

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Membership Meeting of March 25, 2004
MINUTES

The meeting of FCFCA was held at the Packard Center at 7:30 p.m. (Attendance list is attached.) President Carol Hawn introduced Fire Chief Michael Neuhard, who in turn introduced interim Police Chief Suzanne Devlin.

Program — Chief Devlin is normally unavailable on the third Thursday of each month, so she was asked to visit with the Federation briefly at this meeting on the fourth Thursday. In limited remarks, she commented on the county-wide belt tightening now underway, which includes efforts to better integrate county services. As examples, she mentioned a jail diversion program for the mentally ill to get them treatment, domestic violence case management, and efforts to disrupt gangs. Chief Devlin will return for the Emergency Preparedness meeting in May.

President Carol Hawn introduced the evening's main speaker, County Executive Anthony Griffin. Mr. Griffin provided several handouts on the county budget and budget process, including a CD-ROM (attached).

He reported that the circumstances surrounding the 2005 budget are similar to the 2002, 2003, and 2004 budgets. For the fourth year there has been a double-digit increase in residential real-estate assessments, although this trend is slightly moderating -- the 2003 increases were larger than those in 2004. Once again, there are no program expansions or new programs included in the budget; increases are for commitments previously made, such as fire station 40, SACC centers in new or renovated schools, and prior capital commitments.

Schools are once again the largest piece of the budget, at 53 percent, as in FY 2004. There will be the normal exchange between the Supervisors and the Board of Education about further funding, but this year it will probably not increase much beyond the budgeted level. Instead, he said the big theme is reducing the property tax rate, which will probably be reduced by at least 2 cents.

Last year, Mr. Griffin was asked to propose cuts after the budget hearings were held. This year he has submitted a list of \$39 million in possible cuts at the same time as the budget.

In response to a question about the state budget stalemate, he said that the non-schools portion of the county budget includes 2.8 percent of funding from the state, but that the schools budget includes 12 percent from the state. Normally, the schools start the process of rehiring teachers during April and the county transfer to the schools is required by the end of April.

His recommendation has been to proceed with the normal budget process, including mark-up and adoption, under the assumption that a state budget will be forthcoming. However, if there is no state budget by May, the Supervisors would need to advertise a new tax rate (a 47-cent increase) to replace the state funds, setting a new public hearing on the rate for early June. The first half of the tax payments is collected in July and the second half could not, by law, be reduced from that level, even if state funding were restored. He hopes and assumes none of this will happen, and that a state budget will be produced before then.

He also replied to questions about state education money from the Virginia Lottery; the site for the new Command and Control Center, to be housed in a multi-building complex with possible state and federal partners in other buildings; and ambulance fees. In response to the ambulance fee question, he introduced Captain Christine Woodard of the Fire & Rescue Department, who reported on the work of the Ad-hoc Stakeholders Panel on EMS Transport Billing.

Captain Woodard provided detailed handouts (also attached). The panel supports ambulance fees as an additional revenue source for the county. The idea is that these fees will be primarily paid by private insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare, all of which allow for ambulance reimbursement and already provide it in other local jurisdictions. The county would apply for permission to waive individual co-pays for Medicare, which has been granted elsewhere. When the county does collect co-pays, it will do so through "compassionate billing." Uninsured persons can apply for a hardship waiver for the entire fee and this will be made clear from the first bill onward.

Other recommendations include outsourcing the billing process (the companies capable of handling the billing are all within the U.S. at this time), adding Fire Department staff to respond to citizen concerns on the billing, changing over to an electronic rather than paper-based data collection system to comply with federal HIPA privacy restrictions, and establishing an educational/public relations program to introduce the new system. Contributions to volunteer fire departments will be increased from \$25,000 to \$35,000 at the same time.

If the proposal were approved, with the required ordinance change, by the end of April, the earliest possible fee collection would be in the third quarter of 2005.

Business Meeting —

- a. Sally Ormsby presented the Federation FY 2005 budget resolution. The resolution was moved, seconded, and approved.
- b. The minutes of the February 19, 2004, Membership Meeting were moved, seconded, and approved as published.
- c. Art Wells reported that the Nominations Committee of 5 members has been formed and has begun work.
- d. President Carol Hawn reported on an e-mail from Flint Webb of the Environment Committee suggesting a change in park policy to set up a park ranger program. It was agreed this would be taken up at the Board meeting.
- e. Sally Ormsby reported on preparations for the Citizen of the Year banquet on April 25 (note the new date) at the Fairview Marriot. The *Washington Post* has agreed to its traditional role in co-sponsoring this annual event.

New Business —

- a. Sally Ormsby asked for approval to send a letter to the local media on behalf of Federation based on the e-mail sent to the local delegation, regarding the state budget situation. The proposal was moved, seconded, and approved.

Next Membership Meeting: Thursday, April 15, 2004: Community Services Board Presentation and (depending on status of special session) General Assembly update.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Addenda:

Draft Federation Resolution on Fairfax County Advertised Budget
Fairfax County FY 2005 Advertised Budget Plan (booklet, CD, and presentation)
Fairfax County Strategic Planning Initiative
February 23 Memorandum from Anthony Griffin to Board of Supervisors re budget options
EMS Transport Billing Ad Hoc Stakeholders Panel Report, and presentation