



## Dulles Direct Newsletter December 2016

Welcome to the December edition of the Dulles Direct newsletter. I hope you are having an enjoyable holiday season!

While it has been nice to have a break from some of my regularly scheduled meetings, we've still been busy and have updates to share. As Finance Chair, I've spent quite a bit of time preparing for the FY2018 budget process. Board members have been asked to submit any new capital projects for preliminary evaluation to be included in the Capital Improvement Plan. I have submitted several projects not currently scheduled for funding to be reviewed by Finance staff for potential consideration, which I will discuss early next year. The County Administrator is expected to present his proposed budget to the Board during the second week of February, just after the School Board adopts their proposed budget the week prior. There will be more details on the budget process and how you can provide input in my January newsletter.

### LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

#### **HS-9 Purchase Complete, Full Board to Vote on Acceleration**

The Board of Supervisors and the School Board have executed the contract to purchase the property that will

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be the home of HS-9 (our next Dulles South High School) and a future elementary school on Lightridge Farm Road. The decision was made to jointly purchase the property so that the residual acreage could be used for a future County use such as a park or athletic fields.

Over the past two months, I worked with Finance staff to accelerate funding for HS-9 to permit an opening in the fall of 2020 instead of the planned fall of 2021. Given the updated school population projections, it became clear that this was a priority. At our December Finance Committee meeting, the Committee voted to recommend that the full Board approve a finance plan for the school that will accomplish that goal by speeding up appropriations for the school by 6 months, and by providing an immediate \$3.5 million to begin design work right away.

The School Board has decided to utilize the next middle school, MS-7, as a grade 8-9 intermediate school in order to keep all students who live south of Route 50 at schools south of Route 50. Accelerating HS-9 should reduce by one year the need for 9th graders to attend the intermediate school rather than a high school.

The full Board of Supervisors will be asked to ratify the Finance Committee's decision at our first meeting of 2017 on January 3. The acceleration of the school is contingent on completing the acquisition of the property which includes a study period and other approvals to ensure that the intended uses can be accommodated, though at this point there is no reason to think that we won't be moving forward. I appreciate the work of our County staff, who were working under significant fiscal constraints related to debt load and cash flow, which made this request a real challenge. Supervisor Buffington and I also are thankful for the support of our Finance Committee colleagues to move forward.

### **What's the Deal with Decals?**

Periodically-especially around October of every year-I receive that question about Loudoun County's vehicle decal program. The decals are used to identify vehicles that are current on their personal property taxes. Suffice



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to say, they aren't very popular. In fact, when I'm sitting there trying to scrape last year's decal off our minivan windshield (it is hard to reach), I might have had a choice word or two for them myself.

County Treasurer Roger Zurn has heard the complaints too-including from members of the Board of Supervisors-and asked that an item be placed on my Finance Committee agenda to review the existing policy. Treasurer Zurn is a strong proponent of the decal system because he believes that it leads to better enforcement. Indeed, Loudoun boasts a collection rate of over 98% on personal property taxes.

Of course, the taxes themselves aren't so popular, but they are part of the system of taxation that the Commonwealth of Virginia has chosen over the years, and they are meant to "spread" the burden to those who own things other than houses (and therefore don't pay taxes on their residences). The reality is that local governments are responsible for many functions, and the Commonwealth provides us with relatively small amounts of funding to pay for them-so like every jurisdiction, we need personal property tax revenue to pay for all of our expenses. Loudoun collects over \$234.68 million a year in personal property tax revenue-which is equivalent to over 21 cents on the real property tax rate. Our rate of \$4.20/\$100 assessed on vehicles is one of the lowest in the region, and hasn't been raised since 1987.

Which brings us back to decals. The fact that some residents don't pay their personal property taxes every year is unfair to those that do, and increases their burden. The Treasurer's Office runs Project Fairness, which is a two-deputy unit of the Sheriff's Office that is responsible for personal property tax enforcement. Their job is made much easier by the presence of decals, and other residents can see whether their neighbors are current as well. There's an element of peer pressure at work, and beyond that, any resident can call and leave a tip for the Sheriff's Office.

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That said, Fairfax County and many other jurisdictions have done away with decals. At the Finance Committee discussion, some statistics were provided from other jurisdictions which generally show lower collection rates from places that don't have decals-but not always. The Committee decided that we needed more information across the board-about exactly how other counties have made the transition, and how successful they really are at collection. There may also be alternative means to enforce non-payment. The Treasurer expressed his opinion that eliminating decals would ultimately cost the County millions in lost revenue, which is something that we couldn't withstand, but County Administration is now undertaking a more comprehensive analysis that should help us make a decision.

My opinion at this point is that it is probably unlikely that the Board of Supervisors will eliminate decals-but we'll see. The final decision probably won't be made for several months. If we can be convinced that we aren't really putting revenue in jeopardy, I think that most of us would like to get rid of decals-but our primary responsibility is for the financial well-being of the County, and by extension, the taxpayers.

### **Year End Fiscal Report**

We have closed the books on FY2016, and I'm pleased to report that the County finished with a surplus of \$55 million, which beats our projections. This is primarily due to vacancy savings-in which budgeted positions are not filled-and revenues that came in above projections. The Finance Committee has recommended a number of uses of these funds. \$38 million of it has been earmarked for one-time expenses in the FY2018 budget. This essentially allows us to buy down the FY2018 tax rate, and also helps us pay down interest on capital projects sooner. The next group of funding, \$3.6 million, has been earmarked for a future tax rate reduction-since our collection schedule does not perfectly match up with the fiscal year, we need to have funds in reserve should the FY18 budget result in a lower tax rate, even if it is an equalized rate. We then elected to spend the remainder on several lingering projects that needed more money for completion-the majority of which were

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park projects that have run into various issues in the Western part of the County.

The \$55 million surplus does not include LCPS. LCPS had its own surplus of about \$23 million, the majority of which the Superintendent would like to place into the insurance reserve fund. In our first review, though, it appears that the LCPS self-insurance fund has ample reserves, so we're not certain that the amount requested is appropriate. LCPS is conducting an actuarial analysis, and the Finance Committee is taking this subject back up at a later date.

At this time, we declined to fund the School Board's requests for fund balance, which were for 1 turf field, textbooks, and school buses. In the case of the turf field, the County is close to having more information about an alternative to rubber crumb that may prove to be superior, and have the bonus of not having any questions about health impacts. We think it would be unfortunate to proceed with a rubber crumb field right now when we should have more information in the next several months that may allow us to make a better decision. In the case of text books and school buses, the Committee felt that these items should be part of the school's normal budget process, and we were somewhat confused by the request. Apparently, the School Board has had an ongoing policy discussion about using text books verses digital books, and has not been replacing text books. The analysis that is being done has not been completed, which at least to me would make a large expenditure rather premature. Regarding school buses-which is a completely different issue than the school bus driver shortage-LCPS has been diverting funding away from replacing buses to other needs. However, the Superintendent is developing a fleet plan and examining whether to request Capital funds rather than operating funds (LCPS has been using a lease format for buses) instead, which would change the way we fund these purchases. I am not at all clear that providing funding right now would have any material impact on what LCPS ends up doing with its bus fleet, which means I'd rather discuss it during the normal budget process.

I know that none of this is probably particularly interesting or exciting to read about, but in the interest of transparency, I wanted to provide you with the update!

## **DULLES DISTRICT UPDATES**

### **Loudoun County Parkway/Center Street Improvements**

Work has begun on the permanent intersection improvements at Loudoun County Parkway and Center Street. As I shared in last month's newsletter, this project is the result of a safety study conducted in 2013 that identified improvements that would help safety at the intersection. The flex posts installed at the time were meant to be an interim solution until the permanent concrete medians and other improvements could be funded, designed, and constructed.

Drivers should be on the lookout for signage in the area as workers will be present and flex posts give way to concrete medians that will guide traffic and alleviate issues with drivers that try to cut through the flex posts. Weather permitting, the project should be completed in May 2017. During the construction period, all of the movement restrictions in place will remain, even though the flex posts are being removed. I have worked with County staff to ensure that appropriate barriers and signage will be in place throughout the duration of the project.

### **Gum Spring/Braddock Road Intersection**

Those of you that travel westbound on Braddock Road have probably already noticed a change in signage at the intersection with Gum Spring Road. VDOT worked with Van Metre since they purchased the Whitman property on both the northeast and southeast corners to improve sight distances to the south. The previous property owner had been unresponsive to requests from VDOT to remove brush and improve the sight lines.

As a result, VDOT has removed the "no turn on red" restriction for movements from westbound Braddock to northbound Gum Spring. This should help improve the



flow of traffic, even for vehicles traveling straight across Gum Spring or to the south, because it will allow for more northbound movements, especially during the afternoon rush hour. Longer term, Van Metre will be making about \$3.5 million worth of improvements to the intersection as part of the residential and commercial projects on both sides of Braddock.

### **Gum Spring Road Safety Improvements Completed**

VDOT recently completed safety improvements to Gum Spring Road between Cedar Ridge Boulevard and Sweetwater Lane. This project improved the roadway alignment, increased shoulder and lane width, added guardrail and improved roadside drainage along a narrow and twisting stretch of Gum Spring Road. Federal Highway Safety Improvement funds were used for the project that began in December 2015.



### **Belmont Ridge Road Improvements**

Several improvements are underway along Belmont Ridge Road. The widened segment from Broadlands Blvd. to Truro Parish Dr. was just recently opened to traffic. The widening from Truro Parish Drive to Croson Lane has just had completed design plans submitted to VDOT for review. We expect approval of those plans in early 2017 with right of way and easement acquisition to begin in the spring. If all goes as planned, the project should be ready to bid by summer of 2018. The signal at the Belmont and Croson intersection is currently under construction and should be completed by early January.

Work continues on the northern section of Belmont Ridge Road to include the interchange under construction at Route 7 which is expected to be completed in 2019 and widening of the road south from the interchange to Hay Road, which is expected to be completed in 2018.

#### **Increased Fines on Riding Center Drive**

VDOT has installed the Board of Supervisors approved "additional \$200 fine" signage on Riding Center Drive between Braddock Road and Tall Cedars Parkway for speed limit violators. With the signage in place, the Sheriff's Office can now write tickets that include the extra \$200 fine for those caught speeding. It took us quite a while to actually get the signs in place, but I hope they will help slow traffic down somewhat on Riding Center Drive. Riding Center was designed to a 35 mph standard and has no driveways on it, so VDOT would not consider a speed limit reduction. The only other safety improvement available to us for consideration would be to eliminate street parking, which would increase visibility. I know there's an issue around Pine Forest Drive with visibility that we are discussing with VDOT, but we'd like to try to avoid a full restriction on the entire street as that would push a lot of vehicles into the residential streets.

My office deals with numerous requests for traffic calming measures on our local neighborhood streets. In coordination with the Sheriff's Office and VDOT we try to evaluate each street based on traffic volume and its design speed. In most cases the addition of stop signs or other measures require that the request be made by your Homeowner's Association to be followed by a petition of impacted property owners and a study to verify the issue. I am happy to work with your HOA to facilitate that process as needed.

#### **Final Section of Fleetwood Road Completed**

You may recall that the majority of Fleetwood Road was paved between Route 50 and Evergreen Mills Road and completed earlier this year. There was a short section at the Evergreen Mills end that was not completed at the time. This was due to an approved plan that the Willowsford Developer had in place with the County and VDOT to realign this portion of Fleetwood to connect



through their development and meet another planned intersection with Evergreen Mills.

That last piece was just completed and opened earlier this month. The new intersection aligns with Everfield Drive which will have a future direct connection to Creighton Road in Brambleton.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Envision Loudoun Online Engagement Tool**

The development of a community vision for Loudoun County's new comprehensive plan, initiated at the Envision Loudoun Listening & Learning Workshops, continues online.

Interactive comment and mapping exercises available at [www.EnvisionLoudoun.org](http://www.EnvisionLoudoun.org) mirror those completed by more than 900 people who attended the series of workshops held throughout the county in November and December. Anyone who was unable to attend one of the workshops is encouraged to participate in the online exercises, which can be completed in just a few minutes. The online responses will be compiled and recorded along with the comments already collected at the workshops.

This particular online engagement tool for Envision Loudoun is scheduled to be available through early January and is designed to help the county's Envision Loudoun team engage with as many residents, business owners and other stakeholders as possible. More information is available at [www.EnvisionLoudoun.org](http://www.EnvisionLoudoun.org) or by sending an email to [envisionloudoun@loudoun.gov](mailto:envisionloudoun@loudoun.gov).

### **Extension Survey**

The extension agents serving Loudoun are inviting residents to tell them about matters that are important to our community and have created an anonymous, online-survey that everyone is invited to complete. The survey is available at [https://vce.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_2owTt728sgZVViZ](https://vce.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_2owTt728sgZVViZ). For those who would like to learn more about Virginia Cooperative Extension, visit its website

<https://www.ext.vt.edu> or call the Loudoun Office to speak with the agents directly (703) 777-0373.

### **INOVA Loudoun Mobile Health Unit**

Inova Loudoun Hospital Mobile Health Services will be providing blood pressure screenings at the Dulles South Multipurpose Center (24950 Riding Center Drive in South Riding) on Tuesday, January 3, 10:00am to 12:00pm. For further information call the Mobile Health hotline at 703-858-8818 or visit at [www.inova.org/mobilehealth](http://www.inova.org/mobilehealth).

### **Loudoun Symphony Event**

Join the Loudoun Symphony for Winter Respite on Saturday, Feb 4 at the Community Center in Middleburg. The program begins at 4:00 pm and features music by Bach, Beethoven and Hayden. The orchestra and guest soloist, violinist Teresa Gordon, will perform in a music-in-the-round format with the audience seated around the orchestra. Warm your ears on a cold February day with the talented Loudoun Symphony Orchestra. Refreshments will be available. Details, including ticket information, are on the LSO website: <http://www.loudounsymphony.org/lso>.

### **VDOT Snow Removal**

Our region caught its first glimpse of winter weather this month with our recent ice event. When the snow begins to fall this winter, VDOT's goal is to have at least one passable lane on every road within 24 hours when snowfall is 2-4", 48 hours for 4-6", over 6" is expected to be at least 48 hours.

If you feel that your street is missed after these time-frames have passed, you can use the resources below to get more information on plowing status and/or report your issue directly to VDOT:

- [www.virginiadot.org/novaemergency](http://www.virginiadot.org/novaemergency) for news releases, important messages, and links for some of the items below
- [www.511virginia.org](http://www.511virginia.org) for road conditions
- [www.vdotplows.org](http://www.vdotplows.org) for neighborhood status and locations of plows
- @vadotnova on Twitter

- 800-FOR-ROAD (367-7623) to report issues

### **Dulles South Food Pantry**

The Dulles South Food Pantry has expanded its geographic boundaries to serve families in the Brambleton community who are in need of food assistance. Since its inception two years ago, the food pantry has served any person who resides in the school attendance zones for the Freedom High School and John Champe High School clusters in Dulles South. Thanks to the generous support the pantry has received from the community, the food pantry is pleased to begin serving the areas that have been assigned to attend the new Brambleton Middle School opening in 2017.

The food pantry is now open every Wednesday in the historic white chapel at Arcola United Methodist Church, 24757 Evergreen Mills Road, Dulles, VA 20166. On the first and third Wednesdays of the month, the pantry is open to walk-ins from 5-7pm. Other Wednesdays the pantry is open by appointment. Call 703-507-2795 or email [info@dsfp.org](mailto:info@dsfp.org) to schedule a private appointment.

Since opening two years ago, the food pantry has distributed more than 150,000 lbs. of food and currently averages nearly 140 visits a month from local families. Additionally, the pantry provides weekend food to over 100 students in 10 different Dulles District schools. See the Dulles South Food Pantry's website at <http://www.dsfp.org/> for information on how you can help the food pantry fight hunger locally. The Dulles South Food Pantry Inc. is a multi-faith emergency food pantry providing nutritious food, personal supplies and other services to those in need in the Dulles South area regardless of income, faith or other criteria. It is an all-volunteer organization focused both on feeding the hungry and promoting the self-sufficiency of those it serves. Donations to the Dulles South Food Pantry, Inc. are tax deductible.

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