BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
WORK SESSION
JUNE 26, 2024

CALL TO ORDER – A work session of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors was called to order by Meg Bohmke, Chairman, at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 26, 2024 in Conference Room ABC, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford VA.

ROLL CALL – The following members were present: Meg Bohmke, Chairman; Tinesha O. Allen, Vice-Chair; Deuntay Diggs; Darrell E. English; Monica L. Gary; Crystal L. Vanuch; Dr. Pamela Yeung

Also in attendance were Craig Meadows, Interim County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Julia Holmes, Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEMS

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY DISCUSSION

Ian Ollis, Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO) Administrator said that he and Dr. John Ridout, Transportation Planner at FAMPO, would be giving this presentation to the Board. He said that today, they would offer more details regarding the Regional Transportation Authority. He said that Dr. Ridout could answer more specific questions about the financial information. He said that as they discussed at the Board of Supervisors' last regular meeting, the colors on the map provided were representative of the existing regional transportation authorities on the three major highway corridors in Virginia, except for the blue color.

Mr. Ollis said that the yellow signified the I-81 corridor, beige was the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority on the I-95 and the Beltway, green represented the Richmond Central Virginia Transportation Authority on the I-95 and to the east on the I-64, and finally, red denoted the Hampton Roads Authority, which covered Hampton Roads, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, etcetera. He said that the blue represented the George Washington Regional Commission, which housed FAMPO, and currently, it was not a transportation authority. He said that it was the only region on those three highways without a transportation authority.

Mr. Ollis said that he previously mentioned that FAMPO was also the fastest-growing planning district commission region in Virginia, as confirmed by staff member Matthew Lane. He said that the growth had been consistent since around 1960. He said that consequently, they faced all the transportation issues of a rapidly growing area. He said that if they had a transportation authority, it could provide funds to address congestion, traffic, and other problems resulting from population expansion.

Mr. Ollis said that the current transportation authorities included NVTA in Northern Virginia, CVTA in Central Virginia, which was in Richmond, HRTAC in Hampton Roads, Transportation Advisory Accountability Commission, and the I-81 corridor, which was a hybrid organization. He said that each authority had its unique method of dividing funding. He said that the Central Virginia Transportation Authority, situated in the middle, returned 50% of the funds received to the local authority where they were raised, used 15% for regional transit, and allocated the remaining amount for transportation authority projects. He said that in contrast, Hampton Roads used all the funds for regional projects and provided no money back to local jurisdictions.

Mr. Ollis said that regarding the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, they allocated 30% of incoming funding back to the jurisdictions and spent 70% of the funds by the authority on regional transportation authority projects. He said that during a previous discussion at FAMPO in the subcommittee, a majority of members suggested that the 70%/30% split should be a model for a transportation authority if one was established in this region. He said that therefore, 30% of the funding would go back to the jurisdiction where the money originated, and 70% would be used by the transportation authority.

Mr. Ollis said that they were tasked with simulating what might happen if there was a transportation authority present by using several projects and then examining the potential cost of those projects while considering how funds entering the transportation authority could be utilized to finance those projects. He said that they selected one project for each jurisdiction within the George Washington Regional Commission, which consisted of five jurisdictions. He said that they provided a high-level estimate for this example, focusing on funding projects at approximately 33% of their value. He said that the reason for choosing 33% instead of 100% was crucial to understand.

Ms. Ollis said that they intended not to assume that they would receive full funding for the transportation authority and immediately build the project. He said that instead, they proposed using these funds as a local match for either Smart Scale or federal grants. He said that in the case of federal grants, a 20% match was required. He said that for example, if one needed $200 million to fund a project, they would need to provide a $40 million local match. He said that this could be challenging for areas with smaller populations and revenues. He said that the purpose of this authority was to help provide that large local match component.

Mr. Ollis said that projects would still require applying for federal grants or Smart Scale funding, but the local match would significantly increase their chances of success. He said that places like Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia had successfully funded high-value projects due to their ability to provide a substantial local match. He said that they acknowledged that their region had not always been able to provide the local match required, given their smaller population and lower incomes. He said that as a last resort, if all other funding avenues have been exhausted and no external funding is available, then they could consider fully funding projects at 100%.

Ms. Gary asked if there was information regarding the potential of less than five jurisdictions participating in the regional transportation authority included in the numbers provided.

Ms. Bohmke said that yes, it was included in all the data sheets provided.

Dr. Yeung asked if Mr. Ollis could clarify the percentages of 33% associated with the example project selection provided.

Mr. Ollis said that they were requested by the subcommittee to choose a selection of projects that were relevant to localities and determine how they could be financed using an RTA. He said that they picked one project per jurisdiction, as well as the highway as an extra choice. He said that this example demonstrated funding for larger-scale projects. He said that they proposed funding all projects at approximately one-third initially, then they would apply for Smart Scale or federal grants to cover the remaining two-thirds of the funding. He said that the initial 33% provided enough match to score well in Smart Scale and secure the rest of the funding through that process.

Ms. Bohmke said that to clarify, the slide provided was a sampling of projects within each jurisdiction.

Mr. Ollis said that was correct; there was nothing binding about the selection of projects on the slide.

Ms. Bohmke said that they could choose different projects if they wanted to.

Mr. Ollis said that was correct. He said that if they wanted to choose to pursue funding for another project, such as Garrisonville Road, they could do that instead. He said that it would be up to the authority to decide which projects would receive funding. He said that the percentage of 33% was an example; they could make it 20% or 40% or any other percentage they wanted. He said that in fact, they had the option to fully fund the project at 100%.

Ms. Bohmke said that at the subcommittee meeting, they conducted a poll of all the jurisdictions present in the room. She said that the subcommittee could not formally vote on the matter, but a majority of those polled indicated that if an RTA were to be established today, they would propose a 70%/30% split. She said that this was not a binding decision for the potential RTA; it was merely part of the discussion.

Mr. Ollis said that yes, they had just produced examples. He said that in order to fund those projects, they would need approximately $30 million per year. He said that this then led him to the next point. He said that he had requested Dr. Ridout to create an example schedule to determine how much funding they would require annually if they needed to fund those projects. He said that they spread these projects across six years and discovered that in order to cover one-third of their total cost, they would need approximately $30 million per year over the course of six years. He said that this assumed that as a transportation authority, they wished to tackle all of those projects.

Ms. Bohmke said that to clarify, that was under the condition that all jurisdictions in Planning District 16 participated in the RTA.

Mr. Ollis said that that was correct. He said that if only the City of Fredericksburg and Stafford County were members of the RTA, they would first remove all projects unrelated to these two jurisdictions. He said that as a result, the costs would significantly decrease because those projects would no longer be funded. He said that the income would also decline since it would come solely from the participating jurisdictions. He said that the reduction in both income and expenses would balance out. He said that they could still perform a similar analysis but exclude non-member projects and have funding specifically for member projects.

Dr. Yeung asked if which legislators of Stafford and Fredericksburg would support the RTA at this juncture.

Mr. Ollis said that he had not discussed it with legislators of these two jurisdictions. He said that during the policy committee meeting, Senator McPike requested a copy of the memo summary, which he sent to hm. He said that the office of Delegate Josh Cole also reached out to ask if they could answer some questions. He said that they did not provide his office with any documents nor discuss any proposals. He said that they simply inquired about the progress of their process and general information.

Ms. Vanuch said that new information had been received from a conversation with Senator McPike, who stated that he was no longer interested in pursuing RTA legislation further due to Spotsylvania voting on a resolution not to participate in the RTA. She said that Senator McPike said that he would only push for an RTA if all impacted jurisdictions were favorable of it.

Ms. Vanuch said that this development was significant because FAMPO's investigation and creation of the committee had been based on Senator McPike's previous interest. She said that Spotsylvania decided not to move forward, and Stafford had some concerns. She said that in her own words, she believed that competition with school funding was paramount in this matter. She said that to make it lucrative, they would need $30 million in annual funding, which could only be achieved by doing the sales tax numbers.

Ms. Vanuch said that this would directly impact their legislative proposal for a 1% sales tax on school construction. She said that having this information had changed some legislators' and jurisdictions' directions. She said that she did not want to put their lobbyists on the spot but knew that their firm had the conversation with Senator McPike. She asked if they would be willing to address it to save time, as this proposal may not come to fruition on the legislative front.

Kathy Burcher from Advantus Strategies said that as part of the conversation last week when they were discussing legislative interests, she was able to check in with Senator McPike. She said that Senator McPike was very concerned about ensuring all localities participate for maximum benefit, and his understanding was that there may only be two participating. He said that he specifically mentioned that this aspect should be examined before moving forward.

Ms. Bohmke said that for the record, King George also sent an email, which was attached, indicating that they did not wish to participate in the RTA. She said that it was mentioned that Caroline has not formally commented on this issue yet. She said that this newly obtained information remained current. She said that at the last subcommittee meeting, she spoke on behalf of Stafford and her colleagues, who were present and agreed with her, Supervisor Gary and Supervisor Vanuch, stating that they would have Mr. Ollis attend the board meeting as before and then present at their work session today, just like they were doing now. She said that this was new information that had recently come to light.

Ms. Burcher said that she had another conversation with Senator McPike last Thursday, so she apologized but it was something the Board had requested of her. She said that to emphasize the point, this would be a decision made by the General Assembly, but Advantus wanted to make sure that everyone had all the necessary information about where legislators' thoughts were currently at as they decided what would be best for Stafford.

Ms. Gary asked if it was correct that it was not an absolute refusal from Senator McPike, but that he believed there needed to be more work done to form consensus, so they should continue with receiving the information.

Ms. Burcher said absolutely. She said that this was just information for the Board as they put all the pieces together. She said that again, the information they asked for last week was incredibly important as they made these decisions. She said that this was all about the Board as a whole getting the full picture of the current status so that if something did come forward, they could ensure they were influencing the legislation or assisting in refining the language of any proposed legislation in order to best serve Stafford's interests.

Mr. Ollis said that they would leave it up to the Board to discuss this with the senior politicians, and he would continue to convey the paperwork of the process. He said that the slide displayed showed that if there were only two jurisdictions involved, not every project may be pursued. He said that different projects could be chosen instead. He said that Stafford or the City might have their preferences; however, this was something for them to decide. He said that regarding the financial pages, the next page shows a 70%/30% split, which was the preferred option in the previously mentioned poll.

Mr. Ollis said that the following page illustrates a 70%/30% split for only Stafford and the City of Fredericksburg. He apologized for placing an outdated version of the numbers in the slide presentation. He said that the handout on their table was more recent and easier to read due to its large format. He said that the updated the figures when they received confirmation of tax income from 2023, which was not available initially. He said that therefore, the printed copy in front of them contained more accurate predictions. He said that to reiterate, they were only predictions.

Mr. Ollis said that the last page in their printed copy showed the numbers for each proposed tax or the General Assembly's contribution, which was essentially a replacement for the GrantUs tax that has been allocated to Hampton Roads for their tunnel and bridge project. He said that they cannot retrieve those funds due to political reasons. He said that it was allocated by the General Assembly to Hampton Roads and they could not request them to return it. He said that Senator McPike proposed in his draft legislation last year that a state allocation of about $15 million per year could be provided for a potential RTA here, but this was not the GrantUs tax returning; it was in lieu of it being returned.

Mr. English asked for clarification regarding the differing fuel tax numbers for each locality listed in the provided data sheets.

Mr. Ollis said that there used to be a fuel tax for commuter rail in the jurisdictions, including the City of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania. He said that a majority of this fuel tax was utilized to cover VRE services' expenses. He said that whatever remained after paying VRE's contribution returned to the County, albeit in a smaller amount. He said that the State General Assembly decided to expand this so-called commuter rail tax as a gas tax across the entire Commonwealth.

Mr. Ollis said that now, jurisdictions without commuter rail still paid what was once called the commuter rail fuel tax. He said that however, they did not receive direct benefits from it since they did not have commuter services in their locality. He said that for instance, King George now paid this gas tax but did not benefit directly because they lack commuter rail services. He said that what happened to those funds that were not allocated to projects was that they went into the Smart Scale fund. He said that if they had a successful Smart Scale application and received funding, they effectively were receiving some of this gas tax back fund that transportation project.

Mr. Ollis said that if they either did not submit Smart Scale projects for funding or their projects scored badly, they would not get that money back and it would go towards the winning project. He said that in areas that did have transportation authorities such as Richmond, Northern Virginia, and Hampton Roads, if they did not have commuter rail, they get those gas taxes back into the transportation authority. He said that the authority could then allocate the funds either as a percentage back to the jurisdictions or towards transportation projects in their region.

Mr. Ollis said that in Richmond's Central Virginia Transportation Authority and their MPO, they did not have commuter rail services to be funded, so their gas tax goes to their transportation authority, which allocates it to various transportation projects like transit operations and new roadways. He said that the transportation authority served as a means of receiving back the gas tax without there being a commuter rail system. He said that it was the only way to allow jurisdictions like King George County and Caroline County to regularly access the gas taxes levied in those Counties through the extension of what was once known as the commuter rail tax.

Ms. Bohmke asked if those localities had access to those funds if they were not part of an RTA, or if they only received those funds because they had an RTA.

Mr. Ollis said that if a locality had commuter rail, they had signed a contract to receive some of those taxes to pay for the commuter rail. He said that if a locality did not have commuter rail, they did not receive any of that funding unless they were part of a transportation authority. He said that the money would go back into the Smart Scale pot. He said that to reiterate, the only method for Caroline and King George to acquire cash back was through joining the RTA. He said that the provided estimated dollar value served as an approximate indication of what they might potentially earn.

Mr. English said that he assumed those localities were aware of that.

Mr. Ollis said that he made them aware during their last two meetings, but they had a political reason not to join the RTA.

Mr. Ollis said that the provided table displayed each jurisdiction's annual income from various taxes over six years. He said that the side of the table showed the income for each tax type in different years, and the bottom indicated the total income for all six years. He said that this was a 70%/30% split, meaning the amount listed under the jurisdiction's name represented the cash it received for participating in the Transportation Authority per year. He said that the total at the bottom would return to the jurisdiction, which the County could then allocate the funds to transportation projects.

Mr. Ollis said that the legislation was broad enough that it let the RTA decide what to do with the money so long as it was related to transportation. He said that therefore, they could use it to pay the salary of a transportation planner, build sidewalks, build a road, or anything else related to transportation. He said that politicians and County administrators had the potential opportunity to strategize how to utilize this income. He said that it was not against the law; they just did not often discuss it. He said that if a jurisdiction received this income, they could offset transportation projects currently funded by local taxes.

Mr. Ollis said that they had options such as to give the saved tax money back to residents as a tax reduction or allocate it to education if needed. He said that alternatively, they could double up on transportation projects funding. He said that the money could only be spent on transportation, but if a jurisdiction was already investing heavily in transportation, they could offset those costs with this income. He said that it was legally allowed, but the decision was political. He said that he did not advocate for any specific option; he was merely explaining what was legally permissible.

Ms. Vanuch asked what constituted the total revenue for a $0.005 sales tax increase that Stafford would contribute to the RTA on the provided spreadsheet.

Dr. John Ridout, Transportation Planner, said that the retail sales tax, located as a $0.005 in the second-to-right column, accounted for 70% of the overall income. He said that including the remaining 30% would result in the complete revenue figure.

Mr. Ollis said that they would receive $3.8 million annually, specifically in 2025, as it represented 30% of the total retail tax levied. He said that the remaining 70% was included in the $14 million allocated to the transportation authority.

Ms. Vanuch said that she would like to understand how much Stafford would be paying in versus how much they would be receiving back. She said that it appeared that the City of Fredericksburg would be benefiting from the Stafford taxpayers if they were the only two localities that participated in the RTA. She said that it initially seemed to be beneficial when other localities were participating due to their similar tax numbers, but the City of Fredericksburg did not have similar numbers.

Mr. Ollis said that if there were only two jurisdictions, then there would be two representatives from each jurisdiction sitting on the Board of the Transportation Authority. He said that he was not aware of any proposals, including Senator McPike's proposal and all others he had seen, that proposed giving non-elected individuals votes on that Board. He said that Stafford Supervisors would serve on that Board with members of the City of Fredericksburg City Council and possibly a Senator or Delegate.

Ms. Vanuch said that she was concerned about the politicization of local sales tax revenues at a state level for regional transportation projects. She said that Stafford County's tax revenue was much higher than the City of Fredericksburg's.

Ms. Bohmke said that looking at it dollar for dollar, it was an analysis at a much higher level. She said that this process was all about regionalism. She said that one of the reasons Spotsylvania did not want to participate was for similar reasons as Ms. Vanuch, which was that they did not want to split their local money up with other localities. She said that it was a regional effort to address regional transportation issues. She said that she completely understood Ms. Vanuch's point, and that aspect was why they had held so many subcommittee meetings and had many robust conversations about this.

Mr. Ollis said that one practical realization was that the City had limited land remaining for constructing roads. He said that if one examined the actual CMAC and SDBG funds allocated over the past five years, it was evident that the City of Fredericksburg had received very little of it. He said that Spotsylvania had received the largest amount. He said that the City primarily received funding for bike paths and similar projects. He said that their most significant project was Gateway Boulevard. He said that they asked the City if they would apply for Smart Scale funding or CMAC and SDBG money, but they said no. he said that they applied for bike path projects. He said that there were very few spaces of open land in Fredericksburg for a brand new road to be built.

Ms. Bohmke said that the City of Fredericksburg was more interested in improvements to their roads in order to make them more efficient.

Ms. Vanuch said that she understood the focus on regionalism, but without the County of Spotsylvania, it was not regional. She said that based on the numbers provided, it appeared they were giving up a lot of their sales tax.

Mr. Ollis said that they would be giving the funds back to themselves.

Ms. Vanuch said that no, it would be given to the City of Fredericksburg, as they had significant financial requests and plans for road infrastructure. She said that without Spotsylvania's participation, it was difficult for this proposal to move forward.

Ms. Gary said that FAMPO was requesting feedback from the Board about how they wished to potentially inform future legislation on this issue. She said that it was not about setting up a tax but about suggesting what they would want this RTA to look like if it were to be implemented. She said that they had previously submitted legislation three years in a row and then paused it.

Mr. Ollis said that they did so for three years in a row, and then they asked them to come to their meeting in November, but Stafford asked them to not put in the legislation this past cycle because they wanted to discuss the potential options and make up their minds. He said that as a result, there was no legislation introduced in November.

Ms. Gary said that all that was expected was for the Board of Supervisors to provide their input on what they would prefer to see if the RTA was implemented.

Dr. Yeung said that the data provided by Mr. Ollis was beneficial for informing their future actions in this regard. She said that it was necessary for the Board to discuss this with their delegate members regarding what they were willing to move forward for them. She said that Ms. Vanuch and Ms. Gary were on the legislative committee, so they would be working with Advantus to determine their options.

Ms. Bohmke said that they were planning to discuss their legislative program at the July 2 meeting; however, they decided to postpone it until the August 20 meeting in order to provide more time for the Board. She said that it might also be moved to the first meeting in September. She said that they wanted to wait until all members of the Board had an opportunity to review all the data, comprehend the RTA, and acknowledge the efforts made by Dr. Ridout on all these formulas and cells as well as his work in gathering a significant amount of information. She thanked him and the FAMPO team for their assistance.

Mr. Ollis said that they had calculated the total for two jurisdictions and analyzed an equation to determine which taxes would generate sufficient funding to reach a $30 million goal. He said that the model would be similar with only two or three jurisdictions involved, and there would be a target amount based on desired projects. He said that if a list of specific projects was provided, this example could be recalculated for consideration. He said that if it were just two jurisdictions, the river crossing bridge could be funded within two years by combining resources.

Mr. Ollis said that projects in years three to six could then be addressed, such as the Enon Connector or Gateway Boulevard in the City or Garrisonville Road widening in Stafford. He said that in addition to getting those millions, the local portion of 33% would come back to the jurisdiction. He said that the goal was to provide information for the members of the General Assembly. He said that the localities would make their own decisions, and the FAMPO Policy Committee would ultimately decide whether to send a letter or follow whatever the process may be. He said that they would facilitate whatever actions the committee instructed them to perform.

Ms. Gary asked what the effects would be if they chose not to pursue the RTA when considering the restructuring of Smart Sale at the state level. She asked if Smart Scale was more competitive, the localities would have to put up more money to do the projects they wished to fund. She said that they would have to generate the revenue in some way, which may mean raising taxes locally just to make their transportation projects competitive for Smart Scale.

Mr. Ollis said that the state had eliminated one aspect of SmartScale this time around, resulting in competition with the entire state instead of just their region. He said that consequently, Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia, and Richmond became their direct competitors in a way. He said that these areas had transportation authorities that contributed substantial funds for projects, so they had the necessary funding match.

Mr. Ollis said that if they did not possess a transportation authority, they would either need to submit projects without any match and hope they scored well on other aspects or raise the match within their jurisdiction and allocate it to projects from their area to remain competitive. He said that this year was anticipated to be challenging due to the numerous changes made to Smart Scale.

Mr. Ollis said that the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) approved significant modifications in February, and he believed that their scores would suffer as a result. He said that he could be mistaken, but based on discussions with VDOT staff members and others, it seemed like a difficult round ahead. He said that their previous advantages had been removed, such as the removal of the section two step, which used to benefit them.

Ms. Gary asked if the localities that would compose their RTA would be divided into smaller areas that would compete against each other and with larger RTAs.

Mr. Ollis said that yes, they would be competing with them in this current round with the projects they already submitted.

Dr. Ridout said that in addition to being a Tier 2 with Richmond, the other area they would be competing against would be Roanoke, which had a mechanism in place to partially cover the large I-81 corridor.

Mr. Allen asked if the $30 million threshold was still necessary if only two jurisdictions were participating in the RTA.

Mr. Ollis said no. He said that the $30 million was a threshold for all projects from all five jurisdictions. He said that the amount needed depended on the chosen projects. He said that the Board selected the projects, and then the funds necessary to complete those projects over time would be the amount of money they needed to raise. He said that alternatively, as suggested, they could raise one-third of it and attempt to secure the remaining balance from federal grants or Smart Scale funding. He said that altering any of the metrics would cause all the numbers to change. He said that if they reduced the number of jurisdictions involved to two and eliminated other projects, for instance, the required annual amount decreased from $30 million to $12 million.

Ms. Allen asked what the specific cost would be to Stafford if there were only two jurisdictions.

Dr. Ridout said that to arrive at the $30 million figure, they modeled it after the Central Virginia Transportation Authority. He said that they examined similar projects and took into account how much those projects contributed in their competitive process. He said that contributions ranged from 15% to 80%, depending on the project size. He said that for smaller projects, such as a $5 million project, they fully funded them without seeking bids. He said that for larger projects, they typically contributed around 25% across their 160 funded projects.

Dr. Ridout said that they used similar projects in their region, like an interstate widening and a new major limited access corridor, to determine the $30 million figure. He said that this represented what Richmond received per dollar for its projects among those discussed by the subcommittee. He said that to calculate the required funding amount, they considered how much would be needed for each project; thus, the $30 million figure was an estimate rather than a fixed amount.

Ms. Allen said that she would rather start with known participants, which would potentially be Stafford and the City. She said that since Smart Scale had changed its metrics, they were now competing against everyone. She asked if, because the RTA threshold was based on projects, and if their threshold was $12 million, they would be competitive enough for them to pursue an RTA when they would only had $12 million to compete with cities like Fairfax, Richmond, and Norfolk. She said that this was the issue she was grappling with.

Mr. Ollis said that they should calculate the cost of projects they wished to construct and determine one-third of that amount as the required funding. He said that if they planned to build the river crossing, they would need approximately $40 million to $50 million. He said that if the City was part of the RTA and collaborated on the project, joint funds could be used since it covered both jurisdictions. He said that with an annual contribution of $12 million to $14 million, it would take several years to accumulate the $40 million needed for a federal grant to construct that bridge.

Ms. Allen said that she believed the river crossing should be funded by federal and state authorities, so she would consider removing it as a potential RTA project. She asked what significant regional projects the two localities could use their taxes to fund. She asked if there was an option for them to fund only certain projects through the RTA.

Mr. Ollis said that typically, it took some time to secure the necessary funding for transportation projects. He said that their own transportation planners would provide recommendations on which initiatives they believed were most important. He said that for example, they might consider widening Garrisonville Road or establishing a new bus route as potential options. He said that any transportation project could be funded once the appropriate resources had been allocated.

Dr. Yeung asked if they could consider taxing Transurban in order to generate revenue for improving I-95.

Mr. Ollis said that the state office had indicated the contract with Transurban did not include a provision for that.

Dr. Yeung said that Fairfax was receiving funding from them in some form, and she was interested in learning how.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION; DISCUSSION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS 2025 GENERAL ASSEMBLY LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

Anthony Toigo, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, said that he had no presentation tonight but did bring their consultants from Advantus Strategies to discuss their legislative program for 2025. He said that they had developed an initial draft for the Board to consider. He said that he would like for Kathy Burcher and Lauren Gilbert to provide the Board with some outlook for the 2025 session before they took questions.

Kathy Burcher with Advantus Strategies said that regarding the transportation authority, their role was to support the Board in ensuring that any legislation contained items that Stafford wanted to move forward in that legislation. She said that they had been involved for this purpose and worked with the Board to discuss concerns with their delegation to ensure they were aware of the conversations taking place. She said that this issue was complicated, as described by Mr. Ollis and Dr. Ridout, and funding often involved a push-pull between regions in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Ms. Burcher said that they were continuing to tweak the legislative language to be reflective of what they had heard from the Board. She said that they made a change in the education piece in particular after seeing the Board last week. She said that it was important to know as they looked forward to the 2025 General Assembly session, they should remember that July 1 marked the beginning of Fiscal Year 25. She said that the General Assembly adopted a two-year budget for Fiscal Years 25 and 26. She said that there was also a caboose budget to finalize spending in the current fiscal year.

Ms. Burcher said that the adopted two-year budget would come before the General Assembly again for them to amend. She said that the odd number of years were always different, making it a short session because they only amended the adopted budget. She said that in December, the Governor would present his amendments to the two-year budget. She said that important in all of that was what they knew to be tight revenues due to work groups, including the K-12 Funding Work Group, studies and reports that were all due November 1 or December 1 of this year to inform any spending that may be available.

Ms. Burcher said that when they looked at the revenues that may be available for the General Assembly to spend, they would be getting a series of reports and recommendations on plans for the best ways to utilize those funds. She said that there had been a pushback against any look at expanding revenue options by increasing taxes across the Commonwealth, and frankly allowing localities such as Stafford to impose additional taxes in their localities. She said that they were operating under this assumption as they looked towards the 2025 session. She said that it was important to consider this as they looked at adopting Stafford's legislative program and where they were.

Ms. Burcher said that one of the primary areas the General Assembly intended to make investments in was in K-12 education due to the recommendations coming out of the JLARC report. She said that they wanted to ensure that they were building a legislative program that was deliverable on the far side while reflecting the values that the Board wanted to move forward and cared about. She said that it was a challenge of balancing these things, which was why the new language they had drafted on education, in particular, was a little more open and not as narrow. She said that they would know more as the joint committee begins meeting.

Ms. Burcher said that they had been tracking closely the General Assembly's efforts to repair some of the language included in the budget for the disabled veterans and families education program. She said that the joint committee to look at K-12 funding recommendations was supposed to meet on the day the Senate came back; however, they canceled that meeting. She said that unfortunately, the first meeting to examine K-12 funding recommendations did not occur and was awaiting rescheduling. She said that they would be tracking this closely for everyone and should be able to narrow down the language.

Ms. Burcher said that other than a few changes due to recent elections in both the 5th and 10th Congressional Districts, which were likely to lead to general elections, they would continue operating with the same delegation and administration as before. She said that the engagement from the previous session was expected to extend into this next session. She said that also, conversations about transportation funding may result in additional changes. She said that they had received some more questions based on the current draft, and they were happy to answer any further questions or hear feedback from the Board about how they would be moving forward.

Ms. Allen said that she had no faith in them getting COCA or any of their education stuff done. She said that it was not due to a lack of faith in her colleagues or Advantus Strategies, but she had no faith in their delegation to get it done. She said that this past year was a critical year for them, and the fact that some delegates suggested half of the funding was unacceptable.

Ms. Allen said that they had a unanimous Board regarding keeping teachers in the third-fastest growing school district in the Commonwealth, but that was dismissed at the state level. She said that she had no faith that it would get done at the General Assembly based on how the previous session had gone. She said that she was very pessimistic about this upcoming session and did not know what input she could give.

Ms. Bohmke said that the Commission on Youth had been studying this issue for ten years. She said that Stafford County had an idea to create a model program that could save the state money. She said that Appropriations Department staffers rejected the proposal. She said that former delegate Bob Thomas, who also served on this Board, had intense conversations with the appropriation personnel.

Ms. Bohmke said that they dismissed his input, assuming he did not know what he was talking about due to being a Supervisor. She said that despite Bob's extensive knowledge of the details, they did not take him seriously and it was frustrating. She said that regarding COCA, she was not convinced that the General Assembly would act on JLARC's recommendations because they had not changed education funding since the 1970s. She said that it seemed unlikely that they would then change it within one or two years.

Ms. Burcher she did not disagree with her assessment at all. She said that when considering the scope and scale of the recommendations from JLARC, it was no surprise to those who had worked in local government that the state was woefully underfunding their share. She said that General Assembly members also recognized this issue. She said that when looking at a $2 billion shortfall in state funding every year, it would certainly take more than a few sessions to make up for that and find the revenues needed to do so.

Ms. Bohmke said that taking into account the increase in the veterans exemption from $17 million to $19.3 million yesterday, an innovative strategy needed to be developed to secure the entire COCA funding. She said that she was ready to picket outside the Pocahontas building and hold a sign due to her strong feelings about this matter. She said that in her view, it was unfair.

Ms. Bohmke said that she doubted that any significant action would be taken within the next three to five years. She said that they may lack both the financial means and motivation to do so. She said that instead, numerous studies and analyses were likely to be conducted as part of the process. She said that as a result, Stafford County must take a courageous stance by doing something truly exceptional, not merely proposing it on paper. She said that they needed to take a stand about this.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had discussed this issue in the legislative committee. She said that she had brought up how there were differences between lobbying for local governments and industries. She said that industries had access to untapped grassroots resources which could be used to build public relations and public affairs campaigns targeting specific legislators with tailored messaging about their impacts.

Ms. Vanuch said that as a locality, they were limited by these resources because most of them approached their narrowly elected delegation and utilized the lobbyists as a resource. She said that they discussed conducting an economic analysis to obtain financial data such as comparing teacher salaries in their area with those in Prince William County and Arlington. She said that they currently had baseline talking points, but they did not have the economic analysis to provide a basis for discussing wage disparities and their impact on educator retention and recruitment, which affected test scores and rankings. She asked if Ms. Burcher had any suggestions for them.

Ms. Vanuch asked if they could commission an analysis and then use the data to build talking points for a public affairs campaign. She said that they could meet with their delegation, McPike, Durant, King, and Milde, to discuss their needs for consensus with the presentation of all the facts. She said that she wondered about the messaging around veterans tax relief. She asked if it was ineffective or how they could demonstrate during the appropriations process that Stafford was different from other localities due to General Assembly actions. She said that she would like to know the best way to message this effectively.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had tried tax relief rebates at least for ten years, which was not effective. She said that they needed to amend their strategies and launch a campaign using Facebook messages to reach all constituents, who would then target legislators with emails and talking points. She said that the School Board primarily criticized them as the Board of Supervisors, and were happy to send negative emails to the Board but not forward them to the delegation for state funding. She said that this highlighted their ineffectiveness in communication. She said that there was a distinct need to improve their messaging strategy.

Ms. Burcher said that regarding the economic impact study, she forwarded information from along the backside of the JLARC study, which contained all the formulas and data used to determine market value and what a wage market value study should look like and include. She said that the appendices also showed rankings of salaries and cost of living with non-100% COCA, with Stafford being nearly equal to all the Counties in the 100%. She said that JLARC conducted some of that analysis, but their firm could not do it for them. She said that they could encourage working with County staff to examine how JLARC pulled that data. She said that she would be glad to obtain the information JLARC provided specifically for Stafford County as quickly as possible.

Ms. Burcher said that she agreed with Ms. Vanuch's suggestion of building a coalition, which likely needed to happen. She said that Ms. Gilbert had been reaching out to colleagues across the Commonwealth regarding the impact of the disabled veterans property tax exemption in order to identify individuals who could collaborate with them and help build a broader coalition, not just as Virginia citizens but also at the General Assembly level. She said that the second part of their strategy involved launching a PR campaign after adopting their program early, which they hoped would happen in June or July.

Ms. Burcher said that this campaign should engage not only those around the table but also their constituents, encouraging them to direct their attention towards the General Assembly and take action. She said that there were multiple steps involved in this process. She said that the initial step for them was to reach out to JLARC and gather as much information as possible from them, which they would then use to develop a more effective message highlighting the economic impact of their proposal, going beyond just presenting a bar graph comparing Prince William and Stafford's statistics.

Ms. Vanuch asked if they could collaborate with Mr. Toigo on developing a scope for a PR campaign. She said that she believed they had to put funding behind this, and while investing $100,000 was a significant cost, it could result in them potentially receiving millions of dollars.

She asked if they could help Mr. Toigo create a scope for the public relations campaign. She said that this would enable them to go through the government procurement process and be prepared to commence work in November.

Ms. Burcher said that they would be able to help guide a framework around engagement, outlining what effective engagement looks like at the state level. She said that they were happy to work with Mr. Toigo and anyone on the County team to identify key components needed for successful engagement. She said that their expertise primarily was limited to ensuring that any proposed approach included elements proven to be effective at the General Assembly.

Ms. Burcher said that it was particularly important during odd-numbered years when the timeline was compressed due to budget amendments being made within 45 days. She said they aimed to build a comprehensive and efficient engagement strategy. She said that the challenges leading up to the General Assembly were heightened during winter and holiday seasons. She said they wanted to address these issues early. She said that the beginning of the school year was an opportune time for engaging families, as they were being made aware of the conditions of the schools their children were attending for the year.

Ms. Burcher said that they would be glad to work with Mr. Toigo to support engagement. She said that they were so grateful to the Board for making the trek down and knocking on doors. She said that the General Assembly had made significant investments in K-12 education over the past few years; however, these investments were not specifically targeted to address some of the issues faced by Stafford citizens. She said that it was incredibly important for the Board members to get their citizens involved in supporting their efforts.

Ms. Gary said that she had spoken with Delegate Cole, who was prepared to carry the legislation they discussed during their meeting in Senator McPike's office. She said that he had also contacted their Commissioner of Revenue and Superintendent, who had provided updated numbers regarding the revenue they were missing out on from real estate taxes for 100% disabled veterans with children in school. She said that they decided to focus on a specific issue and start with a baseline of 1% and above, similar to Stuart's approach.

Ms. Gary said that instead of requesting all the revenue back from the state, they would ask for only the portion allocated from general funds to schools, which was approximately 48% of the total amount, around $7 million. She said that it made their request smaller and more manageable as they aimed to get their foot in the door. She said that several people were ready to carry this legislation, and if the Board wanted legal to start drafting something, they would be ready to receive that request.

Mr. Toigo said that the current total disabled veterans exoneration amount is $19.3 million. He said that Mr. Mayausky stated the program was growing at a rate of 35% year over year. He said that this growth rate represented only 8% of their real estate tax base. He said that given the current tax rate of $0.9067, he estimated the number for veterans and children in schools to be about $7 million. He said that if they took 48% of that figure, they would be asking for approximately $3.5 million.

Ms. Vanuch asked what Ms. Burcher's opinion was regarding moving forward with that request.

Ms. Burcher said that Ms. Gilbert had been reaching out to other localities that had successfully implemented similar programs. She said that these localities with a large per capita impact similar to Stafford were all discussing options for overcoming the local impact, but had concerns about maintaining a veteran-friendly image. She said that there was an opportunity to focus on providing the best public services and schools for veterans in Stafford County. She said that building a coalition would be crucial for success. She said that regarding COCA, it was not included in the JLARC recommendations.

Ms. Burcher said that although Stafford trusted COCA's expertise, the JLARC report did not provide ways to evaluate this. She said that because it was unable to be supported, the General Assembly was trying to figure out what to do instead. She said that forming a coalition moving forward, developing language, and incorporating it into the legislative program. She said that they had not yet adopted it; therefore, they should continue working on identifying supporters outside of their five members in the General Assembly delegation to build a broader alliance.

Ms. Gary said that she believed the strength of the proposal was in its focus on directing resources to schools attended by children of veterans. She said that this ensured that the tax benefits they did not pay were not negatively affecting their children. She said that it became more appealing to members across the aisle, and after speaking with individuals from both sides, she was confident that they could garner widespread support for this initiative.

Dr. Yeung asked if the JLARC committee was not moving forward.

Ms. Burcher said that they were moving forward; however, they had a scheduled meeting on June 18 that was canceled because the Senate convened that day. She said that they had a mandatory report due November 1 of this year, so they would be meeting at some point but it was not scheduled at this time.

Dr. Yeung asked who was the chair of that committee.

Ms. Burcher said that the chair was Senator Ghazala Hashmi.

Ms. Gary asked if Ms. McClendon's office should draft a request for their legislation.

Ms. Burcher said that the COCA issue was futile because it was not included in JLARC recommendations.

Ms. Vanuch said that she would be amenable to their legal team sending the information to Advantus but not to their legislators at this time.

Ms. Gary said that she agreed.

Ms. Burcher said that an key part of this work would be working with other localities facing similar issues and get them to join their efforts. She said they would begin working with JLARC and send some draft language to use as reference.

CAPITAL PROJECTS PUBLIC CONSTRUCTION; NEW CIRCUIT COURTHOUSE UPDATE

Bryon Counsell, Chief Director of Infrastructure, said that tonight's discussion would be focused on the location of the courthouse. He said that over the past several years, there had been a number of studies indicating the siting of the courthouse in a different location. He said that there were various options across the street, on campus, and adjacent to the existing courthouse. He said that working with a consultant, they reviewed the pros and cons of having it connected to the current building or next to it. He said that staff's goal for the evening was to seek a consensus from the Board regarding where they would like to see this courthouse built.

Mr. Counsell said that he and Mr. Overton's presentation would provide detailed information about aspects such as two courtrooms per floor, the shape of the building, and its connection to the existing structure. He said that tonight their primary focus should be on determining the location. He said that they could work out the design details, including appearance and access in a different location, during the design phase. He said that whatever location was generally accepted by or directed by the Board would have regular design updates.

Mr. Counsell said that the Board would have multiple opportunities to either adjust the budget or direct staff to do something different during the process. He said that as the RFP to solicit for an architect was coming up in the next month or so, they needed to inform them of their designated location for designing the facility so that they could evaluate it and commence with the design. He said that this step was one of the last remaining steps before initiating the design of the new courthouse.

Mike Overton, Construction Program Manager, said that the objective of the location study was to assess possible alternatives for the placement of the new circuit court facility. He said that the design had been financed and planned to initiate during the forthcoming financial year. He said that prior to this evaluation, which was conducted in association with Dewberry, there were three previous studies. He said that the first study proposed installing a new court complex at a facility distinct from the government center. He said that in contrast, the 2015 space study suggested constructing an attached building to the existing courthouse.

Mr. Overton said that in 2018, another option emerged for building a separate structure elsewhere on the government center complex. He said that they had four options they originally studied. He said that the key evaluation factors were accommodating the requests and requirements of the court. He said that provided on the slide was one of the two footprints that Mr. Counsell mentioned earlier. He said that their ultimate recommendation was that the most appropriate location was probably adjacent to the existing courthouse on Courthouse Road, which they had determined after considering all options.

Mr. Counsell said that indicated on the map was the existing courthouse was where they currently were. He said that the new annex or circuit court building was located nearby and would connect to the existing structure via a corridor. He said that the remaining parking and other spaces were situated in that area as well. He said that acquiring this property would likely be necessary, but purchasing the brick office building was not required at present.

Mr. Overton said that the first one was at 1267 Courthouse Road, and the second one was at 1259 Courthouse Road. He said that the two-story white building would be demolished during the installation process. He said that this project would impact the budget, regardless of where it was located. He said that the consultant prepared a probably cost analysis, which he would discuss in a moment.

Mr. Overton said that that also, the County did not currently own those properties. He said that one property served as a contractor's office, which was the two-story white building adjacent to the old juvenile and domestic relations court location. He said that it had a for-lease sign and they had not pursued it. He said that the assessed value of that property was approximately $800,000. He said that the two-story brick building primarily housed tenants in a condominium complex. He said that this could make the situation somewhat complicated. He said that Social Services occupied part of that building as well. He said that they could briefly review the numbers associated with the project.

Mr. Overton said that the CIP funding for development over the next several years was $83 million. He said that the consultant presented two options: a taller building with two courtrooms per floor or a more sprawling building with four courtrooms per floor. He said that the taller building was estimated to be less expensive.

Mr. Overton said that constructing that building alone would cost $70 million, not including design or other soft costs at $12 million. He said that the project included major renovations of the existing courthouse to modify it for more functional space for remaining courts, JDR, and general district. He said that the estimated cost for this renovation was $26 million. He said that considering property acquisition as well, the total cost would likely be between $110 million and $120 million.

Dr. Yeung asked if staff had spoken to the judges regarding renovations.

Mr. Counsell said that they had met with the judges several times to discuss their progress and receive feedback. He said that the courts provided them with positive feedback regarding their studies. He said that they may have other concerns that they would like to address with the Board. He said that the costs quoted by Mr. Overton were based on the recommendations from the 2018 study for the number of courtrooms, safety measures, and accessibility.

Mr. Counsell said that the building's estimated cost fell within these parameters. He said that the Board had the authority to determine which parameters to meet. He said that they could adjust the scope of work or increase it as needed. He said that their calculations were based on the recommendations from the 2018 study for the number of courtrooms and other criteria. He said that ultimately, the Board controlled the project's scope.

Dr. Yeung said that she believed the Board needed to have a meeting with the judges in order to determine what was needed. She said that after reviewing their letters, she believed that the Board or at least the Chair and Vice Chair needed to meet with them and address their concerns.

Mr. English asked if they could remodel and renovate the current building in order to put two courtrooms on the first floor and add to it as necessary. He asked how much revenue was returned for the courthouse when issuing fines for violating County code.

Mr. Meadows said that he would need to research that information. He said that he did not know the specific figure immediately. He said that it was revenue which could potentially be utilized for the project in question.

Mr. English asked if it was possible to increase fees to help raise money for the court project.

Ms. Bohmke said that she thought they had already been gathering some of those fees. She said that the Board had established this policy several years prior when they were informed about the courthouse project. She asked Mr. Morris if he had any information concerning that matter.

Mr. Morris said that he did not have additional information; however, he knew that an additional fee was added to the tickets for the express purpose of helping the courthouse project.

Ms. Bohmke said that it had not generated a significant amount of revenue, but there was a number associated with it in the budget.

Mr. Counsell said that regarding Mr. English's initial question about the renovation, they would do so as part of their plan. He said that the 2018 study showed that for the circuit court, JDR, and general district, they needed a certain amount of courtrooms. He said that the study recommended construction of a new circuit court building, moving all court operations to that location temporarily, and then renovate the existing building for JDR and general district court for their purposes.

Mr. English asked if they could renovate the second floor.

Mr. Counsell said that the study indicated an additional 68,000 square feet was required to operate all three courts.

Ms. Bohmke asked who did the study.

Mr. Counsell said that it was Mosely. He said that Peck & Peck did the one before that. He said that they came up with roughly the same numbers with different locations for the new courthouse building.

Mr. Overton said that the circuit court had reiterated that they currently were one court short for their specific circuit court operations. He said that the annex could potentially alleviate some of the issue, but it could be only used for hearings because there was no jury box there. He said that it was limited in terms of the circuit court's use. He said that they had cited growth projections indicating that in 2029, another circuit court would be required, resulting in a total of five circuit courtrooms.

Mr. Overton said that this supported the Moseley study for the space needed. He said that the additional building would initially offer approximately 60,000 square feet of built-out space for four courtrooms, with the possibility to expand and accommodate two more courtrooms. He said that this added flexibility would enable courts to continue functioning while existing courtrooms undergo renovations.

Ms. Gary asked what the projected cost of the land acquisition would be.

Mr. Overton said that a consultant had not looked at it yet, but based on the assessed values, they were estimating about $4 million in total.

Ms. Gary asked if staff had considered the land they had across the street when planning this project.

Mr. Overton said that yes, that was one of the prior approaches. He said that during the study, they consulted with the Sheriff's Department, and they were not interested in expanding into multiple buildings due to cost and security control issues. He said that they shied away from this option.

Ms. Gary asked if their concerns were specific to the Sheriff's Department.

Mr. Overton said yes, that was correct, and it was ultimately for the County.

Ms. Vanuch asked if they had considered putting it across the street, building it out to a size that could replace the current building, and then renovate the old building for staffing needs.

Ms. Bohmke said that they had considered looking at the land across the street, and one of the points she recalled was that they should use that land for new development to generate revenue rather than for the courthouse.

Mr. Morris said that one issue was that with two separate buildings, there would be significant safety concerns and additional staffing requirements.

Ms. Vanuch said that her suggestion was to renovate the existing courthouse for staff and to construct the new courthouse on the land across the street.

Mr. Morris said that they would have to construct more new courtrooms in that case.

Mr. Counsell said that they would have to build a 100,000 square foot building, which was double the size of the current building.

Ms. Bohmke said that it would necessitate the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office to walk across the street to work on their cases.

Ms. Gary said that it was necessary to take smart planning into account in this situation. She appreciated the idea presented because they would continue to grow, and the projected numbers indicated that they were becoming larger and larger. She said that she agreed with Ms. Vanuch on this matter and that perhaps they should re-examine their current approach or make some adjustments.

Mr. Overton said that one concern was that by adding another building here, they would be limiting the growth potential for this campus for general government use rather than the courts.

Ms. Vanuch said that if they required an additional courtroom by 2029 or 2035, they would need another one. She asked where it could be located. She added that constructing a second building would ultimately be necessary. She said that there was land available across the street and had not received any successful responses to requests for proposals regarding anything in that area. She said that they had numerous schools to construct as well. She said that she did not understand why they would not just use the land they had and figure out what they needed to do inside for staffing.

Ms. Gary asked what the available acreage was of the land across the street.

Mr. Morris said that it was about 25 acres.

Ms. Gary asked what they would need to build this out for the future.

Mr. Overton said that it would not necessitate 25 acres.

Ms. Gary said that it would not prohibit them from developing the rest of the land for other uses.

Ms. Bohmke said that they had also considered building it where the County vehicles were currently located.

Dr. Yeung asked if the land being discussed was the land considered for the downtown Stafford area for which a request for proposal had been issued. She asked what would happen to the arts, history, and culture if this was the case, as there appeared to be no other suitable location for that project.

Mr. Meadows said that regarding the numbers presented tonight for addition and connection, remodeling, and other matters, the Board should seriously consider constructing an entirely new structure elsewhere instead of continuing to add onto their current property. He said that although he did not propose a specific location, he believed that building a new structure would be beneficial due to the potential space limitations caused by adding more rooms, especially if another courtroom is needed in the future.

Mr. Meadows said that this new structure could serve as a site for future County government growth. He said that in response to Dr. Yeung's point, altering the downtown Stafford project plans might be necessary, but it would not consume the entire property and could still allow enough space to achieve some objectives from the RFP on the remaining projects. He said that they faced something similar in Montgomery County for years.

Mr. Meadows said that they looked at expanding and adding on, but it finally made more sense to start fresh with a new building and to renovate the existing building for other County uses. He said that with these connections, in his opinion it created all kinds of security challenges., whereas in a facility they created from the ground up, they could design for those challenges from the outset. He said that the construction of a new building would likely surpass $100 million, but that was the current reality faced by the County.

Mr. Counsell said that in order to provide some context on the lengthy process this had been, staff was guided by past Boards to stay within a budget and in a specific technical location. He said that although they studied options outside of that location, their primary focus remained on adhering to the budget and meeting the criteria set forth in the study, plus growth. He said that he asked Mr. Overton to present an alternative scenario of the growing into model for the location adjacent to the existing courthouse.

Mr. Counsell said that this option would allow them to expand up to 2050 or 2060 with the number of courtrooms available, and with a parking deck built on top of one section of their parking lot. He said that by doing so, they could remain on campus for an extended period. He said that however, there were advantages to having a new separate courthouse in the center of town as it would serve as a County focal point. He said that these scenarios were considered in the study.

Mr. Counsell said that a 120,000 square foot standalone courthouse on the 27-acre property across the street would eliminate Downtown Stafford but would also move the current courthouse off-site and leave it available for County staff. He said that another study that would be presented later explained that as County staff grows, more space would be required. He said that the idea of renovating the existing courthouse for staff use was appealing, and they had explored this option. He said that the cost of constructing a separate $120 million courthouse across the street remained a significant factor to consider.

Ms. Bohmke said that if she recalled correctly, JPI was planning to construct their Fountain Park project. She said that she also remembered that there had been a discussion about a swap involving their parking area with JPI. She asked whether the exchange of property between them and JPI had already taken place.

Mr. Overton said that they had graded for a temporary lot, which would later be developed by the County in conjunction with the courthouse construction for additional parking capacity. He said that this lot was essential to provide enough space and parking spots for their development. He said that concerning the parking garage, it was a future phase.

Ms. Bohmke asked if they were within the confines of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that the County had signed with them, or if they had met the requirements that they had set.

Mr. Counsell said that they had not. He said that they were supposed to provide access and a graded lot, which they had not done yet.

Ms. Vanuch asked if that was for the courthouse to be located here.

Mr. Counsell said that was the courthouse to be located here. He said that it was temporary parking for County staff and courthouse staff while construction took up the parking lot for the staging area. He said that it would then become a semi-permanent parking lot area for JPI’s development. He said that sometime in the future after things were developed, it would become space for a parking deck along with another parcel the County owned there.

Ms. Bohmke said that it appeared that staff was not anticipating the Board to change direction and consider the location across the street rather than the addition to the existing building.

Mr. Counsell said that their recommendation was based on all the criteria they had been set and directed to pursue. He said that they believed that acquiring a portion of JPI's property at that time would likely exceed any acquisition needs they would have on this side of the street.

Ms. Gary said that she did not believe they needed to acquire JPI’s property for this project. She said that using the 27 acres did not preclude them from pursuing Downtown Stafford as a project, but it may change the original vision when they put out the request for projects. She said that it was just the County-owned portion, and they hoped that someone would extend and add on other pieces. She said that she wanted to clarify that it was possible to do both the courthouse and the Downtown Stafford initiative, but it may look different than originally envisioned. She said that there was potential for it to provide incentive for people to put things in there because there would be constant traffic to the area.

Ms. Bohmke said that Ms. Gary was absolutely correct. She said that the main benefit from having that land was that from a development standpoint, they could direct what they wanted to happen to it without being subjected to a developer who owned the land and would make all the decisions.

Ms. Allen said that it was possible for the courthouse to function as a central hub for the downtown area. She said that there would certainly always be foot traffic in the area, and there were many vibrant downtown areas that had the courthouse in the center of the area. She said that this may allow them to drive the development of the area.

Mr. Counsell said that he did not believe staff had received clear direction on how to move forward with this project.

Ms. Gary said that they likely should poll Board members on what they thought, but she was in favor of putting the courthouse across the street.

Mr. Diggs asked if the new facility across the street would be used for circuit court, juvenile and domestic relations court, and everything else.

Mr. Counsell said that was correct.

Mr. Diggs said that he supported that.

Mr. English said that he was supportive of placing the courthouse at their current location. He said that they would be way out of bounds to put it across the street.

Dr. Yeung said that she required more information before making a decision.

Ms. Vanuch said that she was in favor of putting it across the street, but she would like to see more information regarding the timeline. She said that she would be interested in exploring procurement resources in alignment with the schools in order to potentially get a discount on construction by using the same developer for their numerous County projects.

Ms. Allen said that she was interested in placing it across the street, but she was interested in the CIP impacts of doing this project in conjunction with the County administration building renovation and additions as well.

Mr. Counsell said that their next presentation would discuss that to some degree regarding a central services facility.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was interested in pursuing the construction of the courthouse across the street. She said that a large issue was the safety considerations of the courthouse, which she did not believe could be improved on their current campus.

Mr. Meadows said that theoretically, the discussion they were having made the most sense. He said that when the dollars came back regarding this project and the next project, it would be a stark reality check. He said that there would have to be discussion about what their priorities were.

Ms. Bohmke said that she agreed. She said that there were issues with other County departments such as the health department and social services. She said that they must consider the big picture for their facilities.

Ms. Allen said that while it would be an expensive endeavor, if they did not build proactively, it would be even more expensive to rebuild it in the future. She said that they should get it done now and avoid having to deal with it again in the future. She said that it was possible that they would have to renovate all the buildings and build the courthouse in the future anyway due to their population growth.

Ms. Bohmke said that it had been proven that it was very difficult to effectively renovate old buildings to accommodate new uses.

Mr. Counsell said that staff had received adequate direction, and their next step would be to bring back more formulated information regarding what the project may look like across the street. He said that it would include sizes for consideration, funding options, cost estimates, and general logistics of completion.

CAPITAL PROJECTS PUBLIC CONSTRUCTION; CENTRAL SERVICES FACILITY STUDY

Mr. Counsell said that this was an important item to consider as the County was growing. He said that several Board members had acknowledged the staff's expansion. He said that as a result, they would require additional employee space and courthouse space. He said that in order to determine these needs, they conducted a space needs study that included the current County operations and the leased buildings, storage facilities, and other locations that were not optimal for their functions. He said that the Sheriff's Office had concerns about storing forensic studies and evidence, while Fire and Rescue had specific storage requirements as well. He said that based on this knowledge, they developed the concept of a central services facility, which many Counties already possessed.

Mr. Counsell said that some larger counties built these facilities after experiencing growth, whereas some rural counties initiated this process earlier in their development. He said that they considered all organizational and operational needs, including Parks and Rec, Sheriff, and Utilities. He said that the Utilities Department must relocate due to data centers. He said that all of their field operations, which comprised approximately 70% of their activities, needed to be moved. He said that they found an opportunity in the central part of the County for various departments to share a facility with office buildings for staff who currently worked off-site.

Mr. Counsell said that the shared space would provide storage, operational needs, and some staff space, allowing room to grow without having to purchase that central area 20 years in the future when real estate would be too expensive. He said that they presented this concept to the Board and had various layouts and data available for review. He said that this was not an emergency but rather a result of Utilities moving to a more central location, which aligned with their goal. He said that it made sense for everyone else to follow that lead and utilize a central space.

Ms. Bohmke asked if the Board could hold another work session on this topic.

Mr. Counsell said that they could. He said that Utilities would need to start looking for a place to go on its own. He said that they could still tag along on that if the property selected for the Utilities location could accommodate all of it. He said that they also had some potions for Utilities to move to a temporary location and later relocate to a more central facility. He said that they could provide more details on the matter if necessary. He said that Utilities was under some pressure to move out quickly. He said that staff was seeking acknowledgement from the Board regarding this concept and further review of concepts for a central services facility.

Ms. Bohmke asked if staff had formulated options for the Board to review tonight.

Mr. Counsell said that they were currently examining potential locations, but they were not yet ready to disclose any specific properties. He said that there were two promising options that they believed would be suitable, but they were still addressing certain logistical aspects.

Ms. Bohmke asked if staff could offer any details so the Board could provide better direction.

Mr. Morris said that they were asking if they wanted to acquire a big enough piece of property for all of these departments or if they should only seek a small piece of property to house the Utilities Department.

Ms. Bohmke asked what staff recommended.

Mr. Counsell said that staff recommended pursuing a central services facility. He said that it would require a buildout by the year 2050 of approximately 100 to 120 acres. He said that this would include the bus garage and potentially constructing a school if there was enough land in the area. He said that they needed to address all the needs of the different departments.

Dr. Yeung asked if some offices would coexist with Utilities.

Mr. Counsell said yes.

Mr. Diggs said that he believed he understood the point being made because they had discussed this matter on the law enforcement side in terms of currently everything being spread out throughout the County. He said that when they consolidated everything into one location, all of the equipment was stored and personnel were housed in a single place rather than having to rent multiple locations throughout the County. He said that he believed a centralized location was an excellent idea and it would be wise for them to invest in the largest possible space.

Ms. Allen asked if they had considered land near the courthouse area. She asked if this would be a phased approach in the CIP.

Mr. Overton said that provided was an overall cost order of magnitude for the project. He said that two projects were already included in the CIP, which were the utilities complex relocation, funded for next year's fiscal year and expected to be completed by 2026, allowing them to move out of Coal Landing, and the additional fleet services facility necessary for schools and County vehicle maintenance, currently projected at $39.9 million in the latter years of the CIP. He said that other programs may have been incorporated into the CIP as needs arose and funding became available.

Mr. Overton said that in total, approximately $170 million for the central complex could be spread out over 20 to 25 years. He said that as Mr. Diggs mentioned, consolidating the multiple storage facilities throughout the County for different departments can lead to savings. He said that Parks and Recreation was one of the most notable examples where inadequate storage could lead to waste of materials. He said that annually, there were materials that could have been salvaged if appropriate storage facilities had been available.

Ms. Bohmke asked if they had the spreadsheet displaying their savings. She said that she needed to see that. She said that she needed to see specific details about their buildings and lease payments with a total of $171 million. She said that she would not blindly trust any of this information without proper evidence. She said that referring to the recent discussion about a courthouse costing between $110 and $120 million, it would likely exceed that amount due to the addition to the existing courthouse. She said that this was an extra expense on top of the billion dollars spent on schools. She said that she required more data to be presented. She asked where efficiencies would be made to ensure this was the most cost-effective approach. She said that considering inflation as well, there were complications to these projects.

Mr. Counsell said that this was the initial step in bringing this idea and concept to the Board. He said that staff understood that it would be a big pull. He said that regardless of how large they built the facility, whether it was smaller and they outgrew it, requiring them to build another one somewhere else, or they constructed something large enough with the ability to grow into it, it was generally accepted as an industry standard for planning and trying to plan for County growth. He said that sometimes, it was just not doable. He said that if they looked at a lot of the counties, such as Prince William with its large government center, they started adding on to that over the last 25 years. He said that they were looking to model something similar by purchasing land over time and creating a central facility.

Ms. Vanuch said that it may be necessary to consider Utilities first and then determine how to fund the rest of the central facility through the CIP.

Mr. Counsell said that land acquisitions were included in the CIP, but the rest was not.

Ms. Bohmke said that the Fire and Rescue training facility was included in the out-years of the CIP.

Mr. Morris said that the main question for tonight was if staff should look for a parcel of land large enough to hold all of these facilities or look for a parcel that could fit Utilities.

Ms. Vanuch said that she did not believe there was an adequate parcel of land in a central location for this facility.

Mr. Counsell said that there was, but staff was not prepared to discuss the parcel at this time. He said that they required further vetting before bringing the topic to the Board. He said that the central services facility mainly included all operational activities happening outside this location. He said that the plan was to gradually introduce the total $171 million, but due to time constraints, they had to abandon that approach. He said that the truth was that the scale of what staff considered effective facility planning and strategic growth was considerable.

Mr. Overton said that the two projects on the CIP would take up around 65% of this facility, which was situated between the fleet services building and Utilities. He said that this space would primarily be used by these departments to carry out their activities.

Mr. English asked if they could use the Moncure school facility for any of these departments.

Mr. Counsell said that staff closely collaborated with the consultant and examined every department's needs, including the Sheriff's Department and Fire and Rescue. He said that they gathered their costs for off-site facilities and assessed how County-owned properties could be incorporated. He said that the general consensus from all departments was that one central facility would be beneficial due to shared services.

Ms. Allen asked when staff would present the information related to land acquisition.

Mr. Counsell said that if the general direction from the Board was to continue pursuing this until they decided not to do it, staff would present an identification of some property that could fulfill their objectives there. He said that they would provide all relevant data for that and then seek the Board's feedback and guidance after that.

Ms. Allen asked if they could provide information on their debt capacity in relation to all these major projects. She said that she needed to see bar graphs or linear lines showing the courthouse, schools, and other projects coming online within the next five years. She said that they should focus on actual budgeted or engineering phases rather than theoretical projects. She said that they may need feedback on tax rates since they would be a significant part of their budget next year. She said that to make informed decisions, it was crucial to start discussing these matters now instead of waiting until budget season.

Ms. Gary said that there was concern about the Fire and Rescue training facility being co-located with other buildings.

Mr. Counsell said that those concerns were part of the reason they were seeking a sizeable parcel of land, so that they had adequate space for their department needs.

Mr. Overton said that a significant portion of the parcel would comprise open spaces. He said that many of these areas would function as outdoor storage locations for vehicles and serve as bus parking spots for the nearby schools.

Ms. Gary asked if they were able to acquire a large enough property, the Fire and Rescue training facility could be far enough away from the other buildings.

Mr. Counsell said that was correct.

Dr. Yeung asked if the $29 million in the CIP for the Utilities division complex was including land acquisition costs for that building or if it was the cost of building the facilities.

Mr. Counsell said that the conceptual layout for the central facility would be 100 to 120 acres. He said that the $29 million was for building the Utilities facilities complex on the land.

Mr. Overton said that they had a conceptual design for the complex. He said that part of the reason for this examination was that, as mentioned earlier, some of these areas required separation.

Ms. Bohmke asked if this would be an additional building for the school administration services or an entirely new one.

Mr. Counsell said that the details have not been fully worked out yet. He said that there may be another use for their existing facilities where the bus garage and maintenance facilities were, and they would build a new facility at the central spot. He said that they had not worked out that much detail yet, which was driving the estimate of about 100 to 120 acres. He said that they had been describing all the needs from all the different departments and scrutinizing them as much as possible.

Mr. Counsell said that then, they started putting together a plan, sketches, and working on order of magnitude costs. He said they should think of this facility more as a wagon wheel. He said that there might be a central hub where people come in and figure out what they need to do, and then Parks and Recreation and their storage facilities would be in a distinct location, Fire and Rescue would be in another location, and in another area, the Sheriff's Office would keep wrecked cars and other types of forensic laboratory space.

Mr. Counsell said that schools would be in another location, and Utilities would be in another location. He said that it would be more of a spread-out campus of different things, but there might be a central building for deliveries and things like that. He said that these were all conceptual; there was no plan in stone. He said that it was not just one big building with a bunch of stuff in it; it was more of a decentralized layout.

Mr. Overton said that building a new garage could be designed to accommodate maintenance of fire engines because the existing garage's limitations did not allow for fitting a fire engine inside. He said that some of the new buses would not even fit in the existing garage, which was part of what the needs expressed by schools were. He said that at present, their main focus was on moving Utilities, which required finding an appropriate location for the facility. He asked whether they should think about obtaining a somewhat bigger area instead.

Ms. Krauss said that the objective was to ascertain whether small land was necessary for utility relocation or if larger land should be taken into account for future planning. She said that as Ms. Allen highlighted previously, RCIP cannot manage this task. She said that it was not designed for it. She said that a considerable amount of work would be needed, and they must address that in the forthcoming budget.

Ms. Krauss said that the expectation was unrealistic; it merely represented a concept. She said that it encompassed what has been studied and what the requirements were. She said that they would not be able to accomplish everything anytime soon. She said that the truth was that there existed some high-priority needs, such as the Utilities relocation.

Mr. Morris said that this effort could take as long as 40 or 50 years. He said that the question was whether they wanted to acquire the land now or wait until later to acquire it.

Ms. Bohmke said that she did not have enough information. She said that there was consensus from the Board to receive more information about this process.

BOARD MEMBER STAFFING PROCESS

Donna Krauss, Deputy County Administrator, said that the document in their packets was related to Board support assistants and their beginning support in the new fiscal year. She said that the draft policy was written and established by herself, Shannon Wagner, and Ms. McClendon, the County Attorney. She said that they spent several meetings compiling information and referring to Virginia Code to create this policy.

Ms. Krauss said that she had two additional documents: a cover page providing a summary of their discussion and details about appointed and employed members by the Board, including their payment, budgeted amount, timesheets, logistics, policies they will follow, which were found in the Board policy, recruitment process at their discretion, available benefits, eligibility, and equipment needs. She said that the final document was a guideline outlining the Board's available options. She said that it was a procedure document developed by County Administration in conjunction with some support from the County Attorney.

Ms. Krauss said that this guideline detailed how their employees would work with the County employees, explaining the intersection process. She said that they had provided information, background, and procedures for them to review. She said that the procedure would be adopted by the County Administrator after the Board had time to digest it. She said that it outlined communication methods, staff support, and training procedures to ensure a clear understanding of all processes. She said that Section 4 covered these details. She said that with this understanding, they could work together successfully.

Ms. Krauss asked the Board to please review the policy as that was the most important step. She said that if they wished to move forward with hiring Board support assistants soon, the policy needed approval at the July 2 meeting, making it time-sensitive and requiring a vote to approve it. She said that if more time for discussion and potential changes was needed, they would have to wait until August. She said that this outlined their timeline and current status.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had one recommended change. She said that under 15-7, number 4, the Board support assistants were required to have County residence. She said that it was an unfair requirement for someone making $29,000. She said that to her knowledge, Prince William did not do the same for their implementation because their former Chair lived in her district.

Dr. Yeung asked if there could be more specific guidelines for their duties, rather than only prohibited activities.

Ms. Krauss asked which part of the policy Dr. Yeung was referring to.

Ms. Gary said that the section was quoting Virginia Code and specifically pertained to campaign activities and similar matters.

Ms. Bohmke said that there was consensus to strike number 4, requiring Board assistants to be County residents, from the policy.

Ms. Allen asked if there was adequate time to add this to the agenda for their next meeting.

Ms. Krauss said yes. She said that however, if Board members requested changes other than what they just discussed, she would like to know what those were so the public could see the redlined changes.

Ms. McClendon said that they could not change the policy without instruction from Board members.

Ms. Vanuch said that it was necessary to vote on this matter in July, as otherwise it would be deferred until August. She said that under procedure, it was written that all requests from Board members or their Board support assistants must go through County administration, except for the purposes of general inquiry and information. She said that the Board and its Board support assistants cannot manage, instruct, direct, or correct any employee under the County

Administrator. She asked if Board support assistants could only indirectly contact staff through Mr. Toigo in case of requests.

Ms. Krauss said no. She said that it was specifically referring to County Administrator staff. She said that this was an internal procedure document for the County Administrator staff.

Mr. Meadows said that it was meant to serve as a guideline on how to proceed.

Ms. Krauss said that that specific document would not be voted on as part of the next Board meeting. She said that the policy was what the Board needed to act on for hiring their staff.

Ms. Allen asked if this information would be included in the agenda add-on regardless, and if they had changes, they would postpone the action until August.

Ms. Krauss said that if the Board members sent her changes, all Board members must agree to the changes. She said that if they all agreed on it prior to the meeting, they could make the change official during that meeting.

Dr. Yeung asked if Prince William had information regarding their duties.

Ms. Krauss said that Prince William had no documentation related to their staff management; it was supervisor-directed. She said that staff believed that creating this policy would protect all parties involved, which was why they did so.

Ms. Vanuch said that these support staff would be on the County payroll, but it stated in the policy that they were employed by the individual Board members. She said that the Supervisors would not be legally employing these staff, so she wanted to clarify that point.

Ms. Krauss said that she needed to investigate the insurance aspect of it. She said that she did not think it was the Board members' responsibility; instead, they would be covered by workers' compensation under the County. She said that she had to confirm this information because they were not considered employees under the County Administrator and did not adhere to all the policies that usually applied to a general employee within the County.

Ms. McClendon said that the approach was slightly different because it went beyond just the County policies. She said that they were dealing with some federal law issues to make sure that the laws applied there did not conflict with others. She said that they had to remain within their personal assistant role as a Board member. She said that this did not mean they were fully disconnected from the County. She said that the objective was to ensure that they maintained the exemption and their final say.

Ms. Vanuch said that the summary of expectations outlined the role of the Board member and stated that the assistant was paid through the County's payroll process.

Ms. McClendon said that was a summary and not the policy itself.

Dr. Yeung asked if staff would be interviewing candidates.

Ms. Krauss said that the Board members could appoint who they wanted, but they could also go through an HR process, which staff would support but would be uninvolved in interviewing.

Ms. Wagner said that they would post the job and assist in applications to be forwarded to the Board members for review and appointment.

Ms. Krauss said that they would not be involved in screening or any of that part of the process.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:38 p.m., Chair Bohmke adjourned the June 26, 2024 Stafford County Board of Supervisor's Work Session.

F. Craig Meadows
Interim County Administrator

Meg Bohmke
Chairman