

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Membership Meeting of June 15, 2006
MINUTES

The meeting of FCFCA was held outdoors at the Hidden Oaks Pavilion behind the Packard Center at 7:00 p.m. and picnic food was provided.

Following the picnic, President John Jennison introduced the speakers, who included a police officer from the Mason District Station who spoke about National Night Out; Jeff Nolan, the Federation representative to the Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities, who in turn introduced the co-chairs of that committee; and the principal speaker for the evening, the Honorable Gerry Connolly, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

Program —

National Night Out Against Crime is held on the first Tuesday in August, which is August 1 this year. This is a crime prevention and community-building event that is part of Neighborhood Watch and is sponsored nationally by Target. It has been a big success in Fairfax County, with 37 neighborhood events held last year, almost a third in Mason Police District. The parties may be for neighborhoods, blocks, or apartment or townhouse complexes and are reported to the press and local political leaders. County police officers, political leaders, and local Target workers will swing by many of the parties. Many materials are available, including wristbands for kids, tee-shirts, banners, fans, handouts, and giveaways. To participate, check the national website for an information packet.

Jeff Nolan introduced Carmen Sanchez and Brenda Cross, co-chairs of the Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities. Carmen Sanchez explained such a committee is mandated by the state for each School Board; its purpose is to meet the unmet needs of students with disabilities. The committee includes 32 representatives from the county districts, the school clusters, and citizens groups like the Federation; most are parents of children with disabilities. The IDEA act of 1976 is the federal law that governs students with disabilities and is administered by the states. To be provided for under the law, a student must have a disability and be able to benefit from instruction. There are 13 disability categories, including learning disabilities, orthopedic disabilities, and visual and hearing impairment. Each disabled student has an individualized education plan. In some cases the plan only requires access. Services may include types of instruction and transportation. Currently just over 14 percent of those enrolled in Fairfax County Schools are enrolled in this program, with an average of 1.8 services per child. The most common disabilities are specific learning disabilities. Many spend less than half a day in special education and the rest of the day in regular classes. Of the students with disabilities who graduate from Fairfax County schools, 94 to 96 percent are involved in meaningful activity, versus a national figure of 75 percent. The percent of the school budget devoted to special education has held relatively steady at 17 percent.

Chairman Gerry Connolly spoke about the status of the Board of Supervisors' six priorities, which the supervisors unanimously agreed on at the start of their current term. These are: gang prevention and intervention; affordable housing; education; the environment; tax diversification; and transportation.

Fairfax County has the lowest crime rate of the 50 largest jurisdictions in the United States, and its crime rate is lower than 30 years ago. The gang prevention and intervention program is to prevent gang recruitment and activity becoming a more serious problem in the county. In general, the law enforcement side of the county's efforts has been strong; this is an attempt to improve prevention and intervention. A local summit established a task force that focused on efforts at the middle school level. Previously, afterschool activities were strong in elementary and high schools, but not in middle schools; only three had regular afterschool programs. By the end of this year, every middle school in the county will have these activities, and they will be available five days a week, instead of three days as in the past. Through a partnership with Cox Communications, the number of boys and girls clubs has increased from one to six.

Affordable housing was also the subject of a summit and task force. The Board of Supervisors adopted all 18 recommendations of the task force unanimously, including the dedication of a penny of the tax rate to affordable housing. This financial war chest has allowed the county to compete as existing affordable housing comes on the market. The goal had been to preserve 1000 units within this 4-year term; as of now, 1200 have been preserved. Chairman Connolly is now hoping to double the original goal. The county is also building a fourth homeless shelter, looking at amending the affordable dwelling unit ordinance to include high rises, looking at building a single room occupancy (SRO) facility, and considering supporting the development of affordable workforce housing on county-owned parcels, including near the Government Center.

Chairman Connolly spoke at some length on details of the education goal, but my notes are incomplete for this part of the presentation. Fairfax County's education system remains among the best in the nation and the transfer to the school system from the county general fund remains the single largest item in the county budget.

In terms of the environment, Fairfax County has also dedicated a penny of the tax rate to stormwater management. The county is now accelerating watershed studies by merging a number of them. By the end of the year, studies will be in place for all 30 watersheds in the county. In response to a question, Chairman Connolly said that additional dedicated funds would be needed to fully address the backlog of stormwater management needs. The county is virtually at build-out in terms of land use, so competition is strong for remaining parcels. However, the Park Authority has acquired the equivalent of seven Central Parks in the last few years and now owns 9.3 percent of the land in the county; Chairman Connolly is encouraging them to aim for 10 percent. This is in addition to state and federal public lands in the county. The entire county bus fleet now uses low-emitting diesel fuel, hybrid cars are being purchased, and the county is a regional leader in air quality.

Tax diversification has been affected by the unprecedented growth in real estate values. Although this has allowed the lowest tax rate in county history, at 89 cents, actual property taxes continue to climb. The car decal and decal fee have now been eliminated. The supervisors have adopted the maximum tax relief for seniors permitted under state law, making another 2200 seniors eligible. Additional education funding from the state has allowed somewhat less tax burden locally. The county now has some new sources of revenue from cigarette, recordation, and hotel taxes, which collectively have reduced the property tax rate by 3 cents.

The answer to transportation is to provide options. Rail to Dulles is a priority; the Dulles corridor is northern Virginia's top job location. Expanding transit on Route One has increased ridership 40 percent in two years. Light rail is being explored for the Columbia Pike corridor. HOT lanes will add capacity and enable Bus Rapid Transit. Telecommuting accounts for 5 to 6 percent of current commuters; Fairfax County has now met its goal of having 20 percent of eligible county employees telecommute, but other employers, including the federal government, must do more. Spot improvements around the county and the continued improvements at the Springfield interchange and Wilson Bridge will also help. The brand-new Cross County Trail offers 40 miles of trails, almost all in stream valleys; it will connect with the Potomac Heritage Scenic Trail, forming a 100-mile loop.

Chairman Connolly answered questions on stormwater projects, more sidewalks to encourage walking as a transit option and increase safety, construction of an SRO, the reduced homeland security funding for the metropolitan region, recreation facilities, planning for the large workforce increase at Fort Belvoir under BRAC, infill housing, and low-impact development.

Business Meeting —

- a. The minutes for the April 27 membership meeting were approved unanimously as written.

b. Carol Hawn, who served as chairman of the Nominating Committee, presented the slate of officers for the next year: John Jennison, president; Jeff Parnes, first vice president; Jeff Nolan, second vice president; Esther Ferington, recording secretary (membership minutes). The position of Treasurer is as yet unfilled. A change to the bylaws regarding the position of Corresponding Secretary will be submitted this fall. She thanked Steve DelBianco and Art Wells for their work on the committee. The floor was opened to nominations for these positions, but no nominations were made. The officers were elected unanimously.

c. Jeff Parnes gave the Treasurer's Report, noting that this had been a very good year for the Federation, due in large part to a successful Citizen of the Year banquet and receipt of donations from the Washington Post for the banquet. He will develop the budget for next year this summer so it is ready to hand off to the new Treasurer. The balance as of the meeting was \$8474.87, with some expenses still to come. This is a net gain of \$3599.93 over this time last year.

d. President John Jennison announced that due to the picnic and outdoor setting, the rest of the business portion of the meeting would be brief. He thanked Jeff Parnes for his work as Treasurer and noted that the Federation is in good shape, with money in the bank and a marketing program for new members underway.

e. Steve DelBianco presented a resolution on the zoning ordinance amendments (ZOAs) on minimum yard requirements and related matters. After a discussion, a vote was taken in favor of the resolution.

f. President John Jennison thanked Merrily Pearce, Sally Ormsby, and Carol Hawn for their work in making tonight's picnic possible.

Next Membership Meeting: September 21, 2006.

Next Board Meeting: June 22, 2006.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.