

BLUEMONT CIVIC ASSOCIATION

General Membership Meeting Wednesday, May 27, 2009, 7:30 p.m. Arlington Traditional School

Call to Order

President Judah dal Cais called the meeting to order at approximately 7:35 p.m. In attendance were Judah dal Cais, Mary Thorne, Sam Ferro, Carl Drummond, Judy Collins, Suzanne Sundburg, Wendy Dean, and 6 Bluemont Civic Association (BCA) members.

Deputy County Manager Barbara M. Donnellan

Donnellan has worked with Arlington County for 25 years. Throughout her tenure, she has served in a number of areas including finance, economic development and tax policy. She served as acting library director prior to becoming chief financial officer and deputy county manager in the County Manager's office. She has been involved in some aspect of the county budget throughout her entire tenure with the county. In her current position, her responsibilities include finance, human resources, technology, police, fire and legislation.

Donnellan reported that the county has been somewhat insulated from the financial downturn thanks to the presence of the federal government and smart-growth planning on the part of the county. Unemployment is lower than in some of the neighboring counties, and property taxes are down an average of 2% on residential properties. Taxes on commercial real estate are up 13% compared to 2008. Arlington is one of 22 counties nationwide whose bonds remain AAA rated, which means the county can still finance capital projects with bond sales. This rating is reviewed yearly in June. In other news, a high percentage of students graduate from county high schools, which contributes to Arlington being the rated as the fifth highest educated county in the United States. Arlington is a diverse community; 110 languages are spoken at home in Arlington.

With the economic downturn, \$20 million was cut from the base budget, including \$8 million in programs and services. The increase in unemployment has led to an increase in the homeless population and a greater demand on area food banks. The county recently lifted its hiring freeze. This being said, there are vacancies that are not being filled to help balance the budget. In general, these are administrative positions. The police budget was decreased. Two officers were cut in Clarendon, but Ballston police coverage remains unchanged. Gulf Branch Nature Center, which was slated for closure, will remain operational with limited hours 3 or 4 days a week.

The question was raised as to what happened with the huge surpluses from previous years. The surplus, which was largely attributed to taxes on real estate growth, was used in the following ways:

- 1) To service debt payments and capital construction. No capital construction was done for years, and in recent years many schools have been renovated or rebuilt. Washington-Lee High School has a new auditorium and pool opening this summer.
- 2) More services were required for the growing population in the county; for example, additional personnel are needed to process building permits, and the county must make an increasingly greater contribution to Metro.
- 3) The cost of services goes up with the cost of living and as the commercial base grows.

The process for the 2010 budget has been challenging and will only grow more challenging for 2011 with the best-case scenario of flat revenues. When deciding what to cut, the county first identifies discretionary items beginning with administration, studies and long-term projects. There is also an effort to increase efficiency and decrease duplication of effort. The County Manager's office appreciates ideas from the community when considering possible service reductions. It used some community suggestions in this budget cycle.

In response to a question, Donnellan explained that bonds are not sold until the project is ready to go. Bond money can only be switched to another project in the same category. For example, funds raised to build a school cannot be used for sewer improvements. However, the bond funds earmarked for the renovation of Yorktown High School could be transferred to renovate Wakefield High School instead. In response to another question Donnellan explained that steps were being taken to minimize the negative impact of BRAC (DOD's base realignment and closure process) on Crystal City. A recent sector plan process focused on redefining Crystal City by making it more pedestrian friendly and offering incentives to retail establishments looking to move into the area. Though military offices will be moving out, homeland security may be moving in. There was also a question of whether school budgets could be trimmed. This is possible, but Arlington's per-student spending is comparable to the Alexandria and Falls Church jurisdictions. The County Manager's office has been tasked this summer to review the county's revenue-sharing agreement with the county school system.

Approval of Minutes for 4/29/09

Secretary Mary Thorne distributed draft minutes for the 4/29/09 General Membership meeting. A motion to approve the 4/29/09 minutes was made and seconded. The membership voted to approve the 4/29/09 minutes as drafted. Thorne will forward the 4/29/09 minutes for posting to the BCA Website.

June Newsletter

Articles should be submitted to Suzanne Sundburg by June 9. She will need the final slate of officers and a recap of the neighborhood day barbecue. Other articles should include an update from Steve Cole on the Bluemont Village concept and a report on the May 28 meeting with Ed Fendley. Some space should be left to report the outcome of the June 11 Neighborhood Conservation (NC) meeting.

Upcoming Items

Officers for 2009–2010 will be elected at the Annual Meeting on June 24. Carl Drummond reported that the NC committee would meet on June 1 followed by the vote on new projects on June 11. Several neighbors will meet with outgoing School Board member Ed Fendley regarding his thoughts on Arlington Traditional School. Completed Wilson Boulevard commercial area surveys can be mailed to BCA or given to Judah by June 1. Patrick Wegeng will be moving forward on planting bushes and trees in Bluemont Park based on a final e-mail vote for approval by the Executive Committee (on April 29, the membership voted to approve the proposed landscaping plan and give the Executive Committee the authority to finalize the plan).

Adjournment

Judah dal Cais adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:50 p.m.