

June 30, 2016

Libby Garvey, Chair and Members of the County Board
Arlington County, Virginia

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

The Members of the Community Facilities Study Committee appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the Board's proposed plan to appoint a Blue Ribbon Panel to address issues relating to setting strategic priorities for Arlington. The Committee met for several hours on the evening of June 15 to discuss the Panel and its proposed Charge. Notes from that meeting can be found at <http://commissions.arlingtonva.us/community-facilities-study/documents/>

This letter is intended to capture the principal comments made at that meeting, both by Members of the Committee and by Members of the Resident Forum who attended the meeting. The letter has been circulated to the Committee members and fairly represents their consensus views.

Purpose of the Blue Ribbon Panel

As a threshold matter, the Members of the Committee were uncertain as to the purpose of the Blue Ribbon Panel.

Some interpreted the Charge as a call for full re-examination of the current County Vision (quoted in the Charge) as a first step in the development of a new Strategic Plan for the County. The Committee understands that any Strategic Plan starts with a Vision Statement and the development of the Plan flows from the approved Vision. Therefore, the Board would need to be clear whether the Blue Ribbon Panel was to start with the current Vision Statement or whether the creation of a new Vision Statement is to be the first step in the development of a Strategic Plan.

Other Members of the Committee thought the Charge directed the Blue Ribbon Panel to carry out a scoping process as a preparatory step to launching a Strategic Planning process. A number of the specific steps outlined were logical elements of a scoping process: an inventory of planning documents; a process for developing

strategic priorities; a process for relating those strategic priorities to the Vision Statement.

The Committee's first recommendation, therefore, is that the Board make clear whether the BRP is to (1) recommend a new Vision and Strategic Plan for the County or (2) undertake a scoping to recommend a process and timetable for how the County (and the schools?) should go about the development of a Strategic Plan.

Who Should do What

The Charge to the Blue Ribbon Panel sets out a number of tasks to be accomplished, some of which seem more appropriately carried out by others. In particular, any review of the Comprehensive Plan and any recommended changes should, by statute, go through the Planning Commission prior to action by the Board. If the Board wants to have the Comprehensive Plan reviewed, its elements reconciled, and its policy goals and objectives revisited, it should charge the Planning Commission with doing so, giving it clear direction and a deadline. This is a step that would follow a Visioning process and agreement on a set of community goals and objectives.

The Committee did have one specific recommendation to make regarding the Comprehensive Plan: it should include the schools. No plan for the County can be considered comprehensive unless it includes an element for the schools, both their facilities and their strategies for the future. The schools currently have a strategic plan which could readily be reviewed and approved as an element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Composition of the Panel and Timetable

The size and composition of the Panel depends in large part on its purpose, as does its timetable. If the Panel is charged with "scoping" for a Strategic Planning process, the small size is wholly appropriate, assuming it is tasked with reaching out widely to gather input and comment. And a year-end deadline is workable. This group should include both citizens appointed by the Board(s) and staff appointed by the Manager and Superintendent.

If, on the other hand, the Panel's task is to recommend a new Vision Statement and resulting set of goals and objectives, then the Committee believes a larger group, reflecting the diversity of Arlington, would be better able to carry out the task. This

process cannot be accomplished in six months. A new Vision Statement could be a 2016 goal with the Strategic Plan to follow in 2017.

Under either option, the Committee believes that the schools should be engaged as an equal partner.

Strategic Priority Setting

Part of the proposed charge to the Blue Ribbon Panel is to offer recommendations for “providing a clear understanding to the community of the framework and process by which strategic priorities are determined” and “how the Comprehensive Plan could be better reflected in the budget and CIP processes.” Based on its review last year, the Committee believes there is currently no strategic “framework or process” for setting and reconciling capital or facility priorities requiring public funds. It was for this reason that the Committee recommended the creation of the so-called “2 plus 2” Committee to provide focus and direction for this critical priority setting process.

A Suggested Approach

If the Board decides it wishes to develop a new Vision and Strategic Plan for Arlington, we recommend the following as a way to approach this mammoth task:

1. The County and School Boards should appoint a group, which should include staff as working members of the group, to develop a scope of work and timeline for the development of a Vision Statement and Strategic Plan. It should be given a deadline of January 2017. The proposed Blue Ribbon Panel seems suitable for this with the addition of School Board appointees and County and school staff.
2. This work could be brought back to the Boards in early 2017 at which time both Boards could decide whether to launch a full Vision Statement and Strategic Planning process which will likely take at least 12 months to complete.
3. The development of a new Vision and a set of strategic goals and priorities for Arlington would need to be done in a very open and collaborative process making full use of the network of citizen expertise found in the Boards and Commissions and giving all which wish to participate an appropriate opportunity to do so.

4. Once the new Vision and Strategic Plan are approved by the Board, the Planning Commission should be tasked with reviewing the elements of the current Comprehensive Plan, extracting from the various sub-plans the Goals and Objectives and highlighting those it believes inconsistent with the newly adopted Vision.
5. Simultaneously, the Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee could be tasked with recommending how the new strategic priorities should be reflected in the annual operating budget adoption process.

We hope these comments are useful to you as you think through whether and how to proceed with the Blue Ribbon Panel.

Sincerely,

Ginger Brown

John G. Milliken

cc. Chairman and Members, Arlington County School Board
County Manager and APS Superintendent