County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

March 12, 2024

TO: Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman and Members
            Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Edward H. Blum, Chairman   *EHB*
            Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee (ITPAC)

SUBJECT: FY 2025 ITPAC Budget Letter to the Board of Supervisors

ITPAC is a County Advisory Committee of citizens with significant government and IT industry expertise. In regular interactions with the Department of Information Technology (DIT) senior leadership, ITPAC recommends current, cost-effective options for handling Fairfax IT challenges and opportunities.

Perennially recognized as a high-achieving county, Fairfax is expected to have first-class IT services using innovative technology solutions. DIT employs agile methods using a flexible technology infrastructure and strategies aligned with the County Strategic Plan for effective and efficient government.

ITPAC knows that it is important to expand and strengthen IT investments when serious community needs exist even in an uncertain fiscal environment. Technology investments are critical to achieving savings in other areas of the County budget and they will produce additional IT savings over time. Also, additional new community needs exist with expanding technology-related requirements.

To this end, we whole-heartedly support the County Executive's IT proposal in the <u>FY 2025 Advertised Budget Plan.</u> This includes providing $5 million in new funding to help bring IT to its Optimal State as well as additional funds to support significant inflationary and IT product cost increases in the Technology Infrastructure Fund. These funds will mean a significant and timely infusion of funds to address important requirements throughout the IT portfolio, but especially in these areas:

- *Infrastructure Requirements*:
  With the County's critical data-driven initiatives, storage use and computing are expanding rapidly necessitating substantial investment. Included are the establishment of data lakes and a focus on data curation and cleanliness. Upgrading hardware is imperative for throughput processing.

- *Cloud Expansion:*
  DIT will need to extend the use of cloud services to offload workloads encompassing Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML) as well as Intrusion Detection and Prevention (IDP).

- *Applications Modernization:*
  DIT's extensive application portfolio not leveraging current technology must be updated. Some applications rely on a framework with end-of-life in 2026. Addressing this may mean staff augmentation and/or implementation of containerization, DevOps and Robotic Process Automation.

- *Phone System Replacement:*
  DIT must address deficiencies in the phone system which cannot accommodate all the requirements of the County's current mobile workforce.

- *New Technology and Training:*
  To keep pace with evolving technology and expand needed capabilities, it is imperative to allocate funds for acquiring new technology when needed and providing ongoing staff training to support it.

ITPAC also supports continuing investments in other critical areas of the IT enterprise, including:

Cyber Security: Investment in cyber security technologies and expertise is paramount. Having current security systems reduces the risk of disruptions to County operations and services.

Hybrid Operation: The Remote Access Project and other options are needed to improve the workforce's ability to function both remotely and on premises securely.

Enterprise Data Analytics: Work on enterprise-wide data governance with analytics and citizen portals must be expanded to leverage the enormous value of County data for making more effective decisions.

Equitable Technology Access: DIT should find ways to incorporate equitable access to technology across the County.

Collaboration with Partners for Growth: With others in the area (such as FCPS or IT companies with a large presence), co-create services such as predictive analytics and smart/connected communities.

County Successes: ITPAC notes that previous investments made by the Board have yielded substantial positive results in recent years. These include:

County Earns National IT Best Practice Award: The County's IT Program continues to be acknowledged as a national best practice. It is praised for its governance, investment, and low-risk delivery model producing cost-effective technology solutions supporting the Board's goals. For 2023, Fairfax County received first place in the Center for Digital Government's Digital Counties Survey for jurisdictions with populations over 1 million. The survey honors the innovative use of emerging technologies, enhanced cybersecurity, and strengthened digital equity initiatives. This is not a finish line crossed, but a success marker reflective of a citizen and business community that has high expectations of the County's commitment to effective technology.

Tax System Upgraded and Planning Land Use System (PLUS) Service Improved: Recent technology upgrades to tax systems have greatly benefited County taxpayers by reducing personal property tax transaction times and decreasing the need for in-person payments. Also, significant increases in permit volume with reduced processing times have emerged with the updated PLUS, the County's platform for online permit applications.

ARPA Funds Used to Support Security Infrastructure and Replacement of Network Switches: DIT used Federal ARPA funds to enhance its security infrastructure. It expanded and strengthened the County's "Defense in Depth" approach with improvements in the detection and remediation of vulnerabilities. It allowed cloud integration. ARPA funds are also supporting the second phase of the county's network infrastructure upgrade, replacing network switches that are at or beyond end-of-life.

Continuing Challenges to Achieving the Mission: ITPAC recommends taking **action** to address these longstanding items.

Hiring Impediments with IT Staff Approaching Retirement: DIT struggles to hire and retain the high-level talent required to compete in the DMV marketplace. Issues include non-competitive compensation, hiring responsiveness, limitation on home location and telework restrictions. The business impact of this situation will be felt soon as nearly 25% of DIT staff are in DROP or eligible to retire shortly.

Agility and Time Required to Execute Contracts: The County would greatly benefit from increased contracting agility and faster contract awarding. Current processes often extend the time required to implement technology. This can increase implementation cost and/or prevent implementation entirely.

Agencies' Business Process Transformations: As agencies seek more efficiency through process transformation, proposals often have significant IT implications. To achieve effective results and achieve long term sustainability, DIT must be engaged early as a partner and collaboration is necessary to achieve positive outcomes and allow the agency to quantify and measure citizen benefits.

Increased Focus on Protection of County Data: Cyber threats continue to grow and become more sophisticated. Timely deployment of security protection across the entire County network is necessary to ensure resilient and uninterrupted operations, while protecting access to a wide variety of data. This must continue to be a budget priority.

Growing Value of Data Analytics with Data Proliferating: Data expansion and increased use drastically escalates the need for technology to gather, manage, preserve, and analyze data.

Additional Recommendations: ITPAC supports the following:

- Support of the significant IT Project funding included in the *FY 2024 Third Quarter Review* to be received by the Board on 3/19/24, which includes nearly $6 million to support critical IT Projects in areas such as Data Analytics, GIS, E-Government, and Electronic Health Records.
- Using any remaining Federal funds and other revenue sources to make more IT investments. This includes any funding designated for broadband coverage equity and other areas in DIT's purview.
- Continue the innovative multi-year, multi-budget process investment strategy for major IT projects such as the recently implemented PLUS system, the Human Services Integrative Roadmap, and similar major projects.
- Provide additional funding as needed to obtain and maintain the required licenses for software and other core systems. Costs are increasing rapidly and will continue to grow in future years.

<u>Conclusion:</u>
As with other large high performing organizations, the County's reliance on technology continues to increase. With the need to protect against constantly evolving cyber threats and the rapid advance in the use of information and technology to deliver services, the County must stay abreast of the latest technologies and applications to meet its goals. ITPAC appreciates the opportunity to provide expert citizen advice to assist the County to achieve best practices in technology governance and implementation.

Cc:
Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee
Bryan Hill, County Executive
Christina Jackson, Chief Financial Officer
Ellicia Seard-McCormick, Deputy County Executive
Gregory Scott, Chief Technology Officer