



## Supervisor Letourneau's FY2017 Budget Breakdown

Last night, the Board of Supervisors voted to adopt a \$2.45 billion budget funded with a \$1.145 tax rate on a 6-3 vote. I voted in favor of the budget because it contains many of my priorities, from the addition of a Community Policing Officer at the Dulles South station to the acceleration of several important school and road projects in our area, all of which are described below. The final budget comes after months of work by staff and the Board of Supervisors. My involvement in this process began last July in my capacity as Finance Committee Chairman. Once again this year, I have prepared a comprehensive look at the highlights of this year's budget so that you can understand where your tax dollars are being spent.

Our work on the budget begins with preliminary revenue projections. Unfortunately, unlike in previous years, this year as our estimates became more refined, our projections had to be adjusted downward based on a decrease in residential tax assessments. This caused our homeowner's equalized tax rate--the rate at which the average homeowner would pay the same as the current year's budget-- to be \$1.14/\$100, a half penny more than what it had been in FY16 (\$1.135). This means the rate would have had to be increased by that half cent just to bring in the same amount of revenue as



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the prior budget year. As the budget process went on, we did realize some additional personal property revenue, mostly from business property, as well as additional state funding for schools that lessened the impact of additional needs within the budget.

While the FY2017 tax rate of \$1.145/\$100 is half a cent more than the homeowner's equalized tax rate, when coupled with the lowered assessment of existing properties, it means the owner of a home at the average assessed value would see an annual increase of \$22 over the equalized rate for the year. Since I've taken office, the Board has reduced the tax rate from \$1.285 while funding needed services in the County and increases to our schools.

I do want to mention that the tax rate of \$1.145 I supported was neither the highest nor the lowest proposed. 3 of my colleagues on the Board supported a higher rate, while 3 others wanted a lower rate. My philosophy is to find the best balance and value for the taxpayer. I believe we have a responsibility to keep the tax rate reasonable, but I also believe that citizens value quality services and do not want to see a degradation simply to save a few dollars a year. As always, the actual amount you will pay in taxes varies greatly depending on your assessment. This year, those of you who own townhomes and condos likely saw your assessment stay flat or decrease, while those in single families likely saw a relatively modest increase. That remains the biggest determining factor in your tax bill, and it is completely out of the control of the Board of Supervisors.

Overall, in FY17 we are spending \$115.2 million on road projects, and \$233 million on school projects. The approved six year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) includes a total of \$697.1 million on rail and road projects and \$541.4 million on school projects.

#### **LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Operating Budget:** The Board of Supervisors approved an increase of \$69.6 million (7%) over last year and requiring an additional \$36.2 million (5.5%)

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in local tax funding. Overall, the Board of Supervisors funded 97.4% of the School Board's budget request. The school system expects an increase of 2,910 (3.8%) new students next school year. While the School Board has the final say over how these additional funds will be spent, based on their request, the amount provided could be used to fund:

- Increases due to enrollment growth
- Salary increases for teachers
- Beginning implementation of Academies of Loudoun
- Expansion of full day kindergarten

When I took office in FY2012, Loudoun was spending an average of \$11,014 per pupil. With this year's budget, that number for FY2017 is now \$13,122. That means that even accounting for growth, the system is now spending over \$2,108 more per student than FY2012 and \$342 more than FY2009 before the recession required actual cuts in the budget. There are certainly increased costs for the system, including mandatory retirement program costs that the state is requiring. But these numbers demonstrate a significant investment by the Board and the taxpayers into public education.

**Capital Budget:** The Capital Budget is a fiscally constrained document. Just as you have a credit limit on your credit card, the County has only so much money it can borrow. Within these limits, we must build all the things that need to be built. This year, the schools are taking up a large chunk of this budget because of the needs in the Dulles South and Dulles North area. I worked with staff and my colleagues to ensure that our needs were met in this budget. Here is a rundown on changes to already approved and newly funded projects of interest to the Dulles District.

**ES-28:** A Dulles South elementary school to be located on a site adjacent to Champe High School. Design has already been funded and construction funds are provided in FY17 for a planned opening in 2018 (in fact, some funds have already been transferred to allow

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LCPS to get a head start). Total funding of \$38.8 million.

**ES-31:** A Dulles North elementary school, design was funded in FY16, but there has been no site identified. Construction has now been pushed back to FY18 with a planned opening for 2019 due to the lack of a site and other needs. Total funding of \$39.8 million.

**ES-23:** A Dulles North elementary school with a planned location on the Arcola Center site. Design is funded in FY20 and construction is funded in FY21 with a planned opening of 2022. Total funding of \$45.4 million.

**Elementary School Classroom Additions:** The School Board has requested classroom additions to be completed at multiple Dulles North and Dulles South schools. The additions would be used to address overcrowding and/or provide space for full day kindergarten if possible. This request was able to be accommodated in FY2017. Total funding of \$16.3 million.

**MS-7:** A Dulles South Area Middle School that was originally funded in FY19 and scheduled to open in 2021. Last year, this was accelerated for design funding in FY17 and construction funding in FY18 with a planned opening for 2019. However, once again enrollment growth has required the project to be accelerated and construction is now funded in FY17 with a planned opening in 2018. The site is on Braddock Road west of Northstar Boulevard. Total funding of \$60.8 million. Some funds have already been transferred to allow LCPS to begin this project given the tight construction timetable.

**HS-9:** A Dulles South Area High School. The construction and opening dates have been moved around several times. This year, the County Administrator's proposed CIP moved the school back to FY2020 funding and a 2022 opening, which I believe would have been too late. We were able to get it back to FY18 design, FY19 construction, 2021

opening. No site has been identified yet. Total funding of \$130.7 million.

**HS-11:** A Dulles North High School to be located on a site near Hanson Park. Design funding has already been provided and construction funding is provided in FY17 with a planned opening in 2019. Total funding of \$121.9 million.

**Modular Classrooms:** Funding for modular classrooms to be placed at Champe will provide additional seats for use by students at Mercer until construction of MS-7 is completed. The classrooms will stay in place at Champe and then be used for high school students until HS-9 is constructed. There is also funding for additional modular classrooms to be in place for the School Board to use for addressing overcrowding as needed in other Dulles North and Dulles South Schools. Total funding of \$3 million.

### **COUNTY BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS**

Although they are funded differently, I'll include both operating and capital budget projects in my breakdown below by department. For Capital Projects, it is important to note that everything you see here has been vetted by the Board and by our outstanding Management and Financial Services team. All of these projects (as well as school capital projects) fit within existing, planned debt limitations and will not jeopardize the County's AAA credit ratings.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

The approved CIP includes funding over the next six years for the major projects that have been added over the last several years including:

- **Belmont Ridge Road-** widening from Truro Parish to Croson, \$15 million in FY18.

- **Prentice Road-** parallel route north of the Greenway from Loudoun County Parkway to Pacific Boulevard, \$89.6 million, design in FY17 and construction FY20-FY21.

- **Shellhorn Road**- parallel route north of the Greenway from Loudoun County Parkway to Lockridge Road. \$24 million in FY 17-20 for design, right of way acquisition, and utility relocation.

- **Mooreview Parkway**- supplemental construction funding of \$1.6 million in FY17.

- **Westwind Drive**- Loudoun County Parkway to 606, \$43.7 million in FY19-FY20.

- **Northstar Boulevard**- from Tall Cedars Parkway to Brambleton, \$79 million in FY17-FY19. The portion from Route 50 to Brambleton has had funding accelerated over last year's approved CIP to more closely match the segment to the south of Route 50.

- **Dulles West Boulevard**- from Dulles Landing to Northstar Boulevard, \$40.3 million in FY19-FY22.

- **Arcola Boulevard**- from Route 50 to Evergreen Mills Road, \$33.3 million in FY19-FY22.

New to the CIP this year is widening **Evergreen Mills Road** from Stone Springs to Loudoun County Parkway, \$29.5 million in FY 22.

**Braddock Road and Supreme/Summerall:** In the summer of 2014, I worked with the Blue Ridge District Supervisor at the time (Supervisor Clarke) and VDOT to place a four way stop at this intersection to alleviate safety concerns. At the time, we determined that this would be an interim condition while we pursued a signal. In order for the signal to operate effectively the roadway needs to be widened and turn lanes installed and I was able to secure the needed design funding at that time. With the design complete, we were given an estimate of \$2 million to complete the project. This year, I was able to work with the new Blue Ridge Supervisor (Supervisor Buffington) to get funding included in the first year of the County's CIP (FY17) and will become available after voter approval of bond funding this fall. This is two years ahead of what had been initially proposed by the County Administrator.

**Evergreen Mills Road Improvements between Stone Springs and Belmont Ridge:**

I worked with the prior Blue Ridge District Supervisor to initiate a study of needed improvements and their associated costs to help traffic movement on Evergreen Mills Road between Stone Springs and Belmont Ridge. We received the recommendations and cost estimates last year and the Board directed that it be addressed during this year's capital budget discussion. The recommendations included intersection improvements as well as widening Evergreen Mills to four lanes between the two intersections.

The County Administrator's initial proposal did not fund the project within the six year CIP plan due to debt limit constraints. However, while the Board worked to address certain school construction issues and the movement of projects, the opportunity became available to get the project scheduled within the CIP. Currently it is slated for design funding in FY2021 and construction funding in FY2022 for a total of \$12.3 million. This project, along with the planned completion of Northstar Boulevard and Arcola Boulevard, will greatly help north/south traffic flow for areas west of South Riding.

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Sheriff's Office:** Specific to Dulles South, the Board approved an additional Community Resource Deputy to provide additional coverage to the service already provided by our current deputy. He is currently stretched between the northern and southern ends of the station coverage area. I have seen firsthand the positive benefits of this program, which provides an officer in the field that is not call-driven, but rather can establish relationships and work within neighborhoods, often in concert with our School Resource Deputies who have a good handle on what is going on with youth in our community. In total, the Sheriff's Office received an increase of \$3.6 million (in line with population growth) for a total of \$87.3 million,



**Fire-Rescue:** Several enhancements have been made over my time on the Board to the Fire and Rescue Department to ensure coverage of stations where volunteers could no longer meet demands of service. This year, we made several important enhancements. Currently, Loudoun County EMS has been operating only with a part-time Medical Director. The time has come to upgrade this position to a full-time, 24-7 staffed position to help direct patient care in emergency response situations. We also added a Quality Assurance position who will be overseeing EMS responses, reviewing records, and ensuring that best practices are being followed. The total budgeted amount for the department is \$73 million, an increase of \$1.6 million.

#### **PARKS AND RECREATION**

One of the more contentious items for discussion was the addition of a new maintenance crew for Parks and Recreation. Currently, there are two. However, over the last several years, the Board has been adding fields to our system, and as you might recall we also took over the maintenance of school fields so that they could be used by leagues and be better maintained. On a 5-4 vote, the Board approved my motion to add a 5-person crew to our rotation. Without this addition, I believe that our costs will be higher in the long term because our fields will degrade more quickly.

There was some change in the status of Hanson Park and initially I was concerned. However, the change ended up not impacting the actual timeline of the project. Initially Hanson would have been fully funded for construction in FY17. The Board had already approved the design funding. Unfortunately, the property was involved in the recent Brambleton rezonings which meant that planning was placed on hold until those were resolved. When planning restarted, the procurement process to hire a design firm took an extremely long time to the point where the Board is just being asked to approve that contract this month. This means that design will not be complete to the point of needing construction funds in FY17, allowing us to delay that funding to FY18.



In this particular case, the delay to FY2018 allows us to fund a much needed school without otherwise impacting the schedule of Hanson Park. However, in my role as Finance Chair, we will be reviewing the procurement process and understand better what led to the delays in this and other projects. We need to see how we can streamline the process to deliver expected facilities to our residents in a timely manner.

### **OTHER COUNTY ENHANCEMENTS**

While my updates tend to focus on the items of specific interest to the Dulles District, there are many county services and departments that all citizens use which are funded in the budget.

Some of the additions to the budget in FY2017 are: additional positions in Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to assist in the intake of mental health clients and mental health services in the Adult Detention Center, Senior Traffic Engineer to reduce our reliance on more expensive contract support for signal and pedestrian projects around the County, a part-time Emergency Assistance Program Specialist to serve those in need of heating and cooling assistance through a State funded program, Accounts Assistant within the Treasurer's Office to assist in preparing taxpayer refunds within a reasonable time frame, funding to staff the newly expanded Sterling Library, Development Process Specialist in Economic Development to help keep our successful Fast Track program moving for new or expanding businesses building in the County, and additional positions in the Clerk of the Circuit Court's Judicial Services and Criminal Divisions to keep our legal system moving.

### **COUNTY EMPLOYEES**

**FY2017 Salaries:** The Board allocated funds for an average of a 2.5% percent merit based pay raise for County employees. Early in the process, I made a motion to reduce the amount available for pay increases from 3% to 2.5%, for a savings of \$1 million which was invested in some of the items outlined above. While we did reduce the overall increase in

salary, we also are making changes to our evaluation system that will make it easier for employees to understand, and for the first time are increasing the VRS retirement multiplier for public safety employees. Other jurisdictions had already taken this step, and this was a top priority for Sheriff's deputies and Fire-Rescue personnel.

### **In Summary**

This marks my fifth budget on the Board, and I think the process went fairly smoothly, especially since there are 4 new Supervisors. On the school side, there still could be improvement, and I remain frustrated with the enrollment growth projections, which wreak havoc on budget planning. However, our dialogue this year with the Board and the Superintendent was cordial, and once again free from the some of the political rancor that has existed in the past. I appreciate the increase in transparency coming from the school side, and Jeff Morse and I continue to have a very strong relationship as we tackle our growth pressure together.

I do hope the School Board will place an emphasis on better forecasting of student populations and a way to capture by-right development and higher than anticipated student generation in townhomes. This would help us maintain a more consistent CIP over the six year planning window.

I believe that even with a slight increase in the rate, we have been able to maintain a reasonable tax rate that provides needed enhancements within the school system, public safety, and transportation - all while limiting the impact on those less fortunate and our efforts to increase commercial business development. The Board has to balance a number of factors each year to make sure we are accommodating growth while fostering a climate that makes us attractive to new or expanding businesses.

For more on the budget, [click here](#). If you have any specific questions, please feel free to contact me at [matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov](mailto:matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov).

This budget will go into effect on July 1, 2016...and then it will be time for me to start working on FY2018!

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