



MONROE MANORISMS

March 2004 ♦ Volume 9, Issue 1

I. A WORD OR TWO FROM THE BOARD

by Gordon Jarratt



Tot Lot Enhancements – Your Input Needed!

Some of the equipment in the Tot Lot is almost ten years old and is scheduled for replacement. The Board is interested in having residents who utilize this amenity provide input about any equipment updates or additions. Funding for this initiative will come from budgeted replacement reserves.

Mary Wolf has agreed to chair the **Tot Lot Refresh Committee!** Both **Susie Beltari** and **Bonnie Schwarzkopf** have also agreed to serve on this committee. They are looking for several additional members. The group will meet in March and April and provide recommendations to the Board in May. Do you have ideas about the Tot Lot that you would like to share? Would you like to join the Committee? Do you use the Tot Lot and have input that would benefit both the children and adult users of the amenity? Please contact Mary, Susie or Bonnie and let them know about your willingness to help and your ideas!

Monroe Manor Tree Replacement Policy

After feedback from tree experts, residents, the ARC, and the Board, the following tree replacement policy is proposed for Monroe Manor.

If homeowners lose a tree in their yard, they need to replace it with a similar size and variety as the dead tree. All tree replacements need to be approved by the ARC. The intention of this policy is to maintain the original landscaping design for the neighborhood -- particularly in areas where a tree lined street has been established.

Obviously, one of the concerns with a replacement tree will be that a larger, more mature tree is being replaced with a much smaller variety of tree. The best approach would be to replace a dead tree with a tree as close to the size of the original tree as reasonable. It is understandable that a 10 year old tree cannot be replaced with the same size tree and that it will take time for the new tree to reach a similar size and maturity as the old tree.

This policy is intended as a guideline; however, the decision regarding replacement variety and size will be determined by the ARC.

The Board and the ARC will be formally adopting the policy in April. If you have any final input, please forward it to **Mary Wolf** before March 31, 2004.

Park Land Trees Cut Down Illegally

Someone has been chopping down trees from the wooded park land play area located north of the Fallon Drive cul-de-sac, and west of the pipe line field along Fox Woods Drive. Anyone with information about this illegal activity on park land should contact either a Board member or the Fairfax County Police non-emergency number at **703-691-2131**.

Two New Recreation Projects in Chantilly

There are two large recreation projects in the Westfields/Chantilly area which are scheduled for completion in the next 12-18 months.

Cub Run RECenter

A new recreation center is scheduled to open in the Fall of 2004. It is called the **Cub Run RECenter** and is being built off of Stonecroft Boulevard (just north of Westfield High School) with features such

as:

- Initially, a 65,000 square foot facility (future expansion to an additional 30,000 sq. ft.)
- 25 meter x 25 yard competition pool
- 4,860 sq. ft. leisure pool with 2 slides
- Whirlpool/spa
- Fitness, cardiovascular, and weight training areas
- Lockers and changing rooms
- Multipurpose and party rooms
- 5,000 feet of trails.

This will be the largest recreation center in Fairfax County, and the only one with two pools under one roof. More information is available at: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/rec/wcrec.htm>

Field House at Cub Run

Adjacent to the Cub Run RECenter will be a new privately financed 160,000 square foot facility called the **Field House at Cub Run**. Features will include:

- 200 meter indoor track
- Eight straight and six oval lanes
- Amenities for pole vault, high jump, and long jump
- Multipurpose floor surface for indoor soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, or football (within the track perimeter)
- Hardwood floor area for basketball, volleyball, and gymnastics
- Three full-sized basketball courts (convertible to youth basketball or six volleyball courts).

The new facility is designed to support competitive gymnastics, cheerleading, concerts, graduation ceremonies, conventions, large-scale speaking events, and youth dances. The building will accommodate multiple sporting events simultaneously and can host several large tournaments to support the school system. The 30-year lease requires that the Field House be available for Fairfax County Public School events on a priority basis. It is scheduled to open in the Spring of 2005.

The Field House at Cub Run will share parking with Cub Run RECenter, but each will operate

independently. Combined with the high school, the recreation center and the field house will be a beautiful and unique complex for use by students and adults.

Fairfax County Parkway and Fair Lakes Parkway Interchange Improvements

Both VDOT and Fairfax County have formally agreed that improving the intersection between the Fairfax County and Fair Lakes Parkways is a high priority. Funding for design, land acquisition, and utilities relocations is available. Funding for future construction still needs to be provided (est. \$45 mil.).

Fairfax County Parkway already supports 30,000 daily vehicles through this intersection (with another 6,000 on Fair Lakes Parkway). This volume already creates backups at the existing signal lights, and the vehicle count is expected to grow significantly.

Plans include:

- A 2.8 mile stretch of Fairfax County Parkway will be widened to 6 lanes (3 in each direction, between the Rugby Road/Fair Oaks Hospital intersection and the Route 29 intersection along the Parkway)
- Fairfax County Parkway would become an overpass with Fair Lakes Parkway beneath it
- Signal lights would be removed.

If federal funding is provided, the project is estimated to take 30 months with a completion date in 2007.

Smithsonian's New Air and Space Museum is Open!

The National Air and Space Museum's **Udvar-Hazy Center** is open and the exhibits are incredible! A minimum of 2-3 hours is recommended to see the highlights – leave additional time should you choose to enjoy the spectacular IMAX movies. The museum is located adjacent to the Dulles airport (the entrance is off of Route 28 just south of the McLearen Road intersection). It is open from 10:00 am – 5:30 pm every day (except for Christmas Day). Admission

is free; however, parking is \$12 per vehicle. A driver may drop off visitors at the center and immediately exit the area without paying the fee. More information about the Air and Space museum is available at 202-357-2700 or <http://www.nasm.si.edu/udvarhazy/>

The IMAX Theatre shows large screen movies every hour (on the half hour) between 11:30 am and 7:30 pm (parking is free after 4:30 pm).

Currently playing:

- Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure
- Adrenaline Rush: The Science of Risk
- Straight Up! Helicopters in Action
- Young Black Stallion
- NASCAR: The IMAX Experience.

Theatre admission is \$8/show (or \$13 for two shows; all times and prices are subject to change). More information about the IMAX Theatre movies is available at 202-275-2371 or <http://www.nasm.si.edu/visit/uhcimax/>

“Bad Bunny:” Too Many Rabbits!

Most residents enjoy the native wildlife. However, some of us have experienced a “mini-invasion” of rabbits that enjoy dining on the many delicacies found in our landscaping, garden and flower beds. What can be done?

Residents Debbie and LeMoyne Zacherl have found the answer! Debbie (a Penn State graduate) is proud to announce that a retired professor from her alma mater has concocted a liquid formula to help keep the bunnies away. Since using the spray last year, they have had 100% success in not having to replace flowers and other plants. The product is called "Liquid Fence." It can be purchased online www.liquidfence.com or at local nurseries such as:

- South Riding Nursery (behind the Sheetz Gas Station on Route 50 west)
- Claude Moore Colonial Farm (McLean)
- Merrifield Garden Center (8132 Lee Highway)
- Sam's Farm (7125 Leesburg Pike Falls Church)

The recommended application is once a month.

When applied, there is a general odor which dissipates in a couple of days. Check out the website above for more information.

“Good Bunny:” The Easter Bunny and Easter Egg Hunt for Kids!

Herndon Parks and Recreation will present its annual Easter Egg Hunt on **Saturday April 10th from 10:00 am – 12:30 pm** at the Herndon High School front lawn (700 Bennett Street). Bring your own kids (ages 2-9) and your own baskets to collect over 7,000 candy and toy-filled eggs! Activities include a magician, Funland, Moon Bounce, running through Cameron the Caterpillar and Freddy the Frog, making crafts, visiting the petting zoo, and of course gathering eggs. Lunch will be available for sale. Each age group will have their own egg hunt time. The Easter Bunny will make a grand entrance and stay for photo opportunities (\$6 in advance; \$7 at the event). The schedule is:

- 9:30–10:30 am - On-site registration
- 10:00 am –12:30 pm – Entertainment & Funland, etc.
- 10:15 am - Egg hunt for ages 2-3
- 10:30 am - Egg hunt for ages 4-5
- 10:45 am - Egg hunt for ages 6-7
- 11:00 am - Egg hunt for ages 8-9

2004 Board of Director Meetings

The remaining 2004 Board of Director meetings are:

- May 19
- August 18
- November 17 (Annual HOA Meeting)

Meetings are generally held quarterly, at 7:30 pm on the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Residents are welcome to attend. Please contact a Board member to confirm the specific date, time, and location.

Updated Monroe Manor Contact Information

Several names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses have changed on the Monroe Manor Contact List (last page of the newsletter). Please discard previous versions.

II. ARC NEWS

by Doug Barbee

ARC Membership Transition

After more than four years of service, **Ken Hagen** has decided to step down from his position on the Architectural Review Committee. The ARC and the Board appreciate his participation and support.

Gene Murphy will be joining the ARC to fill the vacancy. Gene has previously supported the community by serving in positions on both the ARC and the Board of Directors. He is one of the many original homeowners in the neighborhood – having lived here nearly 10 years. Gene has always believed each homeowner should do their share in keeping Monroe Manor an exceptional place to live. He is looking forward to jumping back into things and meeting and working with many of the recent newcomers as they tackle those outside projects. Welcome back Gene!

III. COMMUNITY EVENTS

Monroe Manor Events!

by Judy May

Easter Egg Hunt

Currently, there is no plan for a spring egg hunt. If this is something that you would like to organize, please contact **Judy May**.

Neighborhood Yard Sale – May 15

The yard sale is scheduled for Saturday, May 15. The rain date will be Sunday, May 16. If you are interested in participating, please put your “stuff” out on your driveway by 7:30 am. We will place ads in the newspaper, but we need some volunteers to hang signs. If you are interested in helping, please contact **Judy May**.

Annual Progressive Dinner – May 22

The Annual Progressive Dinner will be held on Saturday, May 22nd starting at 6:30pm. This is a great event to meet more neighbors and to have a fun “adult” social night. Everyone rotates to different houses for three or so courses and then meets at one house for dessert at the end of the evening. The Spencer Family on Fox Mill Drive has already offered to host desserts at their home. An email will be forthcoming with additional information including whether you would like to

host a course (e.g. appetizer, salad, etc.) or to bring a dessert.

Happy Hour - June 18

The first monthly happy hour will be held on Friday, June 18 in honor of the last day of school (as of this writing). The rest of the summer schedule will be sent out via email.

Email Addresses

If you think that we have an incorrect email address for you, please send the correct email to Judy May in order to receive timely information about the Progressive Dinner, Monthly Happy Hours and other community events.

Special Events, Local Festivities, and Holidays!

by Gordon Jarratt

March:

17 – St. Patrick’s Day

20 – Spring begins

3/27 thru 4/11 – D.C. Cherry Blossom Festival

April:

4 – Daylight Savings Time begins

5-9 – School Spring Vacation

10 – Easter Egg Hunt (see article)

11 – Easter Bunny Day!

21 – Administrative Professionals Day

22 - Herndon Council for the Arts “Taste of the Town” (5:30 pm, Worldgate Center)

24 – Baby Animal Day (Frying Pan Park)

May:

5/6 thru 10/8 - Herndon Farmer’s Market begins (Thursday mornings)*

5/7 thru 8/27 – “Friday Night Live” Concert Series begins (Herndon Town Green, Friday nights)**

8 – Sheep & Wool Day (Frying Pan Park)

9 – Mother’s Day

22-23 Northern Virginia Fine Arts Festival (Reston Town Center, 180 artisans)

29–31 – Viva! Vienna

31 – Memorial Day

June:

3-6 – Herndon Festival

6/5 thru 8/28 – Reston Saturday Night Concert Series begins (Reston Town Center Pavilion, Saturday nights)***

6/10 thru 8/26 - Thursday Night Concert Series

begins (Herndon Town Green, Thursday nights)****

11-13 – Celebrate Fairfax (Fairfax Fair; see Willie Nelson!)

12 – Dairy Day (Frying Pan Park; reservations required for special 6/11 Ice Cream Social night)

14 - Flag Day

18 – Last day of School

19 - Reston Taste of the Town

20 – Father’s Day

21 – Summer begins

July:

4 – Independence Day Holiday

24 – Seventh Annual Blues Festival (Frying Pan)

Ongoing events:

* The Herndon **Farmer’s Market** (fresh vegetables & produce) is held from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm on Thursdays from May 6–October 28.

** The Herndon/Dulles Chamber of Commerce presents “**Friday Night Live**” every Friday night from 6:30 - 10:30 pm during May 7–August 27 (Herndon Town Green).

*** Reston Town Center presents its **Saturday night Concert Series** from 7:30 – 10:00 pm during June 5-August 28 (Reston Town Center Pavilion).

**** Herndon presents its **Thursday night Concert Series** at 7:30 pm from June 10–August 26 (Town Green).

IV. LOCAL SCHOOL NEWS

by Gordon Jarratt

Fairfax County Public Schools Calendar

Excessive snow days have caused changes to the 2003/2004 school calendar. As of this writing, the scheduled April 2 Student Holiday has been cancelled (it will be a school day), and the last day of school will be June 18. If another snow day occurs, the last day of school will become June 21, then June 22, etc.

The FCPS website provides the latest calendar:

<http://www.fcps.edu/about/03-04cal.htm>

V. COMMUNITY SERVICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Restaurants

Do you have opinions about local restaurants to share with your neighbors? In this issue of *Monroe Manorisms*, we debut several restaurant reviews. Guest columnist **Mary Wolf** shares her dining experience at several nearby eateries. Neighbors – please contribute your dining reviews for future newsletter issues.

Two Restaurant Reviews!

by Mary Wolf

I thought it might be fun to share some local restaurants that I think are relatively 'unknown' gems.

1. SBC (Sweet Basil Cafe), is located in the McNair Farms Shopping Center (between the car wash and the 7-11). I actually resisted trying this place for over a year, since it always looked like a tiny little 'dumpy' shopping center restaurant more suited to lunchtime. My first visit changed that perception very quickly. The food is fantastic! The menu varies, depending on their specials, and they have the most interesting array of choices. My favorite entree on the main menu is the curried wild rockfish, but don't go there without also trying the appetizers and desserts. The two tuna (fresh sushi grade) appetizers are out of this world. The atmosphere in the evening is pleasant. The candles on the tables (even though covered with paper rather than cloth) and the lowered lighting create an illusion of something finer than a little cubbyhole in a shopping center. Try it -- you won't be disappointed!

[editor’s note: A Washington Post restaurant critic echoes Mary’s opinions -- check out: www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A46844-2003Jun11¬Found=true]

2. The Market Street Bar & Grill is located adjacent to the Hyatt in the Reston Town Center.

Unlike most restaurants in the Town Center, this restaurant is never full (except on special occasions). I have never figured out why, since their food (in my opinion) is equal to or better than any other place in the Town Center. I have always guessed that most people associate hotel restaurants with mediocre quality and high prices for food. Well, the prices here are not cheap, but the meals are exquisite. The atmosphere and service are wonderful, especially in the summer, when you can sit outside on their patio and enjoy the sights/sounds of the Town Center. If you like crab cakes, these are the best I have found in the Northern Virginia area (you'll have to go to the Chesapeake to find the very best)!

The restaurant's website is: www.msbg.net

Travel

Do you have a travel experience about which your neighbors might also be interested? **Mary Wolf** knows about a special place south of us and shares her impressions.

A Travel Experience

by Mary Wolf

I am constantly surprised about the number of people who have never been to **Wintergreen, Virginia**. If you haven't been there, you are in for a treat. You can get to the resort in just under 3 hours. Once you exit off of Interstate 66 (onto Route 29 south), the roads are wonderful and pleasant. As you get closer to Wintergreen, you begin to get glimpses of the Blue Ridge Mountains and on days when the visibility is good, the mountain vistas are breathtaking (especially from some of the overlooks within the resort itself).

Wintergreen is an "upside down" ski resort, which means that all of the shops/accommodations are at the top of the slopes, rather than at the bottom (which is how most resorts are established). If you are a skier, you will be pleasantly surprised to see that decent snow skiing exists as far south as this. If you are an expert skier, you won't find it terribly challenging, but it will keep you in skiing shape until you can get out west. For everyone else (beginners and intermediates), the runs are a nice length, the lifts are decent, there is night skiing, and

the crowds (even on holidays) are manageable. The new snowmaking system at Wintergreen has made a world of difference, given the extreme variation of temperatures that we experience in Virginia. There is still a good base of snow, which I am hoping will survive this 50 degree weather for at least a few more weeks.

But even when there is no snow at Wintergreen, there are many other things to do. For instance, you cannot beat the golf courses (one on the mountain and one in the valley). These courses are highly rated and receive top reviews. There is a Nature Center and over 30 miles of hiking trails, with a variation in difficulty and length. There are mountain bike trails and a shop to rent bikes and helmets, etc. There is a spa, pool and hot tubs located in one building called Wintergarden. There are several small restaurants and two excellent restaurants for lunch/dinner (Coppermine and Devils Knob Grille). Both of these restaurants require reservations in the winter months, and the food is wonderful (but expensive).

There is horseback riding in the valley and there are numerous sites to visit within the area (Monticello, wineries, etc.). There is a lake where you can rent canoes, kayaks, etc., as well as several outdoor pools for the summer. There are various 'kids programs' both in summer and winter. In addition, there are many types of accommodations. The Mountain Inn has rooms (which I suspect are not that great), but there are numerous condominium complexes, as well as houses, that are available for rent through the resort or through private individuals. Although it is more convenient to get around the resort by car, they do provide a shuttle that services all of the resort locations and rental areas. In the summer, the temperature on the mountain is an amazing 10-15 degrees lower than the temps here and the humidity is exceptionally low, which makes it a great summer escape.

If you would like to ask questions or get additional information about Wintergreen, feel free to contact me. The website for Wintergreen is www.wintergreenresort.com.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS

Gordon Jarratt has provided a detailed article about real estate assessments and the County's budget at the end of this newsletter.

VII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

House for Sale

Do you have a Friend looking to buy in Monroe Manor? Ken Hagen and Joan Morrow (12810 Monroe Manor Dr.) will be selling their Exeter home in late Spring or early Summer to move to an "active adult community" in Dumfries. We would be happy to give friends of our neighbors an opportunity to discuss the purchase of our home.

If you would like to share information in future newsletters, please contact **Kathy Lawson**.

Babysitters and Yard Workers!

Parents! Do you have teens that would like to provide their services for jobs such as babysitters and/or yard workers? Send in their name, contact information, and the type of work they would like to do to either **Kathy Lawson or Mary Wolf**, and it will be listed in the next newsletter.

Your Real Estate Assessments, the County's FY2005 Budget and Your Real Estate Taxes

(and some budget "politics and realities")
by Gordon Jarratt

This article hopefully provides some balanced and factual information about your County's budget process and its impact on your tax dollars and your quality of life.

The County's advertised budget has been published. Overall, the County General Fund budget is projected to increase by 4.47% to \$2.73 billion with no increase in the major tax rates and modest increases in other fees. The largest portions of the budget are for:

- Schools - \$1.45 billion (53%)
- Public Safety - \$326 million (11.9%)
- Health/Human Services/Welfare -

\$313 Million (11.4%)

- Other government - \$641 million (23.7%)

The largest portion of the budget goes to fund the schools (FCPS). This \$1.45 billion amount represents an increase of 6.57% over FY2004. Note that the schools have asked for an additional \$39 million not yet funded. "Other" includes 40 agencies and departments such as the Board, County Executive, County Attorney, central administrative services, land development, public works, planning & zoning, Economic Development Authority, Library, Parks, Recreation, County transit operations, Metro/VRE payments, Courts and Judicial administration, and County debt (bond) repayment. Individually, each of these entities represents between 0.1 – 4.0% of the budget.

By state law, localities are required to periodically re-value real estate to full market value (also called equalization). As a practical matter, localities typically place assessments just below full market value because of many reasons (one of which is that it would create a large volume of protests and appeals -- although there is no official policy stating this as a reason).

In February 2004, residential real estate assessments were increased by an average of 11.29% county-wide. Other Northern Virginia localities have recently experienced 12-16% increases. The average Monroe Manor real estate assessment increased by 7%. Past Monroe Manor sales prices have shown, and most home owners would agree, that even with the recent assessment increase, our properties would sell for more than the new assessment (based upon current market conditions).

This is the 4th consecutive year of over double digit increases for most county property owners. The average residential homeowner will pay \$4,147 in real estate

taxes next year on the average residential home value of \$357,506. When adjusted for inflation, however, the average annual increase in residential real estate tax bills since FY1991 is 2.1%. The rate of real estate taxes is proposed to remain at \$1.16 per \$100 assessed value (down from \$1.23 in FY2000).

Other County budget related factoids:

- The County population has increased 26.3% from the 1990 census (estimated 1,033,600 as of January 2004)
- The County employee headcount has increased by 157 over this corresponding period (1.3% total increase; does not include FCPS)
- In FY 1991, there were 13.57 County positions per 1,000 residents; for FY2005 the ratio is 11.06 County employees per 1,000 residents (does not include FCPS)
- During this 14 year period, the County has opened more than 150 County facilities (such as libraries, fire & rescue stations, and police stations; does not include FCPS)
- Each penny that the Board of Supervisors may cut from the Real Estate tax rate means that \$14.5 million must be trimmed from the County's budget (or a penny increase would add the same revenue to the budget)
- Each penny that the Board of Supervisors may cut from the Real Estate tax rate means that the average taxpayer would save about \$36 (or a penny increase would cost each taxpayer the same amount).

Real estate taxes are the primary source of revenue for Virginia local governments. In this budget, almost 61% of the revenue is provided by the real estate tax (up from 51% four years ago). Personal Property (vehicle) taxes provide 17% of the revenue, and other local taxes provide 14%. The personal property tax rate (\$4.57 per \$100 assessed

value) is proposed to remain the same.

So why is there so much dependence upon the real estate tax rate? Part of the answer is that Virginia is a "Dillon Rule" state, which basically means that state government has reserved all legislative and tax power and control for itself, except that which has been specifically given to localities. Other than real estate taxes, over 90% of all County revenue sources are controlled, capped, or limited by the state.

This imbalance (over-dependence on real estate taxation) is very troubling. Cities (Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax City, etc.) are legally able to diversify their revenue stream and do not have this type of challenge. Counties, originally conceived as rural areas instead of heavily populated suburbs with dense housing, today do not have the legal authority to adjust a myriad of potential taxes, fees, and other revenue sources. If local government was allowed to place taxes on tobacco, transient occupancy (hotel tax), and meals, it would raise millions and provide relief for real estate taxpayers. For example, the County could realize over \$80 million in new revenue while simultaneously reducing the real estate tax rate by 6 cents. Some feel that the state should allow larger counties to diversify their revenue base like cities can.

Fairfax County also has a demanding populace with high expectations. There is a constituency or advocacy group for many special interests. When suggestions are made to cut or reduce a program or service, very vocal constituencies strongly show their concern.

Citizens expect their local elected officials and their local government employees to be responsive and efficient. Many constituents also expect immediate answers and solutions to a wide variety of issues and problems -- some of which may or may not be

appropriate for local government to always engage upon and resolve.

Every local government agency and department has undergone strategic planning initiatives to define its core mission and purpose and ensure that resources are being effectively deployed. Unnecessary positions have been cut (with many re-deployed to public safety departments). The County has received independent national and international recognition for its efficient operation, excellent management, the quality of life factors in the community, and its effective use of e-government (24x7 government transactions and information via the web). Some functions have been sourced to the private sector. All areas are doing more with less.

Some citizens think that local government is already too large and should cut and reduce programs and services and staffing. Other people think that the local government already has enough revenue and should simply live within its means and not expand. Still others think that revenue increases should be capped or be held within some type of range. Aren't those worthy goals? Doesn't each one of us have to live within our means and adjust spending depending upon our personal situations?

Sometimes, taxpayers are not aware that a Federal or state law may mandate a new requirement on a locality. Some of these have local resource requirements, but they are passed on to the locality as unfunded mandates. Local government must also react to and be ready for certain statistics and demographics. As more homes have been built in the western portion of the County, more students are now here that need an education. The new residents expect quick response times from Fire & Rescue and Police personnel, so more Public Safety buildings and equipment and personnel are required. And new residents want more libraries and recreation facilities

(and so on).

Another big factor is the Public School system. They currently receive 53% of the County's budget (they also receive additional state and federal funding). Increasing numbers of school-aged children in new neighborhoods require additional funding to open new facilities and provide additional instructors. And by most measures, FCPS schools are truly some of the best public schools in the nation.

There are numerous special education programs within the schools. And there are families with special needs children that expect the local schools to provide their "differently-abled" children with an education. Some of these programs are very expensive to operate when looked at on a per-student basis. But to the families and children involved, the benefits are enormous. So what is the appropriate level of funding for education? And how do we consider that tangible yet intangible factor of how closely does an investment in good schools relate to increases in our real estate values?

Some have proposed that the County should be more restrictive in its zoning or extract large impact fees for new developments. Shouldn't developers have to pay fees for each new dwelling unit that will soon be inhabited by people wanting roads and schools and public safety and libraries and recreation and human services, etc.? Again, current state laws regulate the ways the County can extract concessions from local developers (legal development proffers are supposed to be voluntary from the developer or land owner). Note that if these impact fees were applied, it would still be the homeowner who ultimately pays for it (the increased costs would likely be rolled into the per unit prices of the dwelling units, rather than be taken out of the developer's profit).

Other people feel that there are still a large number of social problems and issues in our County that still need to be addressed. Many County residents do not speak English, have a low education, cannot find affordable housing and decent jobs, and request special assistance from their local government. What level of programs and services is appropriate? Do you believe there is a large issue about homeless people in the County? If not, it is because there is an adequately funded program with adequately trained personnel using adequate facilities to deal with it. Addressing the myriad of human services issues and concerns requires significant funding and staffing considerations. There are no easy answers with consensus.

Should the County fund and staff multiple helicopters for its Police Department? Should the County's Health Department provide dental services for 3,700 low income children? Should the Libraries shorten their hours of operation or eliminate Children's reading programs? Should the Police Department reduce the number of Middle School resource officers? Should the Community Services Board reduce its high school alcohol and drug intervention programs (affecting 324 youth and families)? Should two new School Aged Child Care centers not be opened in elementary schools? Should the County's Consumer Protection Division be closed? Should the County reduce its Child Care Assistance and Referral program? Should fees be charged for seniors to attend senior centers? Should per hour or per participant fees be charged to sports leagues to use the outdoor recreation fields? Should the schools and teachers be required to increase class size by one pupil per classroom to save money?

Voters have sent mixed messages to elected officials (voting for a reduction in the car tax; defeating proposals to increase the sales tax to pay for local transportation needs;

regularly supporting bonds for new schools and public safety facilities; and in November 2003 defeating candidates that ran on a no tax increase platform or capped tax increase). We all know that our transportation situation is very bad and that the primary entity with major road responsibility (state VDOT) won't have significant funding for Northern Virginia's needs for years. So what are we going to do about it? Is the answer more roads, or private/public partnerships, or mass transit rail, or more busses, or special occupancy or toll lanes? Or should we be planning future developments so most people live very close to the areas where they work, go to school, eat, shop, and play? There are no easy answers.

Today, the federal government provides only 1.5% of the revenue for Fairfax County's budget. And the Commonwealth of Virginia provides only 2.8% of the revenue for the County's budget. The majority of state income taxes paid by Fairfax County taxpayers go into Richmond's General Assembly coffers for redistribution to other areas of the Commonwealth. **Out of every \$1.00 in state income tax that Fairfax County residents give to the Commonwealth, our locality receives only 19 cents back.** Our local economic engine "fuels" many needs in the rest of the state. But many feel that the state needs to redirect a larger portion of the revenue received from Fairfax County back to us. Of course, budget deficits at the federal and state levels each year result in a reduction of external funds for each local County.

Another "wild card" factor in all of this is the annual Virginia General Assembly budget process. As this is being written, the House of Delegates, the State Senate, and the Governor all have proposed different state tax increase measures. Each of these will result in different amounts that are reimbursed to the Counties – including very

important local school funding reimbursements. And of course those budget amounts directly impact the decisions each locality must make.

Despite all of the issues and concerns, the County remains a very desirable locality in which to live with very low crime statistics and diverse cultural and entertainment activities. Many people want to live and work here, and many employers desire the demographics of the local work force. And many taxpayers are generally satisfied with their quality of life and the level of government programs and services.

All of the budget facts and stats in this write up are based upon the February 2004 advertised (proposed) budget. During March and April, the local elected officials will make their own assessment of the budget proposal, listen to the competing requirements, obtain input from constituents, and make their own budget and/or tax rate changes (increases or decreases). Several members of the Board of Supervisors have stated that to help offset the rising increase in real estate assessments they want to provide some tax relief by reducing the real estate rate by 1-2 cents. One member wants a 5 cent reduction.

Both of these statements are true:

- A 2 cent reduction would reduce County-wide tax revenue by \$29 million.
- A 2 cent reduction would reduce the taxes owed by the average real estate taxpayer by \$72.

Those who believe the local government already has too much revenue will

emphasize the savings of \$29 million that would be put back into the pockets of the taxpayers. Those who believe that the schools should be fully funded would say it is not worth hurting the quality of education for the cost of one \$72 family meal in a nice restaurant.

If the County is required to fully fund the Schools' budget request, then a rate reduction may not be possible (without finding additional budget reductions). If any tax rate adjustment happens, then all of the figures in this article would of course be adjusted somewhat.

Do you have strong opinions about the budget or the priorities of the County? There are several opportunities for your views to be heard and input received:

- Write or e-mail your elected representatives
- Hunter Mill District Supervisor Cathy Hudgins will hold a public meeting on the budget on Wednesday, March 24 at 7:00 pm in the Vienna Community Center
- Full public hearings on the budget will be conducted by the Board of Supervisors during March 29-31 at the Fairfax County Government Center (these can be viewed on Cox Cable 16).

The Board will formally adopt the budget on April 26.

Comprehensive county budget information can be found at:

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/gov/omb