



Dulles Direct Newsletter March 2016

Welcome to the March edition of the Dulles Direct newsletter. I hope that everyone enjoyed their Spring Break last week. The Board of Supervisors has spent some long nights in the Board Room working on the FY2017 budget. While final approval will come on April 5, we have finished our work sessions and I will provide an update on some key issues below. Following final approval, I will send out a more detailed report on the budget.

TONIGHT is the SCC Public Hearing to take comments on the County's Alternatives 4 and 5 on the power lines. I sent out an email last week discussing those alternatives and the process which you can read [here](#). We are hoping that the community will come out in support of the County alternatives, as opposed to Dominion's preferred routes that utilize Route 50 from Northstar Boulevard to the site just east of Poland Road.

One new update is that the Poland case has been combined with the case for another line that is serving a site north of Evergreen Mills Road (Yardley Ridge). Because of that, the evidentiary hearing originally scheduled to be held in Richmond on June 7 will now be held on June 29. I hope to see many of you tonight!

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

FY2017 Budget Update

While the final vote won't be held until our Business Meeting on April 5, the Board has been taking straw poll votes on a myriad of issues. Based on those straw votes, staff is now preparing a final appropriations resolution for approval on April 5.

As it currently stands, the tax rate would be \$1.145/\$100. While three of my colleagues pushed for a higher rate and one proposed a slightly lower rate, I voted in favor of this rate because I think it represents a fair outcome for everyone. The current tax rate is \$1.135/\$100, while the homeowner's equalized tax rate for FY2017 would be \$1.14/\$100.

This was a tough budget-a much tougher year than we've experienced previously due to assessments failing to meet our projections. At the same time, student enrollment growth was significantly higher than expected, and several major County departments that perform core functions are simply at their limit and need more staffing. Loudoun's population for FY2017 will be 380,000, and at that level it becomes necessary to provide some additional staff support.

My goal, as always, is to find value for the taxpayer and a balance between funding our needs and a reasonable tax rate. Loudoun's tax rate has been steadily decreasing as assessments have risen (from \$1.285 to \$1.135). I will provide a more detailed explanation of what is included in this budget once final passage is complete, but I do want to touch on a couple of topics that always receive a lot of interest:

Loudoun County Public Schools

On the operating side, this budget provides LCPS with an increase of \$69.6 million, or 7.1%. Student enrollment is increasing by 3.8%, so this budget will more than keep pace with enrollment. LCPS requested an 8.8% increase. The amount provided by the Board



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of Supervisors at this tax rate is 97.4% of the requested amount-which is exactly the same ratio as provided to the County's departments. The School Board will decide exactly how the money is spent, but the funding provided by the Board is enough to cover salary increases for staff, costs associated with enrollment growth, state-mandated costs associated with retirement and benefit plans, and a further expansion of full day kindergarten in schools that have capacity.

On the capital side, a lot of work was done by the Board to accommodate as much of the school's requests into our Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Since most of the growth is in the southern part of the County, finding ways to alleviate overcrowding in schools was my top priority this budget season. As Chairman of the Board's Finance Committee, I worked closely with staff to develop a Capital Improvement Plan that accelerates new capacity while ensuring other County priorities are maintained.

The Board of Supervisors voted to adopt the Finance Committee proposed CIP on a 9-0 vote. The Finance Committee's recommended CIP is a carefully constructed document that prioritizes providing school capacity in Dulles South and Dulles North. Specifically, the CIP accelerates construction to the current fiscal year of MS-7 - a new middle school on Braddock Road that will relieve overcrowding at Mercer Middle School, ES-28 - a new elementary school adjacent to John Champe HS that will relieve overcrowding at several schools, classroom additions to Dulles South and Dulles North schools, and modular classrooms to be initially used at Champe for Mercer students. It also plans funding for ES-31, a new elementary school in the Dulles North area in FY2018 and it accelerates funding of HS-9, a new Dulles South high school (site to be determined) in FY2018 and FY2019.

Turf Field Upgrades

During this budget season, the School Board and the Board of Supervisors heard from parents and students

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representing the four high schools in Loudoun that do not currently have turf fields-Heritage, Dominion, Freedom and Briar Woods.

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Newly constructed high schools are built with turf fields and certain older high schools have seen their fields upgraded. In one case, the Athletic Booster club at a school contributed about 25% of the funds needed. In another case, the Washington Redskins provided a grant to fund a portion of the cost. And in December, the Board of Supervisors used end of year surplus funds to upgrade the field at Potomac Falls High School, which had major drainage issues. I actually voted against providing that funding because I was concerned about the impact of using fund balance given uncertainty at the time with the FY2017 budget.

The cost of turf installation at an existing school is about \$2 million. The School Board requested funding for turf fields at the remaining high schools in FY2021 and FY2022. However, the School Board prioritized two new high schools, two new elementary schools, a new middle school, and classroom additions ahead of turf fields for existing schools in their list of projects. They provided a request to the Board of Supervisors for inclusion in the overall County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). As I have shared with you before, the request for FY2017 far exceeded the amount available for the entire County in the plan, so it could not be completely accommodated.

The CIP utilizes a variety of funding sources. Many transportation projects are planned to be funded through the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, and are contingent on winning competitive awards. Other sources of funding for projects include cash, General Obligation (GO) Bonds, and developer proffers. The CIP is a heavily constrained document and it was particularly tough this year given all of the requests and the need to accelerate seats in our schools. The County has limits on both existing (carryover) debt and new debt issued for projects. These limits help us stay within our fiscal guidelines, which are carefully reviewed each year by

major credit rating agencies who then assign grades. We work very hard to remain a "Triple-Triple A" County-AAA ratings from all three major agencies. This is the highest possible rating achieved by only a fraction of municipalities across the country, and it allows us to obtain the best interest rates possible on financed projects, which in turn saves taxpayer dollars. As we prepare for our next bond sale, I will be once again traveling to New York with some of our finance staff to meet with these agencies at the end of April.

Even without these capacity constraints, the four remaining turf fields are not ideal candidates to be financed in FY2017. The CIP is a 6 year planning document that is updated every year, and it is considered a poor financial practice to fund projects in the first year of the CIP that did not previously exist in the plan at all.

Regardless, there were no scenarios available to us in which the funds needed for turf could be accelerated prior to when the School Board requested it. There is no available debt capacity prior to those years. Beyond the school projects discussed earlier, other CIP funded projects in FY2017 include the Courts Complex Expansion in Leesburg, several fire stations and apparatus, and a component of the Juvenile Detention Center. In order to fund turf fields, other projects would have to be removed from the CIP. While staff worked on scenarios that could potentially accomplish this, none of them would have allowed the Board to accelerate the school projects that are badly needed, and in the end the Board decided they were not viable alternatives.

However, this does not mean that no additional turf fields will be funded or built before 2021.

The Board voted to add turf fields to the discussion for FY2016 fund balance. In December of each year, the County closes the books on the previous fiscal year. There is often a surplus of funds. Some of the surplus must be reserved for contingency funding, and

another portion of the surplus should be made available for the upcoming fiscal year. However, there is often some additional funding available to pay cash for one time expenses. As I mentioned previously, although I opposed it, that is how the Potomac Falls HS turf project was funded last year.

In addition, projects sometimes move or are delayed within the CIP. In many respects, FY2017 is an unusual year because of the sheer number and dollars requested by the schools to deal with capacity issues. It is certainly possible that additional capacity may become available in the FY2018, FY2019 and FY2020 budgets if the fields aren't funded with cash fund balance before then.

It is my understanding that the School Board's Finance Committee is planning to work on a policy related to recommending funding for the remaining four fields. This could include the order of preference for the four remaining schools, and whether public-private partnerships (such as booster clubs) may be available to help fund a portion of the costs.

Finally, I would note that the issue of rubber crumb turf has generated some controversy in the community and around the country. Our neighbors in Montgomery County, Maryland, have decided to no longer install rubber-crumb turf, as have several other major school systems.

At this point, as many of you know, the science is inconclusive. However, the EPA has launched an investigation into the matter. As a parent of four children, I am sensitive to the concerns of other parents about this issue, and I know that none of us want to place any child at risk. While I am not a member, the Joint Board of Supervisors/School Committee met recently on this topic, and it will continue to be discussed.

I appreciate the frustration felt by parents, students and supporters of the four schools that don't have turf. I understand that it seems unfair. As I've pointed out, it

is also unfair to have students in Dulles South and Dulles North to attend extremely overcrowded schools, and unfortunately we can't solve all of these problems immediately. Many of the speakers at the Board meetings discussed the lack of access to fields, which results in less practice time, longer drives and later nights. As a result of what I heard, I do believe that changes could be made to the way that the current turf fields are administered. That topic is solely up to the School Board's discretion, but I have discussed it with Dulles District School Board Representative Jeff Morse and I believe that LCPS would consider some changes. The turf fields are community assets, paid for by all the taxpayers, including those whose children attend schools that don't have turf. I hope that these issues can be resolved in a way that relieves some of the burden on students and parents at Heritage, Dominion, Freedom and Briar Woods until such time that a final resolution is reached.

Updates on transportation projects and other budget items will be covered in next week's update.

Acceleration of Funds for Dulles Area Schools

In addition to moving up the capital funds for construction for the schools I mentioned above, the Board also took action this month to move up funding related to several Dulles area schools.

First, the Board accelerated \$3 million in design funding for MS-7. This school is the next Dulles South middle school and will be constructed on property located on the south side of Braddock, west of Northstar. The funding was requested to get a head start on the school in anticipation of the balance of funding becoming available on July 1 of this year and will allow it to open one full year ahead of schedule in fall 2018.

Second, we accelerated \$2 million for ES-28 (Dulles South elementary school), \$3 million for HS-11 (Dulles North high school) and \$1.48 million for John Champe High School modular classrooms to allow

those projects to get started ahead of schedule due to concerns with Fish and Wildlife Service regulations related to certain bat species and associated restrictions on construction activities. This will help make sure we don't have issues meeting the opening timelines. Accelerating funds basically means that the County is allowing LCPS to access funding prior to final approval of these projects and prior to the fiscal year beginning in July. We are confident that we have the cash flow to be able to do this, and it will make a big difference in those project schedules.

Gum Spring Village Center Plan Changes

Many of you may be familiar with the Gum Spring Village Center located at the corner of Gum Spring Road and Route 50. This shopping center was impacted at the time that traffic was shifted to the new Gum Spring Road alignment. After years of discussions, the Center filed an application with the County to make changes to their approved commercial uses and phasing.

When originally approved, the shopping center was to be built in phases. Phase 1 is currently constructed. Phase 2 was tied to the completion of Southpoint Drive across an adjacent property to the new alignment of Gum Spring Road. Unfortunately, the development of that adjoining parcel did not move at the same pace as the shopping center or the completion of Gum Spring and this left the shopping center more difficult to access for traffic on Route 50 and Gum Spring.

So, the owners have requested that the County allow them to move forward with Phase 2 without the completion of Southpoint Drive to the east. This request came after multiple attempts to come to an agreement with the property owners to their east. The shopping center owner, County staff, and I have had numerous discussions since 2012. Unfortunately, no agreement could be made. The request would allow Gum Springs Village Center to construct another section to the center roughly the same size as the existing building and allow a fast food restaurant with

drive through. Traffic studies have shown that the impacted roads would operate appropriately with the change and County staff is supportive.

We heard the application for the first time at our Public Hearing this month and decided to move it forward to our first meeting in April. I expect my colleagues on the Board will be supportive of the application. I wish to emphasize that moving forward without Southpoint extended is the choice of the owner of the shopping center. Because the road also serves that one project, it will not be built by the County.

This doesn't mean we will never see that connection of Southpoint to the east-it could happen at a later date when the adjacent parcel develops.

Old Arcola School Proposal

As I shared in a previous newsletter, the Board is considering a partnership for the Old Arcola School (the abandoned building next to the old Fire Station on Stone Springs Boulevard, formerly Gum Spring Road) with the Windy Hill Foundation to develop 50 apartments designated for affordable housing and for people with developmental disabilities. 14 of the apartments would be in the school building itself, and the other 36 would be behind it in a new 2-story apartment building.

I was initially interested in learning more about this proposal, but became extremely concerned when I learned that the property is located in the County's LDN 65 Airport Noise Overlay District, which typically does not allow residential housing. Based on this and other land use concerns, I voted against moving it forward for further negotiations. (The motion passed, 7-2, so I was in the minority).

While I acknowledge the need for these types of housing units, this is the wrong location. The FAA noise monitor in this area consistently measures the loudest of any in Loudoun or Fairfax Counties, with aircraft routinely hitting mid-80s dba. Opening the

door to residential development in the LDN 65+ is bad for everyone--the airport and the residents.

Furthermore, from a land use perspective, I strongly object to placing 50 apartments on a 5 acre lot on this section of Stone Springs Boulevard. Although the Board has planned several improvements to surrounding roads, those improvements are years away. The intersection of Evergreen Mills Road and Stone Spring Blvd is one of the most congested in the entire County--in both directions. Adding high density housing into the mix is not a good idea. This development is also not consistent with the character of the surrounding area, and it opens the door to future high density development on surrounding lots.

The Board has not made a final decision on this-it will probably be coming back to us this summer. I will update you before then.

DULLES DISTRICT UPDATES

Update on Signal at Braddock and Riding Center

You may remember that I initiated a project to fund a traffic signal at the intersection of Braddock Road and Riding Center Drive. The Board approved the use of proffer funding to fund the warrant study, design and acquisition of easements at the intersection. The design has been approved by VDOT and the County is in the final stages of securing the needed easements from impacted property owners, such as South Riding Proprietary and the Catholic Diocese.

At our second Business Meeting this month, the Board approved the balance of proffer funds needed to move forward with construction. This allows the County to prepare the project for bid this spring and construction to begin in the fall. I have been told that the light should be operational by spring 2017.

Commission and Board Openings

I am still accepting applications for the following boards:

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

You must be a Dulles District Resident to serve. 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>.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Secondary School Boundary Process

The School Board is currently undergoing a review of the attendance boundaries for several middle and high schools in our area, including Lunsford, Mercer, Stone Hill, Champe, Freedom, and Rock Ridge. The first meeting and public hearing was held last night and there are several more to be held between now and the expected adoption of new boundaries in May.

Please note that this process is completely under the direction of the School Board and I do not have a role in the decision that is ultimately made. Information on the process and scheduled meetings can be found at the following link:
<http://www.lcps.org/Page/168857>.

Household Hazardous Waste Events

Loudoun County has announced the Spring 2016 schedule for the County Household Hazardous Waste Collection Program.

The purpose of this program is to provide a safe, no cost method for residents to dispose of the unused, old or unwanted hazardous materials stored in their

homes. Household hazardous waste is any waste produced in the home that is dangerous or potentially harmful to our health or the environment.

Events operate from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and are free to the public (Loudoun County residents only). More information on the types of items that are accepted is available at www.loudoun.gov/hhw or by calling 703-771-5500.

The Event dates and locations are as follows:

- April 23 - Harmony Park and Ride, 39464 East Colonial Highway, Hamilton
- May 21 - Ashburn North Park and Ride, 45151 Russell Branch Parkway, Ashburn
- June 25 - Freedom High School, 25450 Riding Center Drive, South Riding

Dulles South Food Pantry

The Dulles South Food Pantry is in need now more than ever. They are now serving an average of 70 families at every distribution (over 300 people). Additionally, the Pantry provides almost 100 Friday Food Packs (weekend food for kids) to the schools in the Champe and Freedom HS clusters every week. The Dulles South Food Pantry is open to distribute food the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month from 5 pm to 7 pm located at 24757 Evergreen Mill Road, Dulles, VA, 20166.

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 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

the following unexpired food: canned chicken & tuna, soups and stews with protein, 1 or 2 lb. bags of rice or rice mixes, pasta and pasta sauce (no glass please), breakfast cereal and pancake mix, granola bars, fruit (in cans, plastic or dried), canned or dried beans of all types, toothpaste, shampoo and grocery store gift cards in any amount. They welcome monetary contributions and volunteers as well. They are able to accept food donations at the Pantry 10-11:30 am Mondays and Wednesdays and 7-8:00 pm Monday nights or at the Dulles South Multipurpose Center located at 24950 Riding Center Drive in South Riding during business hours. For additional information please visit their website at www.dsfp.org.

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