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## November 2010

### "A Month in Review"

#### **In This Issue:**

#### **[Fairfax County Looks to Buy a Privately Owned Trash Incinerator - A Bad Idea](#) -**

Fairfax County staff is looking to buy a privately owned and operated trash incinerator at a potential cost of \$500-\$700 million. I do not support this plan.

**[Incentivizing County Employees to Save Taxpayer Dollars](#) -** Governments at all levels are notorious for the annual tradition of spending all of their budgets by the end of the year - often in not the most productive ways. Last month I offered a proposal to address this year end spending and possibly save Fairfax County taxpayers millions of dollars.

**[Update on the FY 2012 Budget](#) -** Last month we received our first budget update since the spring and the current forecast is for a FY 2012 shortfall of \$54 million. Homeowner taxes doubled from 2000 to 2007 - it is time we gave taxpayers some relief. See my ideas below.

**[Fairfax County Parkway will be Impacted by NGA Opening Beginning in January](#) -** Starting on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 the National Geospatial Agency (NGA) will be moving 300 employees per week to its new campus (NGA East) located in Springfield. We must remain focused on minimizing the impact of NGA's opening on our community. I have been working to minimize some of the impact.

**[Route 50 Lane Closures Set for Weekend of December 11-12](#) -** On December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, between the hours of 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. (weather dependent), VDOT will be driving new bridge piles in the vicinity of the Fairfax County Parkway bridge over Route 50. The noise associated with pile driving is so loud that the work cannot be done at night; therefore daytime lane closures during the weekend will be required while this work is done.

## **Fairfax County Looks to Buy a Privately Owned and Operated Trash Incinerator - A Bad Idea**

In 1988 Fairfax County and Covanta signed an agreement for Covanta to construct and operate a trash incinerator in the Lorton area. Since then Covanta has been operating the facility in a successful manner and has become an active member in the community. In fact, over the years, they have sponsored various community based organizations and events, participated in Earth Day, the County Fair and received many awards for their work including the 2010 Virginia Governors Environmental Excellence Award. In short, they have been a great community partner. But most importantly, Covanta has provided Fairfax County with one of the lowest tipping fees (the price paid to drop off trash) in the region, ranging from \$26 to \$33 a ton.

For those of you that follow the *Herrity Report*, you know that I believe in the competitive bidding process, privatization of various government functions where it makes sense and overall less government intrusion in our lives. Competition leads to lower prices and better service. That is why I am very concerned that Fairfax County, specifically the Department of Public Works (DPW), is focusing not on renewing the lease with Covanta but instead on purchasing the facility. Some estimates have put the cost of purchasing Covanta in the \$400-\$700 million range.

It is hard for me to comprehend the County government making a purchase of this magnitude at the same time our citizens are demanding that governments at all levels return their focus to core government functions. Owning and operating a trash incinerator is not a core government function.

Why would we spend our scarce capital improvement dollars on a trash incinerator when we have huge capital needs in public safety and school construction and renovation? The only reasons given by supporters of the purchase are "it gives us more control" and "we can do it better". Covanta competitively provides these services across the country, has invested in the upkeep of the facility and our current competitive tipping fees all demonstrate the value of the current arrangement to the County.

I cannot support the County's purchase of a trash incinerator given the proven success of our current arrangement with the private sector, our other outstanding capital needs, and the lack of a compelling reason to purchase it.

## **Incentivizing County Employees to Save Taxpayer Dollars**

Last month I made a proposal that could end up saving Fairfax County taxpayers millions of dollars. At the October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting the Board approved my motion to have the County Executive develop a proposal for the County similar to the one used last year by Governor Bob McDonnell to create a budget surplus at the state level.

The Governor asked state employees to hold down year end spending and create a surplus. If they reached this goal he promised a bonus of 3% to state employees who had not had a raise in three years. Not only did they reach their goal but they exceeded it, which in part

led to the state having a \$403 million surplus. The Governor then used some of the surplus to give state employees the promised bonus. I believe this is an idea that has merit in Fairfax County and one we should consider.

We all know governments at all levels are notorious for the annual tradition of spending all of their budgets by the end of the year - often in not the most productive ways. This is done to ensure they will get the same amount the following year. While the County Executive and the County CFO have been successful at cutting budgets and having large balances at the end of the year to carryover, my discussions with several county employees indicates the year end spending tradition still exists in parts of Fairfax County.

Here in Fairfax County our hardworking employees are our most important asset. Despite the fact that we have continually asked them to do more with less over the past three years the County has been able to maintain a high level of service because of their dedication and ingenuity and they have done it without any pay increases.

These employees are the ones who know where the "hidden" savings are in the county budget. Incentivizing our employees to identify and implement these savings should be a win-win for the employees and the taxpayers. I will keep you updated on this initiative as it moves forward.

### **Update on the FY 2012 Budget**

Last month we received our first budget update since the spring and the current forecast is for a FY 2012 shortfall of \$54 million. The County is also predicting home values will be up slightly at 3.3%. The good news is that the shortfall number is down significantly from the previous two years: \$650 million for FY 2010 and \$257 million for FY 2011.

The bad news is that we are looking at a shortfall even though home values are up. If we keep the tax rate the same the average homeowner is looking at a \$156 tax increase and we still have a shortfall.

In the seven years before I joined the Board of Supervisors home values increased and the tax rate decreased. However the tax rate did not decrease enough to keep the actual taxes paid even or down. As a result the average homeowner tax bill increased from \$2,400 in 2000 to \$4,800 in 2007.

The real challenge this year will be to convince the Board to drop the tax rate to reduce our homeowners tax bills even though values are rising. I believe it can be done.

Some of the things I will be focusing on in the budget process include:

- School Administration: The schools make up 54% of our budget. FCPS is entirely too top heavy and there are millions of dollars to be saved by cutting central administration.
- Political Statement Positions: The environment and the ability to bike are important but do we really need an "Environmental Coordinator" at a salary of over \$100k per year? Same with the "Bicycle Coordinator"? These are top level management positions the County added over the last ten years to satisfy certain political constituencies and they need to go.

- Affordable Housing: The County added a new \$4 million affordable housing program last year at the same time the Board voted to raise taxes in order to close the shortfall (I voted against the budget and the tax increase). It doesn't make any sense to spend millions of dollars on public housing when year after year the County taxes more and more people out of homes they already own.
- Efficiencies: The Fairfax County budget doubled from 2000-2007. Do you notice a considerable difference from the County services you were receiving in the 2000? We need to find the areas where we have dramatically increased spending but have not seen the same increase in results.
- Reducing Regulation: I have been successful in some of my attempts to reduce the burden we have added to our homeowners and businesses with respect to land disturbance. These regulations also cost the County to administer. Much more can be done.
- Competitive Sourcing: We need to seriously consider competitive sourcing. For instance, last year I put a proposal on the table to compete the trash collection at county owned buildings (currently done by the county) that could have saved us \$500,000. Staff has not acted on that proposal.

Please let me know if you have any ideas on the budget or want to help with the budget review this year.

### **Fairfax County Parkway will be Impacted by NGA Opening Beginning in January**

Starting on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 the National Geospatial Agency (NGA) will be moving 300 employees per week to its new campus (NGA East) located in Springfield. They will continue at that pace until all 8,500 NGA employees are in the new facility on the old Engineering Proving Grounds. Approximately 60% of the NGA employees currently live or work in Western Fairfax County making them very likely to use the Fairfax County Parkway to get to the new NGA facility. Obviously my main concern here is traffic. For those of you that live or drive in this area I ask that you please contact my office if you see problems start to develop.

As *Herrity Report* readers know one major problem that I see developing is the inadequacy of the Rolling Road/7100 single loop ramp that drivers will have to use to continue north on 7100 (the Ffx Co. Parkway). There is simply no way this single loop ramp will be able to handle the influx of cars and I am working hard to find money to expand the ramp.

A solution has been identified and the engineering is progressing but there are no funds identified for construction. I had this project added to the Board's priority list for local, state and federal funding. I have also discussed the project with the Secretary of Transportation, our local delegates and members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board. I hope some of the \$1.4 billion in funds identified by Governor McDonnell's audit of VDOT can be allocated quickly to this project.

While I am very concerned about the affect NGA East will have on traffic in our community there are some silver linings. We have already seen home values rise in Saratoga (a neighborhood adjacent to the campus) as NGA workers begin to look for

housing close to their new location. Over time I suspect we will see home values in other neighborhoods close to NGA East rise as well. With that being said, we must remain focused on minimizing the impact of NGA's opening and I assure you that doing so will continue to be one of my top priorities in the years to come.

### **Route 50 Lane Closures Set for Weekend of December 11-12**

Construction work for the new interchange on the Fairfax County Parkway at Fair Lakes Parkway and Monument Drive is currently underway. On the weekend of December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, between the hours of 7 a.m. and 9 p.m., the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) will be driving new bridge piles in the vicinity of the Fairfax County Parkway bridge over Route 50 as part of this project. The noise associated with pile driving is so loud that the work cannot be done at night; therefore daytime lane closures during the weekend will be required while this work is done. This operation will require double lane closures on eastbound and/or westbound Route 50 and single lane closures on the Fairfax County Parkway at this bridge location during the day. VDOT anticipates these lane closures will cause major impacts to the traveling public both Saturday and Sunday, so drivers are strongly advised to use alternate routes. VDOT will be placing variable message signs in the area approximately a week in advance of the work to warn and remind drivers of the upcoming closures.

For more information on the interchange project, visit VDOT's website at:  
[http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northernvirginia/fairfax\\_county\\_parkway-fair\\_lakes.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/northernvirginia/fairfax_county_parkway-fair_lakes.asp)

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