. Katelyn was also the co-emcee of the presentations before the Board of Supervisors. I was glad to see the library recognized!

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

School Construction as By Right Use

Loudoun's zoning controls what can be built where. In many zoning districts, schools are not allowed as a by-right use using the existing zoning, and require a special exception. There has been an effort by the Board of Supervisors to potentially change zoning classifications to change that recently, which I did not support.

The Board approved a Resolution of Intent to Amend the Loudoun County zoning ordinance allowing public schools to be built by-right (without a special exception process) in most zoning districts on a 7-2 vote. I was one of the two in the minority for several reasons. Currently, the County zoning ordinance requires a special exception process for most schools that are built. This process does cost money and staff time, as plans are reviewed by staff in various departments and the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors must hold public hearings and vote on the final land use approval. I agree with those who argue that the process is too time-consuming, but I think it could be improved rather than eliminated.

In my 18 months on the Board, I have discovered just how essential it is to have thorough reviews of school sites. The County's Transportation and Capital Infrastructure Department (TCI) needs to review school site plans so we can catch potential traffic issues before we build, not after. If the special exception process was eliminated, the County would lose the ability to have that TCI review. The case of Cardinal Ridge Elementary School (ES-21) is a classic example of why it is a good idea to have more review, not less. LCPS originally proposed an entrance to the school directly on Braddock Road. I objected, because I was concerned that congestion in the school parking lot could lead to additional delays on Braddock Road. Because of the special exception, this issue was referred to TCI, and their analysis ultimately validated my concern and helped convince the School Board to make a change to the site plan. The process worked and the school is being constructed with a sensible transportation plan.

Even with this layer of review, sometimes the process does not work. Buffalo Trail Elementary is an example. The road network and traffic light that was supposed to be in place was not when the school opened. This past year, the increased number of students created huge problems along Gum Spring Road, and the traffic signal is still years away. Buffalo Trail was built before my term, but these issues should have been flagged at that time. Certainly, eliminating the special exception process is not a step in the right direction to ensure that these types of issues are caught and dealt with before they become a problem for our citizens.

The bottom line for me is that when a school is built, it stands for decades and affects the community around it. We have to get it right, and we only have one chance to do so. As a result

of the Board's vote, staff will now propose various options to amend the Zoning Ordinance to make schools by-right. Those amendments will be reviewed by the Planning Commission and come back to the Board of Supervisors for a public hearing. I hope that in time, my colleagues will be convinced that this is not the best direction to go in.

Home Daycare Regulations Update

Over one year ago, I began working to avert major disruptions to home daycare providers and parents in Loudoun County due to the regulations issued by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) requiring providers to be in agreement with the local zoning ordinance. Staff presented draft language to the Board at the June 5 meeting to correct some of the discrepancies between our ordinance and the state requirements. The language follows Board direction to allow up to 12 children in the home in some zoning districts with performance standards (previously the Loudoun limit was nine) and to decrease the age of children counted toward the maximum from 14 to 13.

County staff held an informational and public input meeting on these proposed changes in May. Public input will continue as the Planning Commission and full Board hold public hearings and take final votes on the regulations in the coming months. Please continue to let me know your thoughts on these [proposed changes](#).

Review of Funding for County Non-Profit Groups

During the FY14 budget debate, I pledged to revisit the issue of how the County awards funding to the non-profit agencies in our community. I brought forward an item this month asking the Board to have the Finance committee review the non-profit funding process and come up with a needs-based approach. The Board supported my item unanimously and the Finance committee will be taking up the topic at its July 9 meeting.

My observation is that we seem to take a backwards approach to awarding funds, waiting for the groups to apply and then grant (or deny) them the funds they request. I would rather identify the needs in the County first and then set aside a pool of funds to address those needs. This type of approach would likely save taxpayer money and remove some of the political considerations from the process. My proposal would essentially set up a competitive grant process within each category defined by the Board as a need, with County staff using agreed upon criteria to make awards. I look forward to the discussion at the Finance Committee.

Board of Equalization Appointment Process

During this year's General Assembly session, legislation the Board sought giving us the authority to appoint members of the Board of Equalization (BOE) became law. The BOE is the body to which property owners can appeal their real estate assessment.

Previously, members of the BOE were appointed by the Loudoun County Circuit Court, which proved to be problematic because the Circuit Court itself hears appeals from the BOE. As a result, the judges were reluctant to exercise any oversight of the BOE, which was badly needed. Over the last few years, it became clear that the BOE was not operating in a manner worthy of the public's trust. The BOE routinely did not follow standard procedures for open meetings and transparency, and became entangled in an expensive lawsuit when they attempted to kick a citizen out of a meeting. The Washington Post ran a good [story](#) detailing some of the history and the steps taken by the Board of Supervisors to make the assessment process more fair and transparent, which included moving the County Assessor from a direct report to the Board to the Commissioner of the Revenue, an independently elected official.

The Board voted this month to enact this newly granted authority and a public hearing will be held on the ordinance changes, likely in September.

Government Reform Commission Completes Work

The Board established the Government Reform Commission (GRC) at the beginning of our term to review county operations and make suggestions on how we might provide more effective and efficient governing practices for the citizens of Loudoun. After 18 months of hard work by the GRC members and staff, the commission has completed its work. The GRC held public input sessions and received comments from commission and Board members. At the beginning, the GRC took on a list of over 40 issues, while later paring it down to a more manageable number. The GRC recommendations touched on many areas—economic development, Loudoun Water, public safety, and government operations. Several of the GRC's recommendations have been adopted by the Board of Supervisors, and several more are still under review.

I think overall the GRC was a success, and I'm grateful for their service. In particular, I'd like to thank Barbara Munsey, who was my appointee representing the Dulles District. The Commission benefited from her tenacity and extensive knowledge of County issues.

The one area that the GRC really did not make progress is on school issues—due largely to essentially a lack of cooperation from LCPS. However, the Joint Board of Supervisors/School Board is making another attempt through a process that they directly will control to try to find areas of greater efficiency between the schools and the County. This is a badly needed exercise and I fully support the effort.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Public Hearing on Secondary Road Six-Year Plan (including Bull Run Post Office Road)

The County and VDOT will be holding a joint public hearing on the FY2014-2019 Secondary Road Six-Year Plan and the FY2014 Construction Improvement Budget Priority List. One of the identified projects is the paving of Bull Run Post Office (BRPO) Road. Total cost for paving the road is estimated at \$8.6 million, which would be funded through this program (not local tax

dollars). It is important for residents to voice their opinion on whether this project should be included. Please provide your comments by either attending the hearing on Wednesday, July 10 at 6pm at 1 Harrison Street, SE, Leesburg, VA or via email at bos@loudoun.gov.

Star Spangled South Riding

It's time to celebrate America's birthday the way the Founders intended—fireworks, food, friends and family. Come out to Star Spangled South Riding on Wednesday, July 3 from 6pm to 10pm and join the festivities. There will be a parade, music and fireworks. For more information, click [here](#). Unfortunately, the Board of Supervisors has a business meeting at the same time—so while all of you are enjoying real fireworks, perhaps I will be witnessing a different kind in the Board room!

Heat Relief for Seniors

The Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging, the Virginia Department for the Aging, and Dominion Virginia Power are offering a program to provide fans and limited summer cooling assistance to eligible individuals age 60 and over. The program runs through September 30, 2013. For more information and income eligibility guidelines, please call 703-777-0257.

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