

Dulles Direct Newsletter February 2017

Welcome to the February edition of the Dulles Direct newsletter. It may seem like spring is here already, but winter is budget season in Loudoun County. This means that the Board of Supervisors will be meeting for budget work sessions over the next month in addition to our regular meeting schedule. More on the FY18 budget below.

I started off February by joining some of my colleagues at the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce's Policy Maker Series Breakfast. The Chamber invites the Chair, Vice-Chair and Committee Chairs to speak at this event at the beginning of the year. I shared a lot of good news about the progress we've made in Loudoun reducing our commercial vacancy rates, adding new business and jobs, and bringing in more commercial revenue for County services. I also previewed the challenges we're facing in our FY2018 budget and beyond.

I was pleased to join Cub Scout Pack 282 at Hutchison Farm Elementary School earlier this month. I spoke to fifth graders working on the Arrow of Light about my role on the Board of Supervisors and issues of importance that they see in our community.

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An official groundbreaking was held last week for a new library under construction in the Brambleton Town Center. I was unable to attend thanks to the virus that everyone seems to have, but during the last term I worked hard to negotiate a reasonable agreement with the Brambleton developer in order make this project work. Brambleton Group will be providing 40,000 square feet of library space on the bottom two floors of a commercial office building, similar to the model that was used in the Gum Spring Library. Following completion of the physical space, the County will outfit the building and prepare it for opening by mid-2018.

FY2018 Budget Update

The County Administrator presented his proposed budget to the Board of Supervisors on February 15. The proposed \$2.5 billion budget is based on an equalized tax rate of \$1.135/\$100 in assessed value, a full cent less than this year's rate. His proposed budget includes funding for many of my priorities, including full staffing for the new Dulles South recreation and senior center and Kirkpatrick West Fire and Rescue Station. In this budget, we will be working to provide increased funding to many of our human service departments that have seen increased caseloads with our growing population over the last several years. The next several weeks will be spent going through the proposed budget department by department to ensure that we are addressing any critical needs while getting the best possible value for taxpayers.

On the capital budget side, the Finance Committee has already held one meeting to work on the \$2 billion capital plan. The CIP already includes many sorely needed transportation projects in our area, though some are still a few years out from receiving full funding. The Board already took action late last year to expedite the needed school capacity increases in Dulles North and Dulles South. During this year's process, County staff reevaluated the cost estimates of every road project based on modeling provided by VDOT, which resulted in several of our Dulles South projects seeing significant cost escalation. This is due to a tightened



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construction market, expenses related to right of way acquisition and utility line relocation, and other factors which have consistently driven up costs.

On the positive side, there is the prospect of receiving up to \$80 million in state "SmartScale" funding for projects in our CIP. In most cases, we would have been requesting regional NVTa funding for these projects, so the state funds would free up some capacity to request funding for other projects. Northstar Boulevard, however, is not one of the projects in line for state funding, which is disappointing because it was slated to receive funding last year, but got bounced in favor of Route 7 widening in Fairfax County by the Commonwealth Transportation Board. The Finance Committee spent time discussing the various approaches that the County could take to address this issue, and decided that our smartest approach would be to fight for and hopefully receive the \$80 million for other projects, and then make Northstar our top NVTa priority.

The School Board presented their \$1.24 billion proposed budget to the Board of Supervisors on February 22. They are projecting nearly 3,000 new students for next year, a 3.8% increase over current enrollment. The requested budget increase is \$64.5 million (9%). At the Administrator's proposed budget, we are currently about \$3.5 million short of funding the School Board's request, which is a very minimal gap. Much of their budget request is tied to growing enrollment and staffing for new schools that will be opening soon as well as salaries and benefits increases for staff. The proposed budget also continues the planned expansion of Full Day Kindergarten to serve 82% of students, though I should note that the Dulles South and North areas would likely still receive the fewest number of full day kindergarten classrooms due to overcrowding.

We will now be holding a series of public input sessions on the proposed budget. This is an opportunity for all of you to let the Board of Supervisors know your priorities. Those sessions are scheduled for:

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Quick Links



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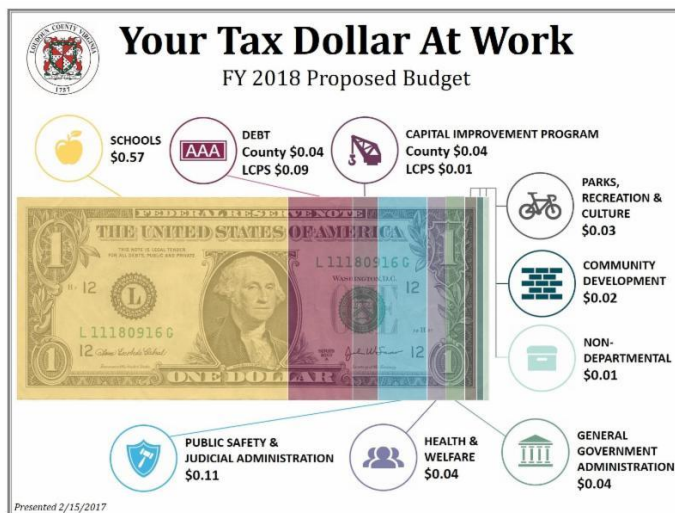
- Tuesday, February 28 - 6:00 p.m. at the Loudoun County Government Center (1 Harrison Street in Leesburg)
- Thursday, March 2 - 3:00 p.m. at the Loudoun County Government Center (1 Harrison Street in Leesburg)
- Saturday, March 4 - 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., Loudoun County Public Schools Administration Building (21000 Education Court in Ashburn)

In addition to the opportunities to speak in person, you can always email the Board a loudounbudget@loudoun.gov. More information on the proposed budget and the budget process is available at www.loudoun.gov/budget.

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Metro Financial Obligations

At this month's Finance Committee, I added an item to the agenda to discuss Loudoun's Metro costs over the coming years. The challenge is that WMATA (Metro) has not calculated costs for Loudoun yet because we are not part of the system and won't be for a couple more years. At the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC), we created a Technical Advisory Panel made up of the Chief Administrative

Officers of key jurisdictions to help vet WMATA's future needs. At the same time, the DC Chief Financial Officer was working on a projection model, and the two groups worked together on the formula that was used by our staff to make the projections that were discussed.

What they've developed is essentially a worst case scenario--based on no additional federal or state help, and Metro's current inability to finance capital expenses due to the way that the WMATA compact has been set up. (For comparison--local governments like Loudoun finance our large projects, but Metro has to pay in cash as they go). All of these things need to change, along with many other reforms at Metro. There have been conversations about this with key stakeholders, from Congress on down.

The Virginia jurisdictions have already indicated that the cost escalation in these models is not feasible, and will not be agreed to. Loudoun's share is about 4%, so we are less impacted than our neighbors such as Fairfax County, but the formula is the same for each jurisdiction. Should Loudoun actually have to pay these numbers, staff has developed some strategies which would contain our costs and minimize the impact to our budget. In fact, our FY18 capital budget proposal already accommodates those cost increases in future years, in the event that they do occur.

In addition, the numbers presented were inflated because they include all operating and capital costs associated with WMATA's bus service, which Loudoun has opted out of. They were included because an accurate breakout of costs between rail and bus does not yet exist. Rail has a far greater fare recovery than bus, so the bus portion of these numbers is significant, we just don't exactly know how much yet. That will also bring the number down for Loudoun.

As Secretary/Treasurer of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, which is the entity that controls Virginia's WMATA contributions and policies, and as Vice Chair of MWCOG, I have been working closely with my regional colleagues to

develop solutions to Metro's problems and to deal with escalating costs. The next big milestone will be the final report of the MWCOG Technical Advisory Committee in April, which will explore various funding options for Metro's needs.

In the meantime, Loudoun's Metro tax districts, which right now are set up to pay for construction costs, are doing well, and work continues to bring high quality tenants to our Metro corridor, including the Gramercy District's Smart City project at the Ashburn Metro station, which is backed by Microsoft. Ultimately, this type of development will create jobs closer to home for Loudoun and bring workers into our county, which will help us pay for Metro, improve transportation, and support our economy for decades to come.

The WMATA cost projections for Loudoun County that were developed as part of the MWCOG Technical Advisory Committee Report estimated the county's obligation at \$50.8 million in FY 2020. This is \$27.9 million higher than the most recent estimate that was reported to the Board in September 2016. It is important to note that these projections were developed for the purpose of identifying the resources that will be required to return WMATA to a safe and reliable system, which assumes that a significantly larger capital improvement program (CIP) is necessary. It is not clear that WMATA actually has the capability to spend more than the current \$1 billion/year in capital funds, but these projections include some years when they would be spending significantly more than that.

While future operating and capital improvement costs are projected to be higher than previous estimates, Loudoun County's costs associated with construction of the Silver Line have not changed. Our construction funding commitment was established at 4.8%, currently \$274 million of the total Silver Line construction project. The county secured a \$195 million federal loan, available via the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA), to pay for the bulk of our share of construction. In accordance with the TIFIA loan agreement, Loudoun is

not obligated to repay the TIFIA loan until Metrorail revenue service begins in the County.

In addition, we are constructing three commuter parking garages next to the future Metro stations; two at the Ashburn Station and a third at the Loudoun Gateway Station. We have budgeted approximately \$130 million to construct the three garages. The county's total cost for garage construction is expected to be well below the budgeted amount because construction of the north garage at the Ashburn Station is now being paid for privately under an agreement with Comstock.

We have planned for a number of funding sources to meet our obligations to Metro. These funding sources include the TIFIA loan to pay for Silver Line construction, revenue from the Metrorail Service Tax Districts that is already being collected, gasoline tax that must be diverted to WMATA starting in FY 2019, transportation funds from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, future debt issuance to pay for the county's ongoing capital obligation to WMATA and parking garage revenue that will be used to pay for construction and operating costs associated with the three garages. As a preventive measure, the County Administrator's proposed FY18 budget already makes the transition away from gas tax revenue for our current transit services, which will allow us to accumulate extra funding for the next few years if we choose to.

Finally, I will continue to make the point that the Metro's impending extension to Loudoun has been subsidizing tax rates for the entire County for over a decade. Land values in proximity to Metro stations are higher than comparable properties elsewhere, and those funds have been paid to the County's general fund and used to provide services to the entire County. There can be no debate that Loudoun's tax rate would be higher today if the Board had not opted into Metro in 2012.

This is a conversation that will be ongoing as the region tries to work out a solution to providing a dedicated funding source for Metro that will help relieve the burden on local jurisdictions of the costs associated with catching up on years of neglect.

Proposed Countywide Blight Ordinance

It has been an ongoing struggle over the last five years to deal with two properties in Dulles South-- the former United Rentals building and the shell of the once planned hotel, both located near East Gate on Route 50.

The hotel building was originally planned as a Sheraton and construction began just before the recession. The owner at the time lost their financing and was unable to complete the project as intended. I have had conversations over the last few years that have all been promising in their plans to restart the project, but nothing has come to fruition to date. Over the last year+, the current property owner hasn't responded to any inquiries from my office.

The United Rentals building was vacated several years ago and is part of property within the future Fox Gate development. Fox Gate was approved before my first term on the Board as a mixed use development between Route 50 and East Gate View Drive enveloping the Pleasant Valley Methodist Church. Again, to date, there has been no activity on that development. The United Rentals building was recently the scene of a serious fire which placed Fire-Rescue personnel at serious risk as they attempted to clear the building.

As my frustration has grown, I've had staff researching potential ways for the County to take action. I learned that there is a tool that the General Assembly allows, but that Loudoun has not adopted the required blight ordinance locally in order to use it.

The County's Zoning Ordinance currently only permits our staff to cite property owners when the property is found to be a safety hazard, but there is not enough teeth to get them to do more than ensure it is sealed up

each time there is an issue. Even the fines that are at our disposal pale in comparison to the cost of razing a building, especially the size and materials involved in this case.

I have therefore introduced a legislative item that the Board approved which begins the process of adoption of a blight ordinance. The first step is for the County zoning staff to draft language that aligns with the proper section of code. It is vital that we have the necessary tools, within the scope of what is permitted, to deal with vacant buildings that have become unsafe for our community. The ordinance could include provisions for the County to remove the building and ensure some payback of the costs associated in the future.

While I will continue to work within the current Zoning structure to ensure that the property owners are being held accountable, I want to make sure we are also getting the necessary tools in place when the situation gets to the point of what we have experienced with these two buildings. With several zoning efforts underway, I don't yet know when this will begin working through the process, but I will keep you informed as it does. In most cases ordinance adoption takes 12-18 months, so this isn't a short term effort-but those buildings have been there a while too.

Streamlined Process for Road Construction Projects

In my time on the Board I have seen many sorely needed road projects delayed for various reasons. The most frustrating reason has been delays in the Right of Way acquisition process due to stalled negotiations with land owners. At the request of the Board of Supervisors, our Department of Transportation and Capital Infrastructure and the County Attorney have devised a new process to accelerate projects.

The County is relatively new to road construction. In the past, most roadways were constructed by VDOT or developers. However, in 2012, the Board of Supervisors became frustrated by the lack of funding

for road construction in Richmond and began placing projects into our own Capital Improvement Plan. We also dedicated two cents from the tax rate toward road construction, which has become a source of our local match for funds we are now receiving from the State via the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority.

The prior construction process waited until design was 100% complete before even beginning securing the needed right of way. Now, the County will begin that process at 70% of design completion. By beginning this step sooner and compressing tasks such as title work, we estimate that we will shave 6-12 months off the total project schedule. Getting shovels in the ground sooner and keeping costs lower on projects.

One other aspect of the process that will change is the County's more aggressive use of "quick take" to acquire properties. In "quick take," the County obtains property and can begin work, while the cost is worked out via settlement or by a judge. This process is already used by VDOT routinely.

I want to emphasize that in most cases, the land we are talking about is vacant, or a small portion along a property boundary that has long been identified as a future road alignment. However, the County has seen several property owners delay these proceedings for years, with the knowledge that delays add costs to the County. The County uses independent appraisals, and I always encourage landowners to do the same. We make every attempt to be reasonable, but unfortunately some of the responses have not been reasonable, and that must change. We are using taxpayer dollars for these projects, and we shouldn't be paying far more than a property is worth to avoid a long delay in a project.

DULLES DISTRICT UPDATES

Avonlea Town Center Update

I have received frequent questions about the lack of activity on the Avonlea Town Center site. Peterson

Companies has pulled crews off the site due to physical site issues encountered during construction which require additional mitigation. They are currently working on a plan to complete that work, but it likely will result in delays to the project. I don't have additional details, other than that they continue to market the project and are working to bring in tenants.

Commuter Bus Routes Added in Dulles South

In case you missed my prior news alert, Loudoun County Transit has launched long haul bus service from the East Gate Park and Ride in addition to the existing Metro connection service.

Since opening that lot in 2015, I had been working to bring long haul bus service there. The ability to add the service was dependent on the County's acquisition of additional local transit buses, which would be utilized on Metro connection routes to free up existing long haul buses for service elsewhere. After some manufacturing delays, the County received those local transit buses and placed them into service.

Loudoun Transit also has made changes to some existing routes that run from the Dulles South Park and Ride in Stone Ridge. These service changes are based on input from riders and are designed to alleviate overcrowding, shorten existing trips and increase reliability.

For a link to the new schedules and a summary of the changes visit www.loudoun.gov/buschanges.

Proposed Through Truck Restrictions on Goshen Road, Sacred Mountain Street, Marrwood Drive and Lenah Mill Boulevard

In response to requests from residents in Stone Ridge and Lenah Mill, the Board of Supervisors will include in our Public Hearing agenda for March 15 a proposed through truck restriction on Goshen Road, Sacred Mountain Street, Marrwood Drive and Lenah Mill Boulevard.

In order for VDOT and the Commonwealth Transportation Board to approve the restriction, a

Public Hearing and approval by the Board of Supervisors is required. An additional requirement is that the closest alternate route be identified. VDOT has identified Northstar Boulevard to Stone Spring Boulevard to Route 50 as an alternate.

The Public Hearing will begin at 6:00 pm on March 15 and is held at the Loudoun County Government Center (1 Harrison Street in Leesburg). You may attend and sign up to speak on a specific topic at the time it is brought up by the Board.

Related to Sacred Mountain Street, my office is in receipt of concerns of overflow parking from John Champe High School on that street as well as some neighboring roadways. We are currently working with the HOA and County staff to identify the concerns and begin the process to look at possibly enacting a Residential Parking District for those homeowners.

New Traffic Signals Activated

The traffic signals at the intersections of Tall Cedars Parkway and Poland Road and Ryan Road and Northstar Boulevard were both activated earlier this month. These should help improve safety at both of these intersections while alleviating some of the backups seen with the prior all way stop signs. Please be patient as we all become accustomed to the new signals at these intersections.

Providence Ridge Turn Lane

This nice burst of spring that we have all enjoyed has been a great help to completing this project. They have finally been able to complete the paving and the striping was completed last week. I have been told that VDOT inspections have been scheduled for this week and that once they give the okay, it will be open for use. Thank you to the residents of Providence Ridge for their patience as we worked to get this completed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Input Sought on Transit Services

Loudoun County has launched an annual effort to obtain input from members of the public about the

County's bus routes and transit services. The public may provide feedback until March 31, 2017, through a survey or by attending community meetings scheduled in the coming weeks. The county will host information sessions that provide opportunities to learn more about the county's existing bus network and formal process for soliciting and receiving feedback from the community regarding transit routes and services.

The county is seeking suggestions specifically for new or modified bus routes and enhanced services. The county encourages members of the public to provide input by taking an online survey at www.loudoun.gov/TransitSurvey.

Members of the Transit Advisory Board and county transit staff will be on hand to meet with the public during upcoming information sessions:

- Tuesday, February 28, 2017, 7:00 - 8:00 p.m., Dulles South Multipurpose Center, Banquet Room #3, 24950 Riding Center Drive, South Riding
- Wednesday, March 15, 2017; 7:00 - 8:00 p.m., Loudoun Valley Community Center, Gymnasium, 320 West School Street, Purcellville

The information collected from the public will be analyzed along with a broad range of factors - including ridership and available funding - to develop plans for future transit services. As part of the County's annual budget process, the Board of Supervisors will consider recommendations for changes to bus routes and services based on the community input and staff analysis. Any changes to bus routes approved by the Board will be announced prior to taking effect on July 1 each year. The current input sessions will inform bus services that begin July 1, 2018. More information about Loudoun County's transit service is online at www.loudoun.gov/transit. Anyone with questions about the input process or the online survey may call 703-771-5665 or email rideshare@loudoun.gov.

Scholarship Opportunities Available Through NOVEC

The NOVEC Scholarship Program will award \$1,500 scholarships to qualified graduating public high school students in NOVEC's service territory in Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William and Stafford counties, and the City of Manassas Park. An additional \$1,500 scholarship will go to a student in NOVEC's service territory who either attends private school or is home schooled. From the scholarship winners, selection committees will choose the overall outstanding student for the \$1,500 J. Manley Garber Scholarship. The recipient of this scholarship will receive a total of \$3,000 to help with his or her college education.

Complete the NOVEC scholarship application and submit all required materials no later than March 13, 2017. More information is available at www.novec.com or contact Donna Snellings at scholarships@novec.com.

Reminder to Lock Vehicles



The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office is reminding residents to be extra vigilant in locking their vehicles. Criminals are searching for unlocked vehicles and valuables such as purses, electronics, cash or and firearms have been stolen. In some cases, the garage door opener in the vehicle has been used to get into the garage and then access the home.

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit is offering residents several tips for deterring thefts from vehicles:

- **KEEP YOUR VEHICLE LOCKED.**
Most stolen items are taken from vehicles that are left unlocked.
- Remove all items from your vehicle, including garage door openers, when not in use. When you cannot do this, put the items out of sight (inside a lockable glove box or trunk). If your vehicle has an integrated garage door opener, please keep the openers out of sight.
- Park inside your garage, where possible, and keep the garage locked. Or, try to park your vehicle near or under an illuminated area.

Report suspicious activity immediately by calling the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office non-emergency line at 703-777-1021 or call 9-1-1.

VDOT Snow Removal

If your street is maintained by VDOT, their 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 for news releases, important messages, and links for some of the items below
- www.511virginia.org for road conditions
- 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 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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