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[00:00:01] All right. We're going to go ahead and get started. Let me welcome everyone to our joint meeting with our members of the General Assembly. I'm going to kick this off just with a few comments at the beginning, but I want to start by apologizing that Supervisor Jimenez, who is the chair of the Legislative Committee, is not here today due to illness. So I'm going to channel back to the 12 years I chaired this committee and try to try to remember how to do this. But but in all seriousness, I want to welcome and thank our members of the General

[00:00:37] Assembly, Board of Supervisors members, school board members who are here, as well as a lot of other staff and interested folks. This is always a well attended meeting. And again, thank you to our General Assembly members for supporting last year's initiatives. And I want to particularly start by thanking a few people, specifically Delegate Sullivan for the infamous noisy muffler bill. That deserves a round of applause. Give him some noise. That's right. Delegate Bolova,

[00:01:10] reforming and funding the Urban Public Private Partnership Fund. Thank you. And Delegate Watts, who's not here, but extending authority to our park authority to ban sex offenders, as well as I want to thank Senator Pekarski for her help on the Senate side with that same noisy muffler bill, and also Delegate Helmer for his help on the Urban Public-Private Partnership Fund study that I mentioned before, and a lot of other great things that happened during session.

[00:01:41] But I just wanted to highlight those county, very nuanced but important county-specific initiatives, and we're certainly looking forward to the next session and continuing to work with you on additional opportunities. We're here in October. For those of you who have been here before, you're used to being here in December.

[00:01:59] There's a couple things that have changed. One is we moved this meeting up earlier so that we could get some additional conversation. And so we're not talking about specific bills necessarily. If you want to, that's great. But more kind of things on your mind and things you think are achievable in the next session and in a little bit more casual environment.

[00:02:18] Also, you will see in your blue folders our draft legislative program, which is a little bit different in format than in the past. It has been our goal for a long time, and I think we've succeeded this year in making it quite a bit shorter, quite a bit more succinct, and quite a bit more targeted on some of the big issue items that we deal with, and hopefully you'll find that helpful during the last session.

[00:02:44] Just as a reminder, at the very high level, the overarching principles that our board has had and has had as long as I've been here, and I know longer than that, and they're very simple, which is to preserve local land use authority, increasing taxing flexibility, and opposing unfunded mandates, especially in the economic environment that we're facing. And I think it's no surprise to any of you that so many of our families are facing challenges, largely due to decisions made by this administration, how it's affecting our contractors, our federal workers. We're seeing food insecurity numbers at record highs.

[00:03:21] Our nonprofits are stretched thin in trying to provide services to people who are struggling due to higher cost tariffs, inflation, all the things that you know. And so making sure that, you know, we try to protect ourselves against unfunded mandates at the end of the day.

[00:03:37] Those have to be paid for somewhere, and they're largely being paid for on the backs of real estate taxes and particularly difficult for so many of our families struggling with affordable housing right now. So those are our overarching principles. Just a few highlights.

[00:03:54] Obviously, K-12 funding is always number one, always will be number one with our board. We know that there's outdated funding formulas that particularly challenge Fairfax County. We all know about the J-LARC study. I'm not going to go through that in detail because everybody in this room is well aware of it.

[00:04:11] Our superintendent and school board, well aware of the challenges that we're facing funding public education. And so any strides we can make towards implementing more of those JLARC recommendations, we're appreciative for the ones that have been worked on, but we know there's still a lot of work to be done in that area, and anything that can be done to address those JLARC recommendations is going to be welcomed and celebrated by this board and by our shared county residents and constituents.

[00:04:40] I also want to focus on the effects of H.R. 1. I know this is a little bit outside of the norm, and we're talking a lot about this with our federal partners. But as I mentioned earlier, changes that are happening at the federal level are having a profound effect on our residents. And October 1, which was just the other day, will go down as a sad day for a lot of people because a lot of folks in Fairfax County that have not had the effects of the SNAP administrative cost shift are not yet reporting, so to speak, those concerns. And we know that the federal share dropped from 20 to 25 percent and the state and

[00:05:18] local share rose to 75 percent. And so, you know, that is a big challenge with this cost shift for for SNAP beneficiaries. We thank you for covering the state share in the budget. And I know you all talked about these issues ad nauseum, but we're at the it's now affecting people stage. And so that that becomes really important. Fairfax still faces an over \$6 million revenue reduction in FY 2027, \$8.8 million for a full year, again, to the SNAP beneficiaries. And so this is a significant

[00:05:53] hole financially for some of our most impacted families. January 1 is a crucial date, we all know, for Medicaid. And so, so many people who live in Fairfax County are getting their twice annual redeterminations made and will affect their Medicaid benefits. We know that at a county level, our health department and others are already working on what those effects are going to be on us and what those costs are going to be shifted to the county. We provide a lot of medical services for vulnerable populations, but again, in a tough economy, that is going to be stretched as thin as

[00:06:32] thin gets, and we're going to continue to do what we can to make whole these federal reductions. I bring it up here because, honestly, we can't, and I had this conversation with our members of our federal delegation, we are not situated to fill every shortfall. We do not have the revenue to fill every federal program that is cut.

[00:06:51] And so if we're going to maintain the level of services as best we can for the most vulnerable in our community, it's going to take a state-local partnership to be able to do that. That's just being honest. The state can't fill that hole alone. The county can't fill it alone.

[00:07:07] But working together, hopefully we can mitigate some of the impacts on our most vulnerable residents. Lastly, we're here to work with you, as we always are during session. I've got to give props to Jennifer Vanee and her team.

[00:07:22] You know her. That's a round of applause. You know her and her amazing team. They're embedded down in Richmond. But as I remind folks all the time, they are here year-round. They do not just show up during session. They are here to work with you, help you, provide you data, get you answers to things that are happening in the community year-round.

[00:07:42] And they love doing it, love doing it. So don't be shy. And finally, we represent the same constituents. I can't say this enough. There aren't state constituents and local constituents. They're just our constituents, and they expect us to be working together and solving problems together.

[00:08:00] With that, I am going to follow the agenda in the order in which it's presented in front of you, so I'll share some more thoughts about our legislative package in a few minutes, but before I do that, I am going to turn this over to our Deputy County Executive, Jennifer Miller, who hopefully many of you had an opportunity to meet for an update on our Housing and Economic Competitiveness Roadmap. Jennifer, welcome.

[00:08:57] I can use my command voice and be loud. Okay, all right. So I spoke to many of you last December and I wanted to give an update on some of the things that we've been doing and both as part of our Economic Competitiveness Task Force and our Housing Task Force.

[00:09:13] So I have some slides, but first I want to point out to you what's in your packet. There are a couple one-pagers, and one of them is a front and back that's kind of helpful. One of them is on the task force work, and another one is on affordable housing that I would ask you to reference. The economic competitiveness and task force overview is a summary of essentially what's about 200 pages of documents

that we'll talk through a little bit here. But it's in response to the nationwide housing crisis and reflects some of the economic conditions that we've seen with the result of the federal cuts that the chairman spoke about and you all are very familiar with, of course.

[00:09:50] And the effort to kind of combine these is really the recognition of the role and the interconnectedness between housing and economic competitiveness. So through these two task forces, we identified actionable opportunities to strengthen the economy, expand the housing opportunities, and improve the environment for businesses, workers, and our residents.

[00:10:11] So through these processes, these two task forces, we introduced over 60 initiatives, and under those, many, many efforts that are cross-agency initiatives that will address a number of issues and be completed by FY29, and we'll go through some of those that have already been complete. The important thing to note, though, is that we do have the existing authority to implement every one of these initiatives already. We don't require any additional legislation. We have the ability under the current legislative authorities. The one pager also contains some of the highlights of some of the initiatives. As mentioned, there's over 60, but it gives you a few

[00:10:49] high picture elements of the initiatives that we are implementing. When I presented to you in last December, I was telling you about the chairman's two board matters, the economic competitiveness and housing task force. The first one was economic competitiveness, and one of the elements it asked us to look at was housing. However, we realized that was such a big issue, and it's obviously something that you all have faced and I know the governor has focused on, so we pulled that into an entirely separate task force. When we presented to you last, about 10 months ago, I talked about the housing continuum in Fairfax County, the shared challenge across the region where supply

[00:11:26] is not keeping up with demand. And I think I mentioned to you last time that we'd had 2.13 jobs added for every new housing unit. That's since been increased to 2.3 jobs. Good news story on the housing front or on the jobs front, not as good on the housing front. Also that the median home value in Fairfax County was \$770,000, which would require a \$200,000 annual income to purchase that home. So the task force at that point was just kind of high level kicking off and telling you some of the things that we'd been working on. We've had a busy 10 months, and I'd like to talk

[00:11:59] to you about some of the highlights and some of the things that we've already done. So by way of background, I think most of you are familiar with the strong economy in Fairfax County, the fact that we have 11 Fortune 500 firms headquartered here. Job postings is, I think, right around 38,000 job postings, which is a 39% increase from FY25, so a nice number of jobs posted in the area. And we had nearly 20,000 new businesses formed in fiscal year 25 in Fairfax County. But challenges, as we mentioned, significant federal cuts, a decrease in our commercial

[00:12:38] real estate assets, and the rising cost of housing, which we know from our CEOs who we convene regularly is one of the challenges with their workforce and attracting and recruiting workforce and retaining them as well. So economic competitiveness and housing, I don't think I need to tell you all how interconnected they are. We're regularly communicating this to our constituents.

[00:12:57] So in recognition of the interconnectedness of the two task forces, we're kind of rolling them up here, but it's of course a foundational economic infrastructure. And as mentioned, we brought in CEOs and asked them, what's one of the biggest challenges that you have in Fairfax County? And housing was one of the first things that they mentioned to be able to attract and retain their employees. One of the last

bullets on there, I think, has been a really interesting discovery as well. We are losing at the largest group is 30 to 44 year olds from Fairfax County.

[00:13:29] So unfortunately, what that means is those folks are generally the ones who are starting a family and looking to buy their first home, and they've not been able to find affordable housing in Fairfax County, which causes them to leave. Interestingly, though, when we look, we are a very regional economy, obviously. We looked at the data. 61% of the people working in Fairfax County live here. So live and work here. We're at 61%. 39% of people working here live elsewhere. So they're commuting in. They cannot afford to live in Fairfax County or making other choices that cause them to do that. And about a third of the people who live in Fairfax County are residents who work outside the county but live here and commute out. So housing is a core economic infrastructure and

[00:14:08] addressing housing is a core issue but also a regional issue. We asked the Economic Development Authority to work with our Department of Economic Initiatives to present some key economic trends which we rolled out last February and then reiterated them in May but I think everyone is tracking. None of these themes will be surprising. Just some of the challenges that we'd already mentioned that we're facing. So grounded in those economic factual points, we decided what would we do for the task force. So we created these two task forces, as mentioned, one in August and one in September. And this was the purpose. And we sat down and we brainstormed what do the task

[00:14:44] forces need to do. And a lot of it was grounded in the board matters. But essentially a roadmap for the economic competitiveness task force to ensure that we enhance our competitive edge in attracting, retaining, and expanding businesses. And for the housing task force, it was to create an action plan that was measurable, that could help with the national housing crisis as it affects Fairfax County, implementing solutions to address that production. So we built on prior efforts. We already had a number of efforts underway, like our ZMOD, modernizing our zoning ordinance, Plan Forward, which was our multi-year effort to modernize the policy plan portion of the comp plan,

[00:15:20] and then of course our 10,000 affordable unit housing goal. So the efforts of the task force were to build on the works already underway. So some of the topics addressed in the task forces were to assess the trends, market our successes, kind of tell our story and help show how growth really helps the economy to existing residents, streamlining our development process, making it more transparent and predictable, and then looking at what economic incentives we can pursue, workforce development, and housing supply, recognizing that all of these are intertwined and interconnected. So we started out, as mentioned, with the board matter that the

[00:15:59] chairman introduced, and then we had really aggressive brainstorming. When I say aggressive brainstorming, we had over 300 action items that we're pursuing that are in our report under these 33 initiatives with dates, metrics, timelines. We report back to the board regularly, as you can see from this timeline. When we rolled it out in May, that was the first step. We've already done our quarterly update, and next month and in November, we will do our semi-annual update, and we're holding ourselves accountable in the annual report to implementing these measures and then measuring them and seeing what's been successful. I'll get a little bit more into this later, but this is essentially some of the things that we heard from the community on the challenges,

[00:16:38] and I'll address these as we go through the following slides. But what we did when we brainstormed and we said, here's the things that we think can address some of these challenges, we

brought in industry, we brought in low-income housing providers, we brought in developers, we brought in community members, and we asked them these questions. We said, we heard from you what I showed on the last slide, and we'll get into more later, but what are the challenges?

[00:17:00] And then of all of the initiatives that we had, we briefed them and said, do you think that these will solve the problems? Would this get you to build more housing? Would this get you to want to invest in the county? So, you know, a lot of times county solutions, and we'll talk about this, but can't fix all the problems, as the chairman mentioned. But I think what's nice here is 68% of the respondents, which is a pretty high percentage for developers who have been working for a long time with the county, believe that the things that we are doing were going to produce measurable results. And we're going to hold ourselves accountable to that. As I mentioned, I think the chairman and the board will hold us accountable. And I know my boss will.

[00:17:35] So talking about the first task force and some of the things we did with the economic task force, these were our focus areas. And I already mentioned there's 33 initiatives under this. A lot of it really had to do with what could we do to make sure that we're marketing our success but then using the economic incentives we have, some of those being state-based, some of them being internal, how can we enhance the workforce development that we have and how can we involve the development process? So I know these look like, you know, big themes, but as I mentioned, for each of these, we have detailed steps in our economic competitiveness roadmap. So we have 165

[00:18:11] discrete action items that came out of this that we are tracking and reporting on every single quarter. So just some of the highlights. I do want to point out, as I mentioned, there was already a number of things we were doing. We weren't, of course, waiting for these task forces to implement. So we'd already had a number of core programs like our Fairfax Core, which is business supporting platforms that support 16,000 small business users each year. We have our Fairfax Founders Fund, which provides capital and technical assistance to promising early stage startups to fuel growth. We had our economic development teams, which directly assist firms looking to

[00:18:47] start, locate, or expand in Fairfax County. And we have our career resource centers that provide assistance to about 12,000 people a year through 30,000 visits. That already all existed. On top of that, some of the highlights of the 33 initiatives that we were doing and are pursuing still is this Office of Workforce Competitiveness and Advancement. We're looking at the opportunities and expanding the types that we look at for local match opportunities, and as mentioned, we work closely with the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority in creating these initiatives, looking at transitioning our Economic Opportunity Reserve, which the board provided support for both in the

[00:19:24] carryover fund and in our meeting earlier this month or last month, and then a technology business accelerator. So all of the details behind this, to include our real estate opportunity team, our and our roadmap but these are kind of some of the high level things that we're looking at that we heard both from the development community and businesses on what it would take to make Fairfax County ensure that we can continue to be economically competitive. Some of the highlights from the housing task force we realized that there's a number of things that the county can't control and looking at this graph a lot of these issues are issues across the region and the state but

[00:20:02] what we said is you know that for the things that we can't control but we can influence we want to stay involved in those. We want to be aware of trends. We want to communicate them. But we really

focused on the right-hand side, which are what are those things within the county authority and the things that we can control. And that's what the task force focused on. So some of the elements we actually took from the community and we said, all right, what are our problems? And instead of just focusing on the problems, we said, let's turn those into solutions. So if we have a challenge of someone saying, as an example, I feel like it's disconnected coordination and development review. Give us more details. We broke that down into the various steps and flipped it

[00:20:39] into improving coordination and development review. All of these items that are listed here, our focus areas, were turned into what were the initiatives that we presented to the development community that resulted in those survey results that you saw showing 68% believe that these will actually move the county forward. There was 137 discrete action items for the housing task force that we are measuring and reporting on every quarter. And this task force had over 50 senior leaders with 13 organizations, and we called it aggressive brainstorming. What are the things that you could, if you could pursue anything to move this county forward above the things we're already

[00:21:16] doing, what are those? And those became our initiatives. So a few of the highlights. There's multiple initiatives that are related to our comprehensive plan, which is, of course, our guide for the development within the county, like long-range land use, transportation, housing, and the environment. Some of the main elements there that we are addressing are improving flexibility and alignment with our comprehensive plan through streamlining dual processing timelines for applications not in conformance with the plan and amending the plan's area-wide guidance to enhance flexibility and reduce reliance on site-specific plan amendments. We're also

[00:21:51] looking at zoning ordinance changes, which, and of course, the zoning ordinance defines exactly how land use can be used within the county. So looking at some of the things from our affordable dwelling units to our accessory living unit zoning ordinances, a number of these efforts are things that staff can do internally, but a lot of them have to have board support. And we've been going to the board and been successful so far in implementing these recommendations. So you'll see some other work with the state like transportation communication with VDOT, which I believe we've already made significant improvements on, customer facing dashboards, affordable housing tools and

[00:22:28] incentives, and then optimizing community engagement and making sure that we're more consistent across the county and leveraging best practices. So progress to date, as I mentioned, for each of the 33 initiatives under both task forces, there's over 300 collective action items. So in the five months since we rolled this out. We've fully completed five of the 33, and you'll see those in the completed initiatives columns. We anticipate that in the next three and a half years, we will complete all of them. And implementation is well underway, and we rolled all these out on May 12th.

[00:23:04] So even though some of the initiatives aren't complete, just some key milestones are on the right-hand side that show you some of the major things that we've completed just in little milestones that roll up into initiative. So for the next steps, all initiatives, as I mentioned, are tracked and reported quarterly, biannually to the Economic Competitiveness Task Force and the Housing Task Force quarterly. And then we're also rolling this out in our strategic plan and how we're doing. So we have a couple upcoming briefings to the Board of Supervisors on the

[00:23:38] Accessory Living Unit Zoning Ordinance Amendment, PPEA, which is Public Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act, our work on public-private partnerships, and some county code

amendments for real property tax incentives. So that's kind of a high-level overview. I know, again, there's over 100 pages behind each of the initiatives that describe them in more detail, but I did just want to emphasize that we're committed to doing the things that we were already doing in Fairfax County, but also implementing all of these initiatives to try to ensure we remain economically competitive and a more friendly environment for additional housing requirements.

[00:24:15] So with that said, I will turn it over and I have some of my leads here from the task forces to see if you have any specific questions. Thank you, Jennifer. And before we go to questions, and these are questions specific to this presentation, we'll do questions on the package here in a minute.

[00:24:31] I just want to emphasize the this is the singular most important issue to our community, not just growing our economy but the affordable housing piece and the goal that the board said of building 10,000 units by 2034 luckily we're nearing the halfway point of that numerically so we are building a lot of affordable housing we're not building it alone we're building it with a lot of partnerships with our non-profits with the state who can provide additional resources and support that makes some of these projects happen and so it is so important these are highly

[00:25:05] technical, very difficult units to get built. But the partnerships are really strong. And I want to give a shout out too to some of our private sector partners that you all work with and we work with, Northern Virginia Association of Realtors and Northern Virginia Chamber. These are groups that are militantly right there with us to build not just a lot of affordable housing, but a lot of housing period. And I know sometimes that's difficult with our constituents, because a lot of times if you have your unit you don't care about the next person getting their unit but as was mentioned earlier it is the number one thing businesses tell us they cannot find and hire

[00:25:43] enough staff because not enough people can afford to live here because they can't obtain housing and so this this transcends all of the metrics that we look at all the time as as the singular most important issue whether you're a business whether you're a resident whether you're in government, whether you're in our nonprofit community helping us solve this really vexing problem. It's a nationwide problem, but we've got to focus on what we can do here locally, and I know all of you are on board for that. So with that, let me ask if there are any questions

[00:26:14] about Jennifer's presentation specifically, since we have the experts here. Yes, Delegate Cohen. Thanks very much. I really appreciate the presentation. Just a few questions, I think, for us, help sort of give us some definitions. Is there a place where we can see who sits on your housing task force? Yes. So the housing task force has actually resulted in the housing action plan, which is online. If you actually just Google Fairfax County housing action plan, you can find it or we can send it to you. And will it tell us who sits on that? Yes. Perfect. The report includes

[00:26:54] all of the folks. And then we also have the presentation that showed the partners who participated we sent it out broadly to all of our affordable housing partners our developers and and they participated at various points great thank you um just real quick just to that actually if the handout the one pager on this has a qr code on the back and it'll take you right to that report awesome thank you so much uh also just with workforce housing i know at the state level we've had a lot of conversations about definitionally what does that mean um and that it may mean something different obviously here in Fairfax County as it does in other places do you have

[00:27:33] a working definition for us of what for what workforce housing means yes and I'm going to phone a friend here because and as you're right because different jurisdictions define things differently right like my understanding is Loudoun County calls affordable housing 80 percent and below we have historically here used it at 60 percent and below HUD uses it at 80 percent and below but I'll turn it over to Tom who is the head of the the director of housing and community development. Good afternoon, Delegate Cohen. In Fairfax County, we look at workforce housing

[00:28:05] as being really anything up to about 100% of the area median income. We focus our public investments on the development of housing around 60% of the median income. And, you know, I'll just note that so very many of the people who utilize the entire affordable workforce housing continuum are working families. Thank you. I so appreciate that. And the last thing I'll say, I do really want to say how much we appreciate what Jennifer Van Nee does and her team. It is super, super

[00:28:44] helpful, and especially hearing all year long is really, really important. To that end, I think often and it is not unique to Fairfax so please take this in the spirit as intended but we hear when you all feel like we are doing something wrong in the housing space and typically it means something that you feel is hurtful to Fairfax County. I think it would be super helpful as we move forward. I understand the ledge plan but like maybe specifically especially for the folks on CC&T, if early people could come and say, hey, we would really like you to carry

[00:29:21] this bill. I think that we see, I think there's been sort of a change in dynamics sometimes, like our interaction with each other of just making sure we want to carry bills that are helpful to Fairfax. And we see our colleagues who do that all the time with their municipalities.

[00:29:39] And so we all really want to be helpful instead of having you come to us and say, this really boneheaded bill, and we're going to work hard to kill it. That is a lot of your energy and is a lot of our energy. So that would be super helpful kind of going forward. Thank you so much.

[00:29:57] Thank you, Delegate Cohen. Oh, I turned myself off. It's a pleasure to work with all of you. I would also say that we can definitely work on that and getting into you early. I know your limits are smaller this year with it being short and that your deadlines keep moving up. I would also say we're also super happy to look at any drafts you're working on so that it's not January when we see them so we can work through some of those problems early on collaboratively together.

[00:30:26] Okay. Other questions? Yes. Senator Boyceko. Thank you so much for the presentation. Really enjoyed hearing about the economic efforts. One of the things that was briefly touched upon was the commercial real estate situation in Fairfax County. And I believe that you all said that it's stabilizing. Can you give us some more detail about that? And because I think that's a huge concern for a lot of people in, you know, we know that Fairfax County really is the engine that drives the rest of the Commonwealth's economy. So if you could help us understand where we are a little bit, a little bit more of a depth. Yeah. So again, I'm going to turn to my, I have two

[00:31:05] experts here and I don't know, Jay, if you want to take it from a DTA perspective on the actual assessments or if Rebecca, you want to take it from the Department of Economic Initiatives or you want to tag team. Come on up. Here you go, Rebecca. So while she comes up, Rebecca Mowdry, who's the head of our Department of Economic Initiatives, and then Jay Doshi, who is the Department of Tax Administration. So we do have a lot of data, which I can provide, of course, in more detail. But just to provide kind of broad brush strokes, you know, since COVID, we saw

[00:31:42] significant changes, of course, especially in our urban areas about how people work and where people work so we did see and jay will talk about the decline in assessments but increased vacancies and our vacancy rate on office elevator did increase however we have seen a stabilization so over the last year i think we're at just about 17 vacancy a healthy vacancy rate in a market like ours is actually maybe more than the 13 or 14 vacancy rate so it is a little bit elevated but but we have seen as stabilized. One of the issues that we're confronting, of course,

[00:32:22] is office buildings. The majority of our office buildings here were built in the 80s and before some in the 90s. These are buildings that are not responding to the current demands of the commercial office market. So we have a lot of opportunities to reposition these buildings. And there is activity going on in the market, but we definitely recognize a need to facilitate that, to catalyze that so that we can reach some of our other economic development as well as housing goals. While Jay comes up, I'll add that one of the initiatives I did not talk

[00:32:59] about, but was on the slide of suburban villages, which is something we're excited about. And Tracy's Department of Planning and Development has been working on that. And that's taking underutilized office spaces out in the suburbs, providing increased density with housing and putting retail on the bottom. So that's one way we're trying to leverage some of the low density there.

[00:33:17] Jay Doshi with the Department of Tax Administration. Could you please repeat the question? The question was to give us more granular detail about the commercial real estate situation because so much of the income is generated in Fairfax County for the rest of the Commonwealth.

[00:33:39] No question, right? So the board had aggressively pursued expansion of the commercial tax base, which works at the advantage of residential taxpayers. With commercial, precisely what Rebecca Maudry mentioned just a little bit ago, the demand for today is for transit-oriented office buildings, convenient to metro, convenient to housing, and the like. And that's not necessarily the profile of the office properties that were built in the 60s, 70s, 80s, etc. When the markets

[00:34:16] are good, you are able to mask issues with desirability, with location, and with age. When the markets turn a little bit, as they certainly did during COVID with the work from home and so on, that then began to expose the faults and the better properties, even if they were not quite ideal in terms of location, are still doing well. But the ones that didn't have the money, didn't have the investment, or had notes that were dropping off, commercial mortgages generally are

[00:34:54] in the 5, 7, or 10-year range. They're not your standard 30-year mortgage. So those factors then led to certainly an increase in the vacancy rates. The solutions are known, but harder to implement, right? Redevelop the property, raise it to the ground, requires capital, interest rate environment today is not as favorable as it was during the pandemic. So all of those things factor into how alternative decisions can be made on that. Conversion to residential, while it's been talked

[00:35:33] about a lot, is extremely difficult given how commercial properties are laid out and how residences function so the floor plate of a commercial office building is vastly different from one that is desirable from a residential perspective although we do have some success stories in fairfax company thank you yeah um and just real quick uh we are we will send out very specific data on this issue because we could spend the rest of the day uh talking about this and i want to make sure you all have the real data including the current vacancy rate what those trends are, how they compare nationally, because I think many people would be very surprised

[00:36:13] at how well we're doing. But, you know, to solve the vacancy rate really takes two things. And one is taking inventory offline that is never going to be refilled again. And many of you visited recently in Tyson's, one of the office buildings that we're repurposing into affordable residential units. Those things are still possible and help with the vacancy rate. But we have very specific detailed information that we can send out on this, and we will do that as well.

[00:36:41] Mr. Chairman, can I just say, let's send out the Tyson's Community Alliance has the latest data as well, showing that the vacancy rate is much lower for a trophy in Class A. We're going to send the data for the whole county, including Tyson's. Delegate Tran. Thank you. And when you send that data, can you also send out, you know, how many housing units we have built within the last few years and what the goal is so that we can see how we're making progress towards goals definitely and we can also provide that to you by magisterial district in the county too so you can see what's happening in your own uh neck of the woods as well uh delegate

[00:37:15] sullivan there's a great dashboard you can get on uh tom will tell us what it is um that that will keep you apprised of how we're doing there i had a question mr chair yeah please this may jump ahead to the legislative presentation but if i don't ask it now i'll forget um so it's a great honor to co-chair the AHAC with the incomparable Kerry Wilson, who really runs the show. You know that. But I learned at the last AHAC meeting from Tom and the staff, who also did just a fabulous job, that the county attorney has a concern with something we passed last year having to do with

[00:37:54] the tax exemption and whether we properly have captured what we need to. So is that on our list to fix it is and in fact it's it's extending eligibility to the housing authority to the rha they're not classified the way that the bill language is classified and so my understanding is that got raised during session but didn't get picked up so if we could go back and pick that up it will allow our housing authority to also take advantage to that which is as you know is building a lot of affordable units yeah the delegate tran you'll be she's gone she will she will be impressed

[00:38:27] We're proud of what we're doing, albeit recognizing how much more we've got to go. But this won't be the first time we've got to go back and fix a bill. Or the last. We're happy to help. We're happy to help.

[00:38:43] All right. Excellent. Senator Salim and then Senator Marsden. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Deputy Miller, for your presentation. This is likely one of the most comprehensive things that I've gotten in the last three years that I've been here. And I just wanted to ask a question in general is that I know the county has a lot of low income and medium income rentals and housing.

[00:39:08] Are we bucketing all that under affordable housing or is there a differentiation between the two that's being made? Because I haven't seen any of that in the task forces that are working on things. Because you have a large number of county residents who make less than \$75,000 across different areas.

[00:39:29] And I think we're coming off as we're a wealthy county. We just focus on affordable housing where you got 10 millionaires in one neighborhood just because I don't make \$2 million more than the other guy. I can't afford to live in that neighborhood. Yeah, that's a great question we do. So what I'm gathering from this conversation is we need to send out the presentation we did in February that contained a comprehensive by income band, how many houses were available, what a family could afford, what AMI and what the delta was, and how many houses we've delivered by decade. So we have that information. It's publicly available now, but instead of making

[00:40:05] all find it, we'll get it out to you. Thank you. And let me just add, we didn't always have that data. This is part of recent efforts have been made to help define the problem so that the proper goals can be set and the monitoring can happen, because part of the affordable housing problem is not losing a lot of the market rate affordable housing that we already have. And so having those baseline numbers is huge by category. And I do think providing that would be very helpful.

[00:40:30] Senator Marsden. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We had a very good conversation last week and you referenced the issue of in our commercial real estate world that a lot of subletting was taking place. And I assume that those are shorter leases would impact financing of any improvements to the building, would make a more, I guess, volatile market up and down because of those shorter leases and what have you.

[00:40:58] Do you have someone who could just kind of give us what that trend looks like and how it's impacting the county's economy? We can. That would be Jay. Jay, you're not off the hook yet. Just a quick answer, and again, this is one we can provide a lot more detailed information on, but at a high level, subletting of office space that's occurring, what is that doing to valuation and to our office economy? Subletting of space is very much part and parcel of the

[00:41:32] normal commerce. What is occurring, and EDA reports this, is to the extent you had demand for 50 or 60,000 square feet with work from home, that same demand doesn't exist. So subletting is very much possible. In some cases, they're actually undercutting the owner of the building and therefore you've got the owner competing with someone who is a current tenant attempting to sub-lease the space. What does that do that drives down rentals, rental rates in an environment in

[00:42:06] which rates have been steady but costs for owners of buildings, commercial properties have been increasing given inflation and all the other factors we're aware. Thank you. Delegate Keys, Kamara. Thank you. I really do appreciate the opportunity to come together in October.

[00:42:26] I think we had some conversation about this last year, and I know I've been working with the folks that are part of my region trying to have conversations earlier. But I'd like to kind of follow up on some comments that have already been made, because when we sit on these committees, we often see what the complaints are in various regions. And this past year, and I anticipate this coming year, we're going to see more of the same. And there has been a large

[00:42:59] emphasis, obviously, on whether affordable housing is available and what is located near it and policy. I hate to drop this word, but particularly with respect to data centers and people's livability standards. And so I'm wondering if there is language somewhere saying how Fairfax would like to address that. I'm anticipating, and I'm always trying to figure out what I'm going to be dealing with, I'm anticipating language in this upcoming session that will be very concerned about

[00:43:35] those two topics. So I can point you towards a couple pages that talk about both data centers and housing. The housing part is, if we're talking about affordable as defined traditionally by federal government, that is in our affecting vulnerable population section, which is on page, I will get this quick, 10. Local government, so the effective and efficient government has the land use section of housing, of how do we make sure not just affordable but others is getting

[00:44:12] funded. And then the environment and energy section has our statement on data centers as well. Do you have the page for that second one? Eight, 10, and 11. So eight is local authority around land

use. Ten is affordable housing is traditionally defined. And then energy environment is 11.

[00:44:34] So if I can have a follow-up, I'm glad you guys are looking at that. And I would anticipate that at the state level, folks will be trying to figure out how to level set best practices for some of these things, right? It would be helpful to know specifically how Fairfax is already addressing that. And that's what, if we can get ahead of those conversations, it would be helpful. Yeah, we can do that. Thank you. All right. Any other questions on this part of the presentation, Senator Serville.

[00:45:13] There we go. I said a follow-up question on what Senator Boyceko was asking about in the commercial piece. I understand the market might have stabilized, but I'm still seeing buildings that are selling in one-third of their tax assessed value as recently as the last 30 days, not just in Fairfax, but in D.C., all over the DMV.

[00:45:32] It seems to me that the valuations have cratered, and while the vacancy rate may have stabilized, the valuations are still in a pit, which to me seems to really undercut county revenue. And so I'm not clear what the plan is to try to replace that revenue, because it seems to me the revenue is really the bottom line.

[00:45:55] Right. So I don't know that Jay has any more to add to this, but it's factually accurate that commercial real estate assessments have gone down. I talked about a couple of the elements that we're trying to do here. Brian, did you want to jump in? A couple of the elements which are looking where we can convert, right, from commercial to residential.

[00:46:12] We've been looking at that. We brought in a whole group because we know that the median house price is \$500,000 to \$600,000 that a family of four can afford. We brought in a bunch of housing developers and Tom Fleetwood led a working group saying, what could we do to get you to build \$500,000 to \$6,000, \$100,000 homes? You know, take these commercial offices and convert them. And that's one of the things that we've been asking. They said a lot of it's internal processes. That's what we're working on. But they said a lot of it's just the financing right now and the cost to construct.

[00:46:39] So I don't think that we have a one-for-one replacement plan unless someone has a magic bullet that, okay, Jay, if you want to add something, but I think it's going to be the same answer. For existing property center, you hit the nail on the head. And then the rest of it is how the chair of the budget committee and the chairman of the board gets to balance the various needs of the community versus the resources available. I can absolutely agree that commercial has not performed the way we wanted it to. And we still have two or three years, even though we've stabilized, we have a few more years to go before we can decline for a tweet. You're absolutely

[00:47:18] correct. Mr. Chair. Yeah. So I just, I'm really worried about where it's all going. I'm surprised we haven't seen any bank failures yet, given what's happening, not just in Fairfax, but also the entire DMV and nationally as well. I know this is going on, but with interest rates where they are, you know, houses are on the market longer and longer and longer every week. You just go online, you can see it growing. You see the backlog growing. Real estate prices are going to start going down. So residential is going to start declining in value. We already got commercial down. I'm just, I worry about where the money's going to come from to pay for things and appreciate the affordable housing will help keep people in the county so we're not losing

[00:47:58] population anymore. And Senator, we worry about that every day and we track it every day. And I think, you know, I'd be remiss to not point out the huge one-two punch that Fairfax County received both from COVID and the unprecedented attack on and change in the way commercial office is used.

[00:48:18] And as we all know, our economy is heavily based on commercial office. That's what's been paying the state's bills for a long time. And that took a big hit because of an international health pandemic. And then on the heels of that, of course, the doge cuts and what's happening at the federal level and what's that doing to our contractors. And so we've been in this period of time where things outside of Fairfax County's control have had a dramatic impact on our local economy. And so every day we're working on solutions to try to deal with those challenges.

[00:48:47] You're hearing and seeing a very tiny thumbnail of the efforts that are happening, but we are concerned about that every day. And while residential was going up and is sky high right now, I mean, you saw what the average cost of a home in Fairfax County was. That is not affordable to a lot of people who live in Fairfax County, and so with that rise in valuation on top of a rise in a real estate tax rate makes those homes that much less affordable for people to be able to afford. So I think the real answer to your question is, and it's one of the things that we hope happens, is there's a real conversation statewide about tax reform because we do not

[00:49:23] have a model that allows us to continue to raise rates on residential real estate and be able to afford to pay the long-term bills for the services that people in this area need. And so I think the real answer to your question is one the staff can't give, but I'll give, is I think we need to have a real conversation. And I know Delegate Watts was here last year talking about that. I know others have, but there needs to be a real conversation about tax reform in the Commonwealth of Virginia because the system that we have now is not prepared long-term to meet the demands and needs that our shared constituents have, I think is the simple answer. With that, I think I saw Supervisor Beerman, do you want to say something quick?

[00:50:02] And then in the interest of time, I want to be able to move on because I know there's questions beyond just these two issues. Supervisor Beerman. Yeah, I was just going to say I don't think anybody is under the impression that we don't need to continue to try and do better in the commercial real estate market.

[00:50:18] But how do you do that? You attract more companies to come here. And how do you attract more companies to come here? You provide great services and you provide housing. And you also potentially provide incentives, which we're looking into. You do all of the things that we just talked about we're trying to do to get more of those companies to decide to locate here.

[00:50:39] And we also should be aware that there are certain areas of the county that are actually doing really well. Supervisor Palchuk was noting that with respect to Class A office space. I mean, Walter Alcorn, what's the vacancy rate in Reston Town Center right now? Yep, yep, exactly.

[00:50:55] Those buildings are doing great. Put a building on the Silver Line, you got some pretty good things going on. We're doing a ribbon cutting next week. We're filling a building with 600 jobs, and it's not even on the Silver Line, but it is right next to the toll road next week. That building has been vacant for years, so ribbon cutting is going to be fun.

[00:51:15] That's what we're trying to do. That's what the whole presentation was about, and, you know, we're looking forward to working with you on it. Thank you. So I'm going to move us along because we want to have the roundtable discussion on the global issues. Supervisor Jimenez, as I mentioned, is not here. So I'm going to take the quick presentation on legislative priorities and initiatives for this session, and then we're going to open it up to additional questions and answers. But before we open it up to questions and answers, immediately upon completion of my presentation, I'm going to turn to my partner, Ricardney Anderson, on the school board just to mention a few school-related issues. And so

[00:51:53] before we get to that, the board has set, and I'll try to go through this quickly, the board has set six key priorities. Some of these you've already heard. First, K-12 education. It is, as I said earlier, it is the driver of our entire budget conversation. If we can't do better in funding K-12 education as a commonwealth, it's increasingly difficult for your local partners and for us to be able to make up that difference. So I'm not going to dwell on that any longer because you all know the issue. You know it well. We've made progress. Let's keep that progress going for our

[00:52:28] kids. Second, transit. We haven't talked a lot about this, but obviously Fairfax Connector and WMATA are key to our economy. We just heard about how much better our office is doing near transit. Transit is an economic development tool, and it moves people. It's not one or the other. It's both, and we would appreciate any help that the state can provide in funding, sustainable funding for WMATA. We know that the DMV Moose Task Force and SJ28 committee have reported out what the needs are. We know we're tens of millions of dollars behind what the needs are going to be for WMATA

[00:53:06] to be able to sustain it long term. It is a small price to pay for the enormous economic benefit that not only it provides to Fairfax County, but to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Third, housing. You've just heard it. I appreciate Delegate Cohen's mention about some positive things that could happen. In our legislative package, it lays out some things we would like to see happen with affordable housing, as opposed to not what we would just not like to see happen, but what we would like to see happen. The housing issue is here with us, and it's going to be with us for a long time. It's going to take all of our work on it. We cannot solve that singularly. Fourth, and I

[00:53:44] mentioned earlier the federal medicaid and snap changes this is really going to hit a lot of our constituents hard in the short term and so anything the state can do like they did last year to try to help support funding of some of those programs people who are falling through the cracks would definitely be appreciated and those programs help keep people in the workforce they are necessary for so many people who rely on them in fairfax county fifth collective bargaining just as a reminder, Fairfax supports collective bargaining. We have led in this area. We have led the

[00:54:17] Commonwealth. Since 2021, our program has served employees and taxpayers using flexible local authority to meet so many of our community needs. You can talk to our partners in labor. We have been doing this now for years. We know how to do it. We would like the state to do it, but we would like the state to be cognizant of how we have done it as well and make sure as many elements of our collective bargaining ordinance are in state legislation so that we don't upend the system that we have here that is working already. Six, and this was in response to

[00:54:52] Senator Survelle's question, is tax reform. I saw a lot of heads nodding in agreement. We've got to tackle this issue. We don't have all the answers. I know individually you all don't have all the answers,

but the reality is the financial model that we have right now is not sustainable in the long term. And I think we need to take a serious look at that. We do have three targeted initiatives.

[00:55:14] One, Delegate Sullivan already raised up, and that is to amend last year's bill allowing local real estate tax relief for non-profit affordable housing projects. And this would extend eligibility to our housing authority, who does a lot of work with our non-profit partners. And again, we have led so many ways in affordable housing, so many creative tools in our toolbox towards our 10,000 goal, this is another great tool that we can use if that simple amendment is done and we add our housing authority to that. We had a presentation earlier in this same room today on this very issue

[00:55:50] and we look forward to using that authority if we get it. Second, dedicated state funding for pedestrian safety. A lot of you have had bills in the past and we appreciate that. We have immediately implemented the authority we've been given, whether it is school bus stop arms, which took years to get the authority in place but we finally got it we immediately put that in place with our school board partners whether it is photo enforcement in school zones again we have immediately put that in place it has made a difference in our school and construction zones hopefully none of you came out on the Fairfax County Parkway today and saw a flash as you drove

[00:56:30] by but in that construction zone it is making a real difference for safety our rectangular rapid flashing beacons and crosswalk improvements throughout the county. Just as a reminder, this has been a long-standing priority for the county. We, years ago, dedicated \$100 million towards pedestrian safety. I want to repeat that, \$100 million dedicated towards pedestrian safety.

[00:56:55] That is us making improvements to VDOT's infrastructure for them. And so we will continue to do that and continue to fund those programs. But we look forward to continued state support on that front. Of the \$100 million, we have already made \$91 million of contributions to that \$100 million account. So we are a mere \$9 million away from funding \$100 million of pedestrian safety improvements over the last six years. And that is specifically tied to our active transportation

[00:57:31] goals. And so continuing to build on that investment, continuing to look at ways for VDOT to streamline their process to make pedestrian safety a higher priority, to be able to help fund some of those initiatives, to get signal installations happening sooner. Those are some real-world things that we look forward to partnering with you on. And then third and our final initiative is to establish a state grant fund to refurbish and renew manufactured housing parks. Many of you know we have several of these in the county and very distinct parts of the

[00:58:07] county. Delegate Cresac has been a partner with us in a lot of these bills in the past, but funding a grant program to make improvements to manufactured housing is the next step that is needed. And so we would appreciate support of those three initiatives as well.

[00:58:23] And that was as quick as I can do that. Before we turn it over to additional questions, let me recognize Dr. Riccardi Anderson from the school board for a few comments on behalf of the schools. Thank you very much, Chairman McKay, and I'll try to be just as quick. I do want to say a special thank you to Supervisor Jimenez, because he and I, I serve as the legislative chair for the board this year, and he and I have been collaborating on our joint positions. Many of them have been raised right now. Obviously, school funding is always going to be an opportunity for us to collaborate, as well as safety, because of many incidents that have occurred this year.

[00:58:58] So those will be priorities you will see coming from us as a joint positions. The board itself, we have our own program, and we appreciate many of you who are here who will be joining us October 15th to speak to us about what you're planning. And hopefully we can give you those bills to carry, Delegate Cohen.

[00:59:17] But I do want to share, just for your edification, a couple of federal priorities that we have. These are longstanding priorities, but they're really big buckets and can really impact us in significant ways to reduce the burden on local dollars. Firstly, IDEA funding.

[00:59:33] 40%, which the federal government has promised since 1975, has never been realized. Fairfax County has seen anywhere from 9% to 11% of those dollars. So if we were to achieve that 40%, that would bring an additional \$166 million.

[00:59:49] Not your problem, not your circus, not your monkeys, but it's a conversation to be had with other people who you have conversations with. Again, we're looking for ways to reduce the local burden that we are currently in because whether or not we receive these funds, we still have to meet the needs of the special education requirements of our students.

[01:00:11] The other piece is impact aid. Impact aid also, we have received in the past few years up to maybe \$4 million. If that was fully funded, it would be \$18 million. So again, another way for us to look for another revenue source, even though we know times are trying with the federal government at current.

[01:00:30] But speaking to the state level, we have some things, obviously, we have to talk about the dollars, but we have some things that do not have dollars attached that I want to spend a little bit of time on. Speaking about the dollars, what I'd like for you to think about is the J-LOG recommendations, recommendations primarily 12 and recommendations 6, which speak to how we are evaluating the local index so that, again, we don't have to continue to lean on to local dollars. But what I want to take the time to lean into the items that are not necessarily tied to money. It is how our schools

[01:01:08] are evaluated and held accountable for student progress. And this is not a Fairfax County problem. This is a problem for 133 school divisions in the Commonwealth. The assessment program as it stands, it's been really interesting the last few years, and it's been from move up cut scores from 400 across every single subject, every single grade level, to different cut scores at every grade level, every subject. That's not a good way of running business. Particularly the thresholds

[01:01:45] that are being used to identify whether or not a school is meeting the accountability thresholds. That is changing all the time. And it is not articulated to the schools until after the data has been submitted. So we do not know the targets. They're moving targets.

[01:02:04] And the way that it is also accounted for, it uses what I call like a learning curve. There's always going to be a bottom. So no matter how much gain a school system engages in, you will always have a group that is at the bottom. What I heard earlier is our schools are world class.

[01:02:23] Our schools are an economic driver of Fairfax County. We are not going to be able to sustain that if we have a high percentage of our schools identified as failing schools, not because they are, but how the calculations have been. That is not thoughtful.

[01:02:39] We all are big fans of high expectations. We have it of ourselves. We have it of our staff. We have it of our superintendent. But we also need to provide high levels of support, high levels of

transparency, and a thoughtful accountability process that's going to allow us to meaningfully make the changes that need to be made.

[01:02:59] Right now, we're fighting upstream. And another example that I know that is near and dear to your heart, Delegant Cohen, is, again, I don't think there's a lot of money involved with this ask, but it's allowed our students to be able to take assessments in their native language. We have moved from students who have, as recently as a year ago, been allowed for five and a half years to gain English language proficiency. That has been reduced to three semesters. That is 270 days. How many of you can move to a different country, learn that language in 270 days, and take an assessment

[01:03:37] and be successful. I don't see any hands. These are our asks. If we are able to make that bit of a change, it would go such a long way because all of these confounding factors, they're crippling our schools. Again, not just Fairfax County Public Schools, but all of the schools across the Commonwealth. So we look forward to continue our conversations with you and thank you for the opportunity. Thank you, Dr. Anderson. And as you mentioned, you will see our agendas in stark alignment with each other, schools and county on the educational elements. And I think that's

[01:04:14] important that we're kind of speaking as much as we can from one voice. And to that end, I want to thank Superintendent Reed and the members of the school board who are here as well, who I know I'll be happy to go into these issues in more detail. And I know what you will see at your event here later in the month. With that being said, I'm going to open it up to questions. We have a whole team of county officials here for any questions that you might have. Anything that you know you're going to be working on that you could use some help on or some guidance on, that's another reason why we're doing this in October as opposed to December, so that we can engage in doing that. And I'm going to start with Senator Surveil and then

[01:04:51] Delegate Tran. Thank you. And I wanted to ask about the pedestrian thing you raised a minute ago. And first of all, I appreciate the \$100 million y'all invested in bike and pet stuff. I remember That was a passion for Supervisor Fausto, I think, started the conversation.

[01:05:06] You all picked it up and brought it in for landing. I did a study bill a couple of years ago. Long story short, but it ended up getting tabled. But I got Kerry Delaney as chairman of the Transportation Committee and Senator Bagby to get, and I think Senator Marsden was chairman of the Transportation Committee at the time, to get VDOT to do a study where they came back and said we were between \$9 and \$19 billion short in Plan District 8 on funding for bike and pet.

[01:05:33] And we then took that study and gave it to the NVTa last year and asked them, can you please tell us how to, how would you prefer to fund this? And the NVTa came back and said, we will tell you which taxes to use, but we won't tell you where to set them.

[01:05:50] And it seems to me that the way to solve this funding problem is to do it through the NVTa, similar to how we did roads, to create a series of regional taxes, program it through the NVTa, They have some kind of funding formula allocated throughout the various localities in Northern Virginia instead of trying to solve it piecemeal, jurisdiction by jurisdiction.

[01:06:09] And the feedback we need from the NVTa and from the region, all the local governments in the region, is tell us what you want, tell us what taxes to do, tell us what rates to set, tell us how to divvy up

the money. Because if all of us just keep throwing random ideas out, it's just going to be picked apart by every local government in Northern Virginia, including the towns, everybody.

[01:06:31] I mean, we're never going to get a consensus. And it seems to me the NVTa is the place to reach the consensus on that. But we just need better feedback if we're ever going to solve that problem. Yeah, I mean, I think NVTa plays a role in that. I'm familiar with the study. I think the challenge at NVTa was they have not been fully funded back to the rate they were at years ago when the General Assembly took money from NVTa to help pay for other initiatives.

[01:06:55] And so they get concerned when we start setting new standards for how NVTa money gets used. I think the other challenge at NVTa, and this just doesn't get recognized, is a lot of people talk about the road projects that NVTa funds. Every single one of those road projects is a multimodal improvement because we don't build roads or do expansions of roads without expanding pedestrian networks, trails, sidewalks, crosswalks, all of those things that add to the cost of those projects.

[01:07:22] And so I think the challenge with NVTa is they felt like they're not in a position to make recommendations on tax rates. That's, I mean, just our Board of Supervisors has to set our tax rate to pay for the needs in our community. And we have public hearings and public input and analysis that does that.

[01:07:38] And ultimately, we set a rate that is a consensus of what we've heard. And I think the challenge on NVTa is, to your point, every locality would probably have a different way to do this. But what's been clearly identified is here's what the need is, here's what the dollars associated with that are. And it's really kind of outside of NVTa's lane to say to the General Assembly, you should impose this tax rate on this specific thing.

[01:08:02] I think the challenge that's out there is real. The need is real. The state is better positioned to understand the flexibility of your own revenue streams and how to do that. And I think that's the lane that NVTa has found themselves. I'm not going to speak for all of NVTa, but as a member of NVTa from this jurisdiction, that was a lot of the conversation.

[01:08:24] I'm looking at Senator Boisco a little bit as a representative of NVTa as well. And so I think moving forward, you know, what we know is we have a lot of pedestrian needs that are out there. What we know is nobody else in Northern Virginia is putting the amount of money that Fairfax County is putting in to the pedestrian challenges that we have out there.

[01:08:42] What we know is doing that out of our real estate tax rate is not the best way to do that, but left with no other choice. That's what we've been doing because of the urgency of the issue. We also know that moving forward, any diversion of NVTa revenue to specific things means other big projects like the Route 1 project that we've been working on for a long time don't happen. And so the pot's got to get bigger at the end of the day, and NVTa will always resist anything that seems like it's taking money from NVTa existing authority and assigning it to

[01:09:19] specific projects and that flexibility loss is a huge issue because NVTa as you know serves the whole region and over a 10-year time horizon the revenues coming in have to reflect the projects going out and so we get one big project like the Route 1 project in Fairfax County takes a lot of NVTa revenue and then that has to be balanced out over 10 years to show that everyone who's paying in, every jurisdiction that's paying in, is getting that requisite money back that they've paid in in projects. So it gets highly

technical. And so I'd be happy to have this conversation further. I think, you know, it would also be useful to talk to Monica Backman at NVTa, you

[01:09:57] know, about the study that was done, because it's very detailed. If you all haven't seen it, I'd encourage you to look at it. I think the study was very useful. I think now the question is, what do you do with this study? And I would like to see the state's response to, what do we do with the study, give us something to get behind as a region. Last thing I'll say is additional taxes.

[01:10:16] This is just my opinion, and not everyone in this room may agree with this, but continuing to just always add another tax in Northern Virginia for things in Northern Virginia is starting to get exhausting to a lot of Northern Virginians. And so they're wondering why we're not getting a better return on our investment. I'm getting asked why I'm spending \$100 million to fix state infrastructure. You know, I don't ask the state to come in and fix county infrastructure. And so the exhaustion level is getting real and those taxes stack up on people who are living in a very difficult time right now financially. And so we have to just, you know, I drove down 81 the other

[01:10:56] day and 64. I kept looking for the toll booths. You know, people here ask me why when we expand our interstates do we get toll booths and they're not getting toll booths. And so I know this is a lot more complicated in this conversation today, but just always going to Northern Virginia and saying, if you need something in Northern Virginia, you Northern Virginians must pay for it, I don't think is the long-term answer either. And I think that's a real challenge at NVTa as well. Delegate Tran. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had two points. And if we were going to discuss, I'd like to discuss my second point, but I want to be on the record for the first. You started your conversation off by talking about the impacts of H.R. 1.

[01:11:35] Let's be frank. H.R. 1 has screwed everybody, whether you're at the state level, at the local level, or an everyday person trying to make it buy, right? But we have put in money just so that everybody is aware, both to try to address the SNAP issue to keep as many folks in the program as possible.

[01:11:53] We put in \$235 million this year for that. We also have a \$575 million contingency fund to address some things that are going to happen around Medicaid and other, you know, businesses that we have to now fill the gap so that the most vulnerable amongst us can get the services. I just met with the deputy secretary for HHR yesterday, and she flagged that they are trying to see how they could really affect the definition of medically fragile under the Medicaid program. Because if you are medically fragile, you do not fall under the work requirements that are hitting our constituents.

[01:12:30] But at most, it looks like 23,400 people are going to fall under that. And so as the state adjusts how they define medically fragile, hopefully that number will decrease. Additionally, we have 1,275 people in Fairfax who are considered non-citizens that have lost coverage, right?

[01:12:54] And so non-citizens is always used as kind of like a term with a lot of suspicion. These are people who are asylees, refugees, people who are escaping domestic violence situations and other situations. So as a community, how do we make sure that we are providing for the least amongst us?

[01:13:13] So I want to flag that. But my second is around this conversation that many of us have had sidebar, and I know one that you and I have had last year together, is how do we improve our ability to work together and our relationship?

[01:13:29] And part of that I have a lot of consternation around is how we talk about funding for education. Because it is, I think, you know, I hope I don't speak out of turn for all my colleagues around the

table. It is one of our top priorities. Our kids do better.

[01:13:45] They are our future. We love them. We want them and our teachers to all do well. But how do we have that conversation when, in a way, I think that is constructive, in a way that clearly understands the constraints we work in at the state, within the state, the part that it's always been a state-local partnership in terms of funding, and recognizing, and I think the landmark study from JLARC a couple years ago, everybody around this table would say, yes, we can, we should, and we need to do better.

[01:14:21] In the last nine years that I've been in office, we have increased funding for public education every single year. And I think we have a commitment amongst us, staying in the majority, that we will continue to do as best as we can. I do say that it is really hard to develop a good working relationship around this conversation when the problem is described as due to the inadequacy of state funding.

[01:14:45] And I say that because there's not a recognition then that we put in \$2 billion in public education funding this past year. That is a historic one-time investment that we have never done at the state level, right, that big of an increase.

[01:15:00] That also includes in there \$230 million almost for special ed and kids who are limited English proficient, By which, like, the share of those students that Fairfax takes care of and teaches, Fairfax benefits the most from that investment.

[01:15:17] We have a lot of work to do to think through the funding formulas. I think that's something that there's a lot of stakeholders that are engaged in as well. But, you know, I just want to say, like, when we talk about it, I think there's a way we can say, and I'm not asking for any pats on my back, right?

[01:15:36] But there's a way to say, hey, the state has done this stuff. We hope that the state can do more. But there's a recognition that the state has, that we as your partners have been pushing for that. And also, these are some ideas that we can do at the local level as well.

[01:15:51] And I think that that would really help to build a constructive relationship amongst us. And I think that this is an issue, just put on the table, that has been really hard for our delegation. I'll speak for myself. Thank you. And actually, to that point, Delegate Tran, I will say this is one of the reasons we have tried to extensively push this conversation to a state-level conversation.

[01:16:14] Because we know, if you all were the General Assembly, that not only would that needle you mentioned be moved significantly, but it would have been significantly moved further. Because I know that you embraced the JLARC study, you know there's still a lot of work to be done.

[01:16:30] You would be more aggressively doing that if it was up to you alone. And I know that a big problem here is parts outside of Northern Virginia that aren't as necessarily aggrieved as we are in education funding because, frankly, a lot of them feel like they're doing pretty well when it comes to that or, in some cases, don't even support public education as a principal.

[01:16:50] And so we've tried to elevate this conversation to our statewide partners so it's not just us talking about it. And I think the value of the JLARC study was it wasn't a study of Fairfax County public education funding. It was a study of state education funding, public education funding. And I think that set the table for what the magnitude of the challenge is that the state faces.

[01:17:11] We face it every year when we go to balance our budget. And I've been on this board now for a lot of years. We have increased education funding significantly every year. And so it's not a matter of

increasing the funding. It's a matter of keeping up with the demand that's out there, making sure that this is a statewide issue, knowing that our Northern Virginia delegation alone cannot solve this problem.

[01:17:34] And one of the reasons why the school board and county board are working very diligently to align our legislative packages so that we're saying the same thing. Look, we know that there are times when yelling in Fairfax County is helpful, and we know when yelling in Fairfax County hurts you and what you're trying to do there, which is why it is important for these other organizations to step up and talk about the need for this. I will tell you, in my years on VACO, we didn't talk about public education until about the last six, seven years. Now, no matter where you are from the state, almost the very first topic that's brought up is education funding, and it doesn't matter where in Virginia you are.

[01:18:13] And that, to me, is a breath of fresh air because there are now parts of the state that didn't think about education funding that finally are thinking about education funding. The question is, Will they have the courage to do some of the things that you all have already done in supporting it? And I think that, you know, remains to be seen as we move forward.

[01:18:30] But I appreciate that. And I don't want to go back to the first part of what you said, because, you know, we've acknowledged the huge amount of support that we need to help deal with the federal problems that are not the making of the state or of this county. What I do think we need to be cognizant of is most of those impacts have not been felt yet by our constituents.

[01:18:51] And so that funding set aside is really important, but understand this problem is going to be with us, and you know this, for years, because most of the eligibility pieces that are going to affect people, whether it's health care or SNAP benefits, are just now starting to be realized or will be being realized over the course of the next year.

[01:19:10] And so those numbers are real. So I appreciate the work that's been done on that and hope we can continue to partner on that. Yes, please, Supervisor Alcorn. Just very quickly, I want to do a finer point on transit funding. I think this is also really important. Regionally, the Virginia Railway Express is looking at a \$40 million deficit starting in FY29, \$13 million next year.

[01:19:33] That's operating funding. WMATA, basically the bill that was passed, gives local governments, us in Northern Virginia, a \$136 million annual obligation starting in FY29. Here in Fairfax County, that would mean we would have to take, for example, our WMATA bond, which is going to be, it's already scheduled for \$200 million, and go to \$500 million.

[01:19:57] That blows a hole in our bond financing. I'm looking at the school folks over there. That's something, if we don't address that, it's going to bite us big time. And also, we have the transit worker compensation bill, SJ731, and we're looking at about \$10 to \$15 million additional on that.

[01:20:16] We do have, I guess, thank you, the authorization to do a sales tax referendum for school construction and transit funding. Okay, I've been around a while. I've seen us go 0 for 3 on referenda to increase taxes for transportation and or education.

[01:20:36] And frankly, if we wait until 28 to do this, we're already four or five months into FY29 when our transit obligation to WMATA increases. by about 70 million dollars a year so i mean we can look at next year but i don't think that's going to be terribly popular in this room to put the referendum on uh but i'm just flagging that we're going to need some help uh one way or another on that thank you yes stella get going i i think just speak a couple of things um i i do want to say there is a frustration that remains

[01:21:14] And I just say this as like one of the new kids on the block here of of continually trying to give opportunities and options that we see other counties take advantage of, to be honest, this this sales tax. There is always a reason that is given for why we don't want to do it.

[01:21:35] And then we say, but we don't have enough money for transit and we don't have enough money for schools. And I think the frustration that I just continue to hear, and I do want people to know, like, we do read your newsletters. So I do want you to be thoughtful when you think about the way that you talk about what the state has been trying to do, to be honest.

[01:21:58] I think in particular looking at, we have one person in this county that sits on education in the house and is Delegate Boulava. the responsibility that she holds of sitting there and making sure that what seems to work in other parts of the county but may not work here is great. And I'm very grateful for that work.

[01:22:20] I want to say that I disagree. I think any member of our house, at least in the house, that you speak to, no matter where they're from, education is their number one priority and frustration that they are having. We have different ways of thinking about it. Some of them would like vouchers and different things, but there's no question that this is a problem that is ever-present, whether it is having staff or having schools fall apart, all of those things. So

[01:22:53] certainly, I do feel like there has been a real consensus around funding education, generally speaking. And I think trying to be super creative, you all are why we did the per pupil, why we funded at-risk special ed and ELL funding per pupil so that you wouldn't get caught up in the LCI. We will talk about the LCI until the cows come home. I will tell you we do have some rural partners who actually do feel the same that we do. If you talk about the folks who

[01:23:29] represent Bath County, where the homestead is, that get the least amount of money from the Commonwealth. They feel much the same way that we feel because a pocket of extreme wealth in their county is masking extreme poverty. And when we have those conversations, it is the same here.

[01:23:49] But I do want to echo what Delegate Tran said in that how we talk about it matters. And instead of where we say we are continuing to fight for this, we are continuing to work together to get more money, and we cannot believe, I mean, all of this money that has gone to education has been historic.

[01:24:10] I do think it winds up like we continually feel like this, and it is very, very difficult to toe the line. We want to be supportive to a person we respect and like each one of you, and it is very difficult when we have constituents saying why are crossing guards not being funded why could our teachers not get their pay raise why and the the narrative is that we don't have the money to do it but then we wave the flag of like we're trying to give you avenues to to collect that money to spend it so

[01:24:45] I don't know how we wind up in less of an adversarial place because we have to this depends our success depends on us doing this, but I think we all feel like we are in this Oliver Twist position of continuing to have to come back and ask and ask and ask. And so I do appreciate these efforts to really collaboratively do this. And I fundamentally agree that education has got to be the number one focus of this state of the board here, because what we are seeing and what we saw

[01:25:20] from COVID on, is that the school is the center of our community. You can talk about HB1. All of the things that are on the greater level macro issues are a microcosm in our schools that they are all dealing with. So I just want us to be thoughtful about how we frame the conversation.

[01:25:40] That's my ask. Thank you. I've got a lot of people that want to be recognized, and we're 10 minutes over, so we'll try to do this as quickly as we can, make sure we can hear from everyone. And I'm just going to go down this way because I'm going to start with Senator Boyce. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good that we're having this conversation, right? When things are easy and everybody has everything they need, we can all feel great with one another and we are really finding a time where the rubber is hitting the road and sitting down and listening to one another, being respectful and thoughtful in the way we interact is the first step. I believe that I am the only person

[01:26:15] from Fairfax County in the General Assembly who sits on the K-12 funding subcommittee. And just for y'all's information, the governor, who is the first governor in the past four years who is actually supportive of our education system, our public education system, they are in the process of going through an RFP to find a consultant to help parse through some of these challenges. They recently asked me and other members of the subcommittee for input.

[01:26:52] I put front and center after convening a conversation with Fairfax County Public Schools, making sure, number one, that we get the costs of what it takes accurate for our localities and their spending requirements. Secondly, clarifying that currently the state underestimates what localities are spending. I heard someone mention the JLARC recommendation number six, to use actual spending data and not weighted state averages, because Fairfax County, it's more expensive.

[01:27:27] And so making sure that they take that into consideration. Also, recommendation 12, the labor cost in Fairfax County are not appreciated in the current structure, making sure that we're looking at that. So what I would ask of you all is continuing, the school board and you all, to continue to reach out to me to talk to make sure that I've got your concerns at hand when I am there to represent this community.

[01:27:56] This is one of the highest priorities for all of us, as we know. And again, you know, whether it's transportation, whether it's tax policy, whether it is education or all the rest of it, right, We are going to be successful when we respect one another and we work together.

[01:28:14] The pitting one another against one another, it happens on both sides. It's not just y'all doing it to us, but we've got to cut that out and sit down and do the business of the people because we all represent the same individuals. So thank you for your work.

[01:28:30] Thank you. Spot on, Senator. And I think the metrics are real, as you just mentioned. and we'll continue to provide with our schools that data that I think is so helpful. Delegate Keyes-Gamara. Thank you. I was going to talk about something totally different, but now I feel like I should say that this is the reason.

[01:28:50] This conversation is how we get to a better answer, right? And having more in-depth conversations earlier and earlier so that we actually know what the facts are. The fact, based on some of the things that commissions, et cetera, that I'm involved in, I can tell you that the previous administration was all about removing power from the Department of Education and defunding public education. We are now digging out of that, right? And we do it with a unified determination to support public education. We

[01:29:29] know none of our communities are successful without good schools, period. There's also some strategy that has to happen because we are Fairfax County and that's why I keep trying to have conversations and I know others have done the same and so I just say let's come together and figure out what that strategy looks like because I think there are some people that benefit from us fighting each other

or even appearing to look like we're fighting each other and I don't want to be a part of that. I've done the best that I can. I will continue to do that because you know We're going to win.

[01:30:05] So the second thing I wanted to say has to do with the pedestrian safety. And I just had an opportunity to talk to several of our supervisors here to say that in light of previous administrations, I did have a bill to try to improve pedestrian safety around our schools.

[01:30:26] Our previous administration was less than receptive. However, I will say I'm happy to work with everybody. And we're really, I'm waiting to hear about your priorities. I spoke with Supervisor Smith yesterday.

[01:30:42] If I can get a hold of those priorities and try to make sure that we combine that with a process that focuses on transparency and communication, I want to address all of not only what the need is in terms of where the money is needed, also the process to make sure that every transportation problem isn't treated the same as the vulnerable school zones where we know young people are in danger. And so I just look forward to working on that.

[01:31:14] And that's going to be my strategy is to how we can get information, specific information from the county so that we can then take that, use our knowledge of where we are and move things forward on behalf of our constituents. Thank you for that. And we will absolutely provide that.

[01:31:30] And I appreciate the focus on the process piece, too, because there's things legislatively that can happen and financially. And then there's just things in practice in terms of VDOT. And I had a meeting with VDOT just a week before last with a lot of the homebuilders who pointed out a whole lot of things that could streamline the process to building housing that had been a challenge with VDOT.

[01:31:50] So it doesn't need a legislative action, but needs the conversation. So thank you for that. Senator Marsden. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To Supervisor Alcorn's concern about, you know, future transit costs, I was at a conference in Columbus, Ohio, that I was covering for Senator Survelle with a number of other states, and the subject of driverless electric shared vehicles came up in Waymo.

[01:32:16] and the data they have, I think after a 2 million mile study, I think it's a little exaggerated. I've read some information that it might be. But they were talking about 92% fewer accidents, injuries, deaths. Waymo, that camel's nose is under the tent.

[01:32:36] You know, they're here, they're around, they're taking pictures, they're mapping things. And this will be an extraordinary savings, you know, to citizens. when you talk about affordability what can be saved by by these things and I don't know how it's how fast it's going to move but I'm reminded of the of the the saying that these things are like ketchup in a bottle first a little comes out and then a lot and this thing could hit you hit us very very fast and we need we you know we will be needing road infrastructure and all of a sudden the

[01:33:14] pressure is going to be on people who have solved their transit problems and and their affordability problems to get to work in ways that solve the first and last mile problem. And I don't know how fast it's going to go, but I hope we're tracking and that my friend Noel is looking at this because you don't want this sneaking up on you and all of a sudden having impacts on the budget and the way people live.

[01:33:40] All in all, it's good news, but at the same time, it is a huge, huge change in the way we live. For sure, and I'm getting head nods over here behind you. Um, others who would like to make a comment or have a question when I go around, uh, yes, Supervisor Palchik.

[01:33:57] Um, I almost didn't speak because I think I really appreciate the conversation and that we're all speaking with each other rather than at each other here. Um, I would add to that, that maybe let's start with, um, thanking each other. Uh, I think we've both done things.

[01:34:12] We were finally given the authority to do the meals tax as someone who, uh, fought really hard to try to get that approved in the ballot, and it was not. I hope you all understand we heard you. We adopted it, and we have to have at least a couple of years of that to understand where that's going. So we appreciate that, and I think as much as we need to thank you for the authorities, it'd be helpful for you to say, hey, thank you. You did do this. We asked you to implement it, and you did. So I do think there's a little bit of both ways that we have to do that.

[01:34:45] The other bit is that, and especially appreciate understanding that while we are an average, maybe a wealthy community, we have the largest, largest needs, more than we've had in decades. And so, yes, the dedicated per-person funding is very helpful.

[01:35:03] All of that is helpful, and we appreciate that. It does mean that we have to continue to understand that while you are making laws statewide, you are our representatives and the impact on our local community is something that we need to continue to understand and find ways to try to be more creative with the power you may have down in Richmond to help the specific needs here. So I do think the conversation gets here. And finally, you know, and it's not all about money, right? Page 14 talks about our local authority as someone

[01:35:39] who's been working with VEDA for 10 years through several different Northern Virginia district administrations, I very much appreciate that, you know, my colleagues in Senator Salim and others are here to help. We hope you understand what a challenge it is and how much of that \$100 million goes into having to review over and over again with changing VEDA representation, changing standards, and having to try to get them on board with understanding that we are a very urban community. And ones like Providence and Mason and Mount Vernon, the older ones,

[01:36:15] are lacking sidewalks, are lacking infrastructure, and it's extremely costly. And those are our most vulnerable communities. And so I think if we're able to help target some of that support, understanding, redoing that infrastructure, \$100 million doesn't go very far, right? We know that.

[01:36:34] But anything you can do, yes, funding is great, but helping us have VDOT take that into account and how important it is to support, especially our vulnerable communities where there's low car ownership.

[01:36:50] We just saw Route 7, the BRT route, 14% don't own cars, right? So I do think there are areas like that where we can partner more and try to target those resources because we know it's a tale of two counties sometimes and a tale of two states.

[01:37:06] But we appreciate those of you who do want to hone in and understand where we are struggling and would really appreciate your help in making us spend less money on specialists and lawyers and our staff when that could be streamlined. And we all agree we can't add more roads for more cars.

[01:37:24] So I think this is a really helpful conversation and we look forward to continuing that. Thank you, Supervisor Palachuk. We're going to go speed real fast with a couple other folks because I want to be respectful of people's time and other commitments. Supervisor Sizemore Eiser. I'll be super, super fast.

[01:37:42] I just want to appreciate the conversation, too. I think there's a room here, and Delegate Cohen and I were sidebarring, about communication throughout the year. You all know when we're talking about big topics such as the housing in February, right, that might be helpful to you as you're planning bills and vice versa. And also a space to talk about budgetary versus non-budgetary work so we can help better inform both of that work and better partner.

[01:38:03] And I really appreciate it. And I think also knowing all the good work you have done around education and these other areas and the good work that we have done so we can kind of lift each other up on that piece I think would be helpful. I'll stop here. Yeah, thank you. Too much focus on what didn't happen and not really a lot of focus on what did happen a lot of times.

[01:38:23] Supervisor Lusk. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And very quickly, I want to thank Delegate Cohen for her comments and appreciate her kind of transparency and frankness. And we'll acknowledge that adversarial relationships don't work.

[01:38:40] So we've got to do better on both sides. So I think what we've done here is we've kind of opened up, I think, a dialogue, which I hope we can continue. And I believe it's going to be powerful for us in the end. And just want to acknowledge that we've got to continue to have open and frank conversations if we're going to continue to be successful in this endeavor.

[01:39:05] So I just want to acknowledge I appreciate very much what you said and your imagery was also effective. And we can do better. And I'm committing on this side to do better as well. Thank you so very much.

[01:39:21] Supervisor Behrman. Page 16, transportation safety and coordination has our interests in trying to speed up processes with VDOT and otherwise, which goes right to what Supervisor Palchuk was talking about. Page 14, where we do talk about requesting for dedicated state funding around those pedestrian infrastructure improvements, that's really important to us.

[01:39:44] I will end by saying raise your hand if you have voted to increase school funding for the last three years. There's not a single person around this table who hasn't. The board of supervisors has, the state has, we all have. We're actually all on the same team here trying to see that be better.

[01:39:59] And I think we have work to do, but I think we're on the same page to do better by our students. Thank you. Thank you, Supervisor Behrman. And if no one else has any comments, I'm sorry we're running so late. Did you want to say something?

[01:40:15] Just very quickly, I want to say thank you for uplifting the K-12 conversation as the school Board, you know, my colleagues are back there along with the superintendent. I just really appreciate the fact that we are centering our students across all things, not just education, but also safety. So I'm really looking forward to see the fruits of this conversation.

[01:40:37] Thank you, Dr. Anderson. It literally drives every decision we make in this room, and I'm sure in the state capitol as well. So we appreciate the focus on that will always be our most important priority as we move forward. So thank you. With that, we're going to wrap up. I will just tell you that in your package,

you have some key, yes, you have the QR code. You also have our draft legislative package, the presentation that was given today, and our staff is going to be working on getting additional information out to you that was requested during this meeting, and we'll make sure that we do that expeditiously. Any questions, any comments about any of it, please let us know

[01:41:16] so that we can get back to you and appreciate that we're doing this early and hope it informs the important work that you all do moving forward. So thank you.



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