



Herrity Report February 25, 2011

County Executive's Proposed FY 2012 Budget Includes Tax Hike

On Tuesday the County Executive unveiled his proposed FY 2012 budget. The budget uses a \$1.09 tax rate (the same rate we have now) but because home values are up slightly, keeping the same tax rate will result in a \$110.55 tax increase for the average homeowner and many homeowners will face an increase of much more than that. Supervisor Frey, Supervisor Cook and I voted against that rate, arguing instead to advertise a \$1.065, the tax rate needed to keep the average tax bill flat. The "advertised tax rate" is the upper threshold that the Board can use when setting the final rate.

I did not support advertising the \$1.09 tax rate because I do not believe the Board should even have the potential for a tax increase on the table. Homeowner taxes doubled from 2000-2007 (\$2,400 to \$4,800) and today, as we are coming out of the worst recession in a generation, home values have fallen and far too many people are out of work or underemployed. We may also be looking at even tougher times ahead as the federal government cuts the workforce and federal contracting that much of our local economy relies on.

Although we have held the property tax burden level the past couple of years, the Board, over my objections, has also increased numerous county fees, including bringing back the car decal fee. The Board has also increased regulations on many of our businesses. Those businesses then pass those extra costs on to their customers i.e. the citizens of Fairfax

County. **The time to provide Fairfax County residents with some tax relief is long overdue.**

We have made significant cuts over the past couple of years and yet when I am out in the community people are not talking to me about the reduced services. In fact, to the credit of our County employees, most people haven't noticed a change in service levels at all.

What they do notice though and what they do talk to me about is the enormous tax and regulatory burden placed on them year after year. We can and must cut more from this budget. We need to look at areas like: further reductions in our workforce (we've cut a lot of positions but mostly unfilled ones), reduction in school administrative expenses, competitive sourcing and in general we need to have a serious discussion about Fairfax County's "nice to have" programs. We also need to closely examine the regulations that drive up the cost of government and the cost to homeowners and businesses.

I did not support advertising the \$1.09 tax rate and I certainly will not support a final budget that uses this tax rate because it is a tax increase on many of our citizens. I look forward to working with the Board and citizens over the next two months to provide real tax relief to the citizens of Fairfax County.

To see the County Executive's proposed budget follow this link:

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb/>

I will also be having two budget town halls. Hearing feedback from my constituents is extremely important to me so I will hope you will be able to attend one of these two meetings:

- **Joint Budget Town Hall with Supervisor John Cook
March 23rd, 7:30 PM at West Springfield High School**
- **Budget Town Hall with the Springfield District Council
March 24th, 7:30 PM at the Fairfax County Government Center Rooms 9 & 10
(12000 Government Center Parkway)**

Acceleration of School Construction and Renovation

For each of the last three years I have asked the Board of Supervisors to hold the bond amount for school construction and renovation at \$155 million even though the County's agreement with the school system drops this to \$130 million. We face staggering school renovation and construction backlogs in Fairfax County and under the current CIP projection things are only going to get worse. I'm happy to report that County Executive's proposed budget holds this funding at \$155 million.

However I think we have an even bigger opportunity to accelerate school construction and renovation projects by taking advantage of historically low construction costs and interest

rates. We have room under our debt cap to increase our annual bond sales above \$155 million and I believe we should be doing so in order to take advantage of these unique conditions (which may not be around for much longer). In 2009, I met with school staff to propose that they consider accelerating school construction and renovation to take advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity. Unfortunately at the time FCPS did not have enough projects designed and they stated opposition to design-build concepts.

FCPS is reportedly now in a position to accelerate a number of projects and Chairman Bulova has asked County and FCPS staff to work together to develop a strategy to get this done. This plan will be discussed at a March 15th joint meeting of the Board of Supervisors and the School Board.

Aging buildings not only strain our capital funds, they also put a burden on operating budgets because keeping these aging, inefficient buildings open is very expensive. These are drastic times that require outside-the-box, creative solutions. I'm happy this idea is moving forward with the support of Chairman Bulova.

Fairfax County Parkway Safety Improvements Underway

After hearing from many constituents about the increased number of crossover and fatal accidents on the Fairfax County Parkway, Delegate Dave Albo and I requested that VDOT conduct a safety study on this issue. We also held a town hall meeting on the results of this study on February 23rd.

Several of the safety improvements identified in the study are underway and others await funding. I will be holding additional meetings on the proposed improvements, particularly those involving Burke Centre Parkway, in the near future.

Most roads are designed for 5-10 mph over the posted speed limit. The Parkway was built with a design speed of 50 mph. Originally the posted speed was 45 mph but it was eventually raised to 50 mph and as well all know many cars typically travel much faster than that making these safety improvements critical. It is also important that we all do our part and not speed on the Parkway.

At the March 8th Board of Supervisors meeting I will be asking the Board to support the studies' recommendations and begin to look at the long term plan for one of Fairfax County's "main streets".



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