



Dulles Direct Newsletter December 2015

Welcome to the December edition of the Dulles Direct newsletter, and the final newsletter of this Board of Supervisors! I hope everybody that celebrates Christmas had an enjoyable one, and that you stay safe during New Year's Eve festivities tomorrow. Most of my time over the past month has been spent on budget issues and on preparations for the next term. In this newsletter I'll give you some details about the County's budget situation (not great news) and close the loop on some of the items that we've been discussing during the year.

I wish to start by recognizing my departing colleagues. Now, as I said at one of our last meetings-nobody is dead, but five of them are leaving the Board-3 by choice, and the other 2 by the will of the voters. The Board got together for the last time on December 16, and concluded our meeting with a dinner hosted by the County Administrator and his staff. It was an interesting term-every member of the Board came from the same political party, yet we had many differences and split votes. I think in some ways that demonstrates that the system worked-we were representing our constituents, and on many issues, political parties aren't really that relevant. Despite those differences, however, we stayed together, which has not always been the case in Loudoun's history. The big picture goals-attract businesses and transportation-were always top of mind, and for the most part everybody got together pretty well personally. I reflected on each departing member at the last

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meeting. I won't repeat all of that here with one exception, but I thank them all for their service.

My exception in this space is Chairman Scott York, who has been a mentor to me. In 2011, seven out of nine members of the Board were new. Within the first six months we had to pass a budget and make one of the most consequential decisions (Metro) that any Board in Loudoun has ever had to make. We absolutely could not have done it without Scott's steady hand and ability to lead, guide, push and prod. All told, Scott served Loudoun for 24 years-as the Planning Commissioner and Supervisor from the Sterling District (4 years each), and as Chairman at Large (16 years). He's the most consequential political figure in Loudoun's history. The respect he gained throughout the region was demonstrated earlier this month when he received the Scull Award from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments-the highest honor for an elected official in DC, Northern Virginia and Suburban Maryland. On a more selfish note, Scott supported me on every major capital project I fought for in the Dulles District-606 widening, Tall Cedars, the library, the Multipurpose Center, and many more. It will seem very odd to walk into the Board room and not see him.



Vice Chairman Buona and I arranged to have a County seal signed by staff to present to Chairman York at his last meeting. The County Administrator also presented the Chairman with the gavel he used during his tenure. He



**Matthew F.
Letourneau**

Dulles District
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thought that after 16 years, we could probably use a new one.



Following that final meeting, I was honored to take the oath of office to continue to serve as the Dulles District Supervisor. The oath was administered by the Clerk of the Circuit Court, Gary Clemens and I was joined at the event by my family. Once again, thank you to the voters of the Dulles District for your confidence in me and to my family for their support--I will continue to do my absolute best to represent your interests in County government.



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Although not on the Loudoun Board, the Sully District Supervisor Mike Frey in neighboring Fairfax County chose to retire and is leaving office in a few days. He has served in that position since the district was created in 1992! We were able to work collaboratively on a number of issues and I certainly appreciated his support of the Braddock and Pleasant Valley roundabout that is currently under construction.

The Board presented Resolutions of Appreciation to our Planning Commissioners at our final meeting of the year. Commissioner Jeff Salmon has been a valuable partner in ensuring proper review of development applications in our district. I appreciate his strong work ethic and service to our district over the past four years.



StoneSprings Hospital Center officially opened on December 7. All operations of the prior Emergency Room facility were shifted to the new facility at that time. Just prior to the opening, I joined Governor McAuliffe and several other local officials for the ribbon cutting.

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

FY2017 BUDGET UPDATE

As Chairman of the Board's Finance Committee, I have spent a lot of time since last summer preparing for consideration of the FY2017 Budget that the Board will approve next spring. County staff has consistently presented to the Board forecasts on revenue due to property tax growth for the coming year.

The forecasts that we receive become clearer as the Commissioner of the Revenue's Office gets further along in the annual reassessment process. The assessments shape the value of the County's tax base and in turn influence how much revenue is received at a certain tax rate.

I don't want to sound like the boy who cried wolf. In the fall of every year, I write about how the forecasts don't look great, and we may have some shortfalls. Generally speaking, those have not materialized.

This year is different.

For the first time in my term, the Board has been informed that the assessments of existing properties are not meeting expectations, and in fact are seeing an actual decline in value. Because of new construction, there will still be revenue growth, but it is not nearly what was anticipated during all of our forecasts. Year to year values of

residential properties are coming in at about -0.9%. It's hard to tell at this point whether this is the beginning of a larger trend, or a blip. One theory put forward by budget staff is that the effects of sequestration, coupled with a glut of certain types of new housing products (multifamily) could be the culprit.

What does this mean for the budget? It means that the equalized tax rate (the rate at which the owner of a home at the average assessed value would have a flat tax bill) would now actually be a higher rate, instead of a lower rate. To give you some perspective, in 2011, the tax rate was \$1.285/\$100 assessed. Every year, the Board has lowered the rate to keep pace with rising assessments, to the current rate which is \$1.135/\$100 assessed. The new projected equalized tax rate is \$1.145/\$100 assessed. Even at that rate, there would be precious little new revenue to deal with additional needs and services either on the County or the School side. The County Administrator's proposed budget will reflect that rate, but there will be a lot of work to do after he proposes it in February.

Now, there is always the chance that things will improve some. I certainly hope so. A significant factor in our budget is the amount of state aid the County receives, and our budget projections are very conservative in that area. But with over 50% of assessments now complete (though you won't see them until the end of January), we have a pretty good idea of what's happening in terms of property values. We also have less fund balance to work with than usual to plug holes in our budget. We stretched last year to give the School Board its entire request, and we've had a series of larger expenditures such as school renovations, and unplanned fire department staffing due to volunteer shortages.

I will say that I was extremely disappointed in my Board's decision this year to fund a turf playing field from our fund balance (surplus) at Potomac Falls High School in Sterling. The argument was that the school itself couldn't raise the funds necessary for the field, and that the Board has funded other fields. Those were different times. When revenues are less than projected, the first thing you should do is stop spending unless it is necessary. An off-budget

\$1.25 million expense when we know we have a big shortfall coming is fiscally irresponsible, and I voted against it. It passed 5-4, with myself, Supervisor Reid, Supervisor Bonfils, and Supervisor Buona opposed.

School Budget

I have begun a dialogue with the School Board to try to maintain our improved process from last year. It will be a lot more difficult this year because there isn't as much new revenue. On the capital side, the School Board finalized its request for over \$270 million in construction projects. That's more than the entire County capital budget. I will admit to being very frustrated that this would even be on the table, since the School Board knows that the Board of Supervisors couldn't fund it even if we wanted to.

Full day kindergarten was a hot topic in the campaigns and a lot of promises were made, and so the School Board's request includes a series of additions to elementary schools in order to add the capacity that would be needed.

However, the request also includes several new schools, including two here in Dulles South, that are absolutely necessary due to overcrowding, particularly at Mercer Middle School. My understanding is that the FDK request was partly to demonstrate to the General Assembly exactly what the County would need in order to be able to accelerate additional capacity beyond what is already being planned.

I need to be very upfront with all of you-as I always have been on this topic. There's no way that I can support expanding full day kindergarten at the expense of every other grade level. I believe that School Board Representative Jeff Morse feels the same way.

Unfortunately, at this juncture, it is an either/or proposition. We can either fund the new schools we need to deal with overcrowding, or the expansions that the School Board has identified as necessary for FDK. It is not a function of the tax rate, at least on the capital side-it's a function of how much debt the County can issue every year. The School Board's request accelerates schools that were not planned to be funded this year in order to deal with growth, and in my view, those have to be the top priority in terms of fund allocation.

That said, I think based on our conversations, the School Board will be able to work with the Board of Supervisors to help prioritize the school projects that are needed. I also know that a FDK implementation plan is a high priority for the School Board, with an emphasis on utilizing existing capacity to the maximum extent possible, and I will be as supportive as I can be of that effort.

One of the issues on the school side is that they have increased their enrollment projections by over 1,000 students. I wrote about this last month, and I'm going to continue to press for reforms on how by-right development is accounted for (currently, it isn't unless it is underway), and on how townhomes are factored (I think the student projections are too low). Both of those issues are directly related to the capacity problems at Mercer and Buffalo Trail, and the capacity problems that we will soon have at Champe.

Debt "Cap"

At the December 16 meeting, in my capacity as Finance Chair, I made a motion supported by staff to increase the self-imposed borrowing limit that the County has from \$200 million to \$225 million per year. The debate got very political quickly and the motion failed 4-5. I have been informed by Chair-elect Randall that she is bringing it back for another vote at the new Board's first meeting on January 6.

The crux of the issue is this-the County has been able to achieve our AAA bond ratings by carefully managing a series of ratios related to how much debt we carry and borrow. It is difficult to quickly calculate each of them, especially for policymakers, so as an easy way of helping us make decisions, in 2006 the Board of Supervisors imposed a \$200 million per year cap on how much new debt can be added to the capital improvement plan.

That was nine years ago. Since then, the County has grown exponentially, as has the budget. At this point, \$200 million a year in debt will still keep the County well under the ratios needed for our bond rating. At \$225 million, we will still easily make our ratios and keep our debt load

manageable-which is logical, because there are now more people in the County to support it. An artificially low cap won't tell us anything, which is why staff has strongly recommended that we raise it.

My motion failed because some of my colleagues expressed concerns about adding more debt than \$200 million a year. Raising the cap itself doesn't do that-that happens during the budget year. If we are in fact in an economic downturn, then I'm quite certain our reaction will be to back out projects as needed to reduce our overall budget. Furthermore, every member of the Board is always free to vote against adding projects to the budget.

However, I would note with some irony that some of the strongest opponents to the motion to raise the debt cap had just voted to spend over \$1 million of our surplus that we really need for next year on the turf field at Potomac Falls.

Sound fiscal policy isn't for show-and the County shouldn't be playing politics with artificial caps on our debt that we know aren't needed. So, on January 6, I will once again support that motion, and perhaps the new Board will see it differently.

Gum Spring Road to Become Stone Springs Boulevard North of Route 50

Be on the lookout for road names to change along Gum Spring Road, north of Rt. 50. The original Gum Spring alignment at the former emergency room building will now be renamed Medical Way from Route 50 to Stone Springs Boulevard just north of the hospital.

With the opening of Stone Springs Boulevard north of Rt. 50 earlier this year, there was a situation where the same road alignment had two names. To fix that, **the portion of Gum Spring that extends from the new Medical Way to Evergreen Mills Road will now be renamed Stone Springs Boulevard** so that the name is the same for the full length from Route 50 to Evergreen Mills.

These name changes will be in place by mid-January and are another step in the reconfiguration of the road network around the hospital. With this change, Gum Spring Road will no longer exist north of Route 50.

Elk Lick Road Intersections at Route 50 and Tall Cedars

Over the past several years, we have seen a number of incidents at the intersections of Elk Lick Road and Tall Cedars Parkway and Route 50. Attempts were made to make some minor improvements, but they haven't been very successful. In order to identify a more effective solution, I requested that staff prepare a proposal for a traffic operations analysis and identify a source of funding.

This month, the Board approved an \$89,000 comprehensive traffic analysis. The analysis would help to identify solutions to safety issues at these two intersections including a review of potentially closing the median break at the Elk Lick and Route 50 intersection. Unfortunately, some of the more common options are not feasible given close proximity to other intersections and before any significant changes are made, I want to be sure we are fully aware of the impacts on traffic patterns in the area. I look forward to working with our staff and VDOT on identifying potential solutions to these problem intersections and will be sharing any recommendations with you after they are received.

Sheriff's Department Training Facility Clears Final Hurdle

The Board of Supervisors approved, on an 8-1 vote, the final land use application associated with a new training facility for the Sheriff's Office. The facility had been funded in prior fiscal years with the final construction funding included in the current fiscal year that began on July 1. This project has received some opposition from the right and the left-from the right because of the price tag (\$21 million) and the left because they don't think it should be a higher priority than other things they'd like to fund.

I have supported this project throughout my term, and I'll explain why. Yes, \$21 million is a lot of money, but these types of facilities are highly customized and not cheap to build. The Sheriff's Department has been operating out of a leased facility near Dulles Airport since 1987. That facility is completely inadequate and quite frankly, borderline unsafe with deputies firing into mounds that are full of spent rounds. There is very little capacity left for them to safely shoot into, and the training ability is limited. The new range facility will enable LCSO to meet all firearms and decision making training requirements in a much safer manner. The new facility will also reduce lead exposure to the deputies as well as the environment, reduce the amount of noise generated and eliminate the chance of an errant round in the self-contained indoor facility.

Originally, the previous Board pursued a shared facility with the Airports Authority and other counties. For various reasons, none of those efforts were successful. In 2012, our Board decided that enough time had been spent and that the time had come to move forward with the project. Of course, those years of delays raised the price tag. One of my colleagues on the Board advocated for having deputies use private and recreational ranges. There is not enough capacity for that (see below) and with a few exceptions those types of facilities don't provide the full complement needed.

Sheriff's deputies must qualify on the range twice per year with additional range time encouraged. There are nearly 600 sworn deputies in Loudoun. We are not Mayberry anymore. Our crime rate is low, but even a low crime rate in a county of 360,000 still presents real crime. This new facility will provide both long and short range firing ranges. However, in recognition of the fact that discharging a weapon is a last resort, it also will provide a scenario training facility to train on de-escalating situations, as well as classroom space.

It is quite possible that other law enforcement agencies may be interested in renting space from Loudoun in order to help recoup costs. My attitude is that this is a facility that is built every few decades, and we might as well do it right and built it with enough capacity to last us well into

the future. Public safety is not the area to be skimping, and I view one of my jobs as trying to provide law enforcement with the resources they need to be successful in their jobs.

Poland Hill Rezoning Update

Last month I shared with you a rezoning proposal for Poland Hill. The 53 acre property is on Poland Road south of Tall Cedars Parkway and proposes a total of 219 units, of which 153-all on the west side of Poland Road-will be age restricted, and 66 (close to the by-right allowed without Board approval) will be market rate. In addition, the anchor for the age restricted portion will be a 100-bed Sunrise Assisted Living facility. The mix of the age restricted units is: 29 single family detached, 46 townhomes, and 78 multi-story condos.

The Board discussed this application at our December Public Hearing and after much discussion moved the application forward to our second Business Meeting on December 16. During the Public Hearing, it was noted that the applicant had set limits on hours for services relating to the assisted living facility and provided buffers from neighboring properties. Extensive outreach was done by the applicant, and the application was supported by South Riding Proprietary, Ridings at Blue Springs Homeowners Association, South Village Homeowners Association, Tall Cedars Estates Homeowners Association, and East Gate Homeowners Association.

The one big outstanding issue for me was the lack of a turn lane from Poland Road into the new development. Due to my concern, the applicant revised the application to add the turn lane if approved by VDOT, as well as take other steps deemed necessary by VDOT to ensure adequate visibility and operation of the road. With those changes, the Board approved the application unanimously.

Stone Ridge Commuter Lot Pedestrian Crossing

At our Board meeting earlier this month, I requested a review of the crosswalk between the two commuter lots on Millstream Drive in Stone Ridge. When the second lot on the south side of Millstream was added, a cross walk was used to connect riders to the bus shelter and either lot.

However, the curve of the road and lack of lighting in the area certain times of the year may be making it difficult for drivers to see people crossing and yielding as required.

The item I brought forward instructed County staff to work with VDOT to identify solutions that can be implemented to make the crossing more visible and safer for users.

Ashburn Station Parking Garage

Even though the Silver Line won't be operating into Loudoun until 2019, a lot of work is underway in preparation. Earlier this year, I shared with you the County's progress in securing a Public-Private Partnership to finance and construct the garages at both the Loudoun Gateway and Ashburn stations.

At our final meeting, agreement was reached with Comstock that will ensure the completion of the garages on the north side of the Greenway at the Ashburn station. By having the private sector construct the garages, the County will not have to absorb the capital costs and this agreement allows us to still maintain some level of control over rates. The deal in place is extremely complicated-it took months to negotiate, and came right down to the wire. It isn't perfect, but it moves the ball forward on getting to where we need to be in terms of our Metro preparedness.

DULLES DISTRICT UPDATES

Dominion Power Lines Project Update

It might be out of sight, out of mind right now, but a lot has been going on in the power line fight. At the Board's Business Meeting earlier this month, we approved the expenditure of up to \$75,000 from our litigation contingency fund as a match to private sector commitments to cover the costs of expert witnesses and additional legal expenses related to next year's hearing. The private sector has stepped up with \$65,000 committed to date. I'd like to thank Van Metre (Stone Ridge), Farmer Meadows Family (Meadows Farms), Jaders (Greenworks), Brambleton, Chantilly Crushed Stone, and Elms at Arcola

for putting their money where their mouth is on this issue! There have been lengthy discussions with the Airports Authority regarding the County's alternatives, and progress has been made in securing their acceptance of certain routes. I will share more on this at a later date, but I wanted to mention that both myself and County staff have continued to spend a great deal of time on this even though you haven't heard anything in a while.

Dulles South Multipurpose Center Update

Work continues on the Dulles South Multipurpose Center expansion. The County broke ground in August and work is progressing nicely and on schedule. The recent focus has been on site work and pouring the competition pool concrete slab. Footings are underway for the building and work is now beginning on the leisure pool and underground electrical. The next phase of work will be on underground water and sewer and the masonry walls.

I think it is safe to say that we all will be looking forward to the completion of this project and its planned opening in 2017.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I-66 Multimodal Improvements Inside the Beltway Project Design Public Hearings

VDOT will be holding Design Public Hearings for the I-66 Multimodal Improvements Inside the Beltway Project. They will be providing information on how the dynamically-priced toll lanes would operate, as well as locations and design of proposed toll gantries and signage. All of the hearings will include the opportunity to view project displays and attend a formal presentation, followed by a public comment period. The hearings are scheduled as follows:

Monday, January 25, 2016 (6-8pm)

*snow date: Thursday, January 28, 2016 (7:30-9:30pm)

Washington-Lee High School Cafeteria

1301 N. Stafford Street
Arlington, VA 22201

Tuesday, January 26, 2016 (6-8pm)
*snow date: Friday, February 5, 2016 (6-8pm)
Stone Bridge High School Cafeteria
43100 Hay Road
Ashburn, VA 20147

Wednesday, January 27, 2016 (6-8pm)
*snow date: Wednesday, February 3, 2016 (6-8pm)
VDOT Northern Virginia District Office
4975 Alliance Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030

If local schools are closed due to inclement weather, hearings will be cancelled and held on the snow dates listed above. More information is available at www.transform66.org.

Opportunities Available to Participate in Local Government

With the new Board of Supervisors term, there are several openings on County Boards and Commissions. Several of my existing appointees have agreed to remain for a second term. However, there are some openings that I will be looking to fill soon. Specifically, I am soliciting applications from Dulles district residents interested in serving on the following:

- Commission on Aging
- Communications Commission
- Transit Advisory Board
- Library Board of Trustees
- Lyme Disease Commission

There are also at large openings that are not district specific. For more information on all Boards and Commissions and to download a copy of the required application form, visit <https://www.loudoun.gov/index.aspx?nid=87>.

Local Fixed Route Service App

We are pleased to announce the launch of the new local fixed route bus service App www.loudoun.gov/localbusmap. The creation of the app was a team effort between the Department of Transportation and Capital Infrastructure and the Office of Mapping and Geographic Information. Data collected by County staff was compiled into an interactive map application that is browser based and can be opened on any mobile device.

The application displays all of the local bus stops, routes, park/ride lots, planned Metro stations, sidewalks and trails. Zooming in on the map provides details of buildings, roads, and other base map features. Users can click on links to specific routes, bus route schedules and bus stops, which are displayed on a user friendly mapping interface.

Loudoun Building and Zoning Permit Application is Online as Fillable PDF

As part of Loudoun County's continuing effort to provide excellent customer service, the Department of Building and Development has redesigned the county's Building and Zoning Permit Application form as an online, fillable PDF. With the addition of this form, the fillable PDF permit application forms that are available online on the Loudoun County website are:

- Building and Zoning
- Electrical
- Elevator
- Fire
- Gas
- Mechanical
- Plumbing
- Sign

More information, including the links to the fillable PDF permit application forms, may be found online at www.loudoun.gov/BuildingPermits.

Active Shooter Video

With recent events in other areas of the country, Loudoun County Government and the Sheriff's Office are sharing a video to help people think about and understand what to do in an "active shooter" situation. Warning: this video may be graphic, you may not want to view if children are around. The video can be viewed at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFqs_pensHM&feature=youtu.be.

Dulles South Food Pantry

The Dulles South Food Pantry is a multi-faith emergency food pantry. They provide nutritious food, personal supplies and other services to those in need in Dulles South and the surrounding area that come to them regardless of income, faith or other criteria. They are an all-volunteer organization focused both on feeding the hungry and promoting the self-sufficiency of those they serve. Donations to the Dulles South Food Pantry are tax deductible. The Dulles South Food Pantry needs canned chicken & tuna; soups and stews with protein; 2 or 5 lbs. bags of rice or rice mixes; pasta; boxed potatoes; breakfast cereal and pancake mix; granola bars; fruit (in cans, plastic or dried); canned beans; pasta sauce (no glass please); seasoning packets; toothpaste; shampoo; and grocery store gift cards in any amount. They are also in need of monetary contributions and volunteers. They are able to accept food donations at Dulles South Multipurpose Center located at 24950 Riding Center Drive in South Riding, Virginia during business hours. The Dulles South Food Pantry is open to distribute food the 1st, 3rd and 5th Wednesdays of the month from 5 pm to 8 pm located at 24757 Evergreen Mill Road, Dulles VA 20166. For additional information please visit their website at www.dsfp.org.

Snow Removal Information

It sure hasn't felt like it over the past few weeks, but winter has arrived. VDOT has been preparing for its arrival and once again will be providing real time plow information during a snow event of more than two inches at www.VDOTplows.org. If you feel your street may have been missed you can call 1-800-FOR-ROAD to file a

report directly with VDOT. As always, residents can reach out to my office during winter events if they feel there is a situation which warrants extra attention. I will also continue to use my Facebook page to provide updates as needed.

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