

City of Alexandria, Virginia
City Council Public Hearing, Monday, March 10, 2014

Docket Item #2: Public Hearing on the FY 2015 Operating Budget
And 2015-2024 Capital Budget

Written Comments of Donald N. Buch, Livermore Lane, Alexandria
Addressed Verbally at the Public Hearing

I commend the City Manager and his staff for a much clearer and more focused budget than those we have traditionally been provided. At this juncture I do have several specific comments:

1. **Metrics**: I believe the public would like to know not only what our money is being spent on but if it is being spent wisely. Not only do we need metrics but we need to include ones that are derived from more than our own past performance.
2. **Four Year Outlook**: I note that we no longer have a 10 year operating projection, but only 4. That said, the four years are concerning enough:
 - 2.1. If we have a high growth economy, we are projected to have a balanced operating budget over the four years following FY 2015;
 - 2.2. With medium growth, we are projected to have an operating deficit of \$88M;
 - 2.3. With slow growth – which is not unheard of – we’d have an operating deficit of \$184M.

I would ask what we are doing now to address those possibilities and would suggest that praying should not be considered a viable option.

3. **Commercial vs. Residential**: We continually hear about the premium value of commercial development given that it pays far more in taxes than the cost of the City services it requires. In contrast, residential development does the opposite, paying taxes that fall far short of covering the cost of the City services it draws.

With that in mind, could we get some specific illustrations of “real” numbers? It strikes me that we repeatedly see properties approved for commercial development only to subsequently find them appealing to switch to residential. In the future, can the public see an evaluation of the direct financial impacts of allowing such a change? Do we lose previously promised proffers? Do incentives that were offered for commercial development then get withdrawn, despite the change in use from a net tax contributor to a continual net draw on City funds?

A “cost/benefit analysis” would be especially valuable in understanding the ramifications of the two major hotels that are now being converted to residential apartments.

4. **Helping Our Existing Residents First**: I am concerned about the extent and circumstances of the less fortunate in our community. We have 300 homeless, 4800 families on food stamps, 56% of ACPS students on free or subsidized lunches. Despite the critical impact of early childhood education, we read of ACPS having to omit 11 pre-K teachers from its budget. We repeatedly hear of reductions in social and mental health services.



Yet I read that we are cutting more than 13 FTEs from Health and Human Services. And I read that we are going to spend \$9.2M on "affordable housing"; no specifics are given. To what extent will we be spending precious funds to attract newcomers to our City when we still have so much to do to assist the less fortunate already in our midst?

I would make the same request of affordable housing as I have of commercial and residential development: what is the true, fully-loaded cost of providing a typical affordable unit? Including such things as land offered free of charge; including educating the children (which number 4.7 times as many students per household than the remainder of the households in Alexandria); including social services. I am not begrudging anyone benefitting from this program; I am simply saying we ought to understand what it truly costs when we are making judgments of how best to allocate limited resources.

Finally, in this regard, I would note that \$5.2M of the \$9.2M budgeted for FY 2015 apparently comes from funds carried over from unspent 2014 funding. That would seem to beg the question that, if these are important programs, why is almost 60% of the 2014 funding going unspent?

City of Alexandria Budget Hearing

March 10, 2014

Testimony – Melissa Feld

Advisory Board, Healthy Families Virginia – Alexandria Program

Mr. Mayor and Members of City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the need for the city's continued support for Healthy Families Alexandria, a program of Northern Virginia Family Services that receives a grant from the Children's Fund. My name is Melissa Feld and I am a resident of Alexandria. I am also a member of the Advisory Board for the Healthy Families Alexandria program.

The Healthy Families America model is a strategy to improve child health, strengthen families, improve school readiness and prevent harm to the most vulnerable in our society. This is an important part of the City's strategy of engaging families who are at risk of poor child outcomes. HFA has been part of the City's safety network for vulnerable families since 1993 and has served over 5,000 families.

One way we have served is through the work of many hours of home visits by Family Support Workers. This has helped improve child health and development, by promoting positive parenting and helping prevent and break the cycle of child abuse and neglect.

We are all aware of the value of investing in early childhood development. There is a connection between adverse childhood experiences, such as child abuse and issues facing parents such as physical and mental health and substance abuse. We now know that the connection extends to employability, life expectancy, and public safety. The most recent research identifies neglect during the first 2 years of life to be devastating and long lasting.

The most frequent cause is maternal depression, one of the many risk factors we screen for with program participants. Healthy Families Alexandria works with expectant parents and their children up to three years after birth.

As evidence of Healthy Families Alexandria successes, child abuse and neglect among our participants is **less** than 1% a particularly notable outcome given that over half of participating mothers report being abused as children. Last year we served over 200 families with salient results.

Unfortunately, for Healthy Families, the combination of the previous cuts and the proposed 5.5% reduction in funding for the Alexandria Fund for Human Services translates into a significant number of families that we can impact and help at a critical development time.

The cost benefit of providing our preventative services saves the city (tax-payers?) substantial amounts in intervention. A significant economic impact will be made by ensuring that at-risk children (babies, toddlers and preschoolers) get the early support they require for success.

This money is an investment in our great city and we need your leadership. Young families in the city need your help. The city is a major community partner and we need that to stay. Please do not cut funding from programs that help our families in need.

As University of Chicago Professor and Nobel Laureate in economics James Heckman said in regard to early childhood, "The question is not where to cut. The question is where to invest, and in what." We believe that it is in all of our best interests to continue investing in Healthy Families.

Thank you.

Melissa Feld
Advisory Board
Healthy Families Virginia – Alexandria Program

From: Adrienne Fikes on behalf of ACHSO, PLTI and herself

To: Mayor and City Council
Budget Public Hearing
3/10/14

Good evening Mayor and Council Members, City Manager and staff, and all of you who care about Alexandria's future. I am Adrienne Fikes, here as a citizen and taxpayer, as Executive Director of the Parent Leadership Training Institute of Alexandria (PLTI), and as a member of the Alexandria Council of Human Service Organizations (ACHSO).

I am here tonight to ask that you restore the Alexandria Fund for Human Services (AFHS) for FY2015 to the FY2014 level, increasing the City Manager's proposed budget by \$111,829 dollars. We thank you for your ongoing support and remind you how important it is to maintain this very special community.

I've lived here for 15 years. I decided to move to Alexandria to raise my daughter here. I sent her off to college years ago and I hope to be here for many years to come. Alexandria has been a caring community that has focused on the needs of its citizens. It is important to me that we do not diminish the diversity of Alexandria's population. We are enriched by it.

I volunteered to get involved with the Parent Leadership Training Institute of Alexandria, in 2006 because my professional experience in leadership and organizational development allowed me to immediately see the power this program had to bring new voices to all of our community tables, boards, commissions, and schools. I know many of you have seen the evidence of that over the last 7 years we have had PLTI in Alexandria. We are collaborating with other non-profits and are in partnership with Alexandria City Public Schools. PLTI is becoming THE resource other organizations and city initiatives call to expand their own capacity.

PLTI gives more residents the confidence to find their voice and actively engage in our community. We are the step stool helping more voices stand up, show up, and speak out about the things that make Alexandria a viable, welcoming, vibrant place to live.

Our PLTI graduates are performing the work the city says you care about. Several members of PLTI helped facilitate the series of community discussions for What's Next Alexandria. PLTI Graduate Jeff Murphy, says, "PLTI has given me the confidence to step outside my comfort zone. Before PLTI, I was comfortable just joining groups, but since I enrolled in PLTI I have: been appointed to 2 commissions by City Council, co-chair the Superintendent's Student Achievement Advisory Committee, joined a youth literacy committee, and led or been involved in several initiatives for children. His wife Jennifer (also a PLTI grad) has expanded her project and taught kids financial literacy.

If you visit the city recreation centers, you are likely to see PLTI graduate Pamela Newton offering cooking demos and shopping tips to combat the type II diabetes impacting our children. Lavon Curtis is running a youth peer mentoring group that has high school student volunteering in the Charles Houston Rec Center's after school program. There are more stories than I have time to tell.

When you look to the many other wonderful community organizations that are improving the lives of children, youth and families, there is a chance you will find a PLTI graduate paying the AFHS funding back exponentially in volunteer hours and capacity building.

I thank the Mayor for working with our students on several community projects, the City for hosting the very successful national training here in Alexandria that is returning for the third year in July, and all of you for your ongoing support.

As we look at the impact PLTI of Alexandria is having on the city, there is strong evidence that we are not just impacting parents, we are simultaneously impacting how the next generation is showing up to lead right now in schools and the larger community. The children are learning the same civic leadership skills that are transforming their parents into engaged thoughtful community leaders.

This year, our Children's Leadership Training Institute is working on a project to encourage more recycling in the schools and their neighborhoods. If you go into the city recreation centers, you will see PLTI graduates. When you visit your boards and commissions, you are likely to be sitting next to a PLTI graduate.

As you know, the members of the Alexandria Council of Human Service Organizations are nonprofits serving Alexandria's neediest residents, along with City's Community and Human Services agencies. I am here tonight to ask that you restore the Alexandria Fund for Human Services (AFHS) for FY2015 to the FY2014 level, increasing the City Manager's proposed budget by \$111,829. We thank you for your ongoing support and remind you how important it is to maintain this very special community.