

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Membership Meeting of June 18, 2009
APPROVED MINUTES (24 Sep 09)

The June 18 membership meeting of FCFCA was the annual Federation picnic meeting. It was held at 7:00 p.m. at the Annandale Community Park pavilion, which is on the same property as the Packard Center. (Attendance list is attached to file copy.) Following the picnic, the previously published minutes for the May membership meeting, as amended, were unanimously approved, as was the proposed 2009-10 Federation budget. President Jeff Parnes then introduced Sharon Bulova, Chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, who spoke on the State of the County. He noted that Delegate Vivian Watts, who represents the district that includes the park, was also in attendance.

Program

Chairman Bulova supplied a handout with her presentation. She also mentioned that her office provides a monthly e-newsletter, the Bulova Byline, similar to one that she produced as Braddock Supervisor, at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/chairman.

She discussed the budgetary impact of the economic downturn on Fairfax County, including a drop in housing values, which affects the county's property tax revenues and thus its budget, and a significant increase in foreclosures. Foreclosures, she said, also erode nearby house values. From a county budget standpoint, there was an 8 percent decrease in projected revenue from the year before. If the budget were kept at the same levels, there would have been a shortfall of \$650 million, so cuts had to be made. It will take a couple of years for the county to get back on its fiscal feet.

She noted that she is completing the remainder of former Chairman Gerry Connolly's four-year term following his election to Congress and a subsequent special election, so she has three years in her current term.

She reported that all the financial tools are in place to complete the Rail to Dulles project. The county is paying for its portion of the project using special tax districts for local businesses, the state is paying for its portion through revenues from the Dulles Toll Road, and the federal share of \$900 million has finally been okayed. She said that the Metro line will be crucial to the transformation of Tysons, which she called a poster child for the approach encouraged by the Greater Washington 2050 initiative. She noted that the Federation, under President Jeff Parnes, was the first organization, last year, to host a briefing on Greater Washington 2050.

In Tysons, this approach calls for transforming a business district into a community with a much greater residential component. The idea is to make the new Tysons transit-oriented and walkable. The transformation as Metrorail extends through Tysons will not be instant, she said, and the plan will evolve. It should take place, she said, over 20, 30, and even 50 years. It will take time. The four stations in Tysons are part of Phase I of Dulles Rail; the extension to the airport, including Reston and Herndon, will be Phase II. The line will transform the corridor served by the Dulles rail. She encouraged those who are interested to go to the county website for a wealth of information on Dulles rail and Tysons Corner planning.

She noted that she was originally elected to the Board of Supervisors on a slow growth platform in 1987, but following a recession, Tom Davis was elected Chair on a growth platform and many county leaders,

including her, took a new look at the policy choices. Now, she says, her focus is on how to grow. Other examples besides Tysons include the Springfield Mall, where plans called for mixed-use redevelopment; the Mosaic at Merrifield, which is a smart growth concept; and economic development associated with the BRAC-related workforce increases at Fort Belvoir and the Engineering Proving Grounds.

She also discussed the HOT lanes now under construction on the Beltway as a unique state public-private partnership that will add new capacity on state right of ways that will be paid back by tolls. She is concerned about the extensive tree removal that has occurred so far. The project will produce two new lanes in each direction, which will be accessible to single-driver cars that pay a toll but will also allow free use by carpools, motorcycles, and buses.

She then turned to possible expansion of Virginia Railway Express (VRE), a service she described as "my baby." She was in at the beginning, she said, on the idea of putting a commuter train service on existing freight rail tracks in the region, through the advocacy group Friends of the VRE. The project was challenging to get started because it was complicated by issues such as insurance and indemnifying the freight railroads. On its debut, the service was well-received but then had early problems with on-time performance. These were subsequently resolved through scheduling agreements with Norfolk Southern and CFS railroads. VRE is now the second fastest growing commuter service in the United States. It is exploring the possibility of extending service to Haymarket, Gainesville, and Spotsylvania.

Finally, she discussed the recent process of creating the FY2010 county budget, which was adopted unanimously by the Board of Supervisors on April 27. To close the \$650 shortfall, the Board sought to bring the community together through a series of community dialogues throughout the county, both to educate citizens about the issues and to seek help from citizens in determining priorities. The priorities that emerged were, first of all, education, then public safety, and then human services, which she described as making sure the county is there for those who need us most. The community dialogues were very helpful, she said, for creating the advertised budget and for the Board of Supervisors. There were then town meetings and briefings through the county on the advertised budget. The result was that by the time of the public hearings before the Board, rather than being angry and frustrated, people were helpful, suggesting different approaches, items we could do without, reorganizational ideas, and things they were willing to pay more for, etc.

Although she is now the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, Chairman Bulova noted she retained her position as Budget Chair. She said she is very proud that the Board voted unanimously in favor of the budget, which, she says, hit the highest priorities and closed the \$650 million shortfall. The Board plans a retreat at the end of June to discuss what comes next. She believes the community engagement and dialogues were important and she seeks to continue this new, improved relationship with the community.

Chairman Bulova then took questions on allocation of more resources for the Richmond Highway corridor; how zoning changes will be made to go with transit-oriented development and smart growth; value of and possible future of citizens budget committees for several of the Supervisors at the district level; and reinstatement of a countywide citizens budget committee, as had existed in the 1990s. Federation President Jeff Parnes noted that the Federation and its budget committee would be pleased to assist in re-creating such a committee, if that were to happen.

Next Membership Meeting: September 17, 2009.

Next Board Meeting: June 25, 2009.

Meeting adjourned at dusk.