

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Membership Meeting of June 19, 2008
MINUTES

The June 19 membership 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. President Jeff Parnes reminded those present that the next Federation membership meeting will be September 18. There will be no Federation Board meeting in June; the next Board meeting will be July 25. He presented the new slate of officers elected at the May membership meeting: Jeff Parnes, President; Charles Dane, First Vice President; Esther Ferington, Second Vice President, and Scott Schlegel, Treasurer. The positions of Recording Secretary and Corresponding Secretary are open. He asked that anyone interested in learning more about these positions contact him via the Federation website (www.fairfaxfederation.org). Jeff Parnes then introduced the speaker for the evening, Gerald Connolly, Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, to speak on the "State of the County."

Program

Chairman Connolly reported that the state of the county in many ways reflects the state of the U.S. economy, with the price of oil and food rising and the effects of the mortgage crisis being felt locally. He said that while the United States is close to the technical definition of recession, Fairfax County and Northern Virginia are not. Job creation continues, though slowly. The county has the highest median household income in the nation, about \$100,000. Federal contracting, especially in information technology, contributes substantially to Fairfax County's economy. The average home in the county has declined 3.8 percent in value and a similar decline is projected next year. Last year there were 74 foreclosures; this year there were 1400 as of January, almost a 20-fold increase. Some neighboring counties have been even harder hit.

Due to the decline in real estate values, the average homeowner will pay less in real estate property taxes, although the tax rate has been increased 3 cents. The economic downturn has also affected revenues in other ways. For example, Federal Reserve reductions in the interest rate reduce the county's income on short-term investments by about \$28 million for every .5 percent reduction. The change in revenue means that county spending will have to be reduced in absolute terms, only the second time in 14 years that this has happened.

The county continues to have a low crime rate and high performing schools and to maintain infrastructure. Recently the General Assembly granted localities the ability to tax commercial real estate at a different rate than residential real estate. The differential between the two rates could have been as much as 25 cents, but the Board of Supervisors set the increase at 11 cents. This increase will go exclusively toward transportation.

In response to the housing crisis, part of the affordable housing fund will be used to address foreclosures, by acquiring some foreclosed properties in distressed neighborhoods where there have been clusters of foreclosures. The county strike force has also had great success, Chairman Connolly said, in attacking illegal overcrowding and boarding houses, even putting some offenders in jail. In some cases, there has been a willful conspiracy to create and operate such boarding houses by a handful of property owners and investors.

On transportation, which he noted is one of the items on the Board of Supervisors' 6-point agenda, Chairman Connolly recapped the recent lack of action by the General Assembly on a new transportation plan. He stated that it has been 22 years since the General Assembly made a significant investment in

transportation, and that northern Virginia cannot afford disinvestment in this priority. By 2014, the state will run out of federal highway dollars. Already the six-year plans being developed are shedding long-planned projects affecting, for example, I-64, I-81, and public transit. Due to the high cost of gas, meanwhile, Metro has experienced large increases in ridership, recently marking its 9th highest ridership in its history, almost equaling the volume for the Reagan funeral, but on an ordinary commuting day.

Reviewing the rest of the Board's 6-point agenda, he noted that in terms of gang prevention, gang membership and activity has been cut by 50 percent. There are now after-school programs at all middle schools. A partnership with Cox Communications has established five Boys and Girls Clubs. There is also a tattoo removal program. On affordable housing, 2200 units have been preserved, exceeding the goal of preserving 1000 in four years. On education, about 70 percent of elementary schools, including all at-risk elementary schools, now have an early childhood learning unit, a pre-K initiative that offers better training for daycare operators and more structured learning. On the environment, the county continues to follow its 20-year comprehensive plan and is winning awards and leading the region on environmental issues. Initiatives include tree preservation, completing and adding bicycle and pedestrian trails, outfitting all county buses to carry bicycles, and an emphasis on transit oriented development. The Park Authority has a goal of setting aside 10 percent of the county landmass as parklands; it is now at 9.6 percent with 1100 acres to go. The Cool Counties program created in partnership with King County (Seattle) and other counties seeks a nationwide impact by sharing a template of specific actions that other counties can follow to reduce carbon emissions as well. On fiscal matters, the county maintains its triple AAA bond rating, has been named the best-managed county in the U.S., and has won many national awards, including being named the #1 digital county.

Chairman Connolly then answered questions on additional carbon-reduction initiatives at the neighborhood and school level (Cool Neighborhoods and Cool Schools), on tree preservation and its role in sequestering carbon, on the role of citizens associations in promoting these programs, on community eligibility for the county's community enhancement program, on ambulance fees, on use of police vehicles, on managing change in the county workforce as a large percentage of workers become eligible for retirement, and on capacity and planning for this fall's election.

Business Meeting —

As is customary for the Federation's spring picnic meeting, there was no additional business, the principal business of the meeting having been briefly conducted when the group was first called to order.

Next Membership Meeting: September 18. Presentation by Bill Lecos, President of the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce.

Next Board Meeting: July 25.

Meeting adjourned at dusk.