



Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Message to the Residents of Arlington County

This year the County Board was able to balance the needs of increased School enrollment, public safety investments, housing needs, economic development investment and other key services while reducing the real estate tax rate for property owners. Continued economic pressures remain with high office vacancy rates, competition for commercial property tenants, and a national economy that is facing modest growth. Despite these pressures, with community input the County Board was able to adopt a budget which continues to provide high quality service and still meet the many needs of a varied community.

The County Board appreciates all the community input provided. This year, we tried to make the budget process more accessible to all through live-streaming meetings and through changes to the work session schedule and format to ensure that the community could engage with the County to provide important input. We appreciate the time so many Arlingtonians took to share their thoughts with the Board. Hearing the priorities of the community was extremely important to us as we finalized the budget.

Highlights of the FY 2017 Adopted Budget include:

Tax Rate Reduction – The adopted budget includes a real estate tax rate reduction of one-half cent providing some relief to County taxpayers.

Arlington Public Schools – Our schools continue to be among the top in the nation and through the budget process the County Board and School Board collaborated to meet the challenges posed by growing enrollment. The Board provided \$464.5 million in ongoing funding and an additional \$2.5 million in one-time funds to meet the growing needs of the School. This budget includes an increase in resources which raises APS's percentage of locally generated tax revenue to 46.6%.

Public Safety – Critical to Arlington's success is the safe and secure community our residents and visitors enjoy. We were fortunate this fiscal year to increase our investment in a variety of areas in public safety. Twelve additional uniformed fire personnel were added to complete 4-person staffing for all fire companies ensuring safe staffing levels and an increase in medical transport staffing during peak hours. In addition, six patrol officers were added in police and five deputies as well as a position dedicated to Americans with Disabilities (ADA) compliance were added in the Sheriff's Office.

Economic Development – Economic development continues to be extremely important as we try to increase commercial occupancy in the County. Additional one-time investments of \$1.5 million were added to assist in the attraction of new tenants and focusing on tenant retention in the County. The County was also successful in working with the State legislature to get authority for a transient occupancy tax add-on for investment in travel and tourism. With the adoption of this hotel occupancy tax, additional funding can be invested in marketing and attracting travelers to Arlington County.

Social Safety Net – The safety net programs that are provided to those most in need continues to be a priority of our community. This year's budget continues that commitment with increased funding to affordable housing programs as well as investments in senior and mental health services.

Other County Board Actions and Guidance:

- The Board provided guidance on various **planning & transportation initiatives**. The Board requested recommendations for the **Neighborhood Complete Streets program** and allocated a position to support the initial implementation. The Board added \$50,000 for the **Lee Highway Alliance** to ensure that this corridor is the focus of the next major planning effort after Four Mile Run Valley. The Board also directed the County Manager to provide a work plan, schedule and scope for the **Master Transportation Plan – Bike Element** in the fall of 2016 and explore options for implementing the advertisement program for ART and Capital BikeShare operations.
- The County Manager will establish a **Senior and Disabled Real Estate Tax Relief** working group to analyze the County’s current program and provide recommendations for consideration during FY 2018 and provide an analysis of **non-profit funding** in the County.
- We continue our commitment to a **healthy, sustainable environment** for all Arlingtonians and fully funded the AIRE program and provided additional ongoing funding to the tree program through our Stormwater Management fund.

The FY 2017 budget is built on the fiscal strength of the County and reflects the community’s values – protecting the health and safety of our residents as well as providing quality public education, a safety net for those in need, affordable housing, and environmental sustainability. We appreciate the collaborative partnership of the community, advisory groups, and staff that help the County Board build a fair and responsible budget that reflects multiple interests and stakeholders.

Sincerely,



Libby Garvey
Chair, Arlington County Board