

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Membership Meeting of June 21, 2007
MINUTES

The meeting of FCFCA was held outdoors at the Hidden Oaks Pavilion behind the Packard Center at 7:30 p.m. and picnic food was provided.

Following the picnic, the minutes for the May 17 membership meeting were moved, seconded, and unanimously approved. President John Jennison thanked all those who had provided food for the picnic. He also complimented Tania Hossein for her work in organizing the Federation's recent emergency preparedness meeting for seniors. The cost of the event, except for the lunch, was paid for by five of the supervisors, including Chairman Connolly. A total of 130 seniors attended and response to the event was very positive.

He introduced Art Wells, who reported on a Braddock District Council program on June 20 on making neighborhoods vital, attractive, and safe. The program, which included an introduction by Chairman Gerald Connolly, was recorded and will be re-broadcast on Channel 16. (Charles Dane provided the broadcast dates of June 24 and 29 at 8:00 p.m.) President Jennison then introduced the main speaker of the evening, Chairman Gerald Connolly, who gave a "state of the county" presentation.

Program —

Chairman Connolly said that in the last four years, the Board of Supervisors has put forward 27 initiatives, from art to early childhood learning to bicycle and pedestrian issues. The heart of its efforts has been a six-point agenda that was adopted unanimously on a bipartisan basis by the supervisors at the beginning of the term, and these are the six points he addressed.

The first is gang prevention and intervention. At the start of this term, only three middle schools had after-school programs. Now all 26 do. Among other efforts, a thousand students are participating in a program for at-risk youth this summer. Four years ago, a survey of at-risk youth in Fairfax County middle schools and high schools indicated that 5.6 percent were involved with gangs. This year, the figure was 2.8 percent. Beyond the issue of gang prevention, he also noted that the county now has the lowest crime rate of any major jurisdiction in the United States, hitting a 32-year low last year.

Second is affordable housing. The chairman noted the work of Federation Board member Bill Hanks through AHOME on this issue. Together with traffic, the lack of affordable housing is one of two key issues that could damage the quality of life here. The first step has been to try to preserve the affordable housing that already exists, which was rapidly being converted from, for example, old apartment complexes to luxury condos. The county organized a summit, followed by a task force, on which Bill Hanks served. The supervisors unanimously adopted all eighteen recommendations of the task force, including a dedicated penny from the tax rate for affordable housing (equivalent to \$22.7 million this year). The money has been put toward a war chest to allow the county to compete with big developers to preserve existing affordable housing. The county's efforts in this area are now winning awards. The goal has been to preserve at least 1000 units during the supervisors' four-year term; by comparison, in the past fifteen years, the county had built 1000 new affordable units. Currently, 1400 have been preserved, and the program is pursuing a project that would involve 600 more.

The county is opening its fourth, and hopefully last, homeless shelter this summer. A strategy to end homelessness in ten years in the county was adopted following a summit; now the implementation plan needs to be adopted. There is both a humane and a financial value in returning people to productive life. The hypothermia program will involve 25 churches this year; the first year of the program marked the first time in memory that there were no deaths from hypothermia in the county. In addition, the new affordable dwelling unit ordinance will include high-rises. The next objective is to create workforce housing; currently many county police, fire, and teaching staff live outside of the county because of

housing costs. The first step will be the construction of a couple of hundred units of workforce housing on the Government Center property.

The third point is education. He noted that this is the critical issue and everything else flows from it. Fairfax County has top schools with one of the lowest dropout rates in the United States and with 94 percent of graduates going on to higher education. Challenges include the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act and the demographic shift to a more diverse student body; there are a hundred different languages spoken by Fairfax students and the system is 50 percent minority. Newsweek magazine's list of the best high schools in America lists all of the Fairfax County high schools, something no other large school district can match. In addition, some of the majority-minority Fairfax schools did better in the Newsweek ratings than some predominantly white Fairfax schools.

The fourth is the environment. The Board of Supervisors has adopted a 20-year plan of action and vision in six major areas. A penny from the tax rate has been dedicated to stormwater management, including restoring streambeds and repairing buffers. The county's air-quality mitigation efforts lead the region. Land stewardship is also a priority. The board has set a goal of securing 10 percent of the county as parkland; the Park Authority managed lands are now at 9.4 percent and 1500 acres are still needed to meet that goal. Two major bonds have helped pay for the new parkland.

The "cool counties" initiative is meant to reduce Fairfax County's carbon dioxide footprint and also provide a model for other US counties; it will be presented at the National Conference of Counties this summer. This initiative includes using hybrid and alternative-fuel vehicles in the county fleet, encouraging telework, encouraging use of compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs), and maintaining or increasing the tree canopy, which is now at about 41 percent. If nothing were done, projections show that the county's tree canopy would drop to 37 percent and stabilize there; the goal is to increase it instead to 45 percent, which calls for an additional three million trees. Trees sequester carbon dioxide and can significantly affect carbon dioxide levels.

The fifth subject area is taxation. Property taxes are the only tax the county controls since all others are controlled by the General Assembly in Richmond. The board has been able to ratchet down the real property tax rate without impacting the quality of life in the county. In Richmond, the bipartisan tax agreement under Governor Warner provided an additional \$125 million for the schools. Richmond has also provided an increase in the recordation and cigarette taxes and a local option hotel tax. In terms of the property tax, the supervisors have reduced the rate from \$1.23 to 89 cents in four years, a 34-cent drop. On average, homeowners will pay less in taxes this year than they did last year. They also eliminated the car decals and associated decal fees, making Fairfax County the only Virginia jurisdiction to eliminate both the decals and the fees. This year, Fairfax County was also the only northern Virginia jurisdiction that didn't raise taxes or slash services.

The sixth point is transportation. The goal of the four-year plan was to offer commuters additional choices. This includes expanding rail in the Dulles corridor, which is the most important employment corridor in northern Virginia, expanding Richmond Highway (Route One) corridor transit via the Richmond Express Service (REX) buses, which have increased transit use there by 40 percent, encouraging telework, and working toward adding high-occupancy/toll (HOT) lanes on the Beltway. The county has also dedicated \$100 million to about 80 spot and intersection improvements, of which 50 are complete and 30 are underway; these can be tracked on the county website. The transportation bond this fall will be the second one in this four-year term.

The recent General Assembly transportation package was transformed by Governor Kaine to include a substantial transfer of power, so that the regionwide transportation authority now has the power to tax and can float bonds (up to \$1.5 billion) against that power. The legislation also provides localities with the right to collect impact fees from developers, including by-right development, and it permits a difference

of up to 25 cents between the residential real estate tax rate and the commercial real estate tax rate. The package as a whole provides serious new investment in local transportation and transit.

Chairman Connolly answered questions on affordable dwelling units in high-rise projects, the safety and value of Beltway HOT lanes, a tunnel instead of elevated rail for Metrorail through Tysons Corner, other rail projects (such as to Fort Belvoir), and flood prevention in the Huntington neighborhood near Cameron Run, which suffered a serious flood one year ago.

Business Meeting —

a. Steve DelBianco reported on a new county staff report on portable storage containers (informally known by the brand name PODS). There will be a hearing July 19 on the issue at the Planning Commission. The Federation passed a resolution in June 2006 on time and space limitations for the containers. The staff report incorporates almost all of the Federation's positions except in regard to compliance with homeowners covenants and to signage; the Federation had recommended greater limits on the size of the signage. The report also notes that PODS must be placed in accordance with existing fire and safety regulations (for example, no placement blocking fire exits). Steve DelBianco will put forward the Federation's position on the subject, including a suggested requirement that applicants should be told that their proposals should conform to any "restrictions or other agreements" that apply to the property.

b. President John Jennison thanked all of the Federation officers with whom he has served as president for the past two terms and thanked the Federation's members. He then handed over the gavel to the new Federation President, Jeff Parnes, who previously served as Federation Treasurer, Webmaster, and, most recently, First Vice President. Jeff Parnes thanked John Jennison for his service as Federation President.

c. Jeff Parnes announced that the next Board meeting will be in July and the next membership meeting will be in September.

Next Membership Meeting: September 20, 2007

Next Board Meeting: July 26, 2007

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.