



## **Dulles Direct Newsletter**

**February 2014**

Welcome to the February Dulles District newsletter. The Board of Supervisors is now in the thick of our busiest time of year—budget season. I receive a large volume of email during this time, so it may take longer than normal for me to respond. I'll get into some details on the budget below, but in terms of schedule, this week is designated for Public Hearings, and pretty much the entire month of March will be spent on work sessions dealing with each area in the budget. In advance of those work sessions, we prepare questions for staff so that we know as much as possible before setting the final budget. Final adoption is scheduled to occur on April 2.

### **LEGISLATIVE UPDATES**

#### **FY2015 Budget**

The County Administrator has proposed a \$1.98 billion budget. The Administrator's proposed budget followed the Fiscal Guidance given by the Board of Supervisors, which was to prepare a budget at an equalized tax rate.

There's always some confusion about what that means. Basically, the equalized tax rate reflects increases in assessments—so at the equalized tax rate, the average homeowner would pay the same as they did last year. Last year's tax rate was \$1.205, this year's equalized tax rate for residential is \$1.155.

At the equalized tax rate number, however, there's still a significant increase in funding available. That's because of new construction and economic growth. As the County continues to attract development, there are more taxable properties. I'm pleased to see strong numbers in the commercial sector. In calendar year 2013, over 1.8 million square feet of permits were issued for commercial development—that's double the previous years and a sign that the Board's economic development strategy is paying off.

Another component of the budget is the FY2015-2020 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). This year's CIP is of great significance because it reflects potential funding opportunities which are available as a result of new transportation funds. Earlier this week, the Finance Committee (of which I'm a member) held a long meeting to put together that CIP. My goal with this CIP is for the first time to be able to include just about all of the major road infrastructure projects needed in the Dulles South area. We certainly have our work cut out for us, but this is the part of my job I enjoy the most and I'm looking forward to putting together the final product over the next month.

Also up for consideration in FY2015 is funding for Phase III of the Dulles South Multipurpose Center (senior center), and new elementary and middle schools in the Dulles North area.

## **School Budget**

Much of the input the Board is receiving is in regards to the School Budget. The discussion on the school budget has been frustrating so far—there is a lot of misinformation and not a lot of constructive dialogue.

Here are the facts: the County Administrator's proposed budget increases LCPS funding by 8% -- about \$66 million, to \$949 million. Again, that is achieved without a tax increase because of economic growth. The School Board has proposed an increase of nearly 13%--\$106 million, which is just slightly less than the Superintendent's budget proposal.

2015 enrollment is expected to increase by 3.4%. The system is also opening three new schools, and needs to deal with mandatory deferred VRS payments. Beyond that, the priorities I hear from the community are teacher compensation, class size and technology. The School Board has proposed STEP salary increases in order to

address a sag in the pay scale for mid-career teachers. I've looked at their analysis and agree it needs to be adjusted. The question, however, is by how much and in what time frame.

I was really disturbed by an email that was prepared by a pro-school advocacy group and distributed by the Loudoun Education Association (LEA), which claimed I said teachers shouldn't receive salary increases because the cost of living in Loudoun is low.

I said no such thing. I did point out that comparative compensation figures in a vacuum aren't very meaningful without taking into account cost of living—but I also said that I appreciated the work the School Board had done to identify a sag in the STEP salary scale and I supported fixing it.

Unfortunately, this email was sent to PTA parents at Pinebrook Elementary School, and to many teachers throughout the Dulles District—most of whom will never see my response.

These types of tactics are in bad faith. The email was designed to try to elicit a response from parents and teachers so they will get engaged in the process, but doing it under false pretenses distorts the process. We're all adults and these are complicated matters with an open and honest dialogue.

We'll be holding a work session next Tuesday on the budget. The Board of Supervisors has asked the School Board for a better understanding of what can be funded with an 8 percent increase.

Many that have contacted the Board are asking for "full funding" of the school budget—which I would point out is simply a request made essentially without a spending cap. An editorial in this week's *Leesburg Today* makes a very salient point: "It is critically important to realize that a "commitment to education" does not require full funding of the School Board's budget request, any more than a commitment to public safety should provide the sheriff with a blank check."

Our job is to balance a lot of priorities—schools, public safety, social services, parks and recreation, transportation—in a way that is fair to taxpayers and business owners and allows Loudoun to continue to thrive. There will also be some disagreement about exactly how much money should go to each priority, but given our overall fiscal picture this year, I think we can find the right balance.

## **Property Tax Assessments**

Now that assessments are out, I thought I would take a moment to review them for the Dulles District and for the County.

As you might recall, the Board changed the assessment process last year so that the Assessor function now resided with the Commissioner of Revenue. Previously, it was with the Board itself. Even though there was not interference from the Board, we wanted to create some independence between the assessment process and the tax rate.

Property taxes are the largest source of revenue for Loudoun County. Over ten percent of the property taxes collected in the County come directly from the Dulles District. Our area has the third highest total assessed property out of the 8 districts in Loudoun. Overall, we experienced a 2.68% increase in assessed value of existing residential properties—among the lowest in the County. Countywide, assessed values of existing homes were up 4.26%. When accounting for new properties in the Dulles District, however, our overall value increased by 8%.

Real property tax assessments have already been mailed and are also available online at [Loudoun.gov/parceldatabase](http://Loudoun.gov/parceldatabase). You may request a review of your assessment from the Commissioner of the Revenue's office Real Estate Division. The Application for Review is available at the website listed above and should be filed by March 5, 2014. Once an appeal has been filed, it will be reviewed by a field appraiser. If you still do not agree with your assessment, you may appeal to the Board of Equalization, which will schedule a hearing (more on the BOE below).

## **Board Denies Willowsford Request for More Homes**

The Board voted 7-2 to deny a rezoning request from Willowsford to build an additional 557 residential units in the Greens South neighborhood off of Braddock Road. I joined the majority in opposition to this application.

While the Willowsford developer made an effort to mitigate some of the impact of the new units, I still had significant concerns: the traffic impact of the additional units on Braddock Road, Gum Spring Road, and Route 50, and the precedent that would have been set by approving a rezoning in this particular zoning district. There are at least six more rezoning requests coming from other developers in this immediate area.

I always evaluate rezoning applications on a case by case basis and believe there are in fact times when it will make sense to approve higher density in order to get

infrastructure and commercial development. However, the proffers in this application were not enough in my view to overcome the impact of the new housing and the lack of infrastructure to support it.

## **DULLES DISTRICT UPDATES**

### **Traffic Signal at Braddock/Riding Center**

The intersection of Braddock Road and Riding Center Drive is regularly experiencing backups. My staff has been investigating the history of this intersection, and we discovered that a traffic light was planned at one time, but was not installed because a VDOT warrant study did not permit it. However, the study was done in 2005—and an updated study has never been completed.

By our estimation, over 1,000 residential units have been constructed in the vicinity since the last warrant study and I believe the intersection will now meet warrant for a signal. The Board of Supervisors approved a new warrant study request earlier this month to get the process underway. I will warn you that it will take a while—the traffic light study and installation process is very, very slow—but I wanted you to know that we're working on it. I'll provide an update with the results of the study when we get them—probably in 8-10 weeks.

### **Brambleton Sports Park Turf**

The new Brambleton Park at the corner of Belmont Ridge Road and Northstar Boulevard could be a candidate for turf fields. The Board of Supervisors is soliciting proposals for a public-private partnership to install turf at private expense. The park will have one large soccer field and two smaller rectangular fields.

This would be an important upgrade to the fields in our District because the turf can be utilized 3 times more often than natural grass, which will increase our ability to practice and play on these fields. This would help address our shortage of fields in Loudoun County. Perhaps more importantly, this could be a model for future improvements to other fields. We're trying to think outside the box a little bit, in order to bring services without an additional expense to taxpayers.

## **Pedestrian Improvements for Croson Lane**

We are working at the border of the Broad Run and Dulles Districts to explore the costs and possible available funding sources to extend and complete missing sidewalk links on Croson Lane. This project would be in conjunction with Supervisor Shawn William's efforts to construct sidewalks along Mooreview Parkway. The sidewalk on Croson Lane would ultimately provide a safe path to and from Moorefield Station Elementary. I will keep you posted as the County moves forward in the process.

I would note that we have received some inquiries about pedestrian access at the Gum Spring/Braddock intersection. We've been doing some research on this—the challenge is that the intersection is not yet built to the ultimate configuration. Braddock is supposed to be four lanes through the intersection, and clearly current traffic is not moving through it very well. It would be difficult to add pedestrian access before the intersection has been built to its ultimate configuration, particularly because we have no identified funds to do it with.

## **Dulles Air Cargo, Passenger, and Metro Access Highway**

You are probably at least somewhat familiar with the Bi-County Parkway by now, which would run along Northstar Blvd between 50 and Prince William County. There is a second piece of that project which is extremely important should the Bi-County Parkway move forward. For now, VDOT is calling it the Dulles Air Cargo, Passenger and Metro Access Highway. The idea is to provide a link between 606 and the Bi-County Parkway to provide access to the Airport and to Metro stations. VDOT has been conducting an environmental assessment of the options for this road and hopes to have their final assessment completed this spring - with a public hearing scheduled in April.

There are two primary options under consideration: the first is to essentially cross 50 on Northstar, and then south of Brambleton the road would head east to 606, and the second is to build dedicated lanes on Route 50 and intersect with Loudoun County Parkway. I'm studying both options and am awaiting further information from VDOT. In addition, there will be a public information meeting held by VDOT in the coming months. For more information, take a look at the presentation VDOT gave to the Board of Supervisors earlier this month. Click [here](#) to view the presentation.

## **West Spine Update**

I've gotten a lot of questions about when the new section of the West Spine Road is opening. The answer is that we don't know yet. I will go ahead and take the blame for delaying it, but with good reason. Because Gum Spring Road will no longer be a through route on the south side, cars heading southbound will need to take either a right or a left at 50 to head south. I have been pushing for months to get an additional lane put into Gum Spring to accommodate additional traffic. I thought this was a done deal—in fact, I even wrote about it in here—but there have been big delays. The lane is required to be built by HCA as part of the Emergency Room project. We have assembled all the parties involved—in addition to HCA there are several others—and we seem to now be all on the same page about what needs to happen. HCA is working to get the lane completed, at which point I will allow the project to proceed.

This is going to be a difficult transition. Tall Cedars Parkway will need to close during construction between Millstream and Gum Spring. I expect major delays when this is first implemented—so I want to at least make sure we've done everything we can to make it a little less painful. That is why I'm insisting that the additional lane on Gum Spring be open.

## **Lane Striping on Route 50**

We also have heard from you regarding the lack of striping on Route 50. I have been trying to work with VDOT on this. Weather plays a big role in the ability to stripe—the cold is not conducive. Striping was first improved westbound, and by the time you read this it should also be better eastbound. It won't be perfect—remember this is temporary striping and it has to come up—but it should be better than what we have now (nothing). I know it is hard to tell where to drive, especially at night or in bad weather.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Night Work Scheduled for Route 50 on March 2-3**

On the night of March 2nd beginning at approximately 8:00 PM and continuing through the morning on March 3rd, there will be signal work taking place at the intersection of Route 50 and Tall Cedars Parkway in Loudoun County. The permanent signal poles and signal heads will be removed, and new temporary signal poles will be installed with new overhead span wire and temporary signal heads.

Lane closures will be up in both the Eastbound and Westbound directions of Route 50 until completion. Also, police officers will be stopping traffic periodically. Upon completion of this work, the new intersection will be fully operational and the traffic configuration through the intersection will stay the same.

It is advised that delays are anticipated on Sunday night, and it is recommended to utilize alternate routes.

### **Dulles Resident Subba Kolla Appointed to Board of Equalization**

Last year, Loudoun sought and received permission from the General Assembly for the Board of Supervisors to appoint members to the Board of Equalization—the body that hears appeals of assessments. The existing Board members were appointed by the Circuit Court and we had big problems on the Board—most notably a lack of transparency and heavy handed tactics.

After a competitive process, the Board selected three applicants to serve on the BOE. One of them is Subba Kolla, a successful realtor here in the Dulles District who I nominated. I'd like to thank Subba for his willingness to serve and congratulate him on his appointment. Subba is very active in the Telexx community here in Loudoun and is well respected.

### **Public Input for the FY2015 Budget**

The final public hearing is scheduled for Saturday, March 1, from 9:00 am – 12:00 pm at the LCPS Administration Building in Ashburn. Speakers are free to address any topic and are generally given two minutes. Of course, you may also provide comments by email either directly to me at [matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov](mailto:matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov) or to the entire Board at [loudounbudget@loudoun.gov](mailto:loudounbudget@loudoun.gov).