

MVCCA (BOARD 2020-1) Resolution on the County Executive's Revised FY2021 Advertised Budget

WHEREAS the FY 2021 Revised Budget, among many changes, reversed the earlier proposed 3 penny increase in the real property tax reverting to the FY2020 rate and reduced the earlier proposed increase in school funding from \$79M to \$7M; and

WHEREAS the pandemic crisis has many unknowns and will likely have future unanticipated effects, but citizens expect that, when we approach "normalcy", our important institutions and our quality of life will be preserved and the County will be positioned to emerge economically strong and fiscally nimble; and

WHEREAS it is critical that the County have adequate funds to robustly address needs and costs created by the pandemic, known and unknown at this time, to protect the quality of life citizens depend on and position the County to return to growth as soon as safety permits; and

WHEREAS Fairfax County Public Schools continues to be the highest priority for the County and for citizens, but the small increase in funding proposed may not prove adequate to address pandemic costs, enrollment changes, infrastructure needs and funding losses from non-County sources without jeopardizing the quality of education, particularly for at risk and special needs students; and

WHEREAS revitalization of the Richmond Highway corridor under EMBARK, and other similar County revitalization projects, would jumpstart economic recovery once the pandemic eases, but the building blocks must be put in place now; and

WHEREAS staffing and hiring a position for a senior level real estate development expert within the Department of Economic Initiatives would help keep economic growth strong and position the County to move effectively once the economic climate improves; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens urges the Board of Supervisors, in adopting the FY2021 Budget and through FY2021:

- (1) To the extent additional funding or financial circumstances permit, provide Fairfax County Public Schools with additional support for pandemic costs, infrastructure improvement and to assure quality educational opportunity for all students;
- (2) To fund a fulltime senior staff position to execute real estate projects within the Department of Economic Initiatives (further details attached).

APPROVED BY THE MVCCA GENERAL COUNCIL AT THEIR APRIL 22,2020 MEETING

DEI Senior Staff Position- MVCCA INPUT TO THE FY2021 REVISED BUDGET

The MVCCA strongly proposes that the County fund an additional position in the FY2021 Budget. It would be well-suited in the recently created Department of Economic Initiatives (DEI).

The position would be a type of real estate development/project manager; a senior level position with expertise in attracting residential and commercial developers that are financially capable of transforming revitalization areas into magnificent places within the County. He or she would have experience in placemaking and creating large-scale, vibrant developments (examples are: City Center and the Wharf in D.C., Pike and Rose in MD, and the Mosaic District in Fairfax). This individual would also work closely with EDA to take advantage of their expertise and national/global staff. The right person might demand a salary in the \$200,000 range, which is a meager amount when considering how many jobs and how much tax revenue they could bring to the County.

Our fear is that if the County waits for the COVID-19 Pandemic to end, before they start being pro-active in attracting real estate development throughout the County, we could be years behind the curve. This person could ensure that the Comprehensive Plan is actually realized and not just a 30-year wish list. The EMBARK Plan is an example of a vision ready to be implemented.

Additionally, the person in this newly funded position should start in FY21, make the necessary connections, and develop strategies to attract investors. While the County is experiencing unforeseen financial challenges due to COVID-19, there are still national and global investors, seeking to capitalize on their future investments. We believe the County could capture these investors.

Thank you for considering our request and for all you're doing for Fairfax, particularly during these trying times.

Fairfax County Public Hearings on the Revised FY2021 Budget, April 28, 2020

Testimony of the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations, as approved by its Board

Presented by: Judith F. Harbeck

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Good evening, Mr. Chairman, Supervisors.

You have previously been provided with the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations (MVCCA) Board approved Resolution in with respect to the County Executive's FY2021 Revised Advertised Budget of April 7, 2020; a copy is also attached.

The Revised Budget is, of course, in recognition of the immense changes which have taken place since the initial Advertised Budget in February. The Covid-19 pandemic has upended lives, businesses and education to an extent unimaginable a few weeks ago. The immediate crisis is not over and, even when "normalcy" returns, the effects will linger.

At a time when it seems everything has changed, we believe some expectations remain strong and immutable. As citizens and taxpayers we expect—and are determined-- that Fairfax County will remain a bastion of strong public services, stewardship of the environment and infrastructure and most importantly a place where all students have the opportunity to achieve a world class education.

We cannot let this temporary disaster crater our institutions and hamstring our recovery.

While we appreciate the acknowledgement of widespread financial distress demonstrated by the recommendation that the real property tax rate be held to FY2020 levels, we are concerned that many County services (especially social services) may be left too lean to respond to what could be a lengthy recovery process with many unknowns.

We are particularly concerned with respect to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS): we fear that while elimination of all teacher raises and steps (not desirable but perhaps unavoidable) would on paper to eliminate the new gap (\$79M), schools also face many unknowns. Pre-pandemic FCPS and County budgets also made assumptions about sales tax revenues and school support from the Commonwealth that may not be realized, leaving FCPS with a gap bigger than can be closed by eliminating raises or new initiatives.

Moreover, many pandemic-related expenses, not anticipated in the FCPS FY2021 Advertised Budget, will further increase the funding gap and threaten FCPS's ability to maintain the quality education we expect and will need to recover from this crisis. For example, more than 200,000 people pass through FCPS'

hundreds of facilities and buses each day; the cost to clean and sanitize will no doubt be astronomical but essential. As was seen in prior economic tough times, enrollment also may increase if students return from private schools; increases in expensive special needs services are already projected. Psychological issues and the need for counselling and referrals will also likely increase, requiring more, not fewer counselors and social workers.

The pandemic has also exposed what many have known for years: online and technical capability of FCPS needs serious updating. Over the past decade, particularly in the “lean” years, schools directed available resources to physical classrooms to hold down class size increases, to respond to uncompensated enrollment growth and unfunded mandates and to bringing teacher compensation to a competitive rate. Hardware purchases to equip all students with access and retrofitting for wi-fi were the major IT expenditures. IT departments were understaffed in part because school-level salaries were not attractive to IT professionals.

The ambitious effort to bring interactive online learning was a clear failure. Although that was not the only distance learning vehicle (Blackboard continues to provide resources and communication between students, teachers and parents, lessons have been broadcast on public access and FCPS’ own channel, and packets were mailed to all students) the response to this crisis did not meet our expectations despite the hard work of teachers and principals.

The School Board is undertaking a review of remote learning failures which will hopefully show where breakdowns occurred and also point ways forward to assure that in future FCPS online learning capability, and tech capability generally, will reach the excellence we expect. But it will not be done without infusion of new funds.

Education is and has always been the highest priority for this Board, residents and homeowners. To the extent additional funds become available—and looking forward to FY2022—we urge this Board to increase funding for FCPS to be sure we protect and improve the quality of educational opportunity for to all students.

In Mount Vernon, we have also seen the sorely needed revitalization of the Richmond Highway corridor, already sluggish, brought to a near standstill by the pandemic. Development in other County areas has also been affected. We cannot wait until the pandemic is over to put in place the building blocks of continued economic growth; waiting will put Fairfax behind the curve and stall realization of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and EMBARK for years.

We believe the County needs a dedicated real estate development expert who can materially aid the County, particularly with respect to the goals of the EMBARK plan, and help jumpstart economic recovery.

We urge you therefore to fund and the County Executive to add and fill for FY2021 a full-time position to manage real estate projects within the Department of Economic Initiatives to help keep economic growth strong and position Fairfax to move effectively once the economic climate improves. The position should be senior level with a salary commensurate with the level of expertise needed and

adequate to attract a top candidate who can attract strong residential and commercial developers and has experience in placemaking and creating large scale, vibrant developments. The jobs created and new revenue brought to the County by new development will greatly outweigh the cost of the new position and could begin to be realized almost immediately.

As homeowners, we are the backbone of the County. As our tax system is now structured, our property taxes are the primary revenue source for the County and for schools. We are also the biggest beneficiaries of County services which create the quality of life we treasure, keep our home values strong and support world-quality schools to provide workers of the future and serve as a magnet to attracting new residents and businesses.

We cannot let this temporary disaster crater our institutions and hamstring our recovery.

Given the financial hardships suffered by some homeowners, we accept the County Executive's recommendation to continue FY2020 rates and eliminate other new taxes at the present time. If funds become available and/or economic conditions improve we urge the Board to direct additional funds to FCPS and consider reinstating all revenue sources available to reduce reliance on residential property tax.

Respectfully submitted,

Board of Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations