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Resolution on the
Fairfax County Fiscal Year 2024 Advertised Budget

Approved by the Federation Board and Membership
March 23, 2023

Respectfully submitted to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

cc:

Fairfax County Chief Executive Bryan Hill

Fairfax County School Board

Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Edelman".

David Edelman
Budget Committee Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tim Thompson".

Tim Thompson
Budget Committee Co-Chair

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INTRODUCTION

The Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations (The Federation) is an 83-year-old umbrella community organization representing tens of thousands of Fairfax County residences in all nine magisterial districts.

We are in unsettled waters in terms of the economy, both nationally and in Fairfax County. We have high inflation and low unemployment. This creates unique challenges for all organizations doing business in the county. It is harder than ever to attract and retain quality personnel. Therefore, the Federation supports the cautious approach taken in this year's FY2024 Advertised Budget.

We continue to be concerned that the "Ten Community Outcome Areas" identified by the County's existing Strategic Plan are aspirational, and lack goals that are measurable and specific with correlated lines of business. We suggest that the County create an execution plan with accompanying milestones for its Strategic Plan. In these uncertain times, a benchmarked Strategic Plan would not only demonstrate strong leadership, but such leadership can itself help stabilize the local economy.

The Federation continues to support revenue diversification in order to fund schools and County services. To this end, we recommend the County further utilize the suite of taxing authorities it has received from the Commonwealth. Diversifying our revenue sources is fiscally smart and is essential to start reducing the tax burden borne by homeowners.

Federation members recognize our lifestyle comes at a cost, but we continue strongly recommending that the Board of Supervisors address the following critical needs and services for FY2024 and successive years:

- 1) Continued excellence of Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), which serve as a magnet for growth and provide the underpinning for the county's economic health. This would include helping students catch up from any delayed progress or gaps caused by the pandemic;
- 2) The need for health care services, both physical and mental, continues to be a challenge for our community;
- 3) Public safety remains a core function of local government and public safety must be accordingly prioritized.

II. FINDINGS

A. Revenues

WHEREAS, the projected increase in overall County revenues is 5.8% in FY2024; and

WHEREAS, the Advertised FY2024 Budget projects an increase in the average tax bill of \$520, which represents a 6.97% increase in residential equalization; and

WHEREAS, residential properties comprise 76.3% of the total tax base; and

WHEREAS, the Commercial/Industrial percentage of the total real estate assessment base decreased from 17.00% in FY2023 to 16.16% in FY2024; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors approved an assessment ratio of 85% in FY 2023 to partially offset the unprecedented increase to vehicle values; and

B. Employee Compensation

WHEREAS, the Advertised FY2024 Budget proposes a Market Rate Adjustment (MRA) for County Employees of 2.0%, as well as performance, merit, and longevity increases; and

WHEREAS, the FCPS Advertised Budget proposes a 3.0% Market Scale Adjustment and a 1% retention bonus, as well as step increases which would provide an average increase of 2.22% for eligible employees; and

WHEREAS, there is societal, educational, and economic value in recruiting and retaining skilled employees; and

C. Public Safety

WHEREAS, the FY2024 Advertised Budget includes funding of \$211M for 1,852 FTE positions related to the Police Department; and

WHEREAS, the FY2024 Advertised Budget includes funding of \$215M for 1,629 FTE positions related to the Fire and Rescue Department; and

WHEREAS, the FY2024 Advertised Budget includes funding of \$8M for 23 FTE positions related to the Department of Emergency Management and Security; and

WHEREAS, the FY2024 Advertised Budget includes funding of \$59M for 223 FTE positions related to E-911; and

D. Education Funding and School Transfer

WHEREAS, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) early childhood programs serve a small fraction of the eligible student population; and

WHEREAS, studies show that investments in early childhood education promote healthy development and can help children avoid more expensive and difficult educational interventions later in their lives; and

WHEREAS, during the Coronavirus pandemic the overall student population in FCPS contracted more significantly than surrounding jurisdictions¹; and

WHEREAS, FCPS' FY 2024 Advertised Budget adds 679.2 staff estimated to cost \$65.2M, which reflects an increase in enrollment and student needs; and

WHEREAS, the population of students with high needs are currently driving 75 percent of the costs of enrollment growth, due to staffing formulas and/or the request for additional teachers with expertise in special education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); and

WHEREAS, salaries for FCPS most experienced staff and its maximum salaries are not market competitive;² and

WHEREAS, FCPS attracts only 1.7 qualified applicants for each open teaching position, (a) which represents half of FCPS' 3-year average of 3.4 and is significantly below its target (3.9) or aspiration (5.0);³ and

WHEREAS, the percentage of teaching positions filled by July 1 dropped below the baseline for the first time since that metric was set in 2017⁴; and

¹ Lumpkin, Lauren, Natanson, Hannah, and Asbury, Nicole, "Students Return to D.C.-Area Schools, But Not in Pre-Pandemic Numbers," *Washington Post*, December 5, 2022.

² Fairfax County Public Schools, "Strategic Plan Report: Premier Workforce" December, 2022. p. 18.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

WHEREAS, FCPS' teacher retention rate continues to fall,⁵

E. Environment

WHEREAS, the FY 2024 Advertised Budget proposes spending \$164,700 for replacing Park Authority gas-powered equipment with electric equipment; and

WHEREAS, the FY 2024 Advertised Budget proposes spending \$400,000 to support the Invasive Management Area Program; and

WHEREAS, the FY 2024 Advertised Budget proposes spending nearly \$200,000 to partially fund the restoration of meadows at Cub Run Stream Valley and Laurel Hill Park; and

WHEREAS, the FY 2024 Advertised Budget proposes spending \$103,000 for the second phase of the three-year project for the water chestnut early detection rapid response control program; and

F. Park Authority

WHEREAS, the FY 2024 Advertised Budget proposes a reduction in **overall?** **parks?** maintenance personnel; and

WHEREAS, native trees and shrubs in our community parks are being overrun and killed by invasive vines and plants, and extra personnel are needed to maintain these County parklands; and

WHEREAS, Park Authority funding has been redirected from typical maintenance operations like ball fields, picnic shelters or playgrounds to high-risk tree and shrub maintenance needs; and

WHEREAS, the County's goal to achieve zero **waste** is 2030, which supports the goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040; and

WHEREAS, a Mobile Nature Center will broaden access to environmental education for children and families; and

WHEREAS, vandalism and other damage to our parks is currently managed by the County's police force rather than a park ranger program; and

WHEREAS, park ranger programs help strengthen neighborhood ties through educational activities in parks, increase environmental education, and have been

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.

successfully launched in surrounding jurisdictions,

III. REQUESTED ACTIONS

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED based on the foregoing, the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations recommends the Board of Supervisors actively pursue the following actions in adopting the FY 2024 Fairfax County Budget:

A. Revenues

- (1) The Board of Supervisors should explore diversifying its tax base as much as is feasible so that revenues do not rely as heavily on residential real estate taxes and are more resilient to economic downturns; and
- (2) The Board of Supervisors should create an execution plan for the County Strategic Plan so that county residents are continually ensuring our investments are strategic in nature; and

B. Employee Compensation

- (3) The Board of Supervisors should fund the proposed MRA, Merit, and Longevity pay increase to the extent possible with an eye to increasing recruitment and retention; and

C. Public Safety

- (4) The Board of Supervisors should fund the FY 2024 Advertised Budget proposals for core public safety, health, and security; and

D. Education Funding and School Transfer

- (5) The Board of Supervisors should accept the County Executive's recommendation to fully fund the recurring costs contained in FCPS' requested transfer, to the extent possible; and
- (6) The Federation supports FCPS' proposed expansion of resources for early childhood education and urges the County's cooperation for greater collaboration in this area, particularly where County facilities might be utilized; and

(7) The Federation expresses its concern that FCPS' hiring targets in the FY 2024 Advertised Budget risk overpromising and potentially underdelivering, given the specialized positions needed as well as problems in teacher hiring and retention; and

(8) The Federation supports the shifts within the proposed increases in employee salaries which provide greater rewards to FCPS' most experienced staff; and

(9) The Federation urges FCPS to study the factors that drive staff hiring and retention, with particular focus on non-fiscal policies that affect workforce satisfaction and which reflect policy changes that can be implemented quickly.

E. Environment

(10) The Federation supports the plan to replace Park Authority gas-powered leaf blowers with 55 battery-operated leaf blowers; and

(11) The Federation supports the plan to increase funding for the Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program; and

(12) The Federation supports the plan for partial funding of meadow restoration at two County parks as part of the Helping our Lands program; and

(13) The Federation supports the plan to fund the second phase of the water chestnut early detection rapid response control program; and

F. Park Authority

(14) The Board of Supervisors should fully fund the Park Authority's request of \$739,463 for park and environmental and ecological stewardship to help the forestry program move from reactive service delivery to proactive and preventative tree care needs, which will in turn return funds to typical maintenance operations; and

(15) The Board of Supervisors should fund the Zero Waste program for the Park Authority at \$500,000; and

(16) The Board of Supervisors should fund the Mobile Nature Center for the cost of \$229,279.

(17) The Board of Supervisors should fund the Park Ranger Pilot Program for the cost of \$500,000.

IV. FURTHER REQUESTED ACTIONS

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors should implement the recommendations of its most recent Lines of Business Review (performed in 2016) to provide savings by eliminating redundancies and eliminating less effective or ineffective programs, to the extent practicable; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors should consider whether a new Lines of Business Review might be helpful in ensuring its spending continues to be properly targeted toward its strategic vision, as well as sustainable over the long term.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors should study employee compensation in its entirety to explore what would best recruit and retain highly qualified individuals to work and live in the county.